

**Université de Montréal**

**Unmasking the Enlightenment:  
Rousseau's Critique of Intellectualism**

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**Thèse présentée en vue de l'obtention du grade de doctorat en philosophie**

**août 2020**

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Université de Montréal  
Département de philosophie

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*Cette thèse intitulée*

**Unmasking the Enlightenment:  
Rousseau's Critique of Intellectualism**

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**Abstract:**

Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* predicts the rise of the public intellectual, and along with him, intellectual trends and scientism. It is therefore a treasure to anyone who has wondered about the cults of "authenticity" and "openness," or slogans like "believe science." To be more precise, his goal in the *Discours* is to expose the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment as hypocrites who laud the advancement of the sciences only to "distinguish" themselves and win power. In this way, the *Discours* parallels the *City of God*, where St. Augustine argues that self-love [*amor sui*] leads to the will to power [*libido dominandi*]. Rousseau's *Discours* is unique however, since he considers the *philosophes* to be unconscious hypocrites. That is, he does not believe that they treat philosophy and science as "fashions" in order to directly acquire power, but rather because they are over-socialized. In this thesis, I will argue that Rousseau develops a unique method in the *Discours* for exposing the over-socialized hypocrite: *unmasking*. Although previous authors such as Molière, La Bruyère and Montaigne often invoked the rhetoric of the mask, I will show that Rousseau is the first to transform this rhetorical device into a method of social theory proper. Ultimately, when Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that Rousseau is the "founder of the sciences of man," it is this method that he is describing. Of course, Rousseau could not have intended for this method, which sought to expose how institutions socialize people, to itself be institutionalized within the academies.

**Keywords:** Rousseau, Enlightenment, *Philosophes*, Intellectualism, Unmasking

**Résumé :**

Le *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* de Rousseau prévoit l'émergence de personnalités intellectuelles publiques et, par conséquent, des modes intellectuelles et du scientisme. Cet ouvrage est donc un plaisir pour ceux qui ont déjà cogité sur les cultes de l'authenticité et de l'« openness », et sur des slogans tels que « croyez la science ! ». Plus précisément, Rousseau s'engage dans le *Discours* à dénoncer les *philosophes* des Lumières comme des hypocrites qui ne louent le progrès des sciences que pour « se distinguer » et gagner du pouvoir. Le *Discours* ressemble ainsi à *La Cité de Dieu*, où saint Augustin soutient que l'amour de soi-même [*amor sui*] donne lieu à la volonté de puissance [*libido dominandi*]. Le *Discours* est cependant original, puisqu'il considère les *philosophes* comme des hypocrites involontaires. Autrement dit, il ne pense pas qu'ils traitent de la philosophie et de la science comme des « modes » pour volontairement obtenir du pouvoir, mais plutôt car ils sont hyper-socialisés. Dans cette thèse, on se propose de démontrer comment Rousseau élabore une méthode unique dans le *Discours* afin de dévoiler l'hypocrite hyper-socialisé : le démasquage. Bien que d'autres penseurs tels que Molière, La Bruyère et Montaigne emploient souvent la rhétorique du masque, on soutient que Rousseau est le premier à transformer cette figure de style en une méthode de la théorie sociale à proprement dit. Lorsque Claude Lévi-Strauss fait valoir que Rousseau est le « fondateur des sciences de l'homme », il semblerait en fin de compte qu'il décrive cette méthode. Pourtant, Rousseau n'aurait pas pu prévoir que le démasquage, qui cherche à exposer comment les institutions socialisent des hommes, soit institutionnalisé lui-même dans les universités.

**Mots-clés : Rousseau, les Lumières, Philosophes, Intellectualisme, Démasquage**

## Introduction

The *Discours* can be viewed as a belated contribution to the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, insofar as it equates the notion of Enlightenment progress with the moral decline of Europe. Whether one has regard to the ancient Greek conception of the golden age, typified by Plato's Atlantis, or the Christian account of man's fall from grace, the ancients tended to regard history as a process of decline. This became a question of debate when Renaissance humanists like Bacon, inspired by recent achievements in natural philosophy, began to reinterpret biblical passages such as Daniel's "*multiplex erit scientia*" (12:4).<sup>1</sup> Instead of affirming the multiplication of "opinions" in the end times, Bacon interpreted "*scientia*" as "knowledge." And while Bacon largely views progress in technological terms, this did not stop him from conceiving of an ideal monarchy organized around the pursuit of science in his *New Atlantis*. By the time the *Querelle* was resolved, prominent thinkers like Fontenelle, the perpetual secretary of the Académie des Sciences, were advancing a dual vision of moral and technological progress. Rousseau, it is well known, rejects this vision in the second *Discours sur l'inégalité*. But it is in the first *Discours*, the famous Fabrician prosopopoeia as it were, that he reveals his sources. Although commentators such as François Bouchardy and Ernst Cassirer have dismissed this *Discours* as a mere rhetorical display,<sup>2</sup> I believe that the ancient authors that Rousseau mobilizes here provide the basis of his view of history. Rousseau is not a metaphysical thinker. Hence, we will not attempt to disprove the essential claim of the moderns: that nature does not degenerate, but is instead stable, and

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Bacon, *Confession of Faith* in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 7, ed. James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis, Douglas D. Heath (Longman, Green and Co., 1859), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Peter Gay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 48, where he refers to the *Discours* as a "mere rhetorical display piece."



can therefore be built upon. Rather, he rejects this account of history for moral reasons, such as those that one finds in Polybius, Seneca and Tacitus to name a few of his sources.

In his *Letters*, Seneca states that our ills multiply in proportion to the “doctrines” [docti] that we invent.<sup>3</sup> In *Germania*, Tacitus praises the superior virtue of the German barbarians, who unlike the Romans, never dismiss vice as merely being “fashionable” or the “spirit of the age” [*indoles et mores saeculi*] (i.e., fashionable).<sup>4</sup> And in his *Histories*, Polybius recounts the “cycle of political revolution” [ἀνακύκλωσις], arguing that necessity and “sociability” compel men to form states, while “the thirst for reputation” and luxury cause their decline.<sup>5</sup> These thinkers have a different notion of the golden age than their classical predecessors, one characterized by simplicity rather than wisdom. It is this notion of history that one encounters not only in Vico, Montesquieu and Fénelon, but also Rousseau’s *Premier discours*: “On ne peut réfléchir sur les mœurs, qu'on ne se plaise à se rappeler l'image de la simplicité [the image of simplicity] des premiers temps. C'est un beau rivage, paré des seules mains de la nature, vers lequel on tourne incessamment les yeux, et dont on se sent éloigner à regret.”<sup>6</sup> Rousseau’s interest in this reading of history is somewhat paradoxical, given that his conception of virtue in terms of hypocrisy and sincerity is markedly Christian. That is, he seems to think that the pagan golden age is the one in which Christian virtues reign.

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<sup>3</sup> See Seneca, *Epistolae Morales*, in *Omnia Opera: L. A. Senecae, Philosophica, Declamatoria et Tragica* (Paris: M. Ehrmann, 1829), p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, in *Germania and Agricola*, trans. by William D. Tyler, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1876), p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> See Polybius, *The Histories*, vol. 3, trans. W. R. Paton (London: Heinemann, 1923), p. 289.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*. In *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol 3., ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) p. 20. Hereafter cited as *Premier discours*.

Rousseau inherits this paradox from Fénelon, who seems to both praise St. Augustine's *City of God* and Virgil's early Rome. More precisely, he admires the selfless and "*pur amour*" of the saints in his *Explication des maximes des Saints sur la vie intérieure*, while explaining in the *Lettre sur les occupations de l'Académie française* that the self-interested love for one's nation of which Homer and Virgil speak inspired some of the greatest acts of virtue.<sup>7</sup> This paradox will manifest itself as a double standard that is necessary for comprehending Rousseau's critique of the public intellectual, and his explication of the origin of scientism. On the one hand, he thinks that the philosopher and scientist must be selfless, which is reflected throughout his oeuvre in his remarks about his own person. In the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, he writes that he "almost always wrote contrary to [his] own interest" [j'ai presque toujours écrit contre mon propre intérêt].<sup>8</sup> In the *Confessions*, he states that he refused a pension from Louis XV on the grounds that the paid philosopher must be prepared to say "Adieu to truth, freedom [and] courage" [Adieu la vérité, la liberté, le courage].<sup>9</sup> And in *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, he asserts that there are two types of men, "the man of truth" [l'homme vrai], who is prepared "to immolate himself" for the truth that he loves, and "the worldly man" [l'homme du monde], who only preaches the truth that "costs him nothing," or others something.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Rousseau denies that the average person is capable of such selflessness, and for this reason makes "self-love" [*amour de soi-même*] the foundation of the state and the general will.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fénelon, *Lettre sur les occupations de l'Académie française* (Paris: Librairie Charles Delagrave, 1875), p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 5, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 120. All translations from French in this work are mine.

<sup>9</sup> Rousseau, *Les Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau*, in *Œuvres complètes*, v. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 380.

<sup>10</sup> Rousseau, *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 1, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 1031.

Insofar as Rousseau does not expect the average person to act selflessly, he thinks that the best society is the one in which there is the least possibility of the interests of its members coming into conflict. Such is the society characterized by simplicity. Further developing on this position in the *Préface à Narcisse*, Rousseau argues that while the savage might commit an evil act, he cannot make a habit of it: "Il est très-possible qu'un Sauvage fasse une mauvaise action, mais il n'est pas possible qu'il prenne l'habitude [habit] de mal faire, car cela ne lui serait bon à rien."<sup>11</sup> That is, if the savage betrays his comrades too often, then he will destroy the society along with himself, as it lacks the wealth, technology, etc., to rebound from each betrayal. The problem, as Rousseau points out in the *Discours*, is that philosophy and science require wealth (as Aristotle also argues in the *Metaphysics*). What is more, Rousseau recognizes the ambition of the French *philosophes* to build academies around these, which, like all institutions, trade in "distinctions." Such distinctions not only pose a threat to society, permitting people to be judged by their titles rather than their actions, but are also incompatible with the selflessness required to pursue the truth. It will not be long, Rousseau believes, until titles, bursaries, etc., are no longer a means of pursuing the truth in the academies, but the ends themselves. And what is worse, the public, enamored with all the "fashionable" philosophies of the salon, Fontenelle's famous eulogies of dead scientists, and so on, will regard these people as "experts" and leaders.

Rousseau's goal in the *Discours* is to expose the *philosophes* as hypocrites, who preach the truth only to win "distinctions," that is, to flatter their vanity and gain power in society. To this end, he employs the rhetoric of the veil, accusing them of concealing their vices behind a veil

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<sup>11</sup> Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse ou l'Amant de lui-même*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 2, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 970, footnote.

of politeness and urbanity: "Les soupçons, les ombrages, les craintes, la froideur, la réserve, la haine, la trahison se cacheront sans cesse sous ce voile [veil] uniforme et perfide de politesse, sous cette urbanité si vantée que nous devons aux lumières de notre siècle."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, one discovers the very same rhetoric in Molière's *Tartuffe*, where Elmire speaks of "placing the mask on [his] hypocritical soul" [faire poser la masque à cette âme hypocrite].<sup>13</sup> One also finds it in La Bruyère's *Caractères*, which, being a critique of *honnêtes hommes* and salon culture, might be considered a forerunner of the *Discours*. But Rousseau's *Discours* distinguishes itself from these by focusing on the unintentional hypocrite, who does not consciously seek power and reputation, but only because he is over-socialized. More precisely, Rousseau understands corruption as the process whereby natural, human tendencies and relations are replaced by institutions. This conception is particularly apparent in the *Émile*, where Émile must learn sciences like celestial navigation by applying them, rather than memorizing them only to repeat them in polite society. However, it is already present in the first *Discours*, where he praises Cato the Elder for removing the Greek philosophers from Rome; Cato appreciates that virtue is not a doctrine that can be taught, but must rather be learned in the course of life by fulfilling one's duties to family and country.

My goal in this thesis is twofold. Firstly, I trace the emergence of the *philosophe* as that of the public intellectual. Secondly, I examine Rousseau's critique of this novel archetype in the *Premier discours*, which not only means unearthing his sources of inspiration, but also defining the unmasking method that he mobilizes to level this critique. To contextualize the emergence

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<sup>12</sup> See Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 8. While the word 'mask' appears in subsequent works, such as the *Préface à Narcisse*, it does not appear here.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière, *Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1894), p. 97.

of the *philosophe*, I first turn to Louis XIV's absolute monarchy, and explain how the reforms of figures like Colbert undermine aristocratic distinctions and create meritocratic institutions that accord the talented, bourgeois man a far greater role in society. As Voltaire holds in his *Lettres philosophiques*, the Enlightenment is borne on the shoulders of these men: "While the barons, bishops [and] popes had torn England apart," he maintains, "the most respectable sect of men, composed of those who study the laws and sciences, negotiators, artisans," began to enlighten humanity.<sup>14</sup> The ascendancy of the bourgeois man is equally reflected in doctrines such as that of *doux commerce*, whereby Mandeville, Saint-Lambert, and other *philosophes* argue that self-interest is the cornerstone of society, and that vices like greed are necessary for advancing the sciences and its overall interests—naturally, Rousseau has this doctrine in mind in the *Discours*. In this part, I also trace the evolution of the *philosophes*, examining Renaissance humanists like Bacon, Erasmus and More, the Republic of Letters, the origins of the *honnête homme* and salon culture, and ultimately the *philosophes'* emergence from this milieu. Indeed, Bacon imagines a society organized around the sciences, but his scientists live underground, studying the earth's minerals in obscurity, their sole reward being the improvement of man's material conditions. In short, they are what humanists like Erasmus call "herculean laborers," self-sacrificing men. This is a Ciceronian ideal, and thoroughly anti-Epicurean. By contrast, the *honnêtes gens* who appear in the 17<sup>th</sup> century pride themselves on being "do-nothings" [faineans] in de Méré's words,<sup>15</sup> and believe that one must primarily study philosophy with a view to making good conversation. At the same time, *honnêtes gens* like Fontenelle will blend Cartesian science with Epicurean ideals,

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<sup>14</sup> Voltaire, *Lettres Philosophiques* in *Voltaire*, ed. Roger-Pol Droit (Paris: Flammarion, 2008), p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> See Le Chevalier de Méré, "De la vraie honnêteté," in *Œuvres complètes du Chevalier de Méré* (Saints-Geosmes: Klincksieck, 2008), pp. 69 – 70.

using the former as a vector to introduce the latter into the salons, as he does in the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. Therefore, one remarks the practice of advancing moral doctrines under the guise of “science” early on. In the end, the *philosophes’* conception of the intellectual is diametrically opposed to the silent, herculean laborer of the humanists. He is self-interested, sympathetic to epicureanism, socially active in the private salon, and a public figure.

In the second part, I develop Rousseau’s critique of the *philosophes* in the first *Discours*. Rousseau’s romanism is perhaps nowhere more apparent in this work, to which he refers as his “Fabrician prosopopoeia” [prosopopée de Fabricius] in a letter to Malesherbes.<sup>16</sup> Hence, I begin by painting a picture of Rousseau’s romanism, and contrasting this with the *philosophes’* nearly universal scorn for Rome. While Rousseau exclaims in the *Confessions* “Would that I was born a Roman!” [Que ne suis-je né Romain!],<sup>17</sup> Hume, Diderot, Voltaire and company all refer to Rome as a pack of “brigands.” What Rousseau admires most about Rome, its simplicity, rusticity, and patriotism, is despised by these well-spoken, urbanite cosmopolitans. What is more, it helps to better understand Rousseau’s insistence on the importance of action over words, as well as his frequent criticisms of the *philosophes’* virtue-signaling, as it were. In addition to Seneca, Tacitus and Polybius, one recognizes the influence of various ancient authors in the *Discours*, including Plutarch, Sallust, Virgil and Xenophon. Through them, Jean-Jacques conceives of the ideal state characterized by simplicity, what Victor Goldschmidt refers to as Rousseau’s “ *cité cynique*” [city

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<sup>16</sup> See Rousseau’s second *Lettre à Malesherbes*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 1, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 1135.

<sup>17</sup> Je sentais [...] je ne sais quoi qui m’élevait l’âme ; et je me disais en soupirant : Que ne suis-je né Romain !” (Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 255 – 256)

of cynics].<sup>18</sup> At the same time, it is evident that Rousseau is reading these thinkers through the lens of modern philosophers such as Montaigne, Montesquieu, and Fénelon, who situate them within contexts that will reappear in Rousseau's *Discours*. Therefore, Leo Strauss explains how Montesquieu contrasts Roman republicanism with modern, absolutist monarchism, and shows that this is mirrored in Rousseau's attempt to associate the popularization of the sciences with the absolutist tendencies of the state—from this perspective, Rousseau's critique appears quite similar to Habermas' own in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.<sup>19</sup> What I find more interesting however is the neo-Augustinian or Jansenist lens through which everything in the *Discours* seems to pass. While Michael McLendon has recently demonstrated the extent to which the Augustinian critique of *libido dominandi* is present in Rousseau,<sup>20</sup> it was Bertrand de Jouvenel who first characterized Rousseau's *Discours* in Augustinian terms: de Jouvenel argues that Rousseau's claim that the Enlightenment leads to moral decline mirrors Augustine's claim that *libido sciendi* [desire for knowledge] leads to *libido sentiendi* [desires of the flesh].<sup>21</sup> But as I have mentioned above, this critique is complicated by the fact that the society in which these *libidos* are most under control is, according to Rousseau, a pagan and self-interested one. This paradox might be explained by remarking that while hypocrisy is considered one of the gravest sins in Christianity, the pagan moral framework thoroughly precludes it, insofar as one's actions rather than one's intentions are the basis of moral judgements. Quite simply, hypocrisy cannot

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<sup>18</sup> Victor Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique: les principes du système de Rousseau* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1982), p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> See Michael Locke McLendon, *The Psychology of Inequality: Rousseau's Amour-Propre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> See Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Essai sur la politique de Rousseau", in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau : Du Contrat social* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1978), p. 30.

exist where morality does not oblige us to read other's intentions. However, and this paradox remains unresolved, the pagan moral framework also precludes the Christian one for precisely this reason.

In the remaining chapters of this part, Rousseau's unmasking method will be expounded upon. This not only entails studying past thinkers who employ the rhetoric of the mask, but also performing a genealogy of the concept of hypocrisy, and demonstrating how Rousseau's unique understanding of virtues such as autonomy leads him to unmask the unintentional hypocrite. In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that unmasking is part of a "distinctively modern moral scheme."<sup>22</sup> To better understand how unmasking is unique to modernity, I first explain why the style neither emerges in heroic nor Hellenic society where (1) the lack of a concept like the soul or individual means that people consider their social roles (i.e., masks) as a fundamental part of their being, and (2) the emphasis of virtue is on 'successful action' rather than 'good intentions', which can more easily be masked than the former. This analysis is reflected in Aristotle's notion of virtue, which deems failures as vicious no matter how good their intentions might be: "To be vicious is, on Aristotle's view, to fail to be virtuous."<sup>23</sup> In consequence, nowhere does Aristotle describe hypocrisy [ὑπόκρισις] as a vice. Rather, he merely considers hypocrisy as a form of exaggerated speech suited to politics, theater and poetry. This view is characteristic of Hellenic thinkers, and explains why someone like Demosthenes might say that hypocrisy is the "first,

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<sup>22</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> "To be vicious is, on Aristotle's view, to fail to be virtuous. [...] It is therefore very difficult in Aristotelian terms to distinguish between failure to be good on the one hand and positive evil on the other [...]." (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 176)



second and third rule” of oratory.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, as William Barclay demonstrates, hypocrisy is the greatest sin in the New Testament, where its contemporary meaning appears for the first time.<sup>25</sup> This owes to the fact that Christians make the soul the locus of one’s rational being, and thus a place greater emphasis on the intentions of the soul, ignoring the success of one’s actions. This is reflected in passages like Mathew’s “Blessed are meek, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5.5) However, despite this shift to ‘good intentions’, Church Fathers like St. Augustine emphasize the complex and flawed nature of the soul in such a way as to preclude its being unmasked. The unmasking method requires that the soul or individual be sufficiently simple and unchanging to be pinned down, but also pure enough to be perfected or restored—depending on the unmasker’s vision. The former requirement means that someone like Montaigne would not adopt such a method, given his belief that men naturally change the “faces” of their soul as they mature.<sup>26</sup> The latter requirement is typically accompanied by the belief that human flaws and prejudices are simply parts of an artificial exterior that might be shed. It is easy to see how Jean-Jacques meets these criteria, insisting in the *Premier discours* that the virtues are “engraved” upon the human heart, and that the “good man is an athlete who takes pleasure in fighting naked” [L’homme de bien est un Athlète qui se plaît à combattre nu].<sup>27</sup>

I shall not only explain how this contention, along with Rousseau’s quest for autonomy, inspire him to adopt the unmasking method, but also how this method embodies what Claude

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<sup>24</sup> Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators*, in *Plutarch’s Moralia*, vol. 10, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 418, 845b.

<sup>25</sup> William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), p. 140.

<sup>26</sup> See Baehr’s discussion of Montaigne in *The Unmasking Style in Social Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 139 – 140.

<sup>27</sup> See Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 8: “L’homme de bien est un Athlète qui se plaît à combattre nu: il méprise tous ces vils ornemens qui gêneroient l’usage de ses forces, et dont la plupart n’ont été inventés que pour cacher quelque difformité.”

Lévi-Strauss identifies as Rousseau's basic methodology in "Jean-Jacques Rousseau: fondateur des sciences de l'homme," where he argues that Rousseau founded the human sciences. While this implies that unmasking is foundational to the human sciences in some way, I do not intend to defend Lévi-Strauss' stronger claim that Rousseau founded these sciences, whose origins are as diverse as many. I therefore leave this implication untouched. I shall conclude by comparing Rousseau's unmasking method to that of *philosophes* like Holbach and Condorcet, who instead are interested in unmasking the public, and seek to institutionalize the method.

The dangers of institutionalized unmasking become apparent when we examine these philosophers. In *Le Christianisme dévoilé*, Holbach does not hesitate to grant the sovereign the power to unmask the unenlightened masses, whom he accuses of being motivated by "hatred," "fear," "intolerance," "prejudice," and every other based desire under the sun.<sup>28</sup> Although the unmasking method seeks to discover people's hidden motives, it can easily become a means of imputing them, especially when the mask is a caricature. When the unmasker is a dissident like Rousseau, these motives can be disputed, but when it is an authority, one might be coerced or even forced to bear them in silence. The danger, furthermore, is amplified when that authority professes to have science on his side, as in the case of Condorcet. The "social mathematics" of which he conceives in the *Tableau général des sciences* similarly functions to unmask prejudice and "superstition."<sup>29</sup> But Condorcet imagines a vast technocratic, media-academic complex to carry out this science. In the *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, he

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<sup>28</sup> Paul-Henri Thiry Holbach, *Le Christianisme dévoilé ou Examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne*, in *Premières œuvres* (Paris: Les Classiques du peuple, 1972). See pp. 106 – 124.

<sup>29</sup> See Condorcet, *Tableau général de la science, qui a pour objet l'application du calcul aux science politiques et morales*, in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, vol. 1 (Paris : Firmin Didot Frères, 1847 – 1849), p. 540.

praises “the press” for unmasking the oppressors of humanity. Yes, Bacon imagines a scientific class as the rulers of society in his *New Atlantis*, but in Condorcet’s own version,<sup>30</sup> science is the object of society, just as much as society is the object of science. And as Condorcet expresses in his speech to the Académie française, the unscientific classes will be “forced” to accept the light of reason should they reject it.<sup>31</sup>

While I hesitate to argue that the unmasking method is foundational to all social theory, one undoubtedly observes its presence in many 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists. Sigmund Freud unmasks the Victorian defender of chastity as an incestuous murderer. Karl Marx dismisses the Christian’s devotion to the meek and impoverished as a mere “veil of tears” [Jammertales] and accuses him of unwittingly contributing to humanity’s exploitation.<sup>32</sup> And in the *Authoritarian Personality*, Theodore Adorno sets out to expose the White Christian liberal as a crypto fascist. While thinkers like Marx and Adorno present themselves as being critical of the Enlightenment, and concerned about the hidden forms of domination that it engenders, the institutionalization of their sciences and unmasking critiques in academia and media represent precisely the sort of abuses of which Rousseau accuses the *philosophes*; one equally notes the paradoxical nature of institutions themselves informing people how to overcome their socialization. In antiquity, one

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<sup>30</sup> See Condorcet, *Fragment sur l’Atlantide, ou efforts combinés de l’espèce humaine pour le progrès des sciences*, in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, vol. 11 (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1847).

<sup>31</sup> See Condorcet, “Discours de réception de M. de Condorcet”, *Académie française*, accessed August 10, 2020, <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/discours-de-reception-du-marquis-de-condorcet>: “La marche des sciences morales sera donc plus lente que celle des sciences physiques, et nous ne devons pas être étonnés si les principes sur lesquels elles sont établies ont besoin de forcer, pour ainsi dire, les esprits à les recevoir.”

<sup>32</sup> Marx speaks of a religion as an “illusion” [Illusionen] hiding behind a “veil of tears” [Jammertales] in *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, in *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. I (Berlin: Verlag, 1972), p. 378: “Die Aufhebung der Religion als des *illusorischen* Glücks des Volkes ist die Forderung seines *wirklichen* Glücks. Die Forderung, die Illusionen über seinen Zustand aufzugeben, ist die *Forderung, einen Zustand aufzugeben, der der Illusionen bedarf*. Die Kritik der Religion ist also im *Keim* die *Kritik des Jammertales*, dessen *Heiligenschein* die Religion ist.”

is judged by his actions, and in the Christian world, by his intentions, but in modernity, one has the impression of being judged only by the intentions that the state and the media give to him. In the past, Ernst Jünger writes, a man had to commit homicide to be driven into the forest and become a *Waldgänger*, but in our times, it is a matter of “turning the roulette wheel.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Ernst Jünger, *The Forest Passage*, trans. Thomas Friese (Candor, NY: Telos Press Publishing, 2013), p. 17: "Although we will further refine the expression here, it is helpful that it already has a history in old Icelandic vocabulary. A forest passage [*Waldgang*] followed a banishment; through this action a man declared his will to self-affirmation from his own resources. This was considered honorable, and it still is today, despite all the platitudes. In those times, the banishment was usually the consequence of a homicide, whereas today it happens to a man automatically, like the turning of a roulette wheel. [...] In our ancestors' times, anyone banished was already accustomed to thinking for themselves, accustomed to a hard life, and to acting autonomously. [...] Things are different today. People are incorporated into the collective structures in a manner that makes them very defenseless indeed. They hardly realize how irresistibly powerful the prejudices have become in our enlightened epoch. [...] Suddenly, in the midst of such conditions, comes banishment, often like a bolt from the blue: You are red, white, black, a Russian, a Jew, a German, a Korean, a Jesuit, a Freemason—in any case, much lower than a dog."

## Part I: The Origins of the *Philosophes*

### Introduction to Part I

Rousseau presented his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* to the Académie de Dijon in 1750, a year regarded by many as the beginning of the French Enlightenment.<sup>34</sup> His *Discours* was a response to a seemingly uncontroversial question that the Académie had posed to the public in its annual essay competition: “Si le rétablissement des Sciences et des Arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs” [If the reestablishment of the Sciences and the Arts contributed to purifying mores].<sup>35</sup> The answer, which lay in centuries of administrative, philosophical and cultural developments in France and abroad, was for the vast majority of contestants “yes”. Rousseau however responded in the negative. His answer incorporated many of these developments, but the *polemical* style of his *Discours*—which itself is essential to understanding precisely what he was rejecting—often prevents the 21<sup>st</sup> century reader from discerning the true objects of Rousseau’ critique. For this reason, the question must be framed within in its own socio-historical context. Such is the goal of this first part, which will focus in particular on the emergence of the public intellectual, that is, the *philosophe*. That being said, my intention is not to reduce the question to its historical situation. For what Rousseau had to say about the *modern* sciences and arts was deeply inspired by the *ancients*, and is perhaps relevant even to *post-modernity*.

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<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, J.B. Shank, *The Newton Wars and the Beginning of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 1. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

In order to contextualize the question posed by the Académie de Dijon and Rousseau's response, we shall first examine the administrative reforms implemented by figures like Colbert and Pontchartrain during the reign (1643 – 1715) of King Louis XIV. For it was under the absolute monarchy of the exalted Sun King that France erected its first scientific academies, and extended the governmental and hence public sphere beyond the aristocracy to those capable bourgeois men whom Voltaire will later celebrate in his *Lettres Philosophiques* (1733) as the champions of the Enlightenment. The enlargement of the public sphere as a coincidental phenomenon of the absolutist state is a theme to which Jürgen Habermas drew serious attention in *Strukturwandel de Öffentlichkeit* (1962). The **first chapter** of this part is not, however, limited to his analysis. More broadly, we shall attempt to understand how the “reestablishment of the Sciences” came packaged with a bureaucratic state that replaced aristocratic institutions with meritocratic ones open to the lowborn, and which favored commerce over tradition—to the great dissatisfaction of aristocratic-minded men like François Fénelon. Developing this theme is important, not only because this newly formed public sphere pours into the Parisian salons where *philosophes* like Voltaire first convene and compose their esoteric critiques of the Church and other institutions, but also because science and commerce give rise to new “mœurs”, such as those of leisure and luxury that Anne Robert Jacques Turgot and other *philosophes* will later advocate for in their doctrine of *doux commerce*. To be sure, the influence of the *philosophes* is so substantial in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, that the question posed by the Académie de Dijon might be rephrased as follows: “have the *philosophes*, as popularizers of the sciences and the arts, contributed to the purification of mores?”

Although the formation of scientific academies and the enlargement of the public sphere are necessary for understanding the rise of the *philosophes* and the “enlightened” mores of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, neither this cultural archetype nor the values that he espouses can be sufficiently understood without first studying their origin in *humanism*. When Colbert founded the Académie des Sciences in 1666, for instance, it embodied the scientific model that Bacon outlined in works like the *Novum Organum* and *The Great Instauration*, where he not only emphasized the mechanical arts and experimentation over “vain speculation”, but also framed scientific pursuit within a greater, Christian humanist project. Having cast aside scholastic thought, the moderns, Bacon argued, “find themselves in a third period of time [that] will far surpass that of the Grecian and Roman learning”,<sup>36</sup> that will deliver them from the pagan cycles of time, and place them on a linear path of scientific progress to redemption and “eternal sabbath”.<sup>37</sup> To achieve this end, he imagines a *New Atlantis* where the aristocracy is composed of experimental philosophers—as opposed to warriors—that labor “for the benefit and use of life” of humanity.<sup>38</sup> Although the Académie was not founded for the sake of this project, but rather to serve the military, naval and commercial interests of the Sun King’s absolute state, those who helped to establish it undoubtedly had Bacon’s humanist vision of progress in mind. Before the end of the seventeenth century, the Académie would elect as its secretary the *honnête homme*, Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, who had spent his days in the salons of Paris popularizing science and progress, and

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<sup>36</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. G.W. Kitchin (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2001), II, xiv, p. 192.

<sup>37</sup> Francis Bacon, *Confession of Faith* in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 7, ed. James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis, Douglas D. Heath (Longman, Green and Co., 1859), p. 221.

<sup>38</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Great Instauration*, in *Francis Bacon: Selected Philosophical Works*, ed. Rose-Mary Sargent (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999), p. 75.

would use his position in the Académie to broadcast them to the French public. In any case, Bacon's scientific-humanist vision will be explored in the **second chapter** of this part.

The humanist tradition not only had a profound impact on the conceptualization of the cosmological and moral framework within which experimental philosophy was cast, but also on the social philosophy of the *honnêtes gens* of the 17<sup>th</sup> century who would become advocates of the new science, and in so doing transform into the *philosophes* of the 18<sup>th</sup>. This tradition can be traced back to Renaissance Humanists like Erasmus of Rotterdam and Thomas More of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Republic of Letters, men who uncovered in Cicero the rhetorical tools that might be used to arbitrate the religious conflicts of their day, notably between Martin Luther and the Church. Indeed, even before Hugo Grotius defended religious tolerance in the name of natural law in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, More had already developed upon the concept in his *Utopia*—the book that inspired Bacon's *New Atlantis*. The rhetorical tools used by the Humanists were founded on virtues such as honor [*honestum*] and propriety [*decorum*], which they considered conducive to an ideal sort of conversation [*sermo*] leading to friendship and truth, rather than to holy war. If the humanist tradition of the *bonae literae* of the early Republic of Letters merits attention in the **third chapter**, then it is because the social norms of the *honnêtes hommes* and subsequently the *philosophes* can be traced back to them. However, as we shall later see, thinkers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau believed that the *honnêtes hommes* and *philosophes* had failed to live up to the noble virtues of their Ciceronian predecessors.

While Humanists like More put their rhetorical tools into the service of king and country, *honnêtes gens* believed that the ambitions of the court were not conducive to the cultivation of



good *société* and *bons airs*, and instead looked to the *grand monde* [high society] of the salons for its development. Cicero enjoys conversation and friendship for their own sake, but he likely would have considered the discourse of *honnêtes hommes* like the Chevalier de Méré a form of selfish epicureanism. For *honnêtes hommes* eschewed business and politics, and even abstained from specializing in any one field of study, in order to become what Montaigne calls “universal men” capable of discussing any topic and breathing *bons airs* into any conversation. In the **fourth chapter**, my goal is to understand the priority that *honnêtes gens* like the Chevalier de Méré, Nicholas Faret, Montaigne, Pascal and Fontenelle give to *sociabilité*. In particular, I examine the shift from the Ciceronian sense of duty defended by Renaissance Humanists, to what Thomas Carlyle calls the “enlightened self-interest” of *honnêtes gens*. By this, Carlyle means the tendency of thinkers of the era to equate virtue with sweetness and delight, and to rarely consider the conflict between virtue and one’s happiness. I explain this by first examining Pierre Gassendi’s successful attempt to revive certain Epicurean doctrines, and then by showing how Fontenelle introduces what I call neo-Epicureanism or salon-Epicureanism to the *grand monde* of the salon. In distinction with Epicurus, who explicitly mentions virtues that are incompatible with our happiness, salon-Epicureanism is defined, I argue, by the assumption that all virtues are delightful. By means of this discussion, I hope to prepare the way for the following chapter, where I will show how Fontenelle succeeds in advancing the heterodox doctrines of Epicurus that Gassendi was obliged to refute, by pairing them with Descartes’ recent discoveries in physics.

In contrast to other, more universal *honnêtes gens*, Fontenelle took a special interest in mathematics and physics, of which he possessed more than a superficial knowledge, and sought to introduce these topics to the world of the salon. Therefore, in his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des*

*mondes*, he imagines a playful dialogue between himself and a young Marquise, in which he explains to her Descartes' theory of vortices, and shows how it implies a plurality of worlds—an idea that could be traced back to Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Even though Fontenelle does not mention him by name, my analysis reveals that he not only invokes Lucretian arguments there, but also comes to certain Lucretian conclusions that are neither found in Descartes' mechanics, nor implied by it. Among them is the idea that, if other planets form under the same conditions as the earth, then they must also be capable of producing beings like ourselves. Such a conclusion would have been considered controversial, since it contradicts both Biblical history (i.e., the story of creation) and doctrine (i.e., the providential idea that man is unique and exists in order to fulfil his divine purpose). But by using Descartes' mechanics as a vector, Fontenelle is able to introduce this idea, laden with Epicurean implications about man's purpose and the role of happiness, into the world of the salon, where, according to the *honnête femme* Madeleine de Scudery, nothing "shocking" ought ever to be uttered. Fontenelle not only popularizes such ideas in the *Entretiens*, but also in his *Digressions sur les Anciens et les Moderns*, where he employs another Lucretian argument in order to advance a secular vision of scientific progress.

In the **fifth chapter**, I maintain that Fontenelle becomes a forerunner of the *philosophe* archetype by distancing himself from the "universal man or leisure" model of the *honnêtes gens*, and by popularizing Cartesian physics in order to sneak heterodox ideas into the public sphere. What distinguishes Voltaire, the first true *philosophe* I argue, are his explicit political ambitions. If Fontenelle promoted Neo-Epicurean mores and secular progressivism by making himself into an advocate of Cartesian mechanism, then Voltaire popularized Lockean doctrines and English tolerance in his *Lettres philosophiques* by pairing them with Newton's discovery of the force of

attraction. Unlike Fontenelle however, Voltaire was intent upon altering society, as his battle cry “Écrasez l’infâme!” [Crush that infamy!] directed toward the Catholic Church would later reveal. The *philosophes*’ use of science as a vector for heterodox ideas, I further believe, is inspired by what Leo Strauss has called “the struggle of the Enlightenment against prejudice”, which draws a radical distinction between reason and (religious) authority, unlike classical philosophy, which principally opposes reason to appearance or opinion. Hans-Georg Gadamer has also referred to this as the “prejudice” motivating the Enlightenment’s “war on prejudice”.

Having shown how the *philosophes* were inspired by the founding of the Académie des Sciences and King Louis XIV’s bureaucratic reforms, and having given a detailed account of their historical origins, their salon-Epicurean ethics, and their rhetorical tactics, it remains to explain in the **sixth and final chapter** their philosophies proper, which can be characterized, I argue, as “social sciences”. By this, I mean that they represent attempts to reduce all men to individuals, who, deprived of their natural and cultural differences, can more easily be fit into social models aimed at calculating supposedly objective features of society, especially economic ones. This is a critique that Pierre Manent leveled against early Modern thinkers like Machiavelli and Hobbes, and I not only think that it applies to the *philosophes*, but also believe that it is especially useful for understanding Rousseau’s critique of them in the *Premier discours*, where he reminds them how King Xerxes, counting his vast armies and treasuries, was rebuffed by a handful of virtuous Spartans—at least for a few days. Modernity, its attempt to combine science and man, always prioritizes quantity over quality, and becomes a never ending process of leveling-down. Nonetheless, I trace the origins of social science to what Manent describes as the shift from “idealistic” to “scientific” political philosophy. By depriving humans of “nature” or “naturalist

arguments”, Machiavelli and Hobbes likewise deprive them of that inner sphere of liberty, where the perfection of reason and virtue in pursuit of a natural “ideal” formerly translated into political action. In place of nature, these thinkers substitute base psychological desires (i.e., self-preservation and narcissism), which they presume everyone equally possesses, and thereby create “individuals” who can more easily be manipulated externally (i.e., by reconstructing society) owing to their simplicity. This reduction of humanity is necessary for conceiving of what Manent calls “hypertrophic” political theories, which place all of the power in the hands of the organizers of society. And as I show, if thinkers like Mandeville, Hume and Voltaire praise base psychological desires like greed by propping up luxury, for instance, then it is part of the same tradition of “social science”.

Moreover, I argue that if this approach gains traction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, then it owes to the fact, as Hume and Voltaire pointed out, that Newton’s method *seems* to confirm it. Voltaire *esoterically* (to use Strauss’ language) draws the parallel between Newton’s rejection of “occult qualities” and Locke’s epistemological skepticism on the nature of the soul. Hume, who praises Newton for having restored her [nature’s] secrets to that obscurity, in which they ever did and ever will remain”, concludes on that no (moral) *ought* can be derived from what (naturally). Hume’s social science seems to go a step further than Voltaire’s however. For the former claims that we might even apply aspects of Newton’s method to psychological phenomena, such that he devises mental experiments, from which he believes we will be able to come to even more solid conclusions than in the physical domain. It must be reiterated that the shift from idealistic to scientific political theories is never justified by science itself. Rather, the *philosophes* merely observe how Newton’s science ignores the question of nature or metaphysics, but nonetheless

is able to predict the course of celestial phenomena with an accuracy hitherto unknown to man, and attempt to reproduce it in the social world.

This preliminary analysis will also permit us to frame the question posed by the Académie de Dijon, which might be rephrased as follows: how does the popularization of the sciences and the mechanical arts, both by public institutions like the Académie des Sciences and private ones like the Parisian salon, that is, both by statesmen and *philosophes*, alter the moral character of the society? Here, we focus on the *popularization* of Enlightenment science, rather than Enlightenment science per se, following Pierre Manent's lead in his book *Naissances de la politique moderne: Machiavel, Hobbes, Rousseau* (1977): "ce qui est d'abord visé dans son premier *Discours*, c'est la *vulgarisation des sciences, la démocratisation de la culture*" [what is first and foremost the object of his first *Discourse* is the vulgarization of the sciences, the democratization of culture].<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Pierre Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne: Machiavel, Hobbes, Rousseau* (Paris: Payot, 1977), p. 140.

## Chapter I: Louis XIV's Absolutism and the Rise of the Bourgeois Man

### I. i. The Administrative Reforms of Colbert and Pontchartrain under Louis XIV's Absolutism

It was under the absolutist reign of the Sun King, exulted by Voltaire in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), that a vast administrative apparatus for advancing the sciences and mechanical arts took shape in France.<sup>40</sup> With the traditional barriers to monarchical power removed, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619 – 1683), perhaps history's greatest bureaucrat, set to establishing the institutions and academies that would give Louis XIV an advantage in commerce, maritime trade and war.

Colbert is no doubt best known for having founded the Académie des Sciences in 1666.<sup>41</sup> Unlike England's own Royal Society, a private association established in 1660, Colbert's version would be a state entity. And in this way, it represented a greater fulfillment of the ambitions of English, natural philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and Francis Bacon, both of whom "believed that the monarch should rule over knowledge."<sup>42</sup> In his *New Atlantis* (1626) for instance, Bacon imagines a monarchy ruled by noblemen who, rather than waging war, labor in obscurity under the earth's surface to discover nature's truths.<sup>43</sup> This ambition, it must be added, was inspired by what we might anachronistically call today Bacon's preference for science to philosophy, as

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<sup>40</sup> Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1913)

<sup>41</sup> See Denis Diderot (ed.), "Académie Royale des Sciences" in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 1 (Paris: Briasson, 1751), p. 54: "Cette Académie fut établie en 1666 par les soins de M. Colbert. Louis XIV, après la paix des Pyrénées désirant faire fleurir les Sciences, les Lettres & les Arts dans son Royaume, chargea M. Colbert de former une Société d'homme choisis & savans en différens genres de littérature & de science, qui s'assemblant sous la protection du Roi, se communiquassent réciproquement leurs lumieres & leurs progrès."

<sup>42</sup> Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: John Baptiste's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), p. 97.

<sup>43</sup> See Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* in *Essays and New Atlantis*, ed. Francis S. Haight (New York: Walter J. Black Inc., 1942), pp. 288 – 289.

evinced in the *Novum Organum* (1620), where he states that “speculation” must be eschewed for “experimentation,” which requires collaboration as well as greater resources.<sup>44</sup> Although, as Colbert’s contemporary biographer Jacob Soll affirms, we cannot be certain that the Frenchman was directly inspired by Bacon, we can confirm that, like many educated men of his day, Colbert “knew who Bacon was,”<sup>45</sup> as the latter’s ideas had made their impression on society by then—we shall return to Bacon later. Nonetheless, by establishing the *Académie des Sciences* and others, including the Observatoire de Paris in 1667, Colbert attracted some of the greatest minds of Europe, including the Italian Giovanni Domenico Cassini, who discovered the moons and rings of Saturn, and the Hollander Christiaan Huygens, inventor of the pendulum clock.

Colbert’s academic institutions were parts of a greater administrative project however, one that extended the public sphere beyond the cloistered courts and titles of the nobles, to the artisans, merchants and the bourgeois class in general. Hence, his administrative projects contributed to what Jürgen Habermas refers to as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.<sup>46</sup> For instance, as Secretary of State of the Navy, Colbert assigned *commissaires* (or civil

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<sup>44</sup> See Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, ed. Joseph Devey (New York: P.F. Collier, 1902), p. 12, for Bacon’s views on speculation: “The subtilty of nature is far beyond that of sense or of the understanding: so that the specious meditations, speculations, and theories of mankind are but a kind of insanity, only there is no one to stand by and observe it.” For the role of experiment in his philosophy, see p. 119: “The object of our philosophy being thus laid down, we proceed to precepts, in the most clear and regular order. The signs for the interpretation of nature comprehend two divisions; the first regards the eliciting or creating of axioms from experiment, the second the deducing or deriving of new experiments from axioms.”

<sup>45</sup> “While there is no concrete evidence that Colbert read the *New Atlantis*, he knew who Bacon was.” (Soll, *The Information Master: John Baptiste’s Secret State Intelligence System*, p. 215, f. 24)

<sup>46</sup> Habermas defines this sphere as essentially “bourgeois”, which as we shall see is in keeping with Voltaire’s overall assessment that the Enlightenment represented the rise, not of “the shoemaker” but rather that of businessmen, lawyers and scientists. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), p. 27, for his definition of the bourgeois public sphere: “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.”

servants) to various official posts, in contravention of the tradition whereby they were passed down by noble-born *officiers* from one generation to the next; he incentivized shipbuilders to improve upon their techniques by rewarding them with lucrative patents, and he made the secrets of shipbuilding public knowledge by means of funding their study—such secrets had hitherto been closely guarded in the corporate structure of the guilds.<sup>47</sup> It is in light of such reforms that Voltaire would later write in *Louis XIV* that the “Français [...] doivent [à Colbert] certainement leur industrie et leur commerce, et par conséquent cette opulence [...].” (Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, p. 520 – 521) The Colbert project therefore showed that the wealth and knowledge of France could be significantly enhanced by replacing traditional and aristocratic institutions (e.g., corporations and inherited offices) with merit-based ones open to the greater public. One must note, of course, that nobles were not stripped of such privileges in the name of the common good, but rather that of the king, who invoked his absolutist power to improve the commercial and military strength of his realm, and to fund his many wars in Europe. As we shall see in the second part of this thesis, Rousseau disputes in the *Premier discours* this very same presumption, i.e., that technological and commercial success leads to military victories, citing the many wealthy nations that were toppled by poorer ones whose morals had not been corrupted by these things.

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<sup>47</sup> See J.B. Shank, “Before Voltaire: Newtonianism and the Origins of the Enlightenment in France. 1687 – 1734” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2000), p. 78 – 81. As Shank writes: “Only by developing a systematic understanding of the principles involved in the master's discipline could the monarchy become the actual master of the knowledge itself. This ambition pushed the state toward publicity as a means of exposing all publicly relevant knowledge as a prerequisite for acquiring and controlling it. For this reason, it is not surprising to see a new interest in publicity emerging in France in tandem with the rise of the administrative conception of monarchy.” (p. 81)



The reestablishment of the sciences and mechanical arts, as it were, was motivated to a great extent by commercial and military ends, improvements in shipbuilding and optics being conducive to these. Their success depended on broadening the public sphere to include low-born but capable men, and consequently on growing the state. Their fate bound up with one another, French administrators such as Louis de Pontchartrain, Colbert's spiritual successor, formed novel relationships with the public. In 1691 Pontchartrain directed the president of the Académie des Sciences, the Abbé Bignon, to furnish the public with a monthly *mémoire* of its activities, and in 1699 stipulated that the academy present biannually its findings before the public, in addition to publishing an annual *histoire raisonnée* of its greatest inventions. (See J.B. Shank, "Before Voltaire: Newtonianism and the Origins of the Enlightenment in France. 1687 – 1734", p. 57) It must not be forgotten however: the more public men, the bigger the state, and the more income required. Pontchartrain might be lauded for his administrative efforts, but he'll also be remembered for introducing capitation in France, i.e., taxation based on the size of one's estate and income. (See Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, p. 532) So too did Pontchartrain "[sell] noble titles for two thousand crowns in 1696". (Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, p. 535) And although these brought "shame" (Ibid.) on their buyers, as Voltaire writes in *Louis XIV*, putting the aristocracy up for sale might easily be interpreted as another sign of the rise of the low-born but capable man. Bureaucracy, commercialism and meritocracy, these are the soil, sun and water from which the sciences and mechanical arts grow.

Their success would later provide the French *philosophes* with the grounds not only for replacing traditional institutions with liberal ones, but also traditional, aristocratic notions of virtue with a new based on a bourgeoisie self-interest, i.e., the doctrine of *le doux commerce*. In

his famous *Fable of the Bees or Private Vices, Publick Virtues* (1714) for instance, Bernard de Mandeville claims that neither kindness nor virtue are the foundations of society, but rather vices such as envy and the desire for praise, which are most beneficial to trade:

[...] neither the Friendly Qualities and kind Affections that are natural to Man, nor the real Virtues he is capable of acquiring by Reason and Self-Denial, are the Foundation of Society; but that what we call Evil in this World, Moral as well as Natural, is the grand Principle that makes us sociable Creatures, the solid Basis, the Life and Support of all Trades and Employments without Exception: That there we must look for the true Origin of all Arts and Sciences, and that the moment Evil ceases, the Society must be spoiled, if not totally dissolved.<sup>48</sup>

This passage should help set the tone of the thesis: “what we call Evil in the World, Moral as well as natural, is [...] the true Origin of all Arts and Sciences.”<sup>49</sup> What is more, it is evident that “trade and industry,” in other words, the fruits of science, are consistently invoked to justify this doctrine. For as Mandeville also states in his *Free Thoughts on Religion, The Church and National Happiness* (1720): “We see daily men roused from sloth and idleness, and spurred on to emulation and useful labor, by no better principle than envy; and it is generally taken for granted, that covetousness and pride are the chief promoters of trade and industry [...]”<sup>50</sup> As we shall see, Mandeville’s recognition that traditional virtue must be abandoned to advance the sciences and

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<sup>48</sup> Bernard de Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees or Private Vices, Publick Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1732), p. 428.

<sup>49</sup> Rousseau will no doubt affirm this statement in the *Premier discours*, save for the claim that such evil is “natural.”

<sup>50</sup> Bernard de Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, The Church and National Happiness* (London, 1732), p. 12.

industry is hardly exceptional, and appears in different formulations in *philosophes* like Voltaire, Turgot and Saint-Lambert to name a few.

### I. ii. Voltaire, Diderot, Turgot and Saint-Lambert: Scientific Progress and *Doux Commerce*

Before Voltaire praised the Sun King in *Louis XIV*, he sung an encomium to Isaac Newton (1643 – 1727) in his *Lettres philosophiques* (1731).<sup>51</sup> Concealed however within his exoteric praise of the thinker who had discovered the force of attraction, was an esoteric critique of what would be referred to in post-revolutionary France as the *Ancien Régime*.<sup>52</sup> Bishops and Barons had not produced this “powerful genius” [puissant genie] (*Lettre Philosophiques*, p. 61), but instead “the people” (*Ibid.*, p. 43): scientists, lawyers, businessmen, traders—in short, low-born bourgeois men.<sup>53</sup> And according to Voltaire, their success could be traced back to the liberalism and tolerance of the English, embodied best by the “sage and modest philosophy of Locke” [la sage et modeste philosophie de M. Locke] (*Ibid.*, XIII, p. 74), and to their commercial spirit. Liberalism and commercialism, the two synergized and augmented one another: “Le commerce, qui a enrichi les citoyens en Angleterre, a contribué à les rendre libres, et cette liberté a étendu le commerce à son tour” [Commerce, which enriched the citizens of England, contributed to making

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<sup>51</sup> Voltaire, *Lettres Philosophiques* in *Voltaire*, ed. Roger-Pol Droit (Paris: Flammarion, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that the phrase “ancien regime” was only coined after the French Revolution.

<sup>53</sup> The entire passage: “Tandis que les barons, les évêques, les papes déchiraient ainsi l'Angleterre, où tous voulaient commander le peuple, la plus nombreuse, la plus vertueuse même et par conséquent la plus respectable partie des hommes, composée de ceux qui étudient les lois et les sciences, des négociants, des artisans, en un mot de tout ce qui n'était point tyran, le peuple, dis-je, était regardé par eux comme des animaux au-dessous de l'homme. Il s'en fallait bien que les communes eussent alors part au gouvernement ; c'étaient des vilains : leur travail, leur sang appartenaient à leurs maîtres, qui s'appelaient nobles. Le plus grand des hommes étaient en Europe ce qu'ils sont encore en plusieurs endroits du Nord, serfs d'un seigneur, espèce de bétail qu'on vend et qu'on achète avec la terre. Il a fallu des siècles pour rendre justice à l'humanité, pour sentir qu'il était horrible que le grand nombre semât et que le petit nombre ; et n'est-ce pas un bonheur pour le genre humain que l'autorité de ces petits brigands ait été éteinte en France par la puissance légitime de nos rois, et en Angleterre par la puissance légitime des rois et du peuple ” (*Lettres philosophiques*, p. 43)

them free, and this freedom expanded commerce in turn] (*Ibid.*, p. 87). The *Lettres* were burned by the executioner in France. For their esoteric content, which tacitly approved of the sensationalism that Voltaire discovers in John Locke (1632 – 1704), had not gone unnoticed by the authorities—of course, one hardly doubts that the wily Voltaire would have succeeded in passing the *Lettres* under the censor’s nose had his French publisher not acted without his consent.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, a new and interesting argument had been made: that society should be organized with a view to improving experimental science—which, unlike the “science” of the scholastics, both provided useful tools and could predict the course of nature.

Perhaps the most extreme form of this new and interesting argument appears in Anne Robert Jacques Turgot’s *Discours sur les progrès successifs de l’esprit humain* (1750), which was published only one year before Rousseau’s first *Discours* appeared. There, Turgot treats all the kingdoms, empires and nations of the past and present as mere discardable steps on the path to scientific progress, a path on which commerce is a companion no doubt:

Les Empires s’élèvent et tombent : les lois, les formes du gouvernement se succèdent les unes aux autres ; les arts, les sciences se découvrent et se perfectionnent. Tour à tour retardés et accélérés dans leurs progrès, ils passent de climats en climats. L’intérêt, l’ambition, la vaine gloire changent perpétuellement la scène du monde, inondent la terre de sang ; et au milieu de leurs ravages, les mœurs s’adoucissent, l’esprit humain s’éclaire

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<sup>54</sup> For more on this episode, see J.B. Shank, “Voltaire,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified August 31, 2009, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/voltaire>. “Before it appeared, Voltaire attempted to get official permission for the book from the royal censors, a requirement in France at the time. His publisher, however, ultimately released the book without these approvals and without Voltaire’s permission. This made the first edition of the *Lettres philosophiques* illicit, a fact that contributed to the scandal that it triggered, but one that in no way explains the furor the book caused. Historians in fact still scratch their heads when trying to understand why Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques* proved to be so controversial.”

; les nations isolées se rapprochent les unes des autres ; le commerce et la politique réunissent enfin toutes les parties du globe ; et la masse totale du genre humain, par des alternatives de calme et d'agitations, de biens et de maux, marche toujours, quoiqu'à pas lents, à une perfection plus grande.<sup>55</sup>

Turgot's conception of scientific progress differs from Voltaire's in an important way however. For Voltaire had thought that, insofar as the advancement of the sciences depends more on the bourgeois than the noble, organizing society around this goal would be conducive to achieving material and social equality between the two—after all, Voltaire was not a noble, as the Duke of Rohan had cruelly reminded him at the Comédie-Française.<sup>56</sup> Turgot, by contrast, insisted that “barbarism equalizes all men” (Turgot, *Discours sur les progrès successifs de l'esprit humain*, p. 598), whereas the pursuit of experimental science, which requires agriculture, the division of labor, and the accumulation of resources for a group of geniuses who might discover her truths at their leisure, tends toward inequality. Of course, and this must be emphasized, Voltaire was never interested in the equality of peasants, but rather between the privileged nobles and well-to-do bourgeois like himself. As he once wrote to D'Alembert: “On n'a jamais prétendu éclairer les cordonniers et les servantes; c'est le partage des Apôtres” [We never claimed to enlighten

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<sup>55</sup> Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, *Discours sur les progrès successifs de l'esprit humain*, in *Œuvres de Turgot*, vol. 2, ed. Eugène Daire and Hippolyte Dussard (Paris: Guillaumin, 1844), p. 598.

<sup>56</sup> See James Parton, *Life of Voltaire* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1892), p. 184. Parton recounts this incident, which resulted in Voltaire spending one month in the Bastille, and then fleeing to England: “At the opera in Paris, one evening in December 1725, Voltaire was conversing with acquaintances in the lobby between the acts [...] Among the by-standers was the Chevalier de Rohan [...]. This chevalier, forty-three years of age, a dissolute man-about-town, broke into the conversation in an insolent tone, saying, “Monsieur de Voltaire, Monsieur Arouet, what is your name? [...] The chevalier repeated the offensive question [several days later at the opera], when Voltaire replied [...] “I begin my name; the Chevalier de Rohan finishes his.”

shoemakers and servants; that is the affair of Apostles].<sup>57</sup> Enlightenment, while undermining the distinction between (legally) privileged noblemen and the wealthy, leaves the underclasses intact—which might help explain the indifference and even hostility of certain peasants to the Enlightenment and subsequent Revolution, as evinced by the *Chouans*. If the poor complain, then they must remember, as the Geometrician expresses in Voltaire’s *L’Homme aux quarante écus* (1762), that they owe their existence to their betters, and thus should be content if their masters increase the industry of the nation, since more goods shall be imported and they too will feel its effects—albeit in some meager way.<sup>58</sup> We shall of course return to the question of equality later on, for Rousseau argued in his *Premier discours* that the meritocratic demands of science were at odds with the sort of equality on which stable nations are founded.

Contrary to the snooty Voltaire, the *philosophe* Denis Diderot (1713 – 1784) expressed a great admiration for artisans, cataloguing their methods—including those of the shoemaker—in his *Encyclopédie*, which was first published in 1751. And while he regarded natural equality as a “chimera,” he believed “equality” of fortunes to be important for preserving the “tranquility” of the nation.<sup>59</sup> While the *philosophes’* focus on *doux commerce* increased the general estimation of the arts (i.e., the trades), it was the mechanical arts (i.e. what we call engineering today) that they generally lauded. In his entry “Arts” to the first edition of the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot praises

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<sup>57</sup> Voltaire, *Voltaire to Jean le Ronde d’Alembert, Septembre 2, 1768*, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 57 (Paris: Crapelet, 1821), p. 460.

<sup>58</sup> See Voltaire, *L’Homme aux quarante écus* (Paris: Éditions Slatkine, 1996), p. 52, where *Le géomètre* maintains: “par tout pays le riche fait vivre le pauvre. Voilà l’unique source de l’industrie du commerce. Plus la nation est industrielle, plus elle gagne sur l’étranger. Si nous attrapions de l’étranger dix millions par an pour la balance du commerce, il y aurait dans vingt ans deux cent millions de plus dans l’État: ce serait dix francs de plus à répartir loyalement sur chaque tête, c’est-à-dire que les négociants feraient gagner à chaque pauvre dix francs de plus [...]”

<sup>59</sup> See Denis Diderot, “Citoyen”, in *Diderot : Œuvres complètes*, vol. 14 (Paris : Garnier Frères, 1876), p. 193 : “Plus les citoyens approcheront de l’égalité de prétentions et de fortune, plus l’État sera tranquille.”

Bacon for dispelling the prejudice held by speculative philosophers (i.e., scholastics) against the mechanical arts, and for regarding these as “the most important branch of true philosophy”.<sup>60</sup> This too represented a triumph of modern morality over ancient, aristocratic morality. For while the mechanical arts came under a favorable light in the Renaissance, they had been regarded as the “servile arts” in the Medieval Ages.<sup>61</sup> And as Larry Shiner remarks in *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*, the ancient aristocratic disdain for even the most technical arts was so great that, as Plutarch expresses, a young noble might admire Phidias’ statue of Zeus at Olympia, but would never “want to *be* Phidias.”<sup>62</sup>

Finally, it must be stated that the *philosophe* did not merely laud commerce and trade, but luxury itself. Jean-François Saint-Lambert, for instance, maintains that nations must acquire “luxury” so that they can achieve that “maturity” required to pursue the science: “pour tirer les nations de leur faiblesse et de leur obscurité, et pour leur donner une force, une consistance, une richesse qui les élèvent sur les autres nations, il faut qu’il y ait du luxe, il faut que ce luxe aille toujours en croissant pour avancer les arts, l’industrie, le commerce, et pour amener les nations à ce point de maturité” [in order to lift nations up from weakness and obscurity, and to give them a strength, consistency, and wealth that raises them above other nations, there must be luxury, and this luxury must always proliferate with a view to advancing the arts, industry, commerce,

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<sup>60</sup> See Denis Diderot (ed.), *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 1 (Paris: Briasson el Le Breton, 1751-1772), p. 715: “Bacon regardoit l’histoire des Arts mécaniques comme la branche la plus importante de la vraie Philosophie.”

<sup>61</sup> See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. R. J. Blackwell (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), no. 59, p. 29: “Hence, only those arts which are directed to knowing are called free [or liberal] arts, whereas those which are directed to some useful end attained by action are called mechanical or servile arts.”

<sup>62</sup> See Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 23.

and to lead nations to this degree of maturity].<sup>63</sup> Saint-Lambert's reasoning has certainly endured the test of time. Voltaire too praised luxury as an instrumental good in his poem *Le Mondain* (1736), esteeming it the mother of the beaux arts: "J'aime le luxe, même la mollesse / [...] Mère des arts" [I love luxury, even indolence / [...] Mother of the arts].<sup>64</sup> These, of course, were vices that the *philosophes* were praising—a tradition that could be traced back to Mandeville. Thus, the goal of building society around the arts and sciences resulted in the promotion of the following institutions: liberalism, tolerance, commerce, luxury, indolence, and a growing bourgeois class, composed entrepreneurs and mechanical artists, but having no need for aristocrats and their antiquated notions of excellence.

### I. iii. Opposition to the Administrative Reforms of Louis XIV: Fénelon's Neoclassicism

The works of François Fénelon (1651-1715) seem to predict Mandeville's unironic praise of luxury, as well as Voltaire's admiration for Louis XIV's administrative reforms, and ultimately the triumph of the bourgeois man under his reign. He is, for our purposes, noteworthy not only because he formulates one of the first critiques of Louis XIV's luxuriousness in *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699), but also because his critique shares a great deal in common with Rousseau's in the *Premier discours*. Like Augustin and Pascal, Fénelon rejects *amour propre* or what he calls "l'amour intéressé" [self-interested love] in the quest for a "*pur amour*" [pure love] inspired by God, one that is perfectly selfless and wholly dedicated to charity.<sup>65</sup> But unlike these thinkers, he also expresses an admiration for the ancient Romans and Greeks who understood political

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<sup>63</sup> Jean-François Saint-Lambert, "Lux," in *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 20 (Paris: Briasson et Le Breton, 1778), p. 546.

<sup>64</sup> Voltaire, *Le Mondain*, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 3 (Paris: Crapelet, 1817), p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> François Fénelon, *Explication des Maximes des Saints sur la Vie intérieure* (Paris: Librairie Bloud, 1911), p. 130.



excellence in terms of a similar disinterested love, not for God but the polis. What is more, and this should make us think of Rousseau, it is their “simplicity” that he considers to be the source of their disinterested virtue. For as he maintains in his *Lettre sur les occupations de l’Académie française* (1714): “Diverse personnes sont dégoûtées de la frugalité des moeurs qu’Homère dépeint. Mais outre qu’il faut que le poète s’attache à la ressemblance pour cette antique simplicité comme pour la grossièreté de la religion païenne, de plus rien n’est si aimable que cette vie des premiers hommes.”<sup>66</sup> Fénelon’s admiration here for “this life of the first men” is clearly inspired by Roman historians like Sallust, who praises the early Romans for neglecting “letters” [les lettres] (p. 17) and instead concentrating on their duties, and Virgil, who prefers the “poverty of King Evander” to the luxury, decadence, and “magnificence of Rome” (p. 104). Likewise, Rousseau’s critique of the arts and science—which he no doubt associates with the luxuriousness of the Sun King—oscillates between these two polls: on the one hand, he affirms that vanity or *amour propre* corrupts society, but on the other, he believes that patriotic glory can, under the right circumstances, be harnessed to destroy more corrupting forms of vanity, e.g., pride in owning what others cannot afford. Lastly, while I believe that Rousseau’s love for antiquity can be traced to numerous modern thinkers—Montesquieu, Montaigne, etc.—it is no doubt true that Fénelon is one of his greatest influences in this regard.<sup>67</sup>

*Les Aventures de Télémaque* were published without the consent of Fénelon, and while he does not directly criticize Louis XIV there, he clearly has the reforms of the Sun King in mind.

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<sup>66</sup> Fénelon, *Lettre sur les occupations de l’Académie française* (Paris: Librairie Charles Delagrave, 1875), p. 100.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Patrick Riley, “Rousseau, Fénelon and the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 78 - 93, p. 78: “Rousseau owed to Fénelon nothing less than the legitimation of his obsession with Greco-Roman antiquity.”

For instance, his character the Mentor advises Telemachus to avoid the absolutist tendencies of centralized government, which punishes the prudent and industrious by means of a graduated income tax, Pontchartrain's no doubt:

Les princes avides et sans prévoyance, ne songent qu'à charger d'impôts, ceux d'entre leurs sujets qui font les plus vigilans et le plus industrieux pour faire valoir leurs biens : c'est qu'ils espèrent en être payés plus facilement : en même temps ils chargent moins ceux que la paresse rend plus misérables. Renversez ce mauvais ordre qui accable les bons, [et] qui récompense le vice [...].<sup>68</sup>

The Mentor warns both against commercialism and bureaucracy, and argues that when nations place their material wealth first, virtue comes last. Thus, he recounts the story of Erichthon, who introduced the use of silver as money in Hellas, but cautioned the people not to conflate it with what it represented: things necessary and useful to our health and happiness.<sup>69</sup> As the Mentor asks Telemachus, between the nation that considers gold and silver its riches, and another that measures its wealth in terms of the fertility of its land and people, which is the richer? Indeed, we know which version of wealth our modern nations value most. As Fénelon writes:

Lequel vaut mieux, ajouta Mentor, ou une ville superbe en marbre, en or et en argent, avec une campagne négligée et stérile, ou une campagne cultivée et fertile, avec une ville

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<sup>68</sup> François Fénelon, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (Paris: Flammarion, 1912), p. 183.

<sup>69</sup> As the Mentor explains: "Erichthon [...] inventa l'usage de l'argent pour la monnaie: il le fit en vue de faciliter le commerce entre les îles de la Grèce: mais il prévint l'inconvénient attaché à cette invention. [...] Attachez-vous donc principalement aux véritables richesses qui satisfont aux vrais besoins de l'homme. Pour l'argent monnoyé, [...] seroit-il à souhaiter qu'on laissât tomber le commerce à l'égard de toutes les choses qui ne servent qu'à entretenir le luxe, la vanité, et la mollesse." (Ibid., p. 282)

médiocre et modeste dans ses mœurs ? Une grande ville fort peuplée d'artisans occupez à amollir les mœurs par les délices de la vie, quand elle est entournée d'un royaume pauvre et mal cultivé, ressemble à un monstre dont la tête est d'une grosseur énorme, et dont tout le corps exténué et privé de nourriture n'a aucune proposition avec cette tête : c'est le nombre du peuple et l'abondance des alimens, qui forment la vraie force et la vraie richesse d'un royaume. (Fénelon, *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, p. 321)

What a resemblance this passage bears to those found in the *Premier discours*, where Rousseau compares Athens, remembered for its marble sculpture, and Sparta, of which no trace remains other than its heroes and their noble accomplishments! Rather than trade and commerce, the Mentor advises Telemachus to focus on agriculture, which produces people who are “simple in their morals [...] but healthy, vigorous, robust, undisturbed by lusts, [and] exercised in virtue.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Rousseau will affirm that the “rusticity” of the early Romans is a source of their virtue in the *Premier discours*, as well as praise them in the *Du Contrat social* for privileging those who live in the countryside over urbanites.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “Il retranche le faste, la mollesse, et tous les arts qui ne servent qu'à flatter les vices; il fait fleurir les autres arts qui sont utiles aux véritables besoins de la vie: surtout il applique ses sujets à l'agriculture. Par-là, il les met dans l'abondance des choses nécessaires. Ce peuple laborieux, simple dans ses mœurs, accoutumé à vivre de peu, gagnant facilement sa vie par la culture de ses terres, se multiplie à l'infini. Voilà dans ce royaume un peuple innombrable, mais un peuple sain, vigoureux, robuste, qui n'est point amolli par les voluptés, qui est exercé à la vertu, qui n'est point attaché aux douceurs d'une vie lâche et délicate, qui sait mépriser la mort, qui aimerait mieux mourir que perdre cette liberté qu'il goûte sous un sage roi appliqué à ne régner que pour faire régner sa raison.” (Fénelon, *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, p. 76)

<sup>71</sup> Rousseau explains this phenomenon in *Du contrat social*. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), IV, p. 445 – 446: “De cette distinction des tribus de la ville et des tribus de la campagne résulta un effet digne d'être observé, parce qu'à n'y en a point d'autre exemple et que Rome lui dut à la fois la conservation de ses mœurs et l'accroissement de son empire. On croirait que les tribus urbaines s'arrogèrent bientôt la puissance et les honneurs, et ne tardèrent pas d'avilir les tribus rustiques: ce fut tout le contraire. On connaît le goût des premiers Romains pour la vie champêtre. Ce goût leur venait du sage instituteur qui unit à la liberté les travaux rustiques et militaires [...].”

Fénelon's critique of France's absolute monarchy is interesting if only because Rousseau will mobilize many of the same arguments against the Enlightenment. This helps to confirm the thesis that Leo Strauss advances in his article "On the Intentions of Rousseau," where he argues that Rousseau "attacks the Enlightenment as a pillar of despotism or of absolute monarchy."<sup>72</sup> Unlike Rousseau however, Fénelon did not regard the arts and sciences as potential sources of vice and corruption. Hence, the Mentor lauds the Tyrians for having taught humanity how to navigate by the stars, and for the esteem in which they hold their geometers and astronomers, while criticizing Bocchoris, who lacked "curiosity for the sciences" [curiosité pour les sciences] (Fénelon, *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, p. 29) and ruled over Egypt like a tyrant.

Here, we have outlined the political and cultural context in which the *Premier discours* appears. But the *Discours* is not primarily aimed Louis XIV nor absolute monarchy, but rather at the *philosophes*, whom Rousseau accuses of making science and philosophy fashionable. Thus, we must examine their origins and trajectory.

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<sup>72</sup> Leo Strauss, "On the Intentions of Rousseau," in *Social Research*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1947): 455-486, p. 456.

## Chapter II: Bacon and the Origins of Scientific Progress

### II. i. Bacon's *New Atlantis*: Organizing Monarchy around the Sciences

While Colbert might not have been directly inspired by the Baconian model of science, it surely inspired *philosophes* like Condorcet, who wrote his own version of Bacon's *New Atlantis* many years later. Moreover, the Christian humanism that comes packaged with it represents an important stage in the evolution of *Republic of Letters*, to which we can trace the origins of the *philosophes*. When Bacon rejected scholasticism and adopted his new experimental method, he was filled with hope that man might finally be delivered from the pagan cycles of time that St. Augustine had once sought to straighten out, as it were, in the *City of God*.<sup>73</sup> More precisely, he thought that humanity was now entering a "third period of time" (Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, p. 192) in which the world no longer appeared cyclical and therefore static, but rather like a growing plant bearing the fruits of knowledge across human history. As Bacon writes in *Valerius Terminus* (~1603):

[...] knowledge appeareth to be a plant of God's own planting, to it may seem the spreading and flourishing or at least the bearing and fructifying of this plant, by providence of God, nay, not only by a general providence but by a special prophecy, was

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<sup>73</sup> See St. Augustine, *The City of God*, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Marcus Duds (Edenborough: T. & T. Clarke, 1871), book XII, argument xiii, p. 498: "This controversy some philosophers have seen no other approved means of solving than by introducing cycles of time, in which there should be a constant renewal and repetition of the order of nature; and they have therefore asserted that these cycles will ceaselessly recur, one passing away and another coming, though they are not agreed as to whether one permanent world shall pass through all these cycles, or whether the world shall at fixed intervals die out, and be renewed so as to exhibit a recurrence of the same phenomena—the things which have been, and those which are to be, coinciding. And from this fantastic vicissitude they exempt not even the immortal soul that has attained wisdom [...]."

appointed to this autumn of the world; [...] in the prophecy of Daniel, where, speaking of the latter times, it is said, “Many shall pass to and fro, and science shall be increased”; as if the opening of the world by navigation and commerce, and the further discovery of knowledge, should meet in one time or age.<sup>74</sup>

While Bacon’s conception of progress is essentially technological, and understood in terms of man’s mastery over nature, it is not secular. Rather, Bacon maintains that by mastering nature, humanity will be restored to a state not unlike the Garden of Eden, where it will live in perfect health and all of its physical needs will be met—in this way, Bacon distinguishes himself from Enlightenment philosophers like Fontenelle, who will advance a secular theory of unbounded progress. The passage “and science shall be increased” [*multiplex erit scientia*] derives from the prophecy of Daniel 12:4 for the end times. But whereas St. Jerome had interpreted this passage to mean that there shall be a “multitude of opinions” and thence chaos in the final days of the world, Bacon interprets it as foretelling the coming of “an eternal Sabbath” (Bacon, *Confession of Faith*, p. 211) of knowledge.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, it would not seem that Bacon’s vision of progress is informed by classical authors like Cicero who otherwise exerted a great influence on Bacon. For J.R. Webb points out, Cicero, like his contemporaries, believed that the greatest intellects had come before him, and that the world was now in a state of decay (J.R. Webb, “Knowledge Will Be Manifold,” p. 323).

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<sup>74</sup> Francis Bacon, *Valerius Terminus*, in *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. John M. Robertson (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 118.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of the interpretation of this passage during the Medieval Ages and the Renaissance, see J.R. Webb, “Knowledge Will Be Manifold”: Daniel 12.4 and the Idea of Intellectual Progress in the Middle Ages,” in *Speculum* 89, no. 2 (April 2014): 307 – 357. On the “multitude of opinions”, see p. 307.

Bacon not only conceives of what might be called an early version of scientific progress, but also imagines a political regime resembling Plato's *Republic* in which it might be achieved. In the *Novum Organum* for instance, he distinguishes three tiers of people. At the bottom, are those who fight amongst their compatriots for material wealth; in the middle, those who fight alongside their compatriots against other nations for honor; and at the top, those who seek to bring the light of the arts and sciences to all humanity:

It will, perhaps, be as well to distinguish three species and degrees of ambition. First, that of men who are anxious to enlarge their own power in their country, which is a vulgar and degenerate kind; next, that of men who strive to enlarge the power and empire of their country over mankind, which is more dignified but not less covetous; but if one were to endeavor to renew and enlarge the power and empire of mankind in general over the universe, such ambition (if it may be so termed) is both more sound and more noble than the other two. Now the empire of man over things is founded on the arts and sciences alone, for nature is only to be commanded by obeying her. (Bacon, *Novum Organum*, p. 105 – 106)

If the Académie des Sciences was inspired and peopled by first order men, it was established for the sake of a second order ruler whose ceaseless wars with neighboring kingdoms would exhaust the resources of France—one speaks of King Louis XIV of course. Thus, one remarks the conflict between the ambitions of the absolute monarchy and the model that inspired some of its most productive institutions. The distance between the two will grow in the years to come, especially

with Fontenelle becoming the Académie's perpetual secretary, and ultimately lead to the tensions that give rise to the French Revolution, as many commentators have argued.<sup>76</sup>

Like Plato, Bacon also dreamt of Atlantis. His *New Atlantis* (1626) differs however from the one found in the *Critias* and *Timaeus*.<sup>77</sup> For Bacon's exists in the future. In the *New Atlantis* of the future, there is a utopic city named *Bensalem*, meaning "Son of Wholeness in Hebrew", ruled by the philosopher king Solomon. And while Bacon also imagines three tiers of men there, his philosophers do not study arcane moral and metaphysical truths, but instead remain in the cave to experiment on the earth's minerals. Bacon's philosophers live underground and in total obscurity, where they seek to determine the "cause" and "secret motions of things" in order to better understand how to improve human health, duration of life and the material conditions: "The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible [...] for curing of some diseases, and for prolongation of life [...]." (Bacon, *New Atlantis*, p. 288) These objectives are characteristically humanist, and go to the heart of Bacon's belief that that philosopher must be willing to sacrifice both his pride and well-being to succor humanity—here, even the pursuit of the truth per se is considered a form of vanity. As we have already seen, the *philosophes* did

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<sup>76</sup> See, for instance, Roger Hahn, *The Anatomy of a Scientific Institution: The Paris Academy of Sciences, 1666 – 1803* (Berkeley: University of California, 1971), p. 117: "[...] the utilitarian object of the Academy was recognized from its very inception as an essential part of its function. It was a theme reiterated throughout the century by all spokesmen of science from Fontenelle to Condorcet. Everyone referred to the possibilities held out by science for the improvement of man's well-being and in the service of the Crown. But the relative importance of these activities changed considerably in the decades preceding the French Revolution, and in direct response to the stepped-up pace of economic development."

<sup>77</sup> Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* in *Essays and New Atlantis*, ed. Francis S. Haight (New York: Walter J. Black Inc., 1942). In the kingdom of *New Atlantis*, named Bensalem, the philosophers remain in the cave to study the natural causes of things. As their leader, King Solomon explains: "We have large and deep caves of several depths: the deepest are sunk six hundred fathom [...] some hermits [...] choose to live there." (p. 288 – 289)



not share Bacon's attitude toward such vices, and according to the doctrine of *doux commerce*, were happy to make incentives like wealth and glory incentives for scientific progress. The turn from humanism therefore helps to explain how the scientist and philosopher are transformed into public figures in the Enlightenment.

## II. ii. "Herculean Labors": The Renaissance Humanist as Scientist

Unlike the *philosophes*, who eulogized thinkers like Descartes and Newton, the natural philosophers of *New Atlantis* were prepared to live underground, where they would never reap the distinctions and honors that their discoveries merited. Instead, they contented themselves with undertaking what Renaissance Humanists like Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466 – 1536), the Prince of Humanists, referred to as "the labors of Hercules" [*Herculei labors*].<sup>78</sup> This aphorism, which Bacon employs elsewhere in his oeuvre, can be traced back to Erasmus' *Adages* (1508), where such labors are described as being "of a kind to bring the greatest advantage to others, and little or no profit to the doer, except a little fame, and a lot of envy". (Erasmus, *Adages*, p. 18) It was the Latin works of Roman authors like Horace and Cicero that Erasmus uncovered the Herculean laborer, that is, an individual who is eager "to pursue the advantage of others at the greatest expense to oneself, and to bring forth the finest fruits of virtue by being of the greatest service to the greatest number, and thus to imitate the immortal power as far as mortal may." (Ibid., p. 20) A Humanist, as the concept is understood during the Renaissance, is someone who reads the classics, not merely as student of history, but as a gentleman of sorts in search of the

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<sup>78</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Adages*. In *Erasmus on His Times: A Shortened Version of the "Adages" of Erasmus*, ed. Margaret Mann Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 18.

greatest examples of virtue. This is true, of course, with the exception of the Epicureans, whom he regards, like Cicero, with a sort of disdain—we must keep this in mind, for the *honnêtes gens* who emerge after the humanists do not share this disdain, and indeed those like Fontenelle even use Cartesian science as a context for advancing Epicurean doctrines.

Bacon's understanding of the philosopher as a herculean laborer is a consistent theme throughout his oeuvre. And while it has roots in Cicero and other classical thinkers, there is no mistaking its overlap with Christianity. Thus, in the Preface to *The Great Instauration* (1620), he writes the following about the true philosopher:

[They] consider what are the true ends of knowledge, and that they seek it not either for pleasure of the mind, or for contention, or for superiority to others, or for profit, or fame, or power, or any of these inferior things; but for the benefit and use of life; and that they perfect and govern it in charity. For it was from lust of power that the angels fell, from lust of knowledge that man fell; but of charity there can be no excess, neither did angel or man ever come in danger by it.<sup>79</sup>

The humanist conception of virtue is informed by the Christian notion of charity. Likewise, the humanist shares the Christian disdain for vanity, which in Bacon's case, translates to a critique of those who waste their time studying rhetoric and conversation, which he regards as being "trivial and effeminate". In comparison to such types, whom he accuses of being inspired by a

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<sup>79</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Great Instauration*, in *Francis Bacon: Selected Philosophical Works*, ed. Rose-Mary Sargent (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999), p. 75.

“Pygmalion frenzy” for beauty, he offers the model of the herculean laborer, who spends his time studying matter instead:

But the excess herein [in the study of words] is so justly contemptible, that as Hercules, when he saw the statue of Adonis, who was the delight of Venus, in the temple, said with indignation, “There is no divinity in thee”; so all the followers of Hercules in learning, that is, the more severe and laborious inquirers after truth, will despise these delicacies and affectations as trivial and effeminate.<sup>80</sup>

This quote is not, as one might imagine, a reproach of the “schoolmen” or scholastics. (Ibid., p. 42) Rather, Bacon is criticizing a certain “luxuriance of style” that “strangely prevailed about the time of Luther”, who “was forced to awaken antiquity to make a party for him”. (Ibid., p. 42 – 43) The object of his critique was thus the excesses of the humanists, and more precisely, of a sort of wordsmithing they had developed in order to *popularize* their ideas. As Bacon maintains: “because the greatest labor then was to win and persuade the people, eloquence and variety of discourse grew into request as the most suitable for the pulpit, and best adapted to the capacity of the vulgar”. (Ibid., p. 43)

Though it might seem odd to focus on Bacon as a case study here, he helps us to better understand the sort of ideas that the *honnêtes gens* of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the *philosophes* of the 18<sup>th</sup> are rejecting. Bacon, who is influenced both by classical and Christian authors, believes

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<sup>80</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in *The Physical and Metaphysical Works of Lord Bacon*, ed. Joseph Devey (London: George Bell and Sons, 1898), p. 44.

that paying too much attention to the art of conversation is a vice,<sup>81</sup> while the *honnêtes gens* will conceive of good conversation as the highest end of the “universal man”. In addition, the *philosophes* will make it their principal aim to “win and persuade the people” of their doctrines. Neither they nor these *honnêtes gens* share Bacon’s classicism, and emerge in the wake of *Querelle des Anciens et de Modernes*, from which the moderns seem to emerge victorious. Though thinkers like Fénelon and Rousseau are not humanists, they often sight the same ancients authors, and similarly express what might be called an Augustinian admiration for the self-less philosopher who eschews pride. I believe that we can understand how these positions are abandoned by studying the Republic of Letters, which begins as a humanist society and ultimately gives birth to the *philosophes*.

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<sup>81</sup> It should be mentioned however that Bacon did not universally regard rhetoric or the study of conversation as vicious. See Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, p. 44: “Yet the illustrating the obscurities of philosophy with sensible and plausible elocution is not hastily to be condemned; for hereof we have eminent examples in Xenophon, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, and Plato [...].”

## Chapter III: Humanist Origins

### III. i. The Early Republic of Letters: Erasmus and the Revival of Ciceronian Humanism

If the private sphere of the *philosophes* was the salon, then that of the Humanists was the *Respublica literaria* [Republic of Letters], the vast epistolary network whose origins could be traced back to the early 1500s. The *bonae literae*—or lettered men—of this republic considered themselves *civis mundi* [citizens of the world] in the Socratic sense and discussed in their letters how they might resolve religious and social conflicts in their respective villages and kingdoms. They accomplished this by looking to ancient philosophers such as Seneca and Cicero, whom they regarded as “foregleams” of Christianity,<sup>82</sup> and in whose works they discovered the moral and rhetorical tools for resolving the conflicts of their day; for instance, Hugo Grotius’ (1583 – 1645) subordinated matters of faith to a Ciceronian natural law framework in order to reduce both domestic and international religious tensions.<sup>83</sup> Their contact with one another was not always confined to the world of letters however. For they not only bore witness to the advent of the printing press, but were also known to convene in person in publishing houses—albeit with far less frequency than the *philosophes*. It should be mentioned, however, that the early Republic of Letters of which men like Erasmus and Grotius were a part was a cloistered group, being

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<sup>82</sup> See The Professors of Chicago Theology Seminary, *Current Discussions in Theology*, vol. 5 (Chicago: Congregational Sunday School and Publishing, 1888), p. 144: “From the time of Jerome until the period of the Humanists, Seneca was regarded as a Christian, so striking was the similarity between some utterances of his and those of the New Testament.”

<sup>83</sup> This is particularly apparent in the case of Grotius’ *De fide et perfidia* (1602) [Of Good and Bad Faith], where he appropriates Cicero’s concept of *fides publica* [public faith]. As one commentator has noted, “[Grotius ...] suggests that *fides* is to be respected even towards those whose religious beliefs one does not share. Grotius mentions specifically the fidelity to one’s promises: he suggests that promises are to be kept even to heretics. Would this not be the case, he observes, human society itself would dissolve over religious disputes.” See Marc de Wilde, “*Fides publica* in Ancient Rome and Its Reception by Grotius and Locke,” *The Legal History Review* 79 (2011): 455 – 487, p. 473.

composed of “*érudits*” [erudites] and “*savants*” [scholars].<sup>84</sup> Therefore, it did not appeal, as the salon discussions of the *philosophes* did, to a greater audience. This later changes in the 1670s, when a number of journals concerning the affairs of the Republic of Letters appear. For in addition to dealing with the usual erudite subjects, they introduce journalistic ones, thereby appealing to an audience of “*curieux*” [curious persons]. (Lambe, “Critics and Skeptics in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters,” p. 277) Of course, it was around this time too that Fontenelle began composing his eulogies of the scientists of the Académie des Science—another hit among the *curieux*.

One might thus argue the following: whereas early members of the Republic of Letters, and particularly the Renaissance Humanists, were part of a cloistered and erudite society, those who replaced them toward the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century engaged in popularizing and thereby vulgarizing the Republic of Letters’ goals. As Patrick Lambe points out, the *honnête hommes* regarded the erudition of the Humanists, and especially their interest in mastering Latin, as qualities of “picking grammarians concerned only with arguing over words” (Ibid., p. 280). In fact, they even compared such “picking” to the scholastic tendencies that the Humanists themselves had criticized as pointless word games. This attitude is borne out in Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), where his exoteric praise of the Humanists’ erudition conceals an esoteric critique of their lack of cleverness and antiquarianism:

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<sup>84</sup> Patrick Lambe, “Critics and Skeptics in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters,” *Harvard Theological Review* 81, no. 3 (July 1988): 271 – 296, p. 277.

Je crois que le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle a produit un plus grand nombre de savants hommes que le XVII<sup>e</sup> ; et, néanmoins, il s'en faut beaucoup que le premier de ces deux siècles de lumières que l'autre. Pendant que le règne de la critique et de la philologie a duré, on a vu par toute l'Europe plusieurs prodiges d'érudition. L'étude de la nouvelle philosophie et celle des langues vivantes ayant introduit un autre goût, on a cessé de voir cette vaste et cette profonde littérature ; mais en récompense, il s'est répandu dans la république des lettres un certain esprit plus fin et un discernement plus exquis. Les gens sont aujourd'hui moins savants et plus habiles.<sup>85</sup>

The new generation of *hommes des lettres* are "less knowledgeable" but "cleverer". Surely this is the seventeenth century equivalent of complementing one as being "book smart." In Bayle's view, the humanists are only interested in technical distinctions, but are unable to understand the normative significance of the ancients, Bayle, by contrast, presented "Les savants" (i.e., the great minds of antiquity) as heroes or even "'media' figures" (Ibid., p. 278), believing that his age not only required intellectual but also spiritual illumination.<sup>86</sup>

If the *philosophes* succeed in popularizing and vulgarizing a scholarly Republic of Letters, then it is by reshaping the ethical tenants and rhetorical tools of the Humanists. However, what they received from the Humanists had already been filtered through the minds of *honnêtes gens* of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In order therefore to understand how the *philosophes* exploited this tradition

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<sup>85</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Aconce*, in *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Desoer, 1820), note D, p. 183.

<sup>86</sup> "'Les savants' became in Bayle and in his readers 'media' figures who were more important in themselves than for their work; Rend Rapin, in his commentary on Thucydides and Titus Livy (which is paraphrased by Bayle in his article on "Aconce"), argues that the new generation is not satisfied merely with reconstructing the critical apparatus of the ancient authors, but wishes to gain greater illumination by entering into their spirit [...]." (Lambe, "'Critics and Sceptics in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters," p. 279)

to advertise new mores, it should be important to study the development of the Republic in its various phases: (1) the Humanists, (2) the *honnêtes gens* and (3) the *philosophes*. One will note that, whereas the Humanists contented themselves with resolving the conflicts of their day, the *philosophes* did not hesitate to start new ones. This, as we shall see, results from the *philosophes* abandoning the Ciceronian manner of conversation [*sermo*] that Renaissance Humanists such as Erasmus had adopted in the Protestant-Catholic schism.

Among the *bonae literae* of the Republic of Letters one finds some of the greatest minds of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, including not only those whom we have mentioned, but many others like Rene Descartes (1596 – 1660), Marin Mersenne (1588 – 1638), and Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646 – 1716). Our study of the early Republic of Letters shall focus on two figures in particular however, Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536) and Thomas More (1478 – 1535), as both are prime examples of the humanist ethic. They do not seek to enlighten the spirit of their age, but rather see themselves as arbiters, and search amongst the ancients for the rhetorical tools with which they might arbitrate the greatest conflict of their day, the Catholic-Protestant schism.

The Renaissance Humanist is first and foremost a classicist, ambitious to restore ancient Greek and Latin thinkers to their former glory. One of the classical authors that attracted More and Erasmus the most was Cicero, the Roman orator and statesman who quite literally wrote the book on *humanitas*.<sup>87</sup> Cicero composed the work that would later be published as *De Officiis* or *On Duty* as an instruction manual for his son on how to navigate life—and if it were not for the

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<sup>87</sup> See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Moral Duty*, in *Ethical Writings of Cicero*, trans. Andrew P. Peabody (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1887).



fact that it would later become one of the most celebrated works in the Western canon, it would have been a wasted effort, as his son was a drunk.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, Cicero sets out there to show, as Plato had done before him, that *honestum* [moral goodness/honor] and *utile* [utility] are not at odds with one another, but instead fellow travelers. Cicero's humanist resembles most what one today would call a gentleman, "master of the ready word, of wit, of banter, of urbanity".<sup>89</sup> His *honestum* furnishes him the probity and regard for one's honor necessary for pursuing the truth in earnest. Without this quality, he would also fail to master the art of *sermo* [conversation], which obliges one to treat one's interlocutor *bona fida* [in good faith] all the while showing *decorum* [propriety].<sup>90</sup> *Sermo* is the dual art of pursuing the truth and acquiring friends along the way, being akin to Socratic Dialogue—although Cicero deliberately refrains from calling it *logos* [dialogue] given the practical, rather than philosophical, aim of the work. One must distinguish *sermo* from the sort of *conentio* [disputation] in which the politician engages. As a statesman, Cicero was involved in and even welcomed numerous *conentiones*, but always with a view to minimizing its partisan and divisive effects. The humanist as Cicero conceives of him, must employ these gentlemanly virtues for the betterment of his family, his friends, his race and ultimately his commonwealth.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> On Cicero's son, see Peter White, *Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 9: "Cicero's son, the only male of his family to survive the civil wars, gained a reputation in later life as a drunkard and a hothead."

<sup>89</sup> On the Ciceronian humanist as gentleman, see E. K. Rand, "The Humanism of Cicero," in *Proceedings Amer. Philos. Soc.* 71, no.4 (1932): 201 - 216, p. 207.

<sup>90</sup> On the role of *sermo* in Cicero's *De Officiis*, see Michele Kennerly, "Stoic Sociality in Cicero's *De Officiis*," in *Rhetorica* 28, no. 2 (2010): 119 – 137, p. 119: "By connecting [stoic sociality] with *sermo*, and *sermo* with oratory-glory, Cicero fits Stoicism to Rome's political contours and also ushers future leaders of public affairs into both rhetorical and philosophical conversation—mild-mannered modes of discourse—during apolitically turbulent time."

<sup>91</sup> See Cicero, *On Moral Duty*, I, (p. 35 – 36): "To take our departure from the tie of common humanity, of which I have spoken, there is a nearer relation of race, nation, and language, which brings men into very close community

While the ambition of *philosophes* like the Marquis de Condorcet (1743 – 1794) was no less than establishing “equality of fortunes” between all empires, early men of letters inspired by Cicero adopted a bottom-up approach to improving humanity. Arbiters rather than advocates, patriots rather than cosmopolitans, they felt a deep connection to their respective communities. As Pierre Tuynman writes in his article on the lettered Petrus Scriverius (1576 – 1660):

The *bonae literae* were either employed directly "for the common good," or they were deliberately intended as a contribution to the commonwealth of which one considered oneself to be a part: and that meant, at the very least, a further elevation of the glory of one's country or hometown.<sup>92</sup>

The earthly relation that Cicero cherished the most however was friendship, the pursuit of the truth with likeminded and virtuous men. “But of all the relations,” writes the statesman in one beautiful passage, “none is more excellent, none more enduring, then when good men, of like character, are united in intimacy. For the moral rectitude of which I have so often spoken, even if we see it in a stranger, yet moves us, and calls out our friendship for him in whom it dwells.” (Cicero, *On Moral Duty*, p. 36) Humanists too held friendship in the highest esteem, which is evinced in a letter from Erasmus to Servatius, where the former seeks to regain the latter’s Platonic love for him:

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of feeling. [...] the union of blood, especially, binds men in mutual kindness and affection; for it is a great thing to have the same statues of ancestors, the same rites of domestic worship, the same sepulchers. [...] At the same time, nothing is more lovable, and nothing brings men into more intimate relations, than the common possession of these moral excellences; for those who have the same virtuous desires and purposes love one another as they love themselves, and they realize what Pythagoras would have in friendship, the unifying of plurality.”

<sup>92</sup> Pierre Tuynman, “Petrus Scriverius 12 January 1576 – 30 April 1660,” *Quaerendo* 7 (1977): 5 – 45, p. 11

As nothing in nature is so delightful or so sweet, as to love and be loved, so nothing to my mind is more distressing or more unhappy, than to love without return; and as nothing is more human than to love the being that loves you, so nothing is more alien to *humanity* or nearer to the nature of a wild *animal* than to repulse, not to say hate, such a being. You will perhaps suspect that I have composed this exordium, to attempt a reconciliation and patch up again our friendship.<sup>93</sup>

It is through friendship and intimate conversation that one raises oneself above the animalistic to the dignity of humanity. Here, one does not win an argument at the other's expense, but rather discovers the truth with him: "The friendly soul who shows one lost way, / Lights, as it were, another's lamp from his. / Though he has lit another's, his own still shines."<sup>94</sup> Of all the traditions that the humanists pass down to the *honnêtes gens* and *philosophes* of the following centuries, it is their esteem for *sermo* or the art of conversation that has the most lasting impact—studying how this art evolves will be essential for making sense of Rousseau's eventual critique of its water-down practice amongst the *philosophes*.

Some might take issue with the characterization of Erasmus as an arbiter, for he was also a brilliant critic, and thus an instigator of controversies. Endowed with both pluck and wit, his arrows struck the fanatical and impious alike. In his satirical *In Praise of Folly* (1511), he took aim at the pageantry and petty one-upmanship of the monks, whom he accused of depriving the beggars of their income; only if they first learned to be content with themselves, if they learned

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<sup>93</sup> Erasmus, *Erasmus to Servatius (Epistle 8)*, in *The Epistles of Erasmus*, trans. Francis Morgan Nichols (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901), p. 48.

<sup>94</sup> A reference to a poem by Ennius in Cicero's *De Officiis* (Cicero, *On Moral Duties*, p. 34).

“self-love”, could they again become useful to society.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, he shot through the bombast and pedantry of the Italian Ciceronians who had dared to invoke the displeasure of the “barbarian” classicist from the North.<sup>96</sup> In the *Ciceronianus* (1528), he accuses them of being like schoolboys, more interested in proving that they have memorized their Cicero than in using the orators’ tools to advance the Christian message.<sup>97</sup> And to his great fortune, Erasmus was able to loose his arrows from the imposing citadel of Pope Leo X’s favor—at least until the Pope died.<sup>98</sup>

Erasmus’ critiques, of course, were those of a moderate. To prove that he was an arbiter, and that he successfully employed Cicero’s rhetorical tools to this end, one need only examine his correspondence with Martin Luther (1483 – 1546). In addition to these works, the Prince of Humanists had re-translated the Greek passages of the New Testament into Latin, publishing a new edition in 1516 with critical philological commentary. In this edition, Martin Luther found considerable support for many of his proposals for reform.<sup>99</sup> Erasmus thought many of Luther’s

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<sup>95</sup> See Erasmus of Rotterdam, *In Praise of Folly* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1876), p. 37, where Erasmus writes the following about self-love: “In short, without self-love, instead of beautiful, you shall think yourself an old beldam of fourscore; instead of youthful, you shall seem just dropping into the grave; instead of eloquent, a mere stammerer; and in lieu of gentle and complaisant, you shall appear like a downright country clown; it being so necessary that everyone should think well of himself before he can expect the good opinion of others.”

<sup>96</sup> See Erika Rummel, *The Erasmus Reader* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1990), p. 123: “Even Erasmus, who was considered the most eloquent of the northern humanists, was held in contempt and called a ‘barbarian’ by these [Italian Ciceronians].”

<sup>97</sup> See Erasmus of Rotterdam, *The Ciceronian* in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 6, ed. A.H.T. Levi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 368, where the fictional character Bulephorus characterizes the Italian Ciceronians in the following way: “One could approve of a speech like [that of a famous Italian Ciceronian] as being a demonstrated of ability and intelligence if it were delivered by a schoolboy before his fellow pupils in class [...].”

<sup>98</sup> When, for instance, Erasmus was accused of heresy by the monks whom he had mocked, Pope Leo dismissed their claims without giving them any serious consideration. See Frank M. Gibson, “Erasmus: A Humanist among Reformers,” *The Sewanee Review* 30, no. 1 (January 1922): 2 – 19, p. 13: “The University of Louvain now proposed to make a formal examination of the works of Erasmus with a view to delating him in due form to the Pope for heresy. Erasmus coolly re marked that in order to make the proposed examination they must first learn some Greek and Latin. The examination was made, however, and point after point was brought before Pope Leo, who placidly decided them all in Erasmus’s favor as fast as they were made.”

<sup>99</sup> As Gibson writes, “Erasmus’s New Testament had done more than anything else to put into the hands of educated men the proofs of many of Luther’s assertions”. (Gibson, “Erasmus: A Humanist among Reformers”, p. 16)

criticisms just, writing to Melanchthon in 1519 that: “Martin Luther’s way of life wins all men’s approval here, but opinions vary about his teaching. [...] He has made some just criticisms, but I wish they had been as happily expressed as they were outspoken.”<sup>100</sup> As one notes however, he was disconcerted by Luther’s tone. In *A Discussion of Free Will, a Warrior Shielding the Free Will against the Enslaved Will By Martin Luther* (1526), Erasmus reproached the rising Protestant for engaging in *contentiones* [disputations] and for recruiting political partisans, when he might have succeeded in convincing his interlocutors with Ciceronian *sermo*.<sup>101</sup> Inspired by Cicero, who once wrote that “skill in the settlement of controversies is more desirable than courage in disputing them by arms” (Cicero, *On Moral Duties*, p. 50), Erasmus sought to deescalate what would become the bloodiest controversy of the following century, the Thirty Years War.

### III. ii. The Renaissance Humanism of Thomas More: Science, Utopia and Tolerance

Both Erasmus and More exhorted Christians to eschew dogmatism and practice religious tolerance, but neither wavered in his devotion to the Catholic Church. In stark contrast, Voltaire advocated for religious tolerance, while setting out “to assemble the sacred flock” [rassembler le saint troupeau] of *philosophes* and “extirpate the Church” [extirper l’infâme].<sup>102</sup> Indeed, More

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<sup>100</sup> Erasmus, *Erasmus to Melanchthon, 22 April 1519*. In *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 76, trans. Peter Macardle and Clarence H. Miller, and ed. Charles Trinkhaus, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. xxxi.

<sup>101</sup> See Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 96. Remer shows how Erasmus uses the language of Cicero in *Hyperaspistes* to reproach Luther for his contentious criticisms of the Church: “Erasmus refers to Luther’s argument as *contentio* in LB 10:1277B and 1290C [of the *Hyperaspistes*], and to Luther as contending [*contendis*] in LB 10:1281E and 1282B. Erasmus also distinguishes between his own ‘well-balanced inquiries [*inquisitiones*] of learned men’ and Luther’s “quarrelsome disputes [*contentiones*] carried on before the populace.”

<sup>102</sup> For the first citation, “rassembler le saint troupeau”, see Voltaire to Damilaville, 19 September 1764, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 8, (Paris: Antoine Augustin Renouard, 1821), p. 562. For the second, “extirper l’infâme”, see Voltaire to Madame d’Épinay, 1 July 1759, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 28 (Paris: L. Hachette, 1861), p. 301. Voltaire frequently refers to the Church in these terms. Also see Voltaire to Damilaville, May 1761, in *Œuvres*

was not only dedicated to the Church, but quite literally put his neck on the line for it. Serving as High Chancellor in the court of Henry VIII, More embodied the Ciceronian ideal of the *vita activa* of the statesman. The refusal to recognize that Tudor Monarch as the Supreme Head of the Church of England resulted in More's beheading—a sacrifice for which Pope John Paul II would later venerate him as the patron saint of “Statesmen and Politicians”.<sup>103</sup> While Thomas More's actions demonstrate his devotion to the Catholic Church, works like his *Utopia* (1515) reveal a patriot concerned with the maintenance of our civic duties, and show that, despite his criticisms of the Church and his refusal to respect the State's sanctioned sacrilege, he did not regard himself as standing above these institutions, unlike many of the *philosophes*.<sup>104</sup>

In *Utopia* More draws on another significant theme found in Cicero, opposing *negotium* [duty] to the *otium* [leisure] of his character Raphael Hythloday, a young nobleman who divided his inheritance among his brothers in order to travel the world and study philosophy without the interference of civic and domestic duties.<sup>105</sup> Raphael describes to More a utopic island named

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*complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 6, (Paris: Antoine Augustin Renouard, 1821), p. 112, where he writes: “Courez tous sur l'Infâme habilement; ce qui m'intéresse, c'est la propagation de la foi, de la vérité, le progrès de la philosophie et l'avisement de l'Infâme.”

<sup>103</sup> For more on this, see Pope John Paul II, “Proclaiming Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians”, Vatican, last modified October 31, 2000, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_motu-proprio\\_20001031\\_thomas-more.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_20001031_thomas-more.html): “Saint Thomas More [...] distinguished himself by his constant fidelity to legitimate authority and institutions precisely in his intention to serve not power but the supreme ideal of justice. His life teaches us that government is above all an exercise of virtue. Unwavering in this rigorous moral stance, this English statesman placed his own public activity at the service of the person, especially if that person was weak or poor; he dealt with social controversies with a superb sense of fairness; he was vigorously committed to favouring and defending the family; he supported the all-round education of the young. His profound detachment from honours and wealth, his serene and joyful humility, his balanced knowledge of human nature and of the vanity of success, his certainty of judgement rooted in faith: these all gave him that confident inner strength that sustained him in adversity and in the face of death.”

<sup>104</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. Stephen Duncombe (New York: Minor Compositions, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> As one commentator writes, “implicit in [the ethical framework of Utopian republicanism] is that individuals should reject *otium* and embrace *negotium* (the *vita activa*), performing their *official* to their friends and family, promoting the *gloria* of the *civitas* or *patria*, and securing honor for themselves”. See Eric Nelson's “Greek Nonsense in More's *Utopia*,” *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 4 (December 2001): 889 – 917, p. 893.

Utopia that he visited in his travels abroad—a theme that Bacon will reuse in *New Atlantis*. Utopia bears a marked resemblance to Plato's *Republic*. For instance, Hythloday approvingly describes how private property has been abolished in Utopia and wealth redistributed equally among the citizenry, such that everyone has his or her needs met:

In all other places it is visible that, while people talk of a commonwealth, every man only seeks his own wealth; but there, where no man has any property, all men zealously pursue the good of the public [... ;] in Utopia, where every man has a right to everything, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full no private man can want anything; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, none in necessity, and though no man has anything, yet they are all rich; for what can make a man so rich as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties; neither apprehending want himself, nor vexed with the endless complaints of his wife? (More, *Utopia*, II, p. 184 – 185)

More rejects Raphael's endorsement of Utopia's communism however, for he argues that it also deprives nations of "all nobility, magnificence, splendour, and majesty". (Ibid., p. 190) If Raphael is truly interested in improving the commonwealth, adds another character by the name of Peter, then he ought to make himself "useful" by entering into the service of the king. (Ibid., p. 35) Despite his reproaches, More is not entirely unsympathetic to Raphael's description of the underclasses. As one commentator has indicated, Raphael's account of the exploitation of the poor in other kingdoms, where "the condition of beasts might seem far preferable" (Ibid., p. 186), are frequent enough to conclude that "[one] of More's greatest concerns is with the injustices

created by economic inequalities”.<sup>106</sup> Renaissance humanist like More and Erasmus were sensitive to the abuses of the rich and noble, but always remained faithful to their institutions, and moderate in their critiques, owing to their Ciceronian sense of duty.<sup>107</sup> Bacon and More in particular always sought to effect change in their capacity as statesmen, rather than as critics on the outside—something which Rousseau will remind the *philosophes* of in his first *Discours*.

Among other things, Raphael gives an account of the laws concerning religious tolerance in Utopia, where “every man might be of what religion he pleased, and might endeavour to draw others to it by the force of argument and by amicable and modest ways[...]; but that he ought to use no other force but that of persuasion, and was neither to mix with it reproaches nor violence; and such as did otherwise were to be condemned to banishment or slavery”. (More, *Utopia*, p. 169) Neither More nor Peter offer any objection to these laws. Indeed, following Raphael’s long description of Utopia, More responds that “there are many things in the commonwealth of Utopia that I rather wish, than hope, to see followed in our own governments”. (Ibid., p. 190) More might have *wished* for King Henry VIII to adopt such a program for religious tolerance, but was unwilling to squander his “hope” on it. In any case, what we learn from Erasmus and More is that the duty-bound humanist is not an activist, but an arbiter. And one can be certain that

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<sup>106</sup> See Mildred Witt Caudle, “*Utopia: Origins and Purposes*,” in *Social Science* 45, no. 3 (June 1970): 163 – 169, p. 166

<sup>107</sup> Erasmus not only sought to repair divisions within the Catholic Church, but also between the classes, defending the plebeians against the abuses of the nobles in *The Complaint of Peace* (1521): “The people, the ignoble vulgar, despised as they are, are the very persons who originally raise great and fair cities to their proud eminence; who conduct the commercial business of them entirely; and, by their excellent management, fill them with opulence. Into these cities, after they are raised and enriched by plebeians, creep the satraps and grandees, like so many drones into a hive; pilfer what was earned by others’ industry; and thus, what was accumulated by the labour of the many, is dissipated by the profligacy of the few; what was built by plebeians on upright foundations, is leveled to the ground by cruelty and royal patrician injustice.” See Erasmus of Rotterdam, *The Complaint of Peace*, trans. Thomas Paynell (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1917), p. 34 – 35.



neither fear nor cowardice motivates him to adopt such a stance, for More gave his life when his principles would not have otherwise remained intact. By contrast, the *honnêtes hommes* sought only to shirk their duties, as we see in the next chapter.

## Chapter IV: *Honnêtes Hommes* and *les Bons Airs*

### IV. i. The *Honnêtes Hommes* of the *Grand Monde*: Nicolas Faret and the Chevalier de Méré

The *honnête homme* evolves from the Renaissance Humanist. Like his predecessor, he is a student of Cicero's *De Officiis*, and thus devoted to perfecting his speech and deportment. But unlike the Humanist, he places a greater emphasis on pleasure than utility, preferring to delight in the conversation of the salon rather than exercise his capacities as a statesman in the court. Indeed, men of letters such as Jean de la Bruyère (1622 – 1673) and Montesquieu (1689 – 1755) will later mock these *honnêtes gens* for their superficiality. In the *Lettres Persanes* for instance, the foreign travelers are astounded by the effeminate and superficial conversations to be heard in the salons.<sup>108</sup> The *honnête homme* has Epicurean tendencies without being one per se, and would no doubt have rejected the life of one of Bacon's scientists or More's statesman for that of the "universal man", as Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592) calls him. Science, politics and business quite simply do not produce the *bons airs* of conversation that a man well-versed in all subjects—but not overly infatuated with any one subject—might conjure.

One of the earliest accounts uniquely dedicated to the subject of the *honnête homme* is Nicolas Faret's (1596 – 1646) *L'Honneste homme où l'art de plaire au court* (1630).<sup>109</sup> He sets out

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<sup>108</sup> See Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, in *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, vol. 1, ed. Édouard Laboulaye (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), letter 36, p. 141, where Usbek describes the superficiality of the conversations that he hears in the cafés of Paris. See Jean de la Bruyère, *Les Caractères de la Bruyère, suivis des Caractères des Théophraste* (Paris: Librairie d'Abel Ledoux, 1836), where he mocks the effeminate and superficial nature of certain pseudo-*honnêtes hommes*. Also see Molière, *Les Femmes savantes: comédie en cinq actes* (London: Librairie Hachette, 1892), where he tells the story of three *honnêtes femmes*—Philaminte, Armande and Henriette—who are duped by the pseudo-*honnête homme* Trissotin into thinking that he is a great man of letters and learned in the sciences, when in reality he is simply looking to marry for wealth.

<sup>109</sup> Nicolas Faret, *L'Honnête homme ou l'art de plaire à la court* (Genève: Slatkine, 2011)

there to advise noblemen on how “to live in the corruption of the court without being [morally] sullied” [vivre dans la corruption de la cour, sans estre souillé]. (Faret, *L’Honneste homme*, p. 36)

The text does not therefore instruct noblemen on how to be *honorable* and *useful*, but merely on how to preserve one’s own *honor*. That being said, the sort of obsequious deportment that Faret prescribes gives one the impression that he is not primarily interested in the preservation of the nobleman’s *honor*, but more simply in his own well-being. To this end, Faret counsels the following: one must study the humor of the prince, whether it be bellicose, peaceful or scholarly, and “conform” accordingly. (*Ibid.*) Furthermore, one must be submissive, abstain from giving one’s honest opinion, and learn to affirm the prince’s judgement without appearing overly sycophantic, which means “proposing his opinion”:

Il n’y a rien qui choque si rudiment les esprits des Grands que cette obéissance forcée. [...] C’est pourquoy les plus subtiles Politiques [...] enseignent de ne luy donner jamais que des conseils timides et douteux ; c’est à dire de parler à luy d’un accent plein de soumission, et qui semble plutost proposer son avis, que de l’approuver [...]. (*Ibid.*, p. 55)

How different Faret’s guide on the art of conversation is from Cicero’s, who railed against Marc Antony and his followers in fourteen *Philippicae* delivered before the senate, and ultimately paid with his head—a sort of Humanist tradition. Faret’s guide also represents the beginning of the exodus of *bonae literae* from the public sphere to the private one. If *honestum* cannot be united with *utile* in the former, then perhaps it can at least be united with *pleasure* in the latter.

The retreat of the *honnêtes gens* of the 17<sup>th</sup> century into the private world of the salon is also evinced by Antoine Gombaud, the Chevalier de Méré (1607 – 1684), in an essay entitled “De

la vraie honnêteté”.<sup>110</sup> According to de Méré, the ambitions of his fellow courtiers and the intrigues that they precipitate stifle the “bon air” [good atmosphere] after which the veritable *honnête homme* seeks. (de Méré, “De la vraie honnêteté”, p. 70) One must distinguish, as the Chevalier holds, between the court and the “grand monde” [high society], or the world in which *les grands* circulate. (Ibid.) For it is in the latter environment that the *honnête homme* achieves with the greatest facility his aim of producing a light and joyous atmosphere by the art of conversation:

[...] comme la Cour de France est la plus grande et la plus belle, qui nous soit connue, et qu'elle se montre souvent si tranquille, que les meilleurs Ouvriers n'ont rien à faire, qu'à se reposer ; il y a toujours eu de certains Faineans sans métier, mais qui n'étoient pas sans mérite, et qui ne songeoient qu'à bien vivre, et qu'à se produire de bon air. [...] ce sont d'ordinaire des Esprits doux et des Cœurs tendres ; des gens fiers et civils ; hardis et modestes ; qui ne sont ni avers ni ambitieux [...] : Ils ont guères pour but, que d'apporter la joie par-tout, et leur plus grand soin ne tend qu'à mériter de l'estime, et qu'à se faire aimer. (Ibid., p. 69 – 70)

Like the Renaissance humanist and Cicero, the *honnête homme* described by de Méré holds the art of conversation in the highest esteem. Unlike the former however, it is not *utility* but rather living well, joy and being loved—decidedly epicurean ends—with which his *honestum* coincides. What is honest is necessarily pleasant. What is pleasant is not necessarily useful however. The

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<sup>110</sup> Le Chevalier de Méré, “De la vraie honnêteté,” in *Œuvres complètes du Chevalier de Méré* (Saints-Geosmes: Klincksieck, 2008)

*honnêtes hommes* that de Méré describes here are “certain Faineans sans métier” [certain do-nothings without an occupation] who eschew business for leisure.<sup>111</sup> Alas, the self-sacrificing herculean laborer has no place amongst these decidedly self-interested *honnêtes hommes*. This proclivity for leisure, good conversation and ultimately self-interest is one to what Montaigne also frankly admits in his essay “De la vanité”:

Que ne feroy plustot que de lire un contrat, et plustot que d’aller secouant ces paperasses poudreuses, serf de mes négoce ? ou encore pis de ceux d’autruy, comme font de gens, à pris d’argent ? Je n’ay rien cher que le soucy et la peine, et ne cherche qu’à m’anonchalir et avachir.<sup>112</sup>

The *honnête homme* eschews business and other duties, and instead “seeks only to make himself nonchalant and to recline”.

#### IV. ii. The *Honnête Homme* as Universal Man: Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld and Pascal

The term *honnête homme* figures frequently in the *Essais* (1580 - 1595) of Montaigne, who likewise advises against specialization, a trait surely required for success in any bourgeois endeavor, and prescribes instead the study of ethics and morality for the formation of what he

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<sup>111</sup> Also see Le Chevalier de Méré, *De l’Eloquence et de l’Entretien*, in *Œuvres posthumes de M. le Chevalier de Méré* (Paris: Jean & Michel Guignard, 1700), p. 142 - 143, “Je ne voudrois parler que bien rarement des choses, qui ne sont point de la connoissance ordinaire du monde, comme de la Politique, de la Chicane, et des Affaires: Ce sont des sujets ennuyeux pour les esprits bien faits.”

<sup>112</sup> See Michel de Montaigne, “*De la Vanité*,” in *Les Essais*, ed. Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien and Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 998.

refers to as “les âmes universelles” [universal souls].<sup>113</sup> That the *honnête homme* should avoid specializing, neither consecrating too much of his attention to his business affairs nor to the study of theoretical fields such as mathematics, is also reiterated by Blaise Pascal (1623 – 1662) in a fragment entitled “*Honnête homme*” from the *Pensées* (1670): “We should neither be able to say: he is a mathematician, nor a preacher, nor eloquent, but that he is an honest man. This universal quality alone pleases me. When I see a man memorize his book, it is a bad sign. I prefer that one learns from nothing but experience and the occasion to use it.” [Il faut qu’on n’en puisse [dire] ni : il est mathématicien, ni prédicateur, ni éloquent, mais il est honnête homme. Cette qualité universelle me plaît seule. Quand en voyant un homme on se souvient de son livre, c’est mauvais signe. Je voudrais qu’on s’aperçût d’aucune qualité que par la rencontre et l’occasion d’en user.]<sup>114</sup> It is neither the books one reads nor the knowledge that one possess that interests the *honnête homme*, but rather the character that one constructs from that knowledge—as Socrates explains in the *Phaedrus*, those who “put their trust in writing [...] will know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will merely appear to be wise instead of really being so.”<sup>115</sup>

Perhaps the universal nature of the *honnête homme* is summarized best in the *Maximes morales* (1665) of La Rochefoucauld (1613 – 1680): “The veritable honest man is one who boasts

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<sup>113</sup> See Michel de Montaigne, “De la présomption,” in *Les Essais*, ed. Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien and Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 691: “Mais les belles âmes, ce sont les âmes universelles, ouvertes, et prestes à tout: si non instruites, au moins instruisables.”

<sup>114</sup> Blaise Pascal, “Honnête homme,” in *Pensées, opuscules et lettres* (Paris: Garnier, 2010), p. 427. See “*Pensées mêlées III*”, # 532. Pascal, of course, differed in many ways from these *honnêtes hommes*, insisting elsewhere in the *Pensées* on the importance of “pure love” for the truth and the necessarily self-sacrificing nature of the philosopher. Thus, it would be unfair to characterize Pascal as an uncritical *honnête homme*.

<sup>115</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 275a-b, p. 552.

of nothing” [La vrai honnête homme est celui qui ne se pique de rien].<sup>116</sup> Universality means moderation in all things; it means having a well-rounded character, knowledgeable in every field, but dedicated to none. For such are the qualities of a charming conversationalist—one who can discuss anything with any person. Dedication leads to dogmatism, which risks shocking one’s interlocuter, and as the hostess of one famous salon, Mademoiselle de Scudéry, writes in her *Conversation sur divers sujets* (1680), “For me, Amithone says, I avow that I would rather prefer there to be rules for conversation, as there are in many other things. – The principle rule, responds Valérie, is to never say anything that shocks one’s judgment” [Pour moi, dit Amithone, j’avoue que je voudrais bien qu’il y eût des règles pour la conversation, comme Il y en a pour beaucoup d’autres choses. – La règle principale, reprit Valérie, est de ne dire jamais rien qui choque le jugement].<sup>117</sup> In order not to shock, *honnête hommes*, like the Epicureans, abstain from discussing and engaging in politics—what a difference between the 17<sup>th</sup> century *honnêtes hommes* and the 16<sup>th</sup> century Humanists, inspired by that Roman orator who accused the Epicureans of destroying Rome by abstaining from politics and conflating convenience and pleasure with justice!<sup>118</sup> The refusal to discuss anything that might shock, in other words, anything controversial, limited their conversations in Montesquieu’s estimation to the trite and puerile. As the Muslim traveler Usbek writes to his friend Rhédi in the *Lettres Persanes* (1721):

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<sup>116</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales, suivi de réflexions diverses et des Maximes de Madame de Sablé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 76. See réflexion #203.

<sup>117</sup> Madeleine Scudéry, *Les Conversations sur divers sujets* (Amsterdam; Daniel du Fresne, 1685), p. 17.

<sup>118</sup> On Cicero’s critique of the Epicureans, see P.A. Vander Waerdt, “The Justice of the Epicurean Man,” in *The Classical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1987): 402 – 422, p. 421: “Many of Epicurus’ ancient critics shared Cicero’s view (De Fin. 2.74-7) that Epicureanism is incompatible with political life itself, that no statesman could responsibly proclaim publicly that pleasure and advantage are the sole criteria for right conduct. This is a telling objection against Torquatus, to whom falls the daunting task of trying to reconcile hedonism with the traditional moral culture of Rome.”

“Les cafés est très en usage à Paris [...]. Mais ce qui me choque de ces beaux esprits, c’est qu’ils ne se rend partie, et qu’ils amusent leurs talents à des choses puériles.”<sup>119</sup> [Cafés are very popular in Paris.... But what shocks me about these beautiful minds is that they do not intervene, and that they employ their talents to puerile ends.] If de Scudéry wished to prevent *honnêtes gens* from shocking their interlocuters, then she had failed. For Montesquieu was shocked by the banality of their discussions. The *grand monde* is therefore not the erudite world of the Renaissance humanists, but instead a polite one.

#### IV. iii. The Hedonism of *Honnêtes Hommes*: Pierre Gassendi and the Epicurean Revival

Epicurean doctrines were not only prevalent among *honnêtes hommes*, but also among seventeenth century thinkers in general. As Catherine Wilson writes in her comprehensive study *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (2008):

Between the acceptable—corpuscles, secondary qualities—and the unacceptable for all except a radical fringe—atheism, libertinage—there were Epicurean teachings that were available for rethinking that became elements of the many particular versions of the ‘new philosophy’. [...] Seventeenth and eighteenth-century controversies over thinking matter and mortalism were stimulated by Epicurean reflection, and by the attempt to purify religion of its extraneous, superstitious, and persecutory elements, leaving only a minimal core of belief, only so much as was essential for the coherence of the political community and the control of individual passions. The early modern philosophers whom we continue

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<sup>119</sup> Charles de Secondat baron de Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, in *Œuvres de Montesquieu*, ed. Collin de Plancy (Paris: Louis Duprat-Duverger, 1823), lettre XXXVI, p. 488.



to read because their concerns seem understandable to us and their argumentation sufficiently complex were those who had a certain feature in common.<sup>120</sup>

Epicurus' view of nature offered an alternative to Aristotle's, opening up new epistemological avenues. Whereas the scholastics had uncovered in the latter's physics justification for the ethical and religious doctrines of the Catholic Church, the philosophers of the seventeenth century used the former's to reframe the ethical, religious and political problems of their epoch. Stumbling away from the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648) with spiritual exhaustion, they wandered into Epicurus's garden, where Venus acutely circumscribed man's limits and ambitions, but bestowed her voluptuous delights in return. Epicurus had taught that man incurred "the greatest anxiety of the human soul" when he dared to ascribe to nature secret "volitions and actions and causality" for which his senses did not account.<sup>121</sup> Pleasure and pain, these are the two certainties, and thus the guiding lights of human conduct. So cast aside, the Hedonist implored his students, all these vain inquiries into the transcendental nature of the world, and pursue the joys that Venus has made plain as day to you. Worlds form from clusters of atoms, and by time's hand dissipate into the void. Your world is not eternal, nor even unique, since there are many other planets inhabited by creatures not wholly unlike yourselves. Such is the general import of the Epicurean philosophy, wherein the rewards for political ambition and religious observance are diminished, and those for prudent pleasure-seeking increased. Indeed, one might say that Epicurus' garden is a place to which Westerners have, throughout their long history, routinely returned in times of spiritual

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<sup>120</sup> Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), p. 37 – 38.

<sup>121</sup> Diogenes Laertius, "Epicurus," in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 611.

beleaguerment—from the decline of the Roman Republic there came Lucretius, from the Thirty Years War came Pierre Gassendi, Fontenelle and many other *honnêtes gens*, and from the Second World War the Sexual Revolution.

The mathematician Pierre Gassendi (1592 – 1655) is responsible for the modern revival of the Epicurean philosophy. Despised by Cicero and Renaissance Humanists alike, Epicurus had a longstanding reputation as an advocate of moral degeneracy, from which all of his insistence on “calculated” and “prudent” pleasure-getting could not save him. Epicurus, however, was not only an ethicist but also a physicist, whose reduction of nature to atoms (i.e., matter and form) resonated with early modern philosophers and their attempt to overcome the Scholastics, who reduced nature to Aristotelian essences (e.g., the essence of *lux* [light] in virtue of which a piece of wood is susceptible to fire). Gassendi criticized the Aristotelean, syllogistic logic that resulted in such essentialist explanations of phenomena early on his career in *Exercitationes Paradoxicæ Adversus Aristoteles* (1624).<sup>122</sup> An empirically minded physicist and Copernican sympathizer, he attempted to adapt Epicurean atomism to early modern scientific discussions in later works like the posthumously published *Opera Omnia* (1658).<sup>123</sup> Significantly, he thought that the Epicurean

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<sup>122</sup> See Margaret J. Osler, “Pierre Gassendi,” in *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1988), p. 84: “Gassendi argued that the syllogisms favored by Aristotelians could not produce certainty about the world. Moreover, because the conclusion of a syllogism contains no information not already present in the premises, he argued that syllogistic demonstration alone cannot produce new knowledge. Thus, he concluded, the entire method of Aristotelian demonstration is without foundation or utility.” In particular, Gassendi criticizes the analytic-synthetic method that Aristotle describes in his *Posterior Analytics*, whereby the cause of a phenomenon is identified in a purely deductive manner, without the aid of experimentation. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 2 – 3, 71b17-26.

<sup>123</sup> For more on Gassendi’s use of Epicurean atomism, see Saul Fischer, “Pierre Gassendi,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified November 18, 2013, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gassendi/#4>, “In what we today think of as chemistry and physics, Gassendi develops a great range of applications for his atomist hypothesis. In his optics, the atomist theory of light provides a counter to Descartes’s view of light as pressure. For Gassendi, light is a property carried by particular atoms (*atomi lucificæ*) that are identical with heat atoms.” Descartes’ maintained in

theory of nature offered not only epistemological benefits, but also ethical ones, in particular the view of man as the inventor—rather than receiver—of governments, language and laws.<sup>124</sup> Hence Gassendi undertook the controversial task of reconciling the Hedonist's ethics with the Catholic faith, arguing in his *Syntagma Philosophicum* (1658) that Epicurus' discussion of pleasure could be detached from his "polytheism, corporeal conception of the divine nature, the negation of all providence, the denial of creation ex nihilo, the infinitude and eternity of atoms and the universe, the plurality of worlds, the attribution of the cause of the world to chance, a materialistic cosmogony, the denial of all finality in biology, and the corporeality and mortality of the human soul." (Osler, "Pierre Gassendi," p. 82 – 83) As to be expected, Gassendi insisted that the greatest pleasures were not the basest ones, but instead the fruits of calculation, prudence, and contemplation of the Divine. One need not worry about a Hedonist sacrificing knowledge and piety for pleasure, for God had made these the most voluptuous of ends.

Thus Gassendi planted the seeds of that saccharine trope that the *philosophes* could not but help themselves from sprinkling like confectionary over their letters and books: *virtue is so*

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*Les Météores* (1637) that different colors of light were produced when torsion was placed on corpuscles interfacing with a surface. This hypothesis was mathematically and experimentally unverifiable, and criticized both by Gassendi and Isaac Newton.

<sup>124</sup> Gassendi appropriated the Epicurean-Lucretian account of man, whereby he initially finds himself in the state of nature in a quasi-socialized state, and then enters into a civilized state by forming social pacts, the guiding principle of which is not some transcendental law (such as one finds in the Bible), but simply that which is expedient, where expediency is measured in terms of pain and pleasure. As Gassendi writes in his article on "Ethics" in the *Opera Omnia*, "Because life was uncomfortable and dangerous in that ferocious state or state without pacts, people formed an assemblage, so that they could life more comfortably and delightfully. [...] Thus, from nature, the state can be no other than society, in which pacts are begun and preserved reciprocally. For this reason people determined in common to undertake these things among themselves, so that laws or narrowed rights are retained. Since laws are nothing else but pacts." See Lisa T. Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics: Freedom in a Mechanistic Universe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 153. This quote was translated by Sarahsohn. The original can be found in Pierre Gassendi, "Ethics," *Opera Omnia*, vol. II (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1964), p. 795.

*desirable, pleasurable, voluptuous, sweet, delicious, felicitous and sublime!* Gassendi writes in his

*Morale*:

As one says that virtue is essentially the source of the greatest delights, one can also say that vice contains in itself the source of the greatest pains. Such that, on one hand, virtue is accompanied by the greatest goods, and on the other, vice is accompanied by the greatest evils.<sup>125</sup>

This sweetened virtue would inspire the “enlightened self-interest” of thinkers like Fontenelle, Voltaire and Diderot. An impoverished Thomas Carlyle, having consecrated many years of his life to studying the *philosophes* and consuming nothing but this honeyed virtue, eventually became sick to his stomach, called it “enlightened egoism” and biliously dismissed the entirety of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an Epicurean frolic.<sup>126</sup> But Gassendi had cotemporaneous detractors. Méric Casaubon (1599 – 1671) accused Gassendi of having reduced “justice and injustice, virtue and vice” to “fancies, and empty sounds”, that is, expedient modes of pleasure-getting.<sup>127</sup> After all, Epicurus had reduced justice to expediency, and concluded that retreat from the life of civic engagement

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<sup>125</sup> This quote can be found in Charles Jeannel’s *Gassendi Spiritualiste* (Montpellier: Félix Seguin, 1859), p. 33: “Ut dictum est virtutem sive honestatem habere in se unde voluptatem pariet maximam, ita dici jam potest vitium sive dedecus esse id quod habet in se unde maximum dolorem inducat. Quare et, ut virtutem sive honestatem comitatur maximum bonum, sic vitium sive dedecus comitaris maximum malum.” Jeannel attributes it to book I, chapter 4 of Gassendi’s *Morale*. The translation is mine.

<sup>126</sup> For “enlightened Egoism”, see Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870), p. 41. In his fictional tale *Wotton Reinfred*, the main character is purported to have “studied the skeptical writers of his own country; above all, the modern literature of France”, and to have come to the conclusion that the “philosophy of Epicurus was not made for him”. He continues: “But what, then, was virtue? Another name for happiness, for pleasure? No longer the eternal life and beauty of the universe, the invisible all-pervading effluence of God; but a poor earthly theorem, a balance of profit and loss resting on self-interest, and pretending to rest on nothing higher.” See Thomas Carlyle, “Wotton Reinfred,” in *The Last Words of Thomas Carlyle* (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, 1892), p. 23 – 24.

<sup>127</sup> Méric Casaubon, *Of Credulity and Incredulity* (London: 1668), p. 202 – 203.

was especially expedient.<sup>128</sup> Despite such criticisms however, many philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century were sympathetic to Epicurus' physical and ethical theories, including *honnêtes hommes* like Fontenelle who dared to defend some of the more controversial doctrines of the hedonist, notably the plurality of worlds. Here, one remarks a trend: first Epicurus' empirically-susceptible physical theories are introduced to offer explanations that are more consistent, so to speak, with modern mechanical theories; then his ethical theories are suggested—and oftentimes justified on the basis of Epicurus' simplified view of nature.

#### IV. iv. The Salon-Epicureanism of the *Honnête Hommes*: Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle

The first popularizer of the sciences was the most celebrated *honnête homme* of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657 – 1757). He was introduced into *le grand monde* at the ripe age of twenty, when Thomas Corneille and Donneau de Visé praised his character and talents in the *Mercure Galant*: “Il n’aime les belles connaissances que pour s’en server en honnête homme; il a l’esprit fin, délicat, galant.” [He loves great ideas only to edify himself as an honest man; his mind is fine, delicate, gallant.]<sup>129</sup> Their description proved to be almost as accurate as it was flattering, for the aspiring *honnête homme* would become an honored guest of Madeline de Scudéry’s reputable salon, where his Neo-Epicureanism did not “shock” but instead co-mingled with all the pleasant airs that percolated and swirled about there. Fontenelle acquired literary repute with the publication of his *Nouveaux dialogues des morts* (1683), where he developed on a variety of philosophical subjects by imagining, for instance, how a modern lady of the Parisian

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<sup>128</sup> Epicurus, “Fragments,” in *Epicurus: The Extant Remains*, trans. Cyril Bailey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 115.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas Corneille and Donneau de Visé, “L’Amour Noyé,” in *Le Nouveau Mercure Galant*, vol. 3 (May 1677), p. 113 – 123.

salon might discourse with an ancient philosopher such as Plato.<sup>130</sup> This theme (i.e., discoursing with a lady of the salon) would prove most successful, for Fontenelle would reuse it only a few years later in his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), where he presented a simplified version of Descartes' mechanical philosophy, in virtue of which he defended several Epicurean doctrines, including the birth and death of the stars, the plurality of worlds, and the existence of extraterrestrial beings.<sup>131</sup> Whereas the latter work addressed Epicurean physical doctrines to the *honnêtes gens* of the Parisian salon, the former satirically read Epicurean ethical doctrines into the otherwise Epicurean-adverse philosophies of the ancients. Before examining his attempts to popularize Epicurean and other physical doctrines in the salons, it should first be necessary to define Fontenelle's neo-Epicureanism.

In Fontenelle's *Nouveaux dialogues* for instance, Marguerite d'Écosse asks Plato whether or not love is purely intellectual in nature, and the sage provides a strikingly Epicurean response: "Telle est la nature [de l'amour]. Donnez-lui, si vous voulez, l'esprit seul pour objet, vous n'y gagnerez rien. [...] Si vous n'aimez que l'esprit de votre savant, pourquoi le baisâtes-vous ? C'est que le corps est destiné à recueillir le profit des passions que l'esprit même auroit inspirées." [Such is the nature of love. Give it, if you wish, the mind alone as an object, and you shall gain nothing from it... If you love the mind of your scholar, then why do you kiss him? It is because the body is destined to reap the fruits of the passions, which the mind itself has inspired.] (Fontenelle, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 171) This response would certainly not have jibed with Plato's

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<sup>130</sup> Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, in *Fontenelle: Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

<sup>131</sup> Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, in *Fontenelle: Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

Socrates, who admonishes Alcibiades' efforts to seduce him in the *Symposium*, and explains that the true lover (of knowledge) would not trade eternal wisdom for fleeting sexual delights.<sup>132</sup> The mind, according to Plato, does not depend on the body to reap the fruits of love. That being said, neither would Epicurus have advised his students to mix sexual desire with love, since "ataraxia" can more easily be attained through loveless sexual relations—though, to be sure, the Hedonist was content to make reason a tool of the passions.<sup>133</sup> In light of this, one might say that Fontenelle was a neo-Epicurean, in a manner not entirely unlike that countryside gentleman Montaigne, who often invoked Epicurus in his *Essais* to lampoon various sorts of dogmatic philosophers. In "De l'Expérience" for example, Montaigne maintains that one cannot entirely dismiss the role that physical pleasures in motivating us to act, and mocks the Stoic way of thinking with an amusing *double entendre*, according to which putting on one's boots and spending the night with one's young bride, these both being "action[s] according to order", ought to be regarded as equally pleasant or desirable:

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<sup>132</sup> See Plato, *Symposium*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 500 218e-219a: "Dear Alcibiades, if you are right in what you say about me, you are already more accomplished than you think. If I really have in me the power to make you a better man, then you can see in me a beauty that is really beyond description and makes your own remarkable good looks pale in comparison. But, then, is this a fair exchange that you propose? You seem to me to want more than your proper share: you offer me the merest appearance of beauty, and in return you want the thing itself, gold in exchange for bronze."

<sup>133</sup> See Diogenes Laertius, *Epicurus*, in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, trans. Robert D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), book X. According to Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus considered sex desirable: "It is observed too that in his treatise *On the Ethical End* he writes in these terms: "I know not how to conceive the good, apart from the pleasures of taste, sexual pleasures, the pleasures of sound and the pleasures of beautiful form." (p. 535) However, Diogenes also maintains that Epicurus counseled against both sexual love and marriage: "The Epicureans do not suffer the wise man to fall in love; nor will he trouble himself about funeral rites; according to them love does not come by divine inspiration: so Diogenes in his twelfth book. The wise man will not make fine speeches. No one was ever the better for sexual indulgence, and it is well if he be not the worse. Nor, again, will the wise man marry and rear a family: so Epicurus says in the *Problems* and in the *De Natura*. Occasionally he may marry owing to special circumstances in his life." (p. 645)

Elle faict bien l'enfant, à mon gré, quand elle se met sur ses ergots pour nous prescher que c'est une farouche alliance de marier le divin avec le terrestre, le raisonnable avec le déraisonnable, le sévère à l'indulgent, l'honneste au des-honneste, que volupté est qualité brutale, indigne que le sage la gousté: le seul plaisir qu'il tire de la jouissance d'une belle jeune espouse, que c'est le plaisir de sa conscience de faire une action selon l'ordre, comme de chausser ses bottes pour une utile chevauchée.<sup>134</sup>

Interestingly, Montaigne goes on to claim that even Socrates “enjoys as he ought bodily pleasure; but he prefers that of the mind as having more force, constancy, facility, variety, and dignity”. (*Ibid.*, p. 1163) One might even wonder whether Fontenelle discovered his Epicurean Plato here in Montaigne’s *Essais*. That being said, the former’s neo-Epicureanism does differ from the latter’s, for it places a great deal of emphasis on the unity of pleasure and virtue—a popular theme among the *philosophes*. To appreciate this, let us briefly turn to Epicurus.

According to Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus maintains that virtue is a means to the end of pleasure: “And we choose the virtues too on account of pleasure and not for their own sake, as we take medicine for the sake of health”. (Diogenes Laertius, *Epicurus*, p. 663) That being said, he also argues that virtue is the only necessary condition of pleasure: “Epicurus describes virtue as the *sine qua non* of pleasure, *i.e.* the one thing without which pleasure cannot be, everything else, food, for instance, being separable, *i.e.* not indispensable to pleasure”. (*Ibid.*) However, this does not mean that Epicurus defends all virtues, for Epicurus himself states: “Beauty and virtue

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<sup>134</sup> Michel de Montaigne, “De l’Expérience,” in *Les Essais*, ed. Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien and Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 1163.



and the like are to be honoured, if they give pleasure; but if they do not give pleasure, we must bid them farewell”.<sup>135</sup> Many virtues are nothing more than customs or “accidents” according to Epicurus, since they are not rooted in “natural justice” or what is most “expedient”.<sup>136</sup> He might therefore reject certain patriotic or customary virtues, especially the self-sacrificing sort that end in death, which despite being “nothing to us”, certainly does not bring pleasure.<sup>137</sup> To be sure, it is difficult to know exactly which virtues Epicurus would reject, since so few of his own works have survived and we mostly know him through Diogenes Laertius and Lucretius. Nevertheless, we can safely conclude that Epicurus did consider some virtues to be unpleasant, and therefore unworthy of practicing. What makes the neo-Epicureanism of *honnêtes hommes* like Fontenelle unique, is the fact that he appears to ignore any possible conflicts between virtue and pleasure. For instance, nowhere in Fontenelle’s essay “Du bonheur” (1690) are virtue and pleasure at odds with one another.<sup>138</sup> In a word, Fontenelle’s Epicureanism is salon-Epicureanism. Easy-going, if not unserious, it could scarcely respond to the counter-arguments that Cicero poses in *De finibus*

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<sup>135</sup> See Epicurus, “Fragments,” in *Epicurus: The Extant Remains*, trans. Cyril Bailey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 123. The notion that Epicurus considers some virtues to be in conflict with pleasure is also evidenced in his Letter to Anaxarchus. See Epicurus to Anaxarchus, in *Epicurus: The Extant Remains*, p. 127: “But I summon you to continuous pleasures and not to vain and empty virtues which have but disturbing hopes of results.”

<sup>136</sup> See Diogenes Laertius, *Epicurus*, p. 627: “Natural justice is a symbol or expression of expediency, to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another.”

<sup>137</sup> On Epicurus’ view of death, see Diogenes Laertius, *Epicurus*, p. 651: “Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience, and death is the privation of all sentience; therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding to life an illimitable time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality.”

<sup>138</sup> See Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, “Du bonheur,” in *Fontenelle: Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Fayard, 1990). Here, Fontenelle argues that the source of happiness is “d’être bien avec soi” [to feel comfortable with oneself] (p. 216), which can only be achieved if the way “has been prepared by the hands of virtue” (*Ibid.*, my translation), and one has overcome “amour-propre” (*Ibid.*). Setting aside for the moment the fact that Rousseau will later incorporate these two concepts (amour-propre and amour de soi-même) in his own moral philosophy, one notices here that Fontenelle makes virtue a necessary condition of happiness, just as Epicurus does. He does not, however, consider whether certain virtues might conflict with happiness. In one passage, he writes that “it might very well happen that virtue leads neither to wealth nor promotion” (*Ibid.*, my translation), but he goes on to argue that one’s pleasure will not diminish, since “his reason and his rectitude [are] the greatest sources of happiness”. (p. 217, my translation)

*bonorum et malum*, where he accuses the Epicureans of being unfit to endure those very same “dolours of [...] Hercules” that Renaissance Humanists like Erasmus and Bacon were so eager to bear for the greater good of humanity:

[...] Virtue must needs keep Pleasure at arm's length. [...] would you prefer to pass your whole life in that state of calm which you spoke of so often, amidst the enjoyment of unceasing pleasures, free from all pain, and even [...] free from all fear of pain, or to be a benefactor of the entire human race, and to bring succour and safety to the distressed, even at the cost of enduring the dolours of a Hercules? Dolours — that was indeed the sad and gloomy name which our ancestors bestowed, even in the case of a god, upon labours which were not to be evaded. I would press my question and drag an answer from you, were I not afraid lest you should say that Hercules himself in the arduous labours that he wrought for the preservation of mankind was acting for the sake of pleasure!"<sup>139</sup>

This salon-Epicureanism, as it were, presents “la tranquillité de la vie, la société, la chasse, la lecture” [the tranquility of life, good company, hunting, reading] (Fontenelle, “Du Bonheur”, p. 214) as the pleasant pastimes of the *honnête homme*, but never asks what one must be willing to sacrifice to uphold such traditions. Unlike Gassendi, Fontenelle does not seem interested in dealing with the deeper conflicts between pleasure, virtue and religion. And to be sure, it is precisely this salon-Epicureanism, always waxing poetic about how voluptuous virtue is, that gets thrashed in the *Premier discours* by Rousseau, who, it must not be forgotten, thought Cato the

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<sup>139</sup> See Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malum*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), book II, p. 209 – 211. For a summary of Cicero’s three main arguments against Epicureanism in *De Finibus*, see Julia Annas, “Epicurus on Pleasure and Happiness,” in *Philosophical Topics* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 5 – 21. Of these three, one focusses on “cases where exercising the virtues conflicts with seeking pleasure”. (p. 14)

Younger the most virtuous of men, because he did not fight for his own happiness, but rather that of his compatriots, and tore out his entrails in an act of defiance to the tyranny with which Caesar threatened their freedom.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'économie politique*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. III, p. 255: "Osons opposer Socrate même à Caton: l'un était plus philosophe, et l'autre plus citoyen. Athènes était déjà perdue, et Socrate n'avait plus de patrie que le monde entier : Caton porta toujours la sienne au fond de son cœur; il ne vivait que pour elle et ne put lui survivre. La vertu de Socrate est celle du plus sage des hommes : mais entre César et Pompée, Caton semble un dieu parmi les mortels. L'un instruit quelques particuliers, combat les sophistes, et meurt pour la vérité : l'autre défend l'État, la liberté, les lois, contre les conquérants du monde, et quitte enfin la terre quand il n'y voit plus de patrie à servir. Un digne élève de Socrate serait le plus vertueux de ses contemporains; un digne émule de Caton en serait le plus grand. La vertu du premier ferait son bonheur, le second chercherait son bonheur dans celui de tous."

## Chapter V: *Honnêtes Hommes* and Salon-Science

### V. i. The Salon-Science of *Honnête Hommes*: Fontenelle's neo-Lucretianism

Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* represents perhaps the paradigmatic example of 17<sup>th</sup> century popular science. A dialogue between an *honnête femme* of the Parisian salon and the author, the work presents a simplified version of Descartes' astronomical views, focusing in particular on the plurality of worlds. Although Descartes does not explicitly advance this thesis in either his *Principia philosophiae* (1644) or his posthumous *Traité du monde et de la lumière* (1664), it would seem to follow from his arguments there on the formation of planets.<sup>141</sup> The existence of a plurality of worlds was an ancient physical doctrine, one that could be traced back to Lucretius' *De rerum natura*.<sup>142</sup> And if one has the impression that Fontenelle's desire was to inject this and other Epicurean doctrines into the Cartesian mechanical framework, then it is because he does not actually employ Descartes' arguments concerning the formation of planets to prove their plurality, but instead recurs to the very same arguments that Lucretius employs in *De rerum natura*. More precisely, Fontenelle explains to his interlocuter, the Marquise de G\*\*\*, that planets must form and deteriorate all the time by invoking Lucretius' argument by analogy,

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<sup>141</sup> One might even contend that in the case of the *Traité du monde et de la lumière*, which Descartes did not publish in fear that it would be censored or worse, he goes out of his way to state that the crust required for the formation of habitable planets only accumulates on Earth (even though he provides no argument for this), and conclude from this that Descartes himself was opposed to the plurality of worlds. However, given that he did seek to publish the work in his lifetime, despite having composed it before the *Principia philosophiae*, one must hesitate to draw such a conclusion. Perhaps he wrote this to sanitize the work, or perhaps even believed it. See Descartes, *Traité du monde et de la lumière* (Paris: Théodore Girard, 1664), p. 62 - 63: "Enfin nous n'apercevons point de corps mêlez en aucun autre lieu que sur la superficie de la Terre [...]"

<sup>142</sup> See Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*, p. 97: "Lucretius followed Epicurus in maintaining the plurality and self-assembly of worlds. '[W]hen an abundant supply of matter is available, when space is at hand and there is no obstruction from any object or force, things most certainly must happen and objects must be created.'"

according to which planets, being composed of materials not unlike those of plants and animals, must also have a life-cycle. Fontenelle writes:

[...] je crois aussi que l'univers peut avoir été fait de sorte qu'il s'y formera de temps en temps des Soleils nouveaux. Pourquoi la matière propre à faire un Soleil ne pourra-t-elle pas, après avoir été dispersée en plusieurs endroits différents, se ramasser à la longue en un certain lieu, et y jeter les fondements d'un nouveau monde ? [...] N'aurait-elle le pouvoir que de faire naître et mourir des plantes ou des animaux par une révolution continuelle ? Je suis persuadé, et vous l'êtes déjà aussi, qu'elle met en usage ce même pouvoir sur les mondes, et qu'il ne lui en coûte pas davantage. Mais nous avons sur cela plus que de simples conjectures. (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, p. 112 – 113)

Lucretius' argument for the plurality of worlds in *De rerum natura* draws the very same analogy between plant and animal life, on the one hand, and the formation of planets, on the other:

[W]hen there is much matter ready to hand, when space is there, and no thing, no cause delays, things must, we may be sure, be carried on and completed. As it is, if there is so great a store of seeds as the whole life of living things could not number, and if the same force and nature abides which could throw together the seeds of things, each into their place in like manner as they are thrown together here, it must needs be that you confess that there are other worlds in other regions, and diverse races of men and tribes of wild beasts.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Cyril Bailey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), book II, p. 101 – 102 (1069 – 1076)

Fontenelle's recourse to Lucretius' argument here is interesting, especially since Descartes had offered a mechanical explanation for the formation of planets in both his *Principia philosophiae* and *Traité du monde et de la lumière*. Chapter IX of the latter work is dedicated to explaining the origin of planets and comets, and argues that the heavier bodies of which these are composed amass when the circular motion of a vortex propels them into a neighboring vortex—Descartes gives the example of a skiff being launched against the water's current at a bend in a river.<sup>144</sup> And in the *Principia philosophiae*, Descartes maintains that planets are formed from dead stars, or crusted-over suns.<sup>145</sup> Fontenelle was likely aware of this argument, for he explains the death of suns to the Marquise in precisely these terms: “[Descartes] suppose que les taches de notre Soleil étant des écumes ou des brouillards, elles peuvent s'épaissir, se mettre plusieurs ensemble, s'accrocher les unes aux autres, ensuite elles iront jusqu'à former autour du Soleil une croûte qui s'augmentera toujours, et adieu le Soleil.” [Descartes speculates that the spots of our sun being like foam of fog, can become denser, join together, bond with one another, and then form an ever increasing crust around the sun, at which point we can say goodbye to the sun.] (Fontenelle,

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<sup>144</sup> See chapter IX “L'Origine, le cours, & les autres propriétés des Comètes, & des Planètes en général; & en particulier des Comètes” of Descartes' *Traité du monde et de la lumière*, p. 124 – 125: “[...] si vous imaginez deux Rivières qui se joignent en quelques endroits l'une à l'autre, et qui se séparent derechef un peu après, avant que leurs eaux qu'il faut supposer fort calmes et d'une force assez égale, mais avec cela fort rapides, ayant loisir se mêler : les Bateaux ou les autres corps assez massifs et pesants qui seront emportés par le cours de l'une, pourront facilement passer en l'autre : au lieu que les plus légers s'en éloigneront et seront rejetez par la force de cette eau, vers les lieux où elle est le moins rapide.”

<sup>145</sup> One can piece together Descartes' theory on the formation of stars and planets from sections 94 (p. 226 – 227) and 146 (p. 296 – 297) of Part III of Descartes, *Les Principes de la Philosophie*, trans. “un ami de Descartes”, (Paris: Compagnie des Libraires, 1723). Francisque Bouillier does this rather well in his *Histoire de la Philosophie Cartésienne*, vol. 1 (Paris: Durande, 1854), p. 181 – 182: “[...] dans les *Principes*, [... Descartes] fait dériver le troisième élément non plus de l'agrégation des parties primitives de l'étendue, mais de l'agrégation des parties du premier élément, qui rejetées par les plus subtiles fors du globe liquide, ou du solier qu'elles composer, s'attachent les unes aux autres et nagent à sa superficie et lorsqu'elles sont en fort grande quantité, forment des taches semblables à celles du soleil. Ainsi, des étoiles ont pu se recouvrir entièrement de taches et de croûtes épaisses, et, impuissantes à se soutenir et à défendre leur tourbillon contre les tourbillons environnants, elles ont tourné autour du centre du tourbillon qui les a absorbées et sont devenues des planètes. Les planètes et la terre elle-même ne seraient donc que des soleils encrustés.”

*Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, p. 110) That being said, Fontenelle opted to invoke Lucretius' instead.

One therefore wonders: if Descartes provides us with an explanation of the formation of planets, why does Fontenelle invoke Lucretius'? It is important to bear in mind that at this time, physics is still bound to meta-physical and thus normative frameworks—it took more than half a century for physicists to follow Newton's lead and radically separate the two. Mixing Lucretian or Epicurean arguments in with Descartes' would therefore provide an opportunity to advance the formers' world view, even if they were not mentioned in name. This seems probable, given that Lucretius' arguments do not theoretically add anything to Descartes' own. More precisely, the vortices or *tourbillon* that Descartes describes function like heuristic models, which can be mathematically and experimentally tested in order to prove that an identified cause really does produce the effect or phenomenon in question, whereas Lucretius' analogical arguments are no more rigorous than the analytic method whereby Aristotle purports to discover the essence of a thing. What is more, Fontenelle not only injected Lucretian physical doctrines that would seem to confirm Descartes' mechanics, but also ones that were totally alien to Descartes' mechanics, but are sensational or at least "curious," and therefore capable of attracting the attention of the salons.

One of the most notable doctrines, which he discusses throughout the *Entretiens*, is the existence of extraterrestrial lifeforms, which Fontenelle places on the Earth's moon, the planets of our solar system, such as Venus and Jupiter, their moons, and on the "infinite de mondes" [infinity of worlds] that ought to exist throughout the universe. (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la*

*pluralité des mondes*, p. 13) Fontenelle no doubt appreciates that from the perspective of the Catholic Church, this is a controversial topic, and therefore clarifies in the preface that these extraterrestrial lifeforms cannot be the sons of Adam and Eve, even if they resemble humans a great deal, and are more technologically advanced than ourselves in some cases—Fontenelle conjectures, for instance, that the inhabitants of earth’s moon might be more capable of inter-planetary travel than ourselves)<sup>146</sup>:

Quand on vous dit que la Lune est habitée, vous vous y représentez aussitôt des hommes faits comme nous, et puis, si vous êtes un peu théologien, vous voilà plein de difficultés. La postérité d'Adam n'a pas pu s'étendre jusque dans la Lune, ni envoyer des colonies en ce pays-là. Les hommes qui sont dans la Lune ne sont donc pas fils d'Adam. Or, il serait embarrassant, dans la théologie, qu'il y eût des hommes qui ne descendissent pas de lui.

(Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, p. 13)

Fontenelle describes the various cultures of the inhabitants of the planets of our solar system in great detail. “The climate [of Venus] is most favorable to love”, he asserts, with its inhabitants resembling the “Céladons and the Silvandres” of Honoré d’Urfé’s famous romance *L’Astrée*, and their conversations being akin to “the most beautiful of Clélie”, the main character of Madeline de Scudéry’s romantic novel *Clélie, histoire romaine*. (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, p. 78) If their climate is especially amorous, then it is because they are nearer to the sun’s light, and because heat excites the passions; however, too much exposure dulls the mind,

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<sup>146</sup> On the capacity of the inhabitants of the Earth’s Moon for space travel, Fontenelle writes: “Les gens de la Lune savent peut- être déjà faire de petits voyages dans l’air, à l’heure qu’il est, ils s’exercent; quand ils seront plus habiles et plus expérimentés, nous les verrons, et Dieu sait quelle surprise.” (Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, p. 54)



as in the case of the inhabitants of Mercury, whom he compares to “le plupart des nègres”. (*Ibid.*) Despite his gross speculations about the inhabitants of foreign planets, which in the case of Venus seem to be aimed at piquing the interest of *honnêtes gens*, there is a method to his reasoning, the very same that one finds in Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*: if the base components of the planets are all the same, and Earth produces humanoids, then other planets should be inhabited by them too—this also means that one can isolate factors like sun exposure to then predict what the makeup of extraterrestrials might be. However, it cannot be stressed enough that Descartes formulates no mechanical model that would permit us to conclude—or even to speculate on—the existence of extraterrestrial humanoids. This is a Lucretian doctrine, which if it is true, has serious normative implications, namely that humans come into existence merely by chance, and therefore are not orientated to some transcendental good, as Plato, Aristotle and the Church Fathers all hold. If such is the case, then we are left with only a few remaining viable ethical doctrines, epicureanism no doubt being one. To be sure, Fontenelle attempts to remove this implication in the preface to the *Entretiens*, but his frequent comparisons of alien culture and technology to that of the sons of Adam, as it were, would seem to betray his words there. One must not forget that at the beginning of the very same century, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for advancing the Lucretian doctrine of a plurality of worlds without taking sufficient care of its implications.<sup>147</sup> By Fontenelle’s time, the Church’s authority and strictness about such matters seems to have waned.

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<sup>147</sup> See Alberto A. Martinez, “Giordano Bruno and the Heresy of Many Worlds” in *Annals of Science* 73, no. 4 (2016): 345 – 374.

## V. ii. The Salon-Science of *Honnête Hommes* (Continued): Fontenelle's Progressivism

Fontenelle not only popularized normatively significant physical doctrines in the *Entretiens*, but also in his *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688), where he hoped to resolve one of the greatest controversies of the end of the century: whether the Ancients were superior to the Moderns, or vice versa.<sup>148</sup> The controversy was rekindled in 1687 when Charles Perrault expressed in his poem *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand* that the age of the Sun King had eclipsed that of Augustus, writing that Homer would have been possessed of “une plus fine entente et d’un art plus habile” [a more refined understanding and a greater artistic genius] had he composed his epics under the former’s reign. For man had become so refined during this time that “mille mondes nouveaux ont été découverts” [a thousand new worlds had been discovered].<sup>149</sup> In a way that Renaissance Humanists might have appreciated, Perrault exults in the Moderns’ triumph over “des fantômes vains” [the vain specters] (Perrault, *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand*, p. 291) with which Aristotle haunted nature. But the poet goes one step further in stating that while ancient orators like Virgil and Horace are admirable, they have the advantage of being known by many nations and ages. Thus, like a fine wine, the Moderns simply require some aging to ascend to their level. Nicholas Boileau-Despréaux took such offense to Perrault’s poem that he reportedly “shouted for the reading to stop”, and later recruited his friends, including Racine, to defend the Ancients against the Moderns.<sup>150</sup> Perrault and Boileau were

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<sup>148</sup> See Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, in *Fontenelle: Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

<sup>149</sup> See Charles Perrault, *Le Siècle de Louis-le-Grand*, in *Oeuvres choisies de Charles Perrault* (Peytieu: Collin de Plancy, 1826), p. 294 and 291.

<sup>150</sup> Douglas Lane Patey, “Ancients and Moderns”, in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. IV, ed. George A. Kennedy, H.B. Nisbet, Claude Rawson and Raman Selden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 34

longtime enemies, the former having sought out Jean-Baptiste Colbert to prevent the publication of the latter's *Satires* and *L'art poétique* in the previous decade.<sup>151</sup> So Perrault formed his own coalition of Modernists, gaining the support of a budding Fontenelle.

The contention that the Ancients were intellectually superior to the Moderns was a longstanding one, which “climaxed” according to Hans Baron “by a criticism used in Scholastic times, that the relationship of the Moderns to the Ancients may be compared to the situation of dwarves who stand on the shoulders of giants”.<sup>152</sup> Despite its Scholastic roots however, the opinion that the Ancients were somehow superior perdured among Humanists and *honnêtes hommes* alike, owing to the observation that Europe had only managed to stumble out of the “darkness and dense gloom” (as Petrarch famously puts it) of previous ages by rediscovering the Ancients.<sup>153</sup> That being said, inventions like Huygens’ pendulum clock and developments in mathematics and physics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century emboldened the Moderns, who, assured of their scientific superiority, began to wonder if they could equal—and perhaps surpass—the cultural refinement of their Ancient models. Belief in the superiority of the Ancients was significantly

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<sup>151</sup> Robert J. Nelson, “The Ancients and the Moderns”, in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier, R. Howard Bloch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 365

<sup>152</sup> Hans Baron, “The Querelle of the Ancients and the Moderns as a Problem for Renaissance Scholarship”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20., no. 1 (January 1959): 3 – 22. See p. 13.

<sup>153</sup> The phrase “darkness and dense gloom” [tenebris et densa caligine] comes from Petrarch’s (1304 - 1374) *Apologia contra cuiusdam anonymi Galli calumnias*. See Petrarch, *Apologia contra cuiusdam anonymi Galli calumnias*, in *Opera omnia* (Basel: 1554), p. 1195. His use of the term is notable, since he refers not only to days before Christ as dark and gloomy, as was common during his time, but also to the Middle Ages, since they were deprived of the light of Classical thinkers. This literary—as opposed to religious—use of the phrase would later become popular among early Renaissance Humanists, who would then coin the term “Dark Ages”. For more on this subject, see Theodore E. Mommsen, “Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages’”, in *Speculum* 17, no. 2 (April 1942):226 – 242, p. 228: “Men like Boccaccio, Filippo Villani, Ghiberti and others contrasted the ‘rebirth’ of the arts and letters which, they held, had been effected by Dante, Giotto, and Petrarch, with the preceding period of cultural darkness.’ With this change of emphasis from things religious to things secular, the significance of the old metaphor became reversed: Antiquity, so long considered as the ‘Dark Age,’ now became the time of ‘light’ which had to be ‘restored’; the era following Antiquity, on the other hand, was submerged in obscurity.”

buttressed by the Christian worldview as well, “which identified change with deterioration and progress with man’s translation into a celestial realm of eternity.”<sup>154</sup> To be sure, this Christian narrative had its origin in those very same passages from Denial that Lord Bacon reinterpreted in order to advance his own idea of progress.<sup>155</sup> Some of the first thinkers to draw into question this Christian-reinforced belief in the superiority of the Ancients include Juan Luis Vives (1493 – 1540), “a member of Erasmus and More’s circle” (Baron, “The Querelle of the Ancients and the Moderns as a Problem for Renaissance Scholarship”, p. 13), and subsequently George Hakewill (1578 – 1649). As Baron points out, Vives argued in his *Querelle* that “Nature is not yet so effete and exhausted as to be unable to bring forth, in our times, results comparable to those of earlier ages. She always remains equal to herself, and not rarely she comes forward more strongly and powerful in the past, as if mustering together all her forces” (Ibid., p. 14). Hakewill also argues that nature has not deteriorated: “[...] neither are we Dwarfs, nor they Giants, but all of equal stature, or rather we somewhat higher, being lifted up by their means, conditionally there be in us an equal intention of spirit, watchfulness of mind, and love of truth: for if these be wanting, then are we not so much dwarfs, as men of perfect growth lying on the ground”. (Ibid., p. 13) One notices here that the question of the superiority of the Ancients hinges on the question of whether or not nature per se deteriorates over time—oddly enough, the possibility that nature has remained stable, but men of have naturally (or genetically) deteriorated does not seem to be posed. This, of course, is a question that not concerns the moral philosopher, but also the natural

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<sup>154</sup> See Herschel C. Baker, *The Wars of Truth: Studies in the Decay of Christian Humanism in the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1959), p. 78.

<sup>155</sup> See Francis Bacon, *Valerius Terminus*, p. 118 : “[...] in the prophecy of Daniel, where, speaking of the latter times, it is said, “Many shall pass to and fro, and science shall be increased”; as if the opening of the world by navigation and commerce, and the further discovery of knowledge, should meet in one time or age”.

one, who seeks to establish universal laws. It is therefore easy to see how references to thinkers like Descartes and Newton might be made to buttress the Modern's side.

Although one cannot confirm that Fontenelle was familiar either with Vives or Hakewill, he comes to the very same conclusion in the *Digression*: the Moderns are not naturally inferior to the Ancients, for nature and thus man's constitution remain constant. He does however give a seemingly novel argument for this. Just as Fontenelle recurs to Lucretius' argument by analogy in the *Entretiens* to justify the formation of planets, he contends here that: if the "fibers" of the Ancients' brains were better "formed", then so too would the fibers of Ancient "trees" be better formed, yet we have no reason to believe this to be true; therefore, because ancient and modern trees do not differ in their constitution, neither do the "cerveaux" [brains] of the Ancients and the Moderns.<sup>156</sup> Fontenelle then goes on to argue that the climate of a region plays a role in the development of its inhabitant's brains, remarking that different regions produce different fruits: "Il est toujours sûr que par l'enchaînement et la dépendance réciproque qui est entre toutes les parties du monde matériel, les différences de climats qui se font sentir dans les plantes, doivent s'étendre jusqu'aux cerveaux, et y faire quelque effet." [It is nonetheless certain that by the chain of reciprocal dependency between all the parts of the material world, the differences of climates that make themselves felt in plants, must extend up to brains, and have some effect there.] (Fontenelle, *Digressions sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, p. 414) However, he maintains that climate has less of an effect than "art and culture", since the ideas of one nation can more easily

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<sup>156</sup> More precisely, Fontenelle reasons from the idea that nature is always the same, to the idea that its products are always the same, thus proposing a sort of species stasis: "La nature a entre les mains une certaine pâte qui est toujours la même, qu'elle tourne et retourne sans cesse en mille façons et dont elle forme les hommes, les animaux, les plantes." (Fontenelle, *Digressions sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, p. 414)

be introduced to another than its plants: “Cet effet cependant y est moins grand et moins sensible, parce que l’art et la culture peuvent beaucoup plus sur les cerveaux que sur la terre [...]. Ainsi les pensées d’un pays se transportent plus aisément dans un autre que ses plantes [...].” [This effect, however, is less significant and less noticeable, because art and culture influence much more the brain than the earth.... As such the thoughts of one country are transposed more easily into another country than its plants....] (*Ibid.*) Ultimately, Fontenelle concludes that “on ne peut pas juger quels climats sont les plus favorables pour l’esprit” [one cannot judge which climates are the most favorable to the mind]. (*Ibid.*, p. 415) Therefore, with a few exceptions,<sup>157</sup> the natural capacity for learning is essentially the same across space and time for all peoples. Progress therefore appears to be almost exclusively the product of ideal cultural conditions for Fontenelle. But whereas the cultivation of plants depends greatly on their particular climate and constitution, Fontenelle does not believe that the same is true for humans, leaving the reader with the impression that they instead happen by chance, or as the result of some natural tendency. In any case, ideal cultural conditions permit humans to disabuse themselves of their “prejudices and fantasies” (*Ibid.*, 424), and to “perfect” (*Ibid.*, p. 427) their reason by cumulatively building upon the achievements of past generations. In order to illustrate this conception of progress, Fontenelle writes that Archimedes would have invented the plow instead of approximating pi had someone not done so before him.<sup>158</sup> Thus, according to Fontenelle, there

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<sup>157</sup> Fontenelle considers two possible exceptions: “Il y a de l’apparence que les nègres et les Lapons liraient les livres grecs, sans prendre beaucoup de l’esprit grec. Pour moi, j’ai de l’inclination à croire que la zone torride et les deux glaciales ne sont pas propres pour les sciences.” (Fontenelle, *Digressions sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, p. 415)

<sup>158</sup> “[...] tout ce qu’aurait pu faire Archimède dans l’enfance du monde, aurait été d’inventer la charrue. Archimède placé dans un autre siècle, brûle les vaisseaux des Romains avec des miroirs, si cependant ce n’est point là une fable.” (Fontenelle, *Digressions sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, p. 417)

is but one linear and upward bound path to progress on which every race and civilization are fellow travelers.

Fontenelle's conception of progress is undoubtedly the one that remains most popular to this day—as opposed for instance to Immanuel Kant's conception, according to which scientific progress does indeed depend on the heritability of intellectual capacities that only a handful of persons and groups possess.<sup>159</sup> What is more, one recognizes how closely subsequent accounts of progress conform to his. For just as Fontenelle minimizes the uniqueness of Antiquity and its geniuses, reducing the great Archimedes to the inventor of the plow, and transforming Athens into a mere steppingstone on the path to progress for the Moderns, Turgot similarly reduced all nations to but discardable steps on the path to progress, as we saw above. Everything unique is hammered out into an instrument of universal progress, a story in which humans are no longer transcendental beings, but instead clusters of atoms formed by chance along with their cultures, and driven to uncover the hidden mechanisms of nature by the light of earthly happiness alone. Unlike Bacon, who proclaimed in *Valerius Terminus* that man's scientific progress would free him from the pagan cycles of history and restore him to the divine state from which he originally fell, Fontenelle advanced what might be called the secular version of this idea of progress. The *New*

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<sup>159</sup> Kant was no doubt an advocate of progress, for as he writes in his *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*: “[History] allows us to hope that, if it examines the exercise of the human will *on a large scale*, it will be able to discover a regular progression among freely willed actions. In the same way, we may hope that what strikes us as confused and fortuitous may be recognized, in the history of the entire species, as a steadily advancing but slow development of man's original capacities.” See Kant, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 41. That being said, he also believes that progress depends on the development of man's “natural capacities”: “The history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally—and for this purpose also externally—perfect political constitution as a the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely.” (*Ibid.*, p. 50)

*Testament* creed that all human beings were equally capable of being saved was conserved, but justified rather on the basis of tree fibers.

If *les âmes universelles* had once considered scientific specialization noisome to the *bons airs* of the salon, Fontenelle's Lucretian-laden tales of the voluptuous extraterrestrial beings of Venus and the eternal progress of the human race had converted them to the scientific cause. And if the *honnêtes hommes* had lost their taste for Herculean heroes and great statesmen cast in the Ciceronian mold,<sup>160</sup> Fontenelle gave them new ones in the *Éloges* that he composed as Perpetual Secretary of the Académie des Sciences. Thus, in his *Éloge de M. Newton*, he praises the English for raising Newton to the level of glory that heroes in Tacitus' day could not hope to attain:

[La] philosophie [de Newton] a été adopté par toute l'Angleterre, elle domine dans la Société Royale, & et dans tous les excellents ouvrages qui en font sortis, comme si elle étoit déjà consacrée par le respect d'une longue suite de Siècles. [...] Tacite qui a reproché aux Romains leur extrême indifférence pour les grands Hommes de leur nation, eût donné aux Anglois la louange tout opposée. [...] Tacite [...] eût répondu [à celle-là] que le grand mérite n'étoit jamais commun, ou que même il faudroit, s'il étoit possible, le rendre commun par la gloire qui y seroit attachée.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Indeed, Rousseau makes precisely this criticism of the *philosophes* in his *Dernière réponse à Bordes, Dernière réponse à M. Bordes*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 83 : "Je suis sûr qu'il n'y pas actuellement un sçavant qui n'estime beaucoup plus l'éloquence de Cicéron que son zèle, et qui n'aimât infiniment mieux avoir composé les Catilinaires que d'avoir sauvé son pays."

<sup>161</sup> Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Éloge de M. Newton*, in *Fontenelle: Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7 (Paris: Fayard, 1990), p. 128.



By popularizing the sciences among *honnêtes hommes*, Fontenelle gives rise to the *philosophes* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A strange blend of neo-Epicurean *politesse* and scientific amateurism,<sup>162</sup> the *philosophes* would promote their own heterodox theories of human nature by popularizing first Cartesian and then Newtonian science, thus transforming their previously apolitical salons into forums for “shocking” doctrines. Like the Humanists, they are politically engaged, unlike them however, they are not operating as statesman, but rather on the fringes of society.

### V. iii. The Salon-Science of the *Philosophes*: Voltaire’s Lockean-Newtonianism

Voltaire was introduced into the society of *honnêtes gens* by an affluent, libertine deist named Lord Bolingbroke, whose troop of writers and poets included men like Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope.<sup>163</sup> A natural wit with a penchant for the sardonic, he spent nearly a year in the Bastille in 1717 when, in his satire of the French government and elite, he accused Phillippe, the Duc d’Orléans, of having an incestuous relationship with his own daughter.<sup>164</sup> And he would have enjoyed another extended stay in the Bastille in 1726 for insulting the Duc de Rohan, if he did not have friends in high places who managed to convert his imprisonment to exile in Great Britain. His exile in England however proved to be one of his most fortune opportunities. For he

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<sup>162</sup> Although, as his *Préface des élémens de la géométrie de l’infini* (1727) would suggest, Fontenelle possessed a genuine understanding of the mathematical advancements that had prepared the way for modern physics, the *philosophe* par excellence, Voltaire, advocated for a Newtonianism in his *Lettres* which he surely did not understand, but nonetheless believed to coincide perfectly with Locke’s views on the human soul. See Leonard M. Marsak, “Bernard de Fontenelle: The Idea of Science in the French Enlightenment”, in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 49, no. 7 (1959): 1 – 14: “Mathematics was the language of science, the shorthand or language of metaphor, a necessary complement to experiment’s language of analysis. Fontenelle’s understanding of this placed him in the company of Galileo and Newton, and his explanation of this idea was welcomed as a worth-while contribution to scientific thought.” (p. 34)

<sup>163</sup> See J.B. Shank, *The Newton Wars and the Beginning of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), p. 258.

<sup>164</sup> See Robert Zaretsky and John T. Scott, *The Philosophers’ Quarrel: Rousseau, Hume and the Limits of Human Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Sheridan Books, 2009), p. 58.

imbibed English philosophy, science and customs there, and on returning to his native France, cemented his reputation as a first-rate *honnête homme* by popularizing the ideas of Locke and Newton. In particular, he compiled their ideas in his *Lettres philosophiques*, but having learned from his past experiences, he first sent the unpublished manuscript to the royal censor, the abbé Rothlein, for approval. The abbé suggested that he reformulate certain parts, and Voltaire, ever confident in his ability to sneak esoteric ideas past lesser minds, would have done so had his publisher not printed and sold the *Lettres* without his consent.<sup>165</sup> Instead, he was forced to leave Paris and seek refuge with his mistress Émilie du Châtelet. Unaltered, the *Lettres Philosophiques* provide us with special insight into his ambitions to popularize heterodox ideas under the guise of honest science.

If Fontenelle promoted Neo-Epicurean morality and secular progressivism by fashioning himself into an advocate of Cartesian mechanism and, more generally, natural philosophy, then Voltaire advocated for Lockean materialism and English tolerance by pairing them with Newton's discovery of the force of attraction. More precisely, Voltaire attempted to present John Locke's controversial epistemology, which attributed thinking to matter and placed the soul beyond the pale of human knowledge, as "*modeste*" (Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, p. 41) by arguing that it simply conformed with the limits that Newton had placed on his scientific method. How, if Edmund Halley could predict the course of comets by applying Newton's method, could one reject the implications of an epistemology that perfectly conformed with the later?<sup>166</sup> So went

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<sup>165</sup> See J.B. Shank, *Before Voltaire: Newtonianism and the Origins of the Enlightenment in France: 1687 – 1734*, p. 588.

<sup>166</sup> For the reference to Halley in the *Lettres philosophiques*, see p. 87.

the esoteric message of the *Lettres*.

Voltaire draws the parallel between Locke's epistemology and Newton's method against the background of Descartes' philosophy. He explains that, on the one hand, Newton's rejection of the hypothetical reasoning that leads Descartes to found his physics on "les qualités occultes des anciens" [occult qualities of the ancients] (Ibid., p. 64) allowed him to discover action at a distance, i.e., gravity. On the other hand, Locke's rejection of "les idées innées" [innate ideas] (Ibid., p. 39) convinces him to reject Descartes' position that "l'âme est la même chose que la pensée" [the soul is the same thing as thinking] (Ibid., p. 38), and to instead propose that thinking can be explained in material terms, placing the soul beyond the pale of epistemology. Of course, Voltaire does not explicitly state that if one embraces Newton's theory of attraction, then one must also accept Locke's theory of the mind, but he places these conclusions together. For instance, in the letter on Descartes and Newton he writes:

L'essence même des choses a totalement changé. Vous ne vous accordez ni sur la définition de l'âme ni sur celle de la matière. Descartes assure que l'âme est la même chose que la pensée, et Locke lui prouve assez bien le contraire. Descartes assure encore que l'étendue seule fait la matière; Newton y ajoute la solidité. Voilà de furieuses contrariétés. (Ibid., p. 54)

Similarly, in the letter on Locke, Voltaire reports that the English sage's 'modest' history of the soul was guided by the light of (Newton's) physics:

Tant de raisonneurs ayant fait le roman de l'âme, un sage est venu, qui en a fait

modestement l'histoire. Locke a développé à l'homme la raison humaine, comme un excellent anatomiste explique les ressorts du corps humain. Il s'aide partout du flambeau de la physique. (Ibid., p. 38)

In addition to this, Voltaire dismisses out of hand the theologians who interpret Locke's theory as a "déclaration scandaleuse que l'âme est matérielle et mortelle" [scandalous declaration that the soul is material and mortal], writing that Locke has only relegated the soul to the realm of faith, and adding that "les théologiens commencent trop souvent par dire que Dieu est outragé quand on n'est pas de leur avis. C'est trop ressembler aux mauvais poètes, qui criaient que Despréaux parlait mal du roi, parce qu'il se moquait d'eux" [the theologians start off all too often by saying that God is outraged when one is not of their opinion. They resemble all too well those bad poets, who cried that Despréaux spoke poorly of the king because he mocked them] (Ibid., p. 39 – 40).

It goes without saying that Voltaire exaggerated the extent to which Newton's scientific method paralleled Locke's epistemology. For instance, Newton conceives of God in the *General Scholium* as "incorporeal aether 'who would move bodies without offering resistance to them in turn'", which would certainly seem to qualify God as an "occult quality of the ancients".<sup>167</sup> What is more, Voltaire was likely aware of this incongruity, since he contends in the article entitled "Descartes and Newton" from his *Dictionnaire philosophiques* (1764) that many readers have

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<sup>167</sup> See Edward Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing: Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 247: "But 'what could an immaterial aether be? To Newton, it was the infinite omnipotent God, who by His omnipotence is actively present throughout it.' God was conceived as an incorporeal aether 'who could move bodies without offering resistance to them in turn,' as the *General Scholium* would declare."

discovered metaphysical ideas at the end of the *Principia*, where Newton published the *General Scholium*: “Bien des gens, en lisant le peu de métaphysique que Newton a mis à la fin de ses Principes mathématiques, y ont trouvé quelque chose d’aussi obscur que l’Apocalypse” [Many people, in reading the trace of metaphysics that Newton left at the end of the *Principia Mathematica*, found there some things as obscure as the Apocalypse].<sup>168</sup> It would therefore seem that Voltaire knowingly exaggerated the similarity between Locke and Newton to advance the former’s epistemology, along with its implications concerning the soul.

There is a second, esoteric parallel that Voltaire attempts to draw in the *Lettres* between Locke’s conclusion that the soul is beyond the scope of human knowledge, on the one hand, and the tolerance of the English, on the other. More precisely, if we cannot know the nature of the soul, then we should not make religious institutions that basis of society, but instead institutions that we can know, particularly the free market. Thus, in his sixth letter on the Presbyterians, he explains that the English are the most tolerant people because they occupy themselves with practical matters like commerce rather than metaphysical ones like religion, and save the word “heretic” alone for the man who goes “bankrupt”:

Entrez dans la Bourse de Londres, cette place plus respectable que bien des cours; vous y voyez rassemblés les députés de toutes les nations pour l'utilité des hommes. Là, le juif, le mahométan et le chrétien traitent l'un avec l'autre comme s'ils étaient de la même religion, et ne donnent le nom qu'à ceux qui font banqueroute; [...] S'il n'y avait en

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<sup>168</sup> See Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 3 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1879), p. 424.

Angleterre qu'une religion, le despotisme serait à craindre; s'il y en avait deux, elles se couperaient la gorge; mais il y en a trente, et elles vivent en paix et heureuses. (Voltaire, *Lettres Philosophiques*, p. 27)

Voltaire therefore popularized the idea that multi-confessional societies can succeed if diverse peoples are united in their shared interest for commerce, which he thinks is stronger than their religious group interests. Hence, science justifies liberal values like tolerance, which, in turn, are conducive to making practical affairs like commerce and free market capitalism the lynchpins of society. This line of reasoning is remarkable—and seems to go to heart of liberal thinking. Recall how Colbert justified economic reforms, like the introduction of meritocratic institutions, in the name of science. Voltaire is doing something similar, but instead of meritocracy, he maintains that science and tolerance go hand in hand.

The general impression that one gets reading the *Lettres philosophiques* is the following: if English philosophers and scientists refrain from speculating about the “inner nature” of things and “occult qualities”, and as a result, tend to invent epistemological and physical doctrines that are superior to those of Frenchmen such as Descartes, then it’s because they are an exceptionally reasonable people. Indeed, not only do the English defend religious tolerance, but also freedom of speech:

Il y a à Londres environ huit cents personnes qui ont le droit de parler en public et de soutenir les intérêts de la nation; environ cinq ou six mille prétendent au même honneur à leur tour; tout le reste s'érige en juge de ceux-ci, et chacun peut faire imprimer ce qu'il pense sur les affaires publiques. Ainsi, toute la nation est dans la nécessité de s'instruire.

(Ibid., p. 89)

What Leo Strauss calls the Enlightenment's "struggle against prejudice" is perfectly apparent in the *Lettres*, which draws a strict dichotomy between reason on the one hand, and authority on the other.<sup>169</sup> As the quote suggests, the English are obliged to exercise their freedom of speech, since instruction, not authority, is their guiding light. Of course, Voltaire attempted to downplay the implications of the *Lettres*, writing that philosophers are interested in reason alone, and will never form a religious sect with the intention of subverting society: "Jamais les philosophes ne feront une secte de religion. Pourquoi? C'est qu'ils n'écrivent point pour le peuple, et qu'ils sont sans enthousiasme" [Never will philosophers form a religious sect. Why? Because they only write for the people, and are without zeal]. (Voltaire, *Lettres Philosophiques*, p. 42) Of course, one doubts the genuineness of these lines, which are calculated to sound like those of a humanist. For in due time, Voltaire will grow accustomed to calling the *philosophes* his "saint troupeau" [holy flock], and lead them to do battle with the Catholic Church under the banner of "écrasez l'infâme!" [crush that infamy!].<sup>170</sup>

What ultimately distinguishes Voltaire from *honnêtes hommes* such as Fontenelle, and

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<sup>169</sup> See Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 181: "With a view to the radical meaning of revealed religion it must be said: there exists *the* prejudice pure and simple. Therefore freedom—falling away from revelation—also exists. Therefore the struggle of the Enlightenment against prejudice has an absolute meaning. For this reason the age of prejudice and the age of freedom stand opposed to one another. For the age of freedom it is essential that it be preceded by the age of prejudice. "Prejudice" is an historical category. This precisely constitutes the difference between the struggle of the Enlightenment against prejudice and the struggle against appearance and opinion with which philosophy began its secular journey."

<sup>170</sup> See Pierre Milza, "20 - 'Écrasez l'infâme'", in *Voltaire* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2015), p. 731 – 732, for an explanation of the history of Voltaire's use of this phrase: "Signe d'appartenance à une coterie extrêmement réduite, il ne commence à circuler dans le public cultivé et favorable aux Lumières que dans le courant de 1760. Apparaît alors, sous la plume de Voltaire, l'expression qui reste jusqu'à aujourd'hui indéfectiblement attachée à son nom : il faut « écraser l'infâme », que lui-même compare, appliqué à ses propres harangues, au *Delenda est Carthago* de Caton." (p. 731)

makes him the first true *philosophe*, are his political ambitions. Whereas the cultural archetype of the *honnête homme* was created by humanists seeking to escape the business and politics of the royal court in order to take in the *bons airs* of the private salon, Voltaire knowingly set out to alter the structure of society. Indeed, Fontenelle also spread heterodox views in the salon, but the playful dialogues of a kindly old man with *honnêtes femmes* differed substantially from the acerbic critiques of Voltaire, ever sharpening his pen like a dagger to thrust unperceived in between the ribs of tradition and authority. What then, one might ask, was the catalyst for this shift in cultural archetypes, from *honnête homme* to *philosophe*? The scientific advances of the previous century provided too great an opportunity for restructuring society. Colbert's reforms had already shown that meritocratic, rather than traditional, institutions increased the material production and military and commercial strength of the Sun King's Empire. An opportunity thus provided itself to smuggle in, as it were, other social reforms into Western societies, so long as they were paired with science. Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, for instance, is another great example of this attempt to couple social reforms with science.

However, one must not lose sight of the fact that Newtonian science has nothing to say about ethics, morality or politics. As Voltaire pointed out, Newton and Locke disabused humanity of its prejudice for speculating on the inner nature of things, from which past thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, etc., all developed their moral, ethical and political philosophies. Essentially, Voltaire was arguing that if Newton and Locke claim to be ignorant of nature as such, then religious and governmental authorities must also be. But this is somewhat misleading, I believe. For as Jürgen Habermas explains in his critique of positivism, when science becomes the standard for epistemology, it tends, despite its claims about its ignorance of nature



as such, to become a normative force.<sup>171</sup> And this is precisely the issue with Voltaire's esoteric arguments for social reform in the *Lettres*: to the extent that they conform with epistemological limits, they are presented as being reasonable, when in fact they belie Voltaire's own prejudices *against* religious authority and *for* free market capitalism. In other words, it does not necessarily follow from Locke's epistemology or Newton's scientific method that free market capitalism is a more *reasonable* or neutral way of organizing society than religious tradition. This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice" in *Truth and Method*<sup>172</sup>: If Voltaire conceives of authority and tradition as prejudices, and in opposition to reason, then it is because he considers these to be obstacles to independent reasoning, when in truth they are preconditions of knowledge. To be more precise, when we respect authority and tradition, we are recognizing "superior" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 281) knowledge, and therefore the possibility of degrees of knowledge. If however, we did not recognize degrees of knowledge, or think that all knowledge is the same, then it would not be knowledge but only opinion. The Enlightenment prejudice against authority assumes that authority is never "earned" (Ibid.), and

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<sup>171</sup> For an explanation of Habermas' position, see Richard J. Bernstein, "Introduction", *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 5: "Habermas [...] is speaking of 'positivism' in a broad encompassing matter. He wants to identify that tendency, to which many independent movements have contributed, that narrows and restricts the scope of rationality. Reason, from this perspective, can enable us scientifically to explain the natural and even the social world. It can discern nomological regularities, predict, and grasp the empirical consequences of different courses of action. It can evaluate rational decision procedures and assess the cost of competing means to achieve specified ends. But it is beyond the scope of reason to justify ends or warrant universal norms. If we accept this characterization of reason, then we disavow the type of critical reflection where, through a depth of explanation and understanding of social processes, we can further human emancipation from hidden forms of domination and repression."

<sup>172</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 308 – 309: "[...] the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power. [...] The only thing that gives a judgement dignity is its having a basis, a methodological justification (and not the fact that it may actually be correct). For the Enlightenment the absence of such a basis does not mean that there might be other kinds of certainty, but rather that the judgement has no foundation in the things themselves—i.e., that it is "unfounded". This conclusion follows only in the spirit of rationalism. It is the reason for discrediting prejudices and the reason scientific knowledge claims to exclude them completely."

that tradition is thereby arbitrary. But taken to its logical consequence, this prejudice undercuts the very sciences that Voltaire is championing. Although Rousseau does not critique Voltaire and the *philosophes* on these grounds, it is worth keeping in mind, because he will propose his own version of reasonableness in opposition to them. Before we discuss this however, I would like to bring forth some other aspects of the *philosophes'* program.

## Chapter VI: The *Philosophes* and Social Science

### VI. i. The Sources of Inspiration of the *Philosophes*: Early Modern Social Science

The *philosophes* are motivated by two intellectual trends in particular: on the one hand, the shift from the “idealistic” political philosophies of the Ancients to the “realist” or “scientific” ones of Early Modern thinkers like Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, which is reflected in their doctrine of *doux commerce*; and on the other, the epistemological consequences of Newtonian physics, which were a clear source of motivation in Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques*, as we see above. In this chapter, I will focus on the former, which Pierre Manent discusses in earlier works such as his *Naissances de la politique moderne: Machiavel, Hobbes, et Rousseau* (1977), as well as more recent ones like *La Loi naturelle et les droits de l’homme* (2018). After studying Manent’s discussion of this shift in political philosophy, I shall examine the latter point in the following subsection in the context of thinkers like Jean le Rond d’Alembert and David Hume.

Even before Newton rejects those metaphysical or *ad hoc* arguments whereby Descartes sought to grasp nature, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527) and Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679) had already begun the process of proscribing the naturalist arguments that political philosophers like Aristotle and St. Aquinas had employed in their basic structure of society. More precisely, in both Machiavelli and Hobbes nature is reduced to a bare minimum: self-preservation, or the fear of death. This shift however predates Newton’s methodological advances—and although we will not touch on the subject here, Dieter Henrich has argued that the psychology of self-preservation

paved the way for Newtonian concepts such as inertia.<sup>173</sup> In any case, the shift occurs as a result of Machiavelli substantially lowering the bar for humanity, whether because he was a callous and “evil man” as Leo Strauss maintains,<sup>174</sup> or because he was “an honest man” who wanted to write a “handbook for republicans” under the guise of advising tyrants.<sup>175</sup> Nonetheless, Machiavelli holds that the prince should not occupy himself with the lofty and spiritual ambitions of men, since they are in truth “ungrateful, fickle pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain”, and that men speak of the noble only to satisfy their base desires; rather, the prince should strive to instill “the dread of punishment” in his people, since the “fear” of being deprived of their basic needs, their life most of all, is what primarily motivates them.<sup>176</sup> In this way, Machiavelli rejects the sort of naturalist arguments that one finds in Aristotle, who contends that man’s nature is such that he strives to perfect himself and achieve his essential ideal, just as fire

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<sup>173</sup> See Dieter Henrich, “The Concept of Moral Insight and Kant’s Doctrine of the Fact of Reason”, in *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant’s Philosophy*, ed. Richard Velkley, trans. J. Edwards, L. Hunt, M. Kuehn and G. Zoeller, 55 - 88 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 67: “The development of ethics in the seventeenth century and eighteenth century was determined especially by the dissolution of scholastic philosophy, in which system ethic possessed a well-defined place. It was part of the teleology of finite and immaterial being. The first attack that Thomas Hobbes leveled against this perspective shook it in its foundation. The view of government that forms the context for his ethics was conceived in accordance with the ideal of geometry. He meant to construe the complicated body of the state from simple elements and thus make it comprehensible. These simple elements were the basic drives of human beings, the most important being the desire to preserve one’s existence. This drive for self-preservation is the extreme counterinstance to all anthropological teleology, for it is the only subjective motivational impulse that is by definition without a goal. It forms in psychology the predecessor of Newton’s force of inertia (*vis inertiae*), that is, the force that ultimately liberated physics from the Aristotelian teleology of “natural locations”.”

<sup>174</sup> See Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958), p. 9: “If it is true that only an evil man will stoop to teach maxims of public and private gangsterism, we are forced to say that Machiavelli was an evil man.”

<sup>175</sup> See Lionel A. McKenzie, “Rousseau’s Debate with Machiavelli in the Social Contract”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43, no. 2 (April – June 1982): 209 – 228: “With respect to finding continuity between *The Prince* and the republican works, Rousseau might have received some guidance from preceding interpretations. For the most part, however, he was probably justified in concluding that in the past Machiavelli had found only “superficial or corrupted” readers. He chose to reconcile *The Prince* with Machiavelli’s republican works by insisting that it was a “hand- book for republicans” under the guise of giving advice to kings; Machiavelli himself was “an honest man” and “a good citizen.” (p. 215)

<sup>176</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 66 – 67.

strives to achieve its essential ideal by rising up toward the heavens. Another way of putting the matter is to say that Machiavelli is interested only in what man *is*, but not what he *ought* to be—therefore, even before David Hume shows why no *ought* can be derived from what *is*, Machiavelli had already abandoned the *ought* for the *is*.

As Manent argues, by reducing man's nature to the fear of death, and by simply taking man for what he *is*, Machiavelli suppresses the inner life of man.<sup>177</sup> That is to say, if men formerly distinguished themselves by their moral character, and the extent to which each exercised his freedom to perfect himself and approach the ideal, now they were all *individuals*. Lacking any inner life, they all became the same, and could therefore more easily be arranged from the point of view of statecraft like pieces on a board. The rejection of ideals like beauty and the good, and the reduction of all men to the same (i.e., weak, cowardly, deceptive, etc., beings) is according to Manent necessary for the “hypertrophy of theory” and the modern creation of the political sciences:

L'hypertrophie de la théorie, caractéristique de l'approche que nous essayons de cerner, est interprétée ordinairement comme l'advenue ou l'introduction du point de vue 'réaliste' ou 'scientifique' sur les choses humaines, point de vue qui l'a emporté décisivement – cette victoire définissant la modernité elle-même – sur le point de vue

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<sup>177</sup> See Pierre Manent, *La Loi naturelle et les droits de l'homme* (Paris: PUF, 2018), p. 28. More precisely, Manent argues that Machiavelli succeeds in depriving man of what the Stoics referred to as “that which depends on me”, i.e., that which one can personally change. “Plus précisément, « les choses qui changent parce qu'elles dépendent de nous » ne peuvent être regardées comme on regarde « les choses qui ne changent pas parce qu'elles ne dépendent pas de nous », sauf si nous ôtons aux premières le caractère pratique et don l'indétermination spécifique qui est au principe de leur mutabilité. Cela apparaîtra de la façon la plus nette si nous considérons le geste de Machiavel, couramment célébré comme le fondateur du point de vue réaliste, voire scientifique, sur l'action humaine, singulièrement l'action politique.”

‘idéaliste’, celui de la belle ou de la bonne action, des Anciens ou des chrétiens.” (Ibid., p. 28)

Since Machiavelli contends that it is not fundamentally morality and justice but rather coercive force that secures the prince against the miseries of *fortuna* [chance], the state ultimately rests not on natural law but rather the threat of violence. In consequence, Manent points out, Machiavelli cuts out the thing (i.e., natural law) in virtue of which “les hommes *s’imaginent* être réunis” [men imagine themselves to be united] (Ibid., p. 33). If pre-modern accounts of nations all begin with a story of their natural origins—and they do, for Virgil begins the *Aeneid* by tracing the Roman’s lineage back to the Trojans,<sup>178</sup> just as Geoffroy of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain* begins his account with the tale of how the Trojans freed their enslaved brothers and thereby formed Britain<sup>179</sup>—then modern social science disposes of these, or treats them merely as a means of coercing peoples to obey the law. (We ought to keep this in mind for when turn to Rousseau’s accounts of the origin of civilization in the second *Discours* in the final chapter.)

Hobbes offers a similarly reductionist view of humanity, and if he describes our natural origins, then it is only to justify his reduction of humans to their desire for self-preservation, on

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<sup>178</sup> See Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1909), p. 78: “A race of wand’ring slaves, abhorr’d by me, / With prosp’rous passage cut the Tuscan sea; / To fruitful Italy their course they steer, / And for their vanquish’d gods design new temples there”.

<sup>179</sup> See Geoffroy of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Aaron Thompson (Cambridge, ON: Medieval Latin Series, 1999), p. 5: “Brutus, general of the remainder of the Trojans, to Pandrasus, king of the Greeks, sends greeting. As it was beneath the dignity of a nation descended from the illustrious race of Dardanus, to be treated in your kingdom otherwise than the nobility of their birth required, they have betaken themselves to the protection of the woods. For they have preferred living after the manner of wild beasts, upon flesh and herbs, with the enjoyment of liberty, to continuing longer in the greatest luxury under the yoke of slavery.”

which he can construct his hypertrophic political theory. More precisely, as Manent points out, Hobbes recreates the state of nature—of which he himself doubts the historical validity<sup>180</sup>—in order to then show how society is not itself natural. The effect of this, Manent continues, is to deprive humans of the power of their inner sphere (i.e., the natural rationality in virtue of which they formerly distinguished themselves within society) and to reduce them to individuals on equal footing. At the same time, this also renders their traditions, customs, and in a word, everything that encompasses their sociability, as artificial, and therefore as something that can be deconstructed and reconstructed. In this way, humans become more susceptible to being studied in terms of the arrangement of their outer sphere:

Un tel type de raisonnement abolit toute distance entre l'espèce et l'individu appartenant à cette espèce. [...] Dans la conception traditionnelle de l'homme comme animal rationnel, on considérait que l'universalité rationnelle de l'homme n'était pas comme telle toujours actuellement donnée mais seulement potentiellement et que chaque individu devait faire effort sur lui-même pour rejoindre—dans la mesure de ses capacités—l'universel inscrit dans sa nature [...]; dans la vision hobbesienne, il n'y a pas d'universalité potentielle, [...] il n'y aurait d'universalité que présente actuellement, toujours déjà là en chaque individu [...]. Dès lors, l'individualité humaine est absolument close sur elle-même ; non seulement l'individu n'a plus accès par la raison à ce qui était

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<sup>180</sup> See Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1909), part I, 13, p. 97: "It may per adventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition of warre as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world [...]."

la vérité du monde extérieur, mais il n'a plus accès à l'autre individu [...].<sup>181</sup>

In other words, if man abandons his nature (i.e., his narcissistic drive to preserve his life in the face of his fear of death) by entering into society, and if the possibility of society itself is based on contracting individuals on equal footing, then no one, once in that society, can recur to nature to claim either his or her group's moral superiority; hence, all change must be effected globally and from the outside. Put otherwise, the first act of the social scientist is to kill off the heroes—this, by the way, is why works like Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*<sup>182</sup> or Rousseau's *Discours sur la vertu des héros*<sup>183</sup> are deeply anti-modern or romantic, as they are attempts to restore nature and therefore power to the hero.<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, this sub-section should suffice to show that the *philosophes'* turn to social science is prepared by early modern thinkers like Hobbes and Machiavelli, and not merely the consequence of what some call the Scientific Revolution, to which we now turn.

## VI. ii. The Sources of Inspiration of the *Philosophes* (Continued): Newton's Physics

With great insight David Hume observed in the *History of England* (1754 – 1761) that the Scientific Revolution, crowned by Isaac Newton, had born man a gift not unlike Promethean fire:

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<sup>181</sup> See Pierre Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne: Machiavel, Hobbes, Rousseau* (Paris: Payot, 1977), p. 92 – 93.

<sup>182</sup> See Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: James Fraser, 1841)

<sup>183</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur cette Question: Quelle est la Vertu la plus nécessaire aux Héros ; et quels sont les Héros à qui cette Vertu a manqué ?* in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 2. ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond. Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

<sup>184</sup> I discuss Rousseau's romantic vision of the hero in the *Rêveries* in a forthcoming contribution: Jackanich, Paul. "L'homme du monde et l'homme vrai dans les *Rêveries* de Rousseau : s'immoler pour la vérité." In *Collectif sur les Rêveries* (Éditions Hermann)



While Newton seemed to draw the veil from some of the mysteries of nature, he shewed at the same time the imperfections of the mechanical philosophy; and thereby restored her ultimate secrets to that obscurity, in which they ever did and ever will remain.<sup>185</sup>

In virtue of the Newtonian method, one might predict the course of nature, as Edmund Halley did in 1705 when he predicted that the comet, after whom he is named, would return to Earth in 1758.<sup>186</sup> Such mastery over nature, if one could call it that, came at a great price however. For the crown jewel of the Newtonian method was his famous statement “*hypotheses non fingo*” [I do not feign hypotheses] from the second edition of the *Principia*.<sup>187</sup> By this Newton surely did not mean that he had altogether dispensed with hypotheses—indeed, we still use them today. Rather, he meant that he did not form *ad hoc*, or what might be called metaphysical hypotheses. How can the elimination of such hypotheses come at a great price to man though?

To the extent that Newton proclaims *hypotheses non fingo* in opposition particularly to the “mechanical philosophy” of Descartes, it should be useful here to look at the latter. In his *Discours de la méthode*, Descartes himself proves both a successful geometer and physicist, discovering not only (Snell’s) law of refraction, but also the cause of rainbows<sup>188</sup>. For there he manages, albeit briefly, to harness the heuristic power of deductive hypotheses. That is, he first

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<sup>185</sup> David Hume, *The History of England*, vol. 6 (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 1983), p. 542.

<sup>186</sup> Donald K. Yeomans and Tao Kiang, “The Long-term motion of comet Halley,” in *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* 197 (Nov. 1981): 633-646.

<sup>187</sup> Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. Bernard Cohen and Anne Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 943.

<sup>188</sup> See Mark A. Smith, “Descartes’s Theory of Light and Refraction: A Discourse on Method,” in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 77, no. 3 (1987): 1-92, for Descartes’ discovery of the law of refraction. Also see Jed Z. Buchwald, “Descartes’ Experimental Journey Past the Prism and Through the Invisible World of the Rainbow” in *Annals of Science* 65, no. 1, (January 2008): 1-46, for his discovery of the cause of rainbows.

identifies a phenomenon (a rainbow) and then considers its likely causes (sunlight, rain droplets, etc.). He then constructs a middle term, i.e., the hypothesis, that converts features of both the possible causes and the observed effect into common terms that can then be represented in a mechanistic model (Descartes' corpuscle theory), mapped onto a geometric plane with algebraic values, and reproduced in experiments. Following this approach, Descartes successfully shows that rainbows are caused by the refraction of sunlight through rain droplets. However, he then goes on to argue that the different colors of the rainbow are caused by the varying degrees of spin placed on the corpuscles of light, as it were.<sup>189</sup> This is an *ad hoc* hypothesis. For it makes the hypothesis itself (i.e., the mechanistic model) the cause of the observed phenomenon. Descartes errs because he believes that his mechanistic models are not merely heuristic tools (i.e., middle terms that link cause and effect), but really constitutive of nature. Still, what is the great cost of eliminating such *ad hoc* hypotheses?

Descartes not only argues that his mechanical models really constitute nature, but also that they can be deduced from first principles, which we know with certainty. Thus, when Newton shows such *ad hoc* hypotheses to be useless in predicting the course of nature, he also cuts away the metaphysical ground of certainty on which it was formerly possible to found physics. Hence Hume's observation that Newton "restored her [nature's] secrets to that obscurity, in which they ever did and ever will remain". To be clear, Newtonian physics does not definitively refute either metaphysics or the possibility of a metaphysically grounded physics. Rather, Newton has simply articulated a method whereby the course of nature can be predicted—not perfectly, but with an

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<sup>189</sup> René Descartes, *Les Météores*, in *Œuvre de Descartes*, vol. V, ed. Antoine Léonard (Paris: F.G. Levrault, 1824), p. 270-273.

accuracy hitherto unknown to man—without recurring to a metaphysical ground.

If the Newtonian revolution compelled natural philosophers of the day to consider the Descartes' mechanism with suspicion, it also put the final nails in the coffin of Aristotle's physics, and the sort of naturalist arguments used by Christian thinkers like St. Aquinas that had up until then played a significant role in grounding Western values. More precisely, it deprived us of the ability to draw moral and political conclusions from the study of physical nature, as Aristotle and Aquinas had done. Indeed, this process is precisely what Hume had in mind when we argued in his *Treatise of Human Nature* that no (moral) *ought* can be derived from what (naturally) *is*.<sup>190</sup> The reason for this is simple. Newton reduces physics to effective cause, therefore eliminating both formal and final causation, which had served as the basis for arriving at such conclusions. For instance, Aristotle argues in his *Physics* that fire is drawn up into the sky in virtue of its form or essence: lightness.<sup>191</sup> By the same token, an animal's form or soul compels it to perpetuate itself and to serve the needs of man.<sup>192</sup> In this way, how we *ought* to understand the place of things like plants, animals, slaves and so forth, could be discovered through our study of what nature *is*.<sup>193</sup> Thus, the Newtonian revolution not only draws into question the metaphysical

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<sup>190</sup> For more on this, see David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869), p. 469: "In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it."

<sup>191</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*. In *Complete Works (Aristotle)*, trans. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 19; 192b35-193a2.

<sup>192</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), p. 14; 1256b15-20.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23; 1260a4-14.

ground of physics, which formerly served as the basis for our certainty about nature, but also teleological claims about man's moral and political ends that were once derived from the study of physics. To put things rather dramatically, man now risks becoming a simple quantity of mass propelled aimlessly through space. The cost of Newton's revolution now seems clear.

However, when Newton claimed that the cause of attraction could not be deduced from the first principles of the mechanical philosophy, he did not deny that attraction had a cause. Rather, he simply maintained, as the "General Scholium" attests, that God must be its cause, even if we are incapable of precisely articulating the relationship between the two. (See Newton, *The Principia*, p. 943) This is significant. For even if the Newtonian revolution renders dubious those attempts to derive man's purpose from the study of physical nature, it leaves open the possibility of understanding his purpose through God and Providence. *Boyle's Lectures*, which exist to this day, were no doubt conceived of as an attempt to understand God and Providence, and thereby man's purpose in life, within the newly imposed limits of Newton's natural philosophy.<sup>194</sup> John Locke too, despite doing away with those obscure qualities as Voltaire calls them, employs the notion of divine providence to great effect, making it the foundation of man's natural rights.<sup>195</sup> But attempts by Enlightenment "idealists" like Christian Wolff to revive teleological reasoning seem mostly in vain, and as Ernst Cassirer will later point out, provide more inspiration for anti-modernists or romantics like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832) than for thinkers like Kant.

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<sup>194</sup> John J. Dahm. "Science and Apologetics in the Early Boyle Lectures." In *Church History* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1970): 172-186. See pp. 184-186.

<sup>195</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: Whitmore and Fenn, 1821), p. 208-230.

One might then ask what the true consequences of the Newtonian revolution are. The answer is two-fold. First, if certain Enlightenment thinkers work within similar epistemological boundaries, then it is because they express a similar deference concerning the limits of human knowledge—as Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques* reveal. Second, and as a result of the shaking of our metaphysical foundations, the philosophers of the Enlightenment will look for new ways of understanding man. Inspired by the Newtonian revolution and above all by its predictive power, they will set, as we will see in the next chapter, to harness that power in the social sphere. It is this ambition to predict the course of human affairs, I argue, that Enlightenment philosophers take from Newton’s physics, and attempt to add onto the social science of their forerunners.

### **VI. iii. Simple and Predictable: D’Alembert’s and Hume’s Conceptions of Man**

At this point, rationalist attempts to derive man’s purpose from the study of nature start to become unpopular—with the exception, of course, of a few philosophers like Christian Wolff (1679 – 1754), who, in attempting to revive this way of thinking, coins the term “*teleologia*”.<sup>196</sup> In their place, empiricist doctrines that reduce man’s knowledge to his sensations appear. One paradigmatic example of this is Jean Le Rond d’Alembert’s epistemological theory, which serves as the introduction to the first edition of Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* (1751), and helps to justify the goals of that project. There, d’Alembert maintains that “toutes nos connaissances se réduisent primitivement à des sensations, qui sont à peu près les mêmes dans tous les hommes” [all of our knowledge is reducible to our sensations, which are more or less the same in all people].<sup>197</sup> He

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<sup>196</sup> See Jonathan Cohen, “Teleological Explanation”, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 51 (1950 – 1951): 255 – 292. See p. 255.

<sup>197</sup> See Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l’Encyclopédie*, ed. Louis Ducros (Paris: Delagrave, 1893), p. 25.

then adds that logic, or the ability to combine the ideas we receive directly from our sensations, does not properly speaking add anything to them, but only allows us to arrange them in a more or less exact manner, and to communicate them to others.<sup>198</sup> However, because languages are “nées avec les sociétés” [born with societies] (d’Alembert, *Discours préliminaire*, p. 51), they are not free from “caprice national” [national caprice] (*Ibid.*, p. 52), and therefore stand in need of perfecting—a project for which the *Encyclopédie* will no doubt be indispensable:

La science de la communication des idées ne se borne pas à mettre de l'ordre dans les idées mêmes; elle doit apprendre encore à exprimer chaque idée de la manière la plus nette qu'il est possible, et par conséquent à perfectionner les signes qui sont destinés à la rendre [...]. (*Ibid.*, p. 51)

We then see how, after reducing man to his sensations and desires (which are posited as being the same for all men), the project for perfecting and thereby universalizing what was formerly particular, i.e., language, is quickly proposed. What has hitherto held the French language back, d’Alembert contends, are its national prejudices, as well as its “préjugé” [prejudice] for ancient writers like “Cicéron ou Virgile” (*Ibid.*, p. 87) and the use of Latin.

The strict dichotomy between reason and authority of which Strauss and Gadamer speak is particularly evident in d’Alembert’s *Discours préliminaire*, where nationalism, antiquarianism and religion are routinely framed as prejudices and hindrances to science. What I wish to point

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<sup>198</sup> See d’Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l’Encyclopédie*, p. 25: “[...] l’art de combiner et de rapprocher des idées directes [la logique], n’ajoute proprement à ces mêmes idées, qu’un arrangement plus ou moins exact, et une énumération qui peut être rendue plus ou moins sensible aux autres.”

out here is this: in order to catalogue man's affairs, as Diderot intends in the *Encyclopédie*, man must be reduced to his sensations and basic desires, which has the effect of stripping him of those things that not only make him unique, but are also sources of power. In other words, the attempt to universalize man, as we see in the cases of Hobbes and Machiavelli, is the attempt to instead place power in the hands of the social scientist. At the same, this universalizing tendency also plays into the hands of oligarchs and tyrants, since a people's particular and shared history is a great source of unity. While it would be wrong to assert that d'Alembert's purpose here is Machiavellian, as it were, his project conforms quite well to the latter's. By cutting man off from the rational and transcendental, modern empiricism makes for good Machiavellian subjects. The ability to catalogue is the power to control and to exercise *libido dominandi*.

The effects of empirical attempts to reduce humanity to its sentiments and passions are perhaps nowhere more pronounced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century than in the epistemology of David Hume. Inspired by the Scientific Revolution begun by Bacon and crowned by Newton, Hume proposes in *A Treatise of Human Understanding* (1739 – 1740) to found all of the sciences on what he calls the “the science of man”:

[...] the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation. 'Tis no astonishing reflection to consider, that the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects should come after that to natural [subjects] at the distance of above a whole century; since we find in fact, that there was about the same interval betwixt the origins of these sciences; and that reckoning from Thales to Socrates, the space of time is

nearly equal to that betwixt my Lord Bacon and some late philosophers in England, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engaged the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public. So true it is, that however other nations may rival us in poetry, and excel us in some other agreeable arts, the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and of liberty.<sup>199</sup>

Hume intends to ground the other sciences, including Newton's physics, on the science of man. In distinction with traditional metaphysics, the science of man attempts "to describe the way in which we come to believe that one thing is necessarily connected with another—which is just descriptive psychology".<sup>200</sup> It does this by applying to psychological phenomena the very same methods that Newton successfully applied to physical phenomena. That is, it takes "experience and observation" as its starting point, and rejects theories that attempt to justify our beliefs by recurring to "any [*ad hoc*] hypothesis that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature" (Hume, *A Treatise*, p. 6). In order to make the connection between psychological phenomena (e.g., our belief in something and the sensation that causes it), Hume contends that we can devise "careful and exact experiments" whereby we can discern the same psychological patterns across "different circumstances and situations" (*Ibid.*).

In articulating a science of man, Hume hopes not only to determine the possibilities and limits of "the other sciences", but also those of "moral philosophy". Given his belief that "the toleration and liberty" of the English are what make this project possible in the first, one can

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<sup>199</sup> See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), p. 6.

<sup>200</sup> See John Passmore, *Hume's Intentions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 12.



already guess what sort of morals “science” will prescribe. In this sense, Hume’s science of man not only reaffirms, but is essentially built upon the Enlightenment’s “prejudice” against authority. The question, of course, is whether or not Hume believes that the science of man will be as rigorous as Newton’s. That is, will it be capable of predicting the course of human affairs with the same rigor, for instance, that the latter predicts the course of celestial bodies? Indeed, Hume seems to think that the answer is ‘yes’. For in Part III, Section I of the *Treatise*, where he sets out to explain passions like “desire and aversion, grief and joy, hope and fear” (*Ibid.*, p. 209), he even argues that reason is “better” able to discover the “necessary principles” on which “human society is founded” than those on which natural objects like “matter” are:

We must certainly allow, that the cohesion of the parts of matter arises from natural and necessary principles, whatever difficulty we may find in explaining them: And for a like reason we must allow, that human society is founded on like principles; and our reason in the latter case, is better than even that in the former; because we not only observe, that men always seek society, but can also explain the principles, on which this universal propensity is founded. (*Ibid.*, p. 210)

There is no doubt about it. Hume’s “science of man” does not even come close to approaching the rigor of Newton’s science of nature. In the first place, the principle of association on which Hume bases his project, and which he likens to Newton’s principle of “attraction” (*Ibid.*, p. 13), is precisely the sort of *ad hoc* hypothesis that Newton rejects in the introductory passages of the *Treatise*. For, as John Passmore explains, his ‘experiments’ never show us why we should

adopt associationism and not some other theory.<sup>201</sup>

What is more, in the eight “experiments to confirm this system” (Ibid., p. 174) that Hume proposes to us in Part II, Section II, what we find are merely linguistic deductions. In his third experiment for instance, Hume concludes that it is neither “pride” nor “love” that a traveler feels when he remarks the “beauty” (Ibid., p. 176) of a foreign country, because these emotions are inspired only by objects that are related to us. But as James Noxon points out, “one could just as easily invent counter-examples, imagining the pride of a traveler who ‘adopts’ a country as his own”.<sup>202</sup> Another obvious problem is that we cannot isolate factors in psychological experiments like we can in physical experiments. For instance, we could not raise a child in a cell or some other closed environment, and deprive him of every object that he begins to grow attached to, in order then to confirm that he lacks the sentiment of love. Thus, the “science of man” is really no science at all—at least not according to the standards of the science of physics that inspires it.

The social science of the *philosophes* reduces man to his passions, but rather than calling upon him to overcome them in the name universal rationality or some other ideal, it encourages him to embrace them. Hume, for instance, considers the pursuit of “luxury” beneficial to society as a whole.<sup>203</sup> Voltaire, in kind, sings an encomium to “*le luxe*” [luxury] in his poem, *Le*

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<sup>201</sup> “A genuine experiment is exploratory: Hume’s ‘experiments’ are elaborate ways of asserting such commonplaces as that we are only proud of what is of some consequence. A genuine experiment confirms a hypothesis in some unexpected place: Hume’s ‘experiments’ give us no reason for preferring associationism to any other *ad hoc* account of the workings of pride. They are illustrations, merely, and have not the force of genuine experiment.” (Passmore, *Hume’s Intentions*, p. 157 – 158)

<sup>202</sup> See James Noxon, *Hume’s Philosophical Development* (Minnesota: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 119.

<sup>203</sup> See Margaret Schabas and Carl Wennerlind, “Hume on Money, Commerce, and the Science of Economics,” in *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 217 – 230, p. 221, for a discussion of Hume’s praise of luxury.

*Mondain*.<sup>204</sup> If the Enlightenment guides man from out of the darkness of religious tradition and authority, then it is by stripping away his natural and cultural differences and casting light on his basest aspects. And although this is done in the name of tolerance and liberty, in effect it reduces men to neat social units that can be easily arranged like pieces on a chessboard. One might even be willing to accept the ugliness of modern man, if one could be sure that it was based on something more than Machiavelli's misanthropic or "evil" character, or on certain inaccurate parallels between Newton's method and Locke's epistemology. But it's not. As we have seen, Newton's method does not disprove metaphysics; it simply provides a predictive model that does not require any metaphysics. Furthermore, Enlightenment philosophers like David Hume are misguided in their belief that the study of psychological phenomena can be just as rigorous as that of physical ones. Hence the paradox of the Enlightenment: it understands itself as the "struggle against prejudice" in Strauss' words, but is itself motivated by a host of prejudices about the science that inspires and informs it.

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<sup>204</sup> Voltaire, *Le Mondain*, in *Œuvre complètes de Voltaire*, vol. II (Paris: Furne et Cie, 1886), p.716-717.

## Part II: *Libido Sentiendi* and *Dominandi*: Unmasking the *Philosophes*

### Introduction to Part II

Having conducted our genealogy of the *philosophes*, we now turn to Rousseau's critique of them in the *Premiers discours*. Although commentators such as François Bouchardy and Ernst Cassirer have dismissed what Rousseau once called his "prosopopoeia of Fabricius", I argue that it constitutes a unique contribution to the history of ideas. In the first place, Rousseau does not invoke Seneca and other classical authors to merely garnish the *Discours*, but instead to reject the *philosophes'* conception of progress, which they inherited from the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. More precisely, Rousseau affirms the judgement of Seneca, Polybius, and a long list of Roman historians who characterized the so-called golden age of civilizations not in terms of their wisdom, but rather their simplicity. Rousseau, of course is not the first to embrace this modern anti-progressive conception of history, as one also finds it in Vico, Montesquieu, and other modern thinkers. However, and this brings us to our second point, he is the first to make it the basis of a unique method which he begins to fashion in the *Premier discours*: unmasking. That is, when Rousseau unmasks the *philosophes* as vain, idle, weak, effeminate, slaves to the world of appearances, it is this simple—and later in the *Deuxième discours*, natural—self that he is attempting to expose.

With regard to the first point, one notes that long before Joseph de Maistre and other reactionaries, Rousseau characterizes Enlightenment progress as the slippery slope to moral degeneration. Of course, Bertrand de Jouvenel already articulated this thesis in his "Essai sur la politique de Rousseau" (1947), where he contends that Rousseau's critique of the *philosophes*

“est centrée sur une forme de la *libido*, et la plus noble, la *libido sciendi*” [is centered on a form of the *libido*, and the most noble one, *libido sciendi*].<sup>205</sup> Although he does not mention him in name, de Jouvenel is undoubtedly referring to what Augustine calls “*libido sciendi*” [the desire for knowledge] in *De vera religione*, which is intimately connected there with “*libido sentiendi*” [desires of the flesh].<sup>206</sup> Far from considering the *philosophes* as agents of progress, Rousseau considers them mere *popularizers* and *vulgarizers*<sup>207</sup> of science, and thus precipitators of moral decadence:

Maintenant comme alors, la société développe ses maux à mesure de l'évolution dont elle se flatte. Chaque pas qu'elle croit faire en avant l'approche de sa perte : son progrès n'est qu'une décadence. (de Jouvenel, “Essai sur la politique de Rousseau”, p. 24)

Rousseau neither considers scientific progress nor the advancement of knowledge per se to be

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<sup>205</sup> See Bertrand de Jouvenel, “Essai sur la politique de Rousseau”, in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Du Contrat social* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1978), p. 30.

<sup>206</sup> The concept of *libido sciendi* can be found in Augustine’s *De vera religione*, where it is closely associated with *libido sentiendi*. See Augustine, *De vera religione*, in *Œuvres de saint Augustin*, vol. 8, trad. Joseph Pegon (Paris: Desclée, 1951), p. 70, 127. Augustine also explains the relation between the former and the latter in detail the *Confessions*, where *libido sciendi* is presented as “*curiositas*” [curiosity] and “*concupiscentia oculorum*” [concupiscence of the gaze], and is associated with “*vanitas*” [vanity]. See Augustine, *Confessions*, trad. William Watts (London: Loeb Classics, 1912), p. 175 – 176: “For besides that concupiscence of the flesh, which lurketh in the delight of all our senses and pleasures, (wherein those the slaves of it, who go far from thee, waste and perish ;) there is conveyed into the soul by the same senses of the body, a certain vain and curious itch ; not of delight taking in the flesh, but of making experiments by help of the flesh ; which is masked under the title of knowledge and learning. Which, because it is seated in the appetite of knowing, and that for the attaining of knowledge the eyes be the principal of all the senses, is in Holy Writ called the lust of the eyes. [...] And out of this disease of curiosity are all those strange sights presented unto us in the theatre. Hence also men proceed to investigate some concealed powers of that nature which is not beyond our ken, which it does them no good to know, and yet men desire to know for the sake of knowing. Hence proceeds it also, if with that same end of perverted learning, the magical arts be made use of to enquire by.” Interestingly, this would suggest a further connection with Rousseau’s critique in the first *Discours*, throughout which he criticizes the “vanité” of the philosophes.

<sup>207</sup> Pierre Manent argues that de Jouvenel’s reading of Rousseau focuses not merely on the latter’s critique of the arts and science, but more precisely on what Manent refers to as their “vulgarization”. See Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne*, p. 140.

threats to morality, but rather the “progress with which [society] flatters itself”. In other words, it is the concept of progress, the notion that we are better because we know more, because we are further removed from simplicity and nature, that Rousseau takes issue with.<sup>208</sup> For he sees this concept, and particularly its popularization throughout society, as an attempt to promote what was once thought vicious. Sallust’s and Tacitus’ respective accounts of the simplicity and thus purity of the early Romans and German tribes play an equally important role here. Among the few men capable of remaining sober in times of moral decay, they watched on helplessly as a once noble race plunged itself into the deepest excesses, gaining special insight into the causes of man’s corruption—from whence comes Hegel’s saying, “The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering.”<sup>209</sup> So too does Seneca’s argument in the *Letters*, that philosophical doctrines [*docti*] increase in proportion our desires, inspire Rousseau’s critique of progress here. As de Jouvanel proclaims, it was as the “champion” of “classical morality” that Rousseau leveled his critique in the first *Discours*. (Ibid., p. 29)

That being said, I consider de Jouvanel’s thesis incomplete. For Saint Augustine not only speaks of the connection between *libido sciendi* and *libido sentiendi*, but also of the one betwixt these and *libido dominandi* [the desire for power].<sup>210</sup> In addition to unmasking the *philosophes’*

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<sup>208</sup> Given that de Jouvanel has framed Rousseau’s critique of scientific progress in Augustinian terms, it should also be important to remember that Bacon’s doctrine of scientific progress also drew inspiration from Augustine, particularly his *City of God*. Hence, one cannot help but ask: did Bacon fail to consider whether scientific progress was a form of concupiscence? As it shall become apparent in chapter eight, the Enlightenment conception of scientific progress differed greatly from that of Bacon. For Bacon kept epistemology rooted in the ontological order of things, and thus submissive to God, whereas the *philosophes*, inspired by Descartes’ radical epistemological shift, turned knowledge into a secular tool that would be put into the service of man alone. In short, it is ultimately the secular conception of progress that becomes the object of Rousseau’s critique.

<sup>209</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. S.W. Dyde (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. xxi.

<sup>210</sup> See Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, vol. 1 (Lipsiae, 1825), book I, chapter XXX, p. 34; book XIV, chapter XV, p. 24; and book XV, chapter XVIII, p. 37, for his conception of *libido dominandi*.

popularization of progress as an attempt to corrupt society's mores, Rousseau also reveals their desire to dominate society by multiplying its institutions—salons, academies, universities, and the like—accruing bureaucratic power, and resocialization or even *hyper-socializing* its citizens. Recalling Habermas' study from chapter one, we might even argue that the *philosophes* wish to appropriate the bureaucratic power of absolute monarchy for themselves. In any cause, I believe that Rousseau identifies in the *philosophes* something like the 'intellectual' or 'expert', who does not pursue the truth, but rather seeks to manage or gatekeep it. If Rousseau is "history's greatest militant lowbrow" as Berlin mockingly writes, then it's only because he foresaw what the world would become under such types, who disdain the common man for his prejudices, only to impose a thousand others on sharper minds.

In addition, I argue that the success of Rousseau's critique of the *philosophes* depends on his development of a unique methodology, the *unmasking* method. In *The Unmasking Style in Social Theory*, Peter Baehr contends that "the opening salvo in the unmasking war" was fired by Rousseau, whose insistence upon the qualities of autonomy, sincerity and authenticity motivated him to excoriate society's *appearances* without the reservations of his predecessors, such as Montaigne or Molière.<sup>211</sup> Interestingly, Baehr is relying here on Lionel Trilling's reading of Rousseau in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, which traces these qualities back to the first *Discours*. That being said, I deny the presence of anything like authenticity there, and argue that, at best, one merely uncovers the seeds of this virtue in the *Rêveries*. The importance of autonomy and sincerity in the *Premier Discours* is not to be overlooked however. And as before, I demonstrate

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<sup>211</sup> Peter Baehr, *The Unmasking Style in Social Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 17.

that Rousseau successfully reinterprets these ancient virtues in order to mobilize his unmasking method. Whereas the stoics understood autonomy as self-mastery, the Genevan interprets it as self-definition in order to recover his “shredded soul” from the *hyper-socializing* processes that are unique to modernity. At the same time, Rousseau’s unmasking of society in the *Premier* and *Deuxième discours* seems all the more convincing precisely because of the sincerity with which he unmask himself in the *Confessions*. What Aristotle would have deemed an extreme version of sincerity, Rousseauian autobiography operates within the same framework as his unmasking method, being the author’s attempt to expose his *unsocialized* or true self.

I believe that the method with which Rousseau unmask the *philosophes* can be clarified by (a) venturing past modernity and examining the differences between the Ancient Greek and Christian moral frameworks, and by (b) studying two forerunners of the unmasking method, La Bruyère and Molière. Though Alasdair MacIntyre considers unmasking part of the “distinctively modern moral scheme”<sup>212</sup> I argue that the Christian moral framework provides one of the requisite conditions for the method, insofar as it turns our gaze away from one’s actions and focuses it on his motives. To recall, *arete* [virtue] translates as *excellence* in Homer, and Aristotle judges a man to be virtuous only if he *succeeds* in undertaking what he proposes. Hence, for the Greeks, failure is nearly synonymous with viciousness, meaning that there is less occasion to suppose a man virtuous despite his *actions*, or on the basis of his *intentions*. The relative unimportance of intentions in the Greek world is reflected in the difference between their definition of *hupokrisis* [hypocrisy] and the one found in the New Testament, and particularly in

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<sup>212</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 68.



Matthew. Aristotle, for instance, merely distinguishes the hypocritical method from his scientific one, claiming that the former is suited to prose and politics. Demosthenes even says that hypocrisy is the first, second and third rule of oratory. However, if the meek, impoverished and wretched are virtuous in the Christian framework, then it is only because they are judged in spite of their *actions*, and on the basis of their *intentions*. But the latter are much more easily concealed than the former, which explains why the New Testament regards hypocrisy not merely as vicious, but according to William Barclay, as the greatest sin. For hypocrisy threatens the whole Christian framework.

It is therefore not surprising that the unmasking style first gains traction in plays such as Molière's *Tartuffe*, who conceals his cupidity behind the mask of Christian righteousness. There, Elmire states her desire to "faire poser le masque à cette âme hypocrite".<sup>213</sup> Molière, however, practiced unmasking with reservation, for Cléante cautions that righteous unmasking can itself become a mask, and advises the audience to improve society by setting a good example, rather than by hounding out hypocrites. Similarly, in his *Caractères* (1688) Jean de la Bruyère removes "le masque de l'hypocrisie" worn by false *honnêtes hommes*, exposing their vanity, conformity, effeminateness, hedonism and other vices.<sup>214</sup> One wonders here if Jean-Jacques' critique of the *philosophe* is not simply a reproduction of La Bruyère's. However, there are major differences. Like Molière, La Bruyère believes that there are limits to unmasking, and neither wishes to tear away "le voile de la modestie" that guards others from our pride, nor abandon the model of the

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<sup>213</sup> Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière, *Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1894), p. 97.

<sup>214</sup> Jean de la Bruyère, *Les Caractères de la Bruyère, suivis des Caractères des Théophraste* (Paris: Librairie d'Abel Ledoux, 1836), p. 233.

*honnête homme*, whose ‘artless charm’ renders society agreeable. What distinguishes Rousseau from his predecessors, I believe, is not merely the fact that he pursues unmasking without their reservations, tossing the veil of modesty into the mud. No, in distinction with these writers, the man whom Rousseau unmasks is an *unwitting hypocrite*, one who, unlike Tartuffe, hides behind the mask without knowing it. Instead of unmasking the sinner, Rousseau unmasks the artificial or hyper-socialized man, not holding up Christian virtue as the ideal, but rather the simplicity of which Tacitus and Sallust speak, the simplicity that Victor Goldschmidt identifies in the first *Discours* in the “*cit  cynique*”.<sup>215</sup> By accusing modern society of being artificial, Rousseau is able propose another society embedded in reality or nature (i.e., the *cit  cynique*) and then remove the mask imposed by the former, not to castigate people, but rather to show them their true selves, as they should be. Rousseau refines this unique method in the *Premier discours*, and later deploys it in the *Deuxi me*. In following years, not only will *philosophes* such as Holbach and Condorcet appropriate this method, but so too will numerous thinkers the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries—Freud, Marx and Adorno to name a few. Marx, for instance, lifts the “*Jammertales*” [veil of tears] from Christianity to reveal the historical subject, the unwitting product of an exploitative and artificial and society. There is a major difference, however, between these other thinkers and Rousseau, who would have regarded their attempts to *institutionalize* unmasking as contradictory, given that unmasking serves primarily to liberate man from societal institutions, and thereby restore his autonomy. Unmasking belongs to the dissident, not the managers of truth.

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<sup>215</sup> Victor Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique: les principes du syst me de Rousseau* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1982), p. 67.

Of the ancient civilizations, Rome inspired Rousseau the most. Aside from Socrates and his commentators Plato and Xenophon, he confirmed Cato the Elder's judgement regarding the Athenians: they were masters of the arts and rhetoric, but the "words of the [Athenians] were born on their lips, [while] those of the Romans in their hearts".<sup>216</sup> And though he greatly admired Spartans like Lycurgus for their honesty and the simplicity of their wisdom, it was ultimately by imagining himself as that Roman diplomat to King Pyrrhus, the poor but incorruptible Fabricius, that he delivered his first *Discours* before the Académie de Dijon. The first chapter of this part, or **chapter seven**, thus examines the difference between the *philosophes'* and Rousseau's view of the Romans. According to Voltaire, the Romans owed their best laws (like religious tolerance) to the Athenians, and Turgot even claimed that the Romans had only managed to extend their empire across the known world by supplementing their rude language with Greek eloquence. In general, the *philosophes* sought to demystify Rome. Diderot equated the first Romans to a pack of brigands who had only won the admiration of future generations by the scale of their crimes, and Voltaire, denouncing patriotism, cited the Romans as proof that to love one's country, one must also hate one's neighbours. Hume's criticisms cut the deepest however. Years before the Académie's essay contest, he had already put his finger on the Roman prejudices that Rousseau would later hope to defend in the first *Discours*: whereas commerce and luxury were associated with effeminacy and tyranny (i.e., the antitheses of virtue) by the Romans, modernity has shown that it was only by these that peasants became artisans and small business owners, thus giving the average man a greater share of liberty.

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<sup>216</sup> See *The Life of Cato the Elder*, in *Parallel Lives*, vol. II, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), p. 337.

Rousseau was born in Geneva, the Protestant city state that had fought desperately for its sovereignty from the Papacy during the Thirty Years War. To such people patriotism was not the vice of brigands, but rather the aegis of liberty. Reading to him the ancient tales of Plutarch, of those Spartans and Romans who had lived and died for their fatherland, Jean-Jacques' father made certain that his son took this wisdom to heart. Plutarch was the first author that he read in his youth, and the last in his old age, and throughout the *Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau* we see his admiration for these classical heroes rise up through his being. His mind wanders in sublime contemplation through the arches of the Pont du Gard, and Rousseau pronounces: "Would that I was born a Roman!" For many years Rousseau sought to become a playwright and a composer, but the patriotic sentiments that he had inherited from his forebearers, and his admiration for the austere virtue and rusticity of the ancients never abandoned him. Thus, suffocating on the *bons airs* and *sociabilité* of the Parisian salon, he cast aside his artistic ambitions, and resolved to take up the classical banner: to battle the world of appearances. (What Strauss identifies as the classical dichotomy between reason and appearance is fundamental in Rousseau's thought.) With this banner in hand, Rousseau made sure to remind the cosmopolitans, always assembled in their great urban centers, that inequality and indifference to humanity abounds among them the most. His criticisms are prescient: the cosmopolitan progressive lectures us on our duties to foreigners, giving the *appearance* of virtue, so that he can step over his neighbor in the street. The *philosophes*, who entertain the prejudices of the women of the salon, give the *appearance* of respect, only in order to seduce them. They are *virtue-signalers*, interested only in *convincing* others of their virtue so that they don't have to *act* virtuously.

Having established Rousseau's classical roots, our goal in **chapter eight** is to further flesh out de Jouvenel's thesis, which will permit us to better understand the classical arguments that he mobilizes in the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*. In the first place, this means articulating how *libido sciendi* devolves into *libido sentiendi*, or "scientific progress" into moral degeneracy. Drawing on previous chapters, we define scientific progress not merely as the advancement of physical theories and technological innovations, but more fundamentally as a particular world-view that can be traced back to Descartes' epistemological shift. When Descartes asserts *cogito ergo sum*, he uproots the subject from the ontological world that it once occupied in Plato and Aristotle, making the subject its own, radically autonomous ground. It is here that the classical dichotomy between reason and appearance is abandoned for the modern one between reason and authority, which rejects all authority—especially its religious and nationalist variants—that does not come from the autonomous individual. Hence, whereas reason was once a divine key for accessing the highest forms, virtue and beauty, and communing with the divine, it becomes a cold tool in the hands of man. And though Fontenelle, Voltaire and Hume were all highly critical of Cartesian epistemology, their efforts to advance the sciences each flow from it. Fontenelle's secular conception of scientific progress as the linear accumulation of knowledge simply would not have made sense in the Platonic world for instance, where harmony is the starting point and all the world's knowledge already exists in the heavens. Voltaire's endorsement of John Locke's epistemology, as well as Hume's psychology or "science of man", are also both indicative of the radically autonomous Cartesian ego. The question therefore becomes: how does *libido sciendi* degenerate into *libido sentiendi*? Or from the perspective of the classical dichotomy between reason and appearance, how does this form of *libido sciendi* lead us back into the cave?

Having uprooted man from his place in the ontological hierarchy, and made the subject its own ground, few options remain for orientating humanity. One appears to be Epicureanism, whose reduction of the world to matter and form resonated with modern philosophers such as Gassendi and Fontenelle. Epicurus however not only grounded his physics on this ontology, but also his ethics, making the immanently available—pain and pleasure—humanity’s guiding lights. In chapters four and five, we studied how this ethics devolved into salon-Epicureanism, which severed the relationship between virtue and action, and replaced the latter with flowery words, politeness and, in sum, appearances. Salon-Epicureanism is not, however, the only product of enlightened *libido sentiendi* as it were. For its effects are also manifest in the modern science of man, which only makes man *calculable* by reducing him to an individual that is everywhere the same, driven merely by his most selfish desires, and indistinguishable by his virtues. The basest ends (e.g., commerce) are likewise transformed into the lynchpins of society, for once again, it’s easier to *calculate* money than virtue. Having elaborated the relationship between *libido sciendi* and *libido sentiendi*, I show that Bertrand de Jouvenel’s thesis remains incomplete: Rousseau is not simply interested in the relationship between scientific progress and moral decline; he also thinks that the *philosophes* invoke the sciences in order to distinguish themselves and acquire power. In other words, his critique also draws on the relation between *libido sciendi* and *libido dominandi*. To be sure, *libido dominandi* is an Augustinian concept, but it was Blaise Pascal who emphasized the special connection between the three in his *Pensées*.

With a better comprehension of the battlefield (Rousseau’s classism vs. the *philosophes*’ modernism) and the overall framework of the first *Discours* (*libido sciendi* → *libido sentiendi* → *libido dominandi*), we turn in **chapter nine** to elaborating the classical themes that Jean-Jacques

mobilizes there. Diderot apparently tells Voltaire that Rousseau initially came to him expressing his desire to defend the positive moral influence of the sciences and arts, and only resolved to argue the contrary on his advice. In this way, Diderot attempts to explain why the first *Discours* is more the work of rhetoric than substantive thinking. Rousseau, on the other hand, maintains that his “prosopopoeia of Fabricius” was inspired by an illumination, and interpreters like de Jouvenel and Roger Masters have even characterized the *Discours* “prophetic”. By explicating the deeper classical themes of this work, we hope to affirm the latter’s judgement. The first of these that we shall explore was developed in the days of the late Republic and early Empire, when Rome’s moral degeneration had finally precipitated a series of dictators. Present throughout the texts of Sallust, Tacitus and Seneca to name a few, is the idea that the Romans (and Germans) were more virtuous in their early days, when civilization had yet to corrupt them. If their simplicity and ignorance guarded their virtue, then it was because their desires were still natural, and they’d yet to fabricate and multiple more complicated ones. Rousseau invokes these classical thinkers in order to combat the modern prejudice according which the most ‘complex’ and ‘progressive’ (i.e., furthest from their origins) cultures are the most moral. For what pretends to be complex and progressive—spectacles, theatrical performances, polite discourses—trades on appearances and distractions. As Rousseau expresses in a letter to M. Bordes in 1752: “Brutus n’ étoit point un homme doux; qui auroit le front de dire qu’il n’ étoit pas vertueux? Au contraire, il y a des âmes lâches et pusillanimes qui n’ ont ni feu ni chaleur, et qui ne sont douces que par indifférence pour le bien et pour le mal. Telle est la douceur qu’ inspire aux Peuples le goût des

Lettres."<sup>217</sup> [Brutus was not a soft man; who would have the audacity to claim that he was not virtuous? On the other hand, there are cowardly and timid souls who have neither fire nor warmth, and who are only soft by indifference to good and evil. Such is the softness that the taste for letters inspires in men.] Rousseau thus comes to the opposite conclusion of the *philosophes*: the first men of Rome were not brigands, but the most virtuous.

Rousseau also sees this classical theme—which equates corruption with civilization and virtue with simplicity—reflected in Plato’s *Apology*, where Socrates claims that he is the wisest of all men, because he does not think he knows what he does not know, and thus recognizes the extent of his ignorance. Knowledge of ignorance is the best protection of virtue. That being said, Rousseau does not consider this knowledge to be the reserve of Socrates alone, as he also sees it embodied in Cato the Elder, who expels the Athenian philosophers from Rome for distracting the youth from fulfilling its duties to its people, and thus for corrupting them. Hence, what first appears to be hostile to philosophy—Cato expelling the Athenian philosophers—is presented as being in greater conformity with true philosophy. For the true philosopher is not fundamentally one who teaches or argues about ideas, but rather one who *lives out* his philosophy.

**Chapter ten** is dedicated to developing a classical theme just as fundamental to the first *Discours* as the dichotomy between reason and appearances. Here, we speak of the dichotomy between action and words, which is no doubt an expression of the former. When, for instance, Aristotle defines a moral argument, he maintains that one proposes in the premises a plan, and

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<sup>217</sup> Rousseau, *Dernière Réponse de J.-J. Rousseau de Genève*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 72.



then concludes by acting or undertaking that plan—this would mean, of course, that the worst formulators of arguments are all those intellectuals who stand above society. For Aristotle, the virtuous man is therefore a man of action. However, it was not Aristotle’s theory of virtue that inspired Rousseau. Nor was it Plato’s, for although Socrates argues in the *Apology* that acting in ignorance is the cause of evil, he rebuts Callicles’ reproach in the *Gorgias* that philosophers who never apply their knowledge as statesmen, but instead continue to philosophize into their final days, rather resemble old men playing children’s games. Rousseau, whose liberal translation of the *Apology* skillfully omits Socrates’ visit among the statesmen, would have undoubtedly taken Callicles’ side. Rousseau, it seems, is most inspired by Seneca’s theory of virtue, according to which Cato the Younger the “wisest” and most “immortal” of men precisely because he was willing to undertake the Herculean labors of a statesman who fought tyranny in Rome’s darkest of hours. Rousseau’s subsequent veneration of Cato the Younger over Socrates is surely a reflection of Seneca’s reasoning in his essays *On Providence* and *Continence*.

Rousseau was not only directly influenced by ancient thinkers, but also by their modern interpreters. One of the most useful resources in this regard proves to be Montaigne’s essay on *Pédantisme*, which assembles history’s greatest denouncers of useless knowledge. Jean-Jacques discovers four accounts here and reproduces them in the first *Discours*: King Agesilaus’ judgment (from the *Parallel Lives*) that the Spartan youth should not be taught for school, but rather for “what they shall do as men”; Diogenes’ observation that the orators “study how to speak of justice, but not how to act so”, and should therefore practice tennis instead, for at least then they improve their feeble bodies; Xenophon’s remarks on the science of ruling; and lastly, Seneca’s observation that “since the reasoners have begun to appear among us, [...] good men

have been abandoned". Of all these however, Seneca's words seem to have been taken most to heart by Rousseau. For if we examine the *Epistolae* in which he utters them, we uncover one of the guiding themes of the *Discours*: once people forsake simple living and "honest labor", replacing them with various kinds of luxuries, they multiply and complicate their desires and hence their problems; in turn, they require increasingly complicated remedies to solve them. In other words, what appears at first to be philosophical progress, is instead the multiplication of justifications for vice. Rousseau, no doubt, shall see Enlightenment progress through the same lens. From these sources and others, Rousseau imagines in the first *discours* what Goldschmidt calls the "cité cynique", where *simplicity* is the aegis of virtue, and most importantly, man still has *la force de l'âme* or courage to assert himself and lay claim to his freedom.

In **chapter eleven**, we turn to Rousseau's critique of the arts and sciences in the *Premier discours*, mobilizing the ancient resources that we've unearthed above. While Rousseau argues that the arts and sciences are products of vices like luxury, he does not consider them vicious as such. For he regards mechanical arts (i.e., engineering) as useful, and lauds Bacon, Newton and Descartes as "preceptors of the human race". Rather, the focus of his critique, I maintain, is the *institutionalization* of the arts and sciences. More than a decade before *Émile*, one discovers in the first *Discours* what Rousseau will later refer to as "negative education", the goal of which is not to teach virtue, which must be learned in the course of life, but to protect the student from those vicious institutions—spectacles, hollow pleasantries, etc.—that might otherwise prevent him from developing a natural sense of right and wrong. The basic idea of negative education is therefore the following: to be virtuous, to have the courage to uphold the truth, and ultimately attain to physical and spiritual freedom, one must be the author of one's virtue. In other words,

one's virtue must be one's own, not the product of some abstract system or institutional power that can be manipulated like a light switch. For Rousseau, the *institutionalization* of the arts and sciences means the total erasure of such negative education programs—the ideal expression of which is found among the first Romans, Spartans and Germanic Tribes—and their replacement with what might be called *positive education*, which does not seek to teach virtue or love of the truth, but instead to *socialize* the youth. While the effect of Émile's negative education program is to render him an *individual*, I will prove that Rousseau also conceives of a negative education program for *patriots* in the first *Discours*—one equally rooted in nature, despite his claim in the *Émile* and elsewhere that the foremost legislators of patriots (e.g., Lycurgus) “denatured” their citizens to make them so. In any case, the goal of the negative education program for patriots is not merely to inoculate one boy against those intellectual types who would make him a hollow cosmopolitan, but the whole nation.

Rousseau believes that the *institutionalization of education* (i.e., positive education) has made the youth idle, physically weak, cowardly, forgetful of their duties to God and nation, and ultimately slavish. Whereas negative education is *concrete*, meaning that the youth learn virtue by practicing the duties “they must fulfill as adults”, positive education is abstract, sequestering the youth to the classroom where there's little occasion for the practice of virtue, but plenty for its denial. What use do those who live “easy and agreeable” lives, hidden away from the ills and struggles of the world, have for virtue? Who is more likely to display courage, the man who has read several books on the subject, or the one who has formed bonds with his countrymen? The *institutionalization* of the arts and sciences not only corrupts the youth, *socializing* them rather than teaching virtue, it also becomes an incubator for the *philosophe*, the popularizer of science,

who might be regarded here as the ascendant ‘intellectual’ or ‘expert’. Such individuals are not scientists themselves, nor are they interested in the pursuit of the truth, but rather seek only to “distinguish themselves” and *manage* it. To label them *bureaucrats* is not to be hyperbolic, but merely to state a fact—Fontenelle was on the state’s payroll. Rather, it is the idea that they are bureaucrats first, and philosophers second or not all, that forms the core of Rousseau’s polemic here, which, I show, paints the *philosophe* as someone more interested in institutional power than the pursuit of the truth. The *philosophe*, or the nascent intellectual, is according to Rousseau the enemy of the people and geniuses alike.

**Chapter twelve**, of course, examines the method of unmasking that Rousseau mobilizes in the *Premier discours* to level this critique of the *philosophes*. As I have already introduced this method, I’ll simply restate my position here that this method constitutes a unique contribution in the history of philosophy. In **thirteenth and concluding chapter**, I will compare this method to the one that Claude Levi-Strauss discovers in the *Deuxième discours*, which he identifies as the foundation of the social sciences. If it can be demonstrated that the former influenced the latter in some way, then we must ask the following question: to what extent can the social sciences be regarded as attempts to unmask society? In the end, does the intellectual class adopt the very same method that Rousseau used against them? Has the intellectual bureaucracy absorbed this method? To an extent, the answer to these questions seems to be yes. I argue, however, that if Rousseau founded the social sciences, then he never intended them to become *institutionalized*, and would have been horrified by the prospect of *institutionalized unmasking*, which represents a contradiction. The goal of unmasking is restoring our autonomy, where autonomy means freedom from the desires and self-images that society’s institutions impose on us. But when the

very same institutions unmask the people, they do not grant but only subvert their autonomy. In addition, when Rousseau unmask the *philosophes* and accuses them of being unwitting hypocrites, he deprives them of their agency in a sense. The *philosophes* can dispute this assertion, as they did. Though we must ask ourselves what happens when society and its institutions—academia and media for instance—deprive peoples of their agency in this way? When such institutions unmask peoples as hateful, intolerant, prejudiced and so forth, and the whole machinery of society is activated to reinforce the imputation of these motives, begging to differ can have serious consequences. Holbach and Condorcet, I demonstrate, both conceive of institutionalized unmasking as means of spreading ‘enlightened reason’. But whereas Holbach merely wishes to empower a sovereign to do so, Condorcet conceives of an entire model for society—his version of Bacon’s *New Atlantis*—ruled by an intellectual class of “social mathematicians” who are not simply interested in studying the motives behind people’s beliefs, but also in discerning which motives are good or bad. Confident in their struggle against prejudice and authority, the *philosophes* fail to conceive of the potential abuses of reason, and thus lay the foundations for the technocratic complexes of the future, where the common man’s motives are no longer decided by himself, but instead by a class of intellectuals.

## Chapter VII: Rousseau, the *Philosophes* and Rome

### VII. i. Rome According to the *Philosophes*: A Hive of “Patriots”, a.k.a “Brigands”

The *philosophes* praised certain aspects of the Romans, particularly those that they had learned from the Greeks, and which conformed to their preferences. In his *Essais sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756) for example, Voltaire praises the Romans for imitating the religious tolerance of the Greeks:

J'observerai ici sur [la] religion [des Romains] deux choses importantes, c'est qu'ils adoptèrent ou permirent les cultes de tous les autres peuples, à l'exemple des Grecs ; et qu'au fond, le sénat et les empereurs reconnurent toujours un dieu suprême, ainsi que la plupart des philosophes et des poètes de la Grèce. La tolérance de tous les religions était une loi nouvelle, gravée dans les cœurs de tous les hommes [...].<sup>218</sup>

Turgot too, in his *Discours sur les progrès successifs de l'esprit humain* (1750), lauds Cicero and the Latin tongue for their eloquence, without which the Romans could not have governed over Africa, Spain and Gaul successfully, according to him. But he attributes their speechcraft to the Greeks, who lifted them up from their “austere rudeness”:

Les Romains, conquérants de la Grèce, connurent un nouvel empire, celui de l'esprit et du savoir ; leur rudesse austère s'appriivoisa : Athènes trouva des disciples dans ses vainqueurs, et bientôt des émules. Cicéron déploya au Capitole et sur la tribune aux

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<sup>218</sup> Voltaire, *Essais sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, in *Oeuvres de Voltaire*, vol. 6, ed., M. Beuchot (Paris: Lefevre, 1829), p. 179 – 180.

harangues une éloquence puisée dans les leçons des Grecs, et dont ses maîtres asservis ne connaissaient plus que les règles. La langue latine adoucie, enrichie, poliça l’Afrique, l’Espagne et les Gaules. (Turgot, *Discours sur les progrès successifs de l’esprit humain*, p. 477)

The aim of the *philosophes*, it would seem, is to demystify Rome, and more generally antiquity, just as Perrault and Fontenelle had done in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns nearly half a century before them.<sup>219</sup>

Hume makes this clear in his essay *Of Refinement in the Arts* (1742), where he refers to “the Latin classics, whom we peruse in our infancy”, and asserts that men like Sallust always see the past with rosy retrospection—what the Romans themselves called *memoria praeteritorum bonorum*.<sup>220</sup> Such historians, Hume continues, are always extolling virtues they no longer seem to possess, and with an eloquence that betrays their predilection for the arts:

All the Latin classics, whom we peruse in our infancy, are full of these sentiments, and universally ascribe the ruin of their state to the arts and riches imported from the East: Insomuch that Sallust represents a taste for painting as a vice, no less than lewdness and drinking. And so popular were these sentiments, during the later ages of the republic, that this author abounds in praises of the old rigid Roman virtue, though himself the most egregious instance of modern luxury and corruption; speaks contemptuously of the

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<sup>219</sup> This theme was discussed in Part I, Chapter IV.

<sup>220</sup> David Hume, “Of Refinement in the Arts”, in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, vol. 1, ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882), p. 350.

Grecian eloquence, though the most elegant writer in the world [...]. (Hume, *Of Refinement in the Arts*, p. 350)

Although it is to be doubted that Rousseau read Hume's essay before composing the *Discours*, one notes that the latter argues precisely the contrary of the former, in order to prove that the rejuvenation of the sciences and "progress in the arts is rather favorable to liberty, and [...] free government" (*Ibid.*, p. 306). To be more precise, Hume rejects a fundamental aspect of classical morality, according to which commerce and the arts are to be associated with effeminacy, tyranny and slavery. This view was so commonplace that it could be remarked in everyone from Sallust to Alexander the Great's soldiers, who associated his "white Persian tunic" with his newly acquired censorious tendencies.<sup>221</sup> And we find, of course, its paradigmatic example in Cato the Elder, for when asked "What is to be said of making profit by usury?" Cato replied, "What is to be said of making profit by murder?"<sup>222</sup> But Hume maintained that it is precisely commerce that raises peasants to the level of "tradesmen and merchants [who] acquire a share of the property, and draw authority and consideration to that middling rank of men, who are the best and firmest basis of public liberty". (*Ibid.*) Indeed, as we shall see, much of Rousseau's critique in the *Discours* will focus on this notion, that commerce draws men together and makes them equal and free.

The *philosophes* not only took issue with Rome's antipathy for commerce, but also with its patriotic and militaristic tendencies, which they regarded as antagonistic to the former. In his contribution "Vanité" to the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot singles out the Romans as a prime example of

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<sup>221</sup> See Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, in *The Parallel Lives*, vol. 7, trans., B. Perrin (Cambridge: Loeb Classics, 1919), p. 373.

<sup>222</sup> Cicero cites this quote in *De Officiis*, p. 168.



what he defines as vanity: “un homme qui tâche de se faire honneur par de faux avantages” [a man who attempts to honor himself by false advantages].<sup>223</sup> By *faux avantages*, Diderot means that which grants one power, but which either does not reflect one’s character (e.g., wealth), or which reflects one’s character poorly (e.g., crimes). According to Diderot, one finds the greatest example of the latter in “the Rome of old”—hence the Rome that Sallust and Polybius venerate most—where a host of brigands “osent non seulement justifier leurs fameux larcins, mais ils les consacrent” [not only dare to justify their larcenies, but consecrate them] (Diderot, “Vanité”, p. 242). A man who thieves and murders is despised, but the warlord who conquerors and pillages erects shrines and arches at which people come in numbers to celebrate his legacy. To be sure, Diderot hated the “old Rome” for its eagerness to celebrate its crimes and injustices:

La vieille Rome [...] fut dans sa naissance une colonie de voleurs, qui y cherchèrent l’impunité de leurs crimes. Elle fut dans la suite une république de brigands, qui étendirent leurs injustices par toute la terre. [...] Ils assemblent [...] l’univers dans la pompe de leurs triomphes pour étaler le succès de leurs crimes ; et ils ouvrent leurs temples, comme s’ils voulaient rendre le ciel complice de leurs brigandages et de leur fureur. (*Ibid.*)

Diderot does more than demystify Rome. He charges Rome with being “a republic of brigands”. If, however, the thuggery of the Romans owed to their vanity, then the success with which they acquired their “false advantages” owed to their patriotism, at least according to Voltaire.

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<sup>223</sup> Denis Diderot, “Vanité”, in *Encyclopédie méthodique*, vol. 4 (Paris : Panckoucke, 1791), p. 241.

At the heart of all this “brigandage”, Voltaire writes in his *Essais sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations*, one uncovers “love for the fatherland”:

Au milieu du brigandage, l’amour de la patrie domina toujours jusqu’au temps de Sylla. Cet amour de la patrie consista, pendant plus de quatre cents ans, à rapporter à la masse commune ce qu’on avait pillé chez les autres nations : c’est la vertu des voleurs. (Voltaire, *Essais sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations*, p. 179)

Patriotism “is the virtue of thieves”. And in his entry “Patrie” to the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), Voltaire reminds us that the paragon of republican and patriotic virtue, Cato the Elder, always had “*delenda est Carthago*” [death to Carthage] on his lips.<sup>224</sup> To be a good patriot, Voltaire argues, one must necessarily be a bad neighbor: “Telle est donc la condition humaine, que souhaiter la grandeur de son pays, c’est souhaiter du mal à ses voisins. Celui qui voudrait que sa patrie ne fût jamais ni plus grande, ni plus petite, ni plus riche, ni plus pauvre, serait le citoyen de l’univers” [Such is the human condition, that to desire the greatness of one’s country, is to wish harm upon one’s neighbors. He who would neither wish for his country to be greater, nor smaller, nor richer, nor poorer, is a citizen of the universe.] (Voltaire, “Patrie”, p. 143) In the estimation of the *philosophes*, the moral man, who neither profits by false advantages, nor at the expense of his fellow neighbor, is a cosmopolitan and a commercialist, who is far too sober to be moved by the rose-tinted myths of republican virtue and patriotic heroes, or rather brigands. The *philosophes* undoubtedly sided with the Moderns against the Ancients. And while Rousseau did not side with the Ancients in the traditional sense (i.e., by affirming the metaphysical claim that

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<sup>224</sup> Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 26 (Paris : Crapelet, 1818).

nature has declined since antiquity), he found another way of opposing the Moderns: insisting, along with Sallust and others, that old Rome was better not because it was wiser, but instead because its was simpler.

### VII. ii. The Origins of Rousseau: “Would that I was born a Roman!”

Rousseau was a Genevan son, a citizen of that city state whose republican history dated back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century—to long before the Protestant Revolution and Calvin’s ascent there.<sup>225</sup> The Genevans were fierce patriots, and when they took up the Protestant cause, fighting off the Duke of Savoy’s papal army in 1534, they did not hesitate to scorch their own earth to hinder his ingress into the fatherland.<sup>226</sup> The independence they won in 1536 was the fruit of self-sacrifice, and thus cherished greatly among them. In the years to come, Calvin would fashion around it a heavy armor of moral laws, proscribing gambling, theatrical entertainment and other frivolities, while coercing community and church participation. Indeed, Rousseau will later defend the ban on theatre in his *Lettre à d’Alembert* (1758), arguing that even if the playwright aspires to teach good morals, the success of his play will always depend on “pleasing” the audience, even at the cost of the former—Rousseau cites Alexis from Virgil’s *Eclogues* “*Trahit sua quemque voluptas*”

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<sup>225</sup> For an account of the republican history of Geneva, see Herbert Darling Foster, “Geneva before Calvin (1387 – 1536): The Antecedent of a Puritan State”, in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 8, no. 2 (Jan. 1903): 217 – 240: “The communal records of the next century and a half (1387- 1536) show marked skill in municipal housekeeping and in defense and extension of rights of self-government. Besides the primary assembly of all citizens (*consilium generale*), which elected syndics and acted upon treaties, three indirectly representative councils were developed: the little council (*consilium ordinarium*, or *petit conseil*), the administrative body; the council of sixty, for diplomatic affairs; and the council of two hundred established in 1527 on the model of that of the new allies, Freiburg and Bern [...]” (p. 220)

<sup>226</sup> “From the end of July, 1 534, Geneva was fighting to maintain, against the attacks of both duke and bishop, its declarations of independence. The task called for great sacrifice and energy. Bells were melted for cannon, and the suburbs (faubourgs) which enabled the enemy to approach were destroyed, in spite of repeated objections of property owners.” (Foster, “Geneva before Calvin”, p. 222)

[Each is led by his pleasure] here.<sup>227</sup> According themselves greater freedom on their reading of the Book of Revelation, the Genevans also imposed greater duties upon themselves.

The “fils d’un père dont l’amour de la patrie était la plus forte passion” [son of a father whose strongest passion was love for the fatherland], Rousseau naturally inherited his patriotism from his father.<sup>228</sup> In the *Confessions* (1782), he reports reading Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* with his father at the ripe age of seven, and imbibing the heroic tales of “Agésilas, Brutus [et] Aristide” (Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 9) like mother’s milk. It was in those moments, when “I believed myself Greek or Roman” Rousseau writes, that “[my] free and republican spirit” was cast:

De ces intéressantes lectures [de Plutarque], des entretiens qu’elles occasionnaient entre mon père et moi, se forma cet esprit libre et républicain, ce caractère indomptable et fier, impatient de joug et de servitude, qui m’a tourmenté tout le temps de ma vie dans les situations les moins propres à lui donner l’essor. Sans cesse occupé de Rome et d’Athènes, vivant pour ainsi dire avec leurs grands hommes, né moi-même citoyen d’une république, et fils d’un père dont l’amour de la patrie était la plus forte passion, je m’en enflammais à son exemple ; je me croyais Grec ou Romain ; je devenais le personnage dont je lisais la vie : le récit des traits de constance et d’intrépidité qui m’avaient frappé me rendait les yeux étincelants et la voix forte. Un jour que je racontais à table l’aventure de Scaevola,

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<sup>227</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 17: “Quant à l’espèce des Spectacles, c’est nécessairement le plaisir qu’ils donnent, & non leur utilité, qui la détermine. Si l’utilité peut s’y trouver, à la bonne heure; mais l’objet principal est de plaire, &, pourvu que le Peuple s’amuse, cet objet est assez rempli. [...] *Trahit sua quelque voluptas*. Il faut, pour leur plaire, des Spectacles qui favorisent leurs penchans, au lieu qu’il en faudroit qui les modérassent.” For the passage from Virgil, see *Eclogues*, in *Virgil*, vol. I, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (London: William Heinemann, 1916), p. 14, book II, line 65.

<sup>228</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 1, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), book I, p. 9.

on fut effrayé de me voir avancer et tenir la main sur un réchaud pour représenter son action. (Ibid.)

Of all the philosophers that he read, Plutarch inspired Rousseau the most. For as he would later write in *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782), his final work, Plutarch “was the first reading of my childhood” and would be “the last of my old age”.<sup>229</sup> Though Rousseau was instilled with the patriotism and morals that would have permitted him to enjoy the even keel life of a middle class man of Geneva, circumstances dictated otherwise.

When he was only ten years old, Rousseau’s father was involved in a controversy with a gentleman. Accused of reaching for his sword during a quarrel, he faced imprisonment, but fled the country instead, only to see Rousseau years later. And because his mother had died shortly after giving birth to him, Rousseau was now alone. Placed first in the care of relatives, and then bouncing from one apprenticeship to another, he quit Geneva under the cloak of night when he was still a boy—later regretting in his *Confessions* the tranquil life he might have enjoyed there, were it not for this unhappy “accident”.<sup>230</sup> The peregrinations of his youth carried him first into the arms of the Baroness de Warens, or “*Maman*” [Mama] as Rousseau would call her.<sup>231</sup> First

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<sup>229</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rêveries d’un promeneur solitaire*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 1, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), fourth promenade, p. 1024.

<sup>230</sup> “Ce train d’éducation fut interrompu par un accident dont les suites ont influé sur le reste de ma vie”, Rousseau writes. (Rousseau, *Confessions*, I, p. 12) In turn, he is deprived of the simple but pleasant life he might have had: “J’aurais passé dans le sein de ma religion, de ma patrie, de ma famille et de mes amis, une vie paisible et douce, telle qu’il la fallait à mon caractère, dans l’uniformité d’un travail de mon goût et d’une société selon mon cœur. J’aurais été bon chrétien, bon citoyen, bon père de famille, bon ami, bon ouvrier, bon homme en toute chose. J’aurais aimé mon état, je l’aurais honoré peut-être, et après avoir passé une vie obscure et simple, mais égale et douce, je serais mort paisiblement dans le sein des miens.” (Rousseau, *Confessions*, book I, p. 43 - 44)

<sup>231</sup> “Dès le premier jour, la familiarité la plus douce s’établit entre nous au même degré où elle a continué tout le reste de sa vie. *Petit* fut mon nom ; *Maman* fut le sien ; et toujours nous demeurâmes *Petit* et *Maman*, même quand le nombre des années en eut presque effacé la différence entre nous.” (Rousseau, *Confessions*, III, p. 106)

his teacher, and then lover, Rousseau later recounts in his *Rêveries* that he spent the happiest and most idyllic days of his life with Maman.<sup>232</sup> Ambitious however to become a playwright and a composer, he then ventured across Europe, taking odd jobs along the way as a secretary, a tutor, etc., and by the age of thirty found himself in the cultural capital of Paris, where Voltaire was already busy fashioning himself into a *philosophe* and popularizing heterodox doctrines. The substance of his character having already been forged however, Rousseau will ultimately reject Voltaire's coterie of urbanites and cosmopolitans.

### VII. iii. The Rustic vs. The Cosmopolitan Progressive: Rousseau on "Virtue Signaling"

Only one object ever "surpassed the expectations" of Rousseau, and it was the Pont du Gard. The first century Roman aqueduct stands to this day, and after so many bridges built after it have fallen, it remains a testament to Roman ingenuity, organization and will. Visiting the Pont du Gard was a spiritual experience for Rousseau, who spent the entire day wondering its floors, caressing its walls, and letting his mind wonder in "entrancing contemplation" for hours on end. Lost in that wondrous "reverie", Rousseau's "imagination reached its zenith", and the sentiment of his youth returned to him: "Que ne suis-je né Romain!" [Would that I was born a Roman!]<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> In the final promenade of the *Rêveries*, Rousseau recollects these days: "J'engageai maman à vivre à la campagne. Une maison isolée au penchant d'un vallon fut notre asile, et c'est là que dans l'espace de quatre ou cinq ans j'ai joui d'un siècle de vie et d'un bonheur pur et plein qui couvre de son charme tout ce que mon sort présent a d'affreux. J'avais besoin d'une amie selon mon cœur, je la possédais. J'avais désiré la campagne, je l'avais obtenue ; je ne pouvais souffrir l'assujettissement, j'étais parfaitement libre, et mieux que libre, car assujetti par mes seuls attachements, je ne faisais que ce que je voulais faire." (Rousseau, *Rêveries*, p. 1099)

<sup>233</sup> Rousseau recounts his trip to the Pont du Gard in the *Confessions*: "[J'allai] voir le pont du Gard. C'était le premier ouvrage des Romains que j'eusse vu. Je m'attendais à voir un monument digne des mains qui l'avaient construit. Pour le coup l'objet passa mon attente, et ce fut la seule fois en ma vie. Il n'appartenait qu'aux Romains de produire cet effet. [...] Je parcourus les trois étages de ce superbe édifice, que le respect m'empêchait presque d'oser fouler sous mes pieds. Le retentissement de mes pas sous ces immenses voûtes me faisait croire entendre la forte voix de ceux qui les avaient bâties. [...] Je sentais [...] je ne sais quoi qui m'élevait l'âme ; et je me disais en soupirant : Que ne suis-je né Romain !" (Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 255 - 256)

How different was Rousseau's first trip to Paris, whose beautiful outline concealed the greatest miseries. In the *Confessions*, Jean-Jacques reports being "disgusted" by the indifference, poverty and stench of the big city from the moment he enters it:

Combien l'abord de Paris démentit l'idée que j'en avais ! [...] Je m'étais figuré une ville aussi belle que grande, de l'aspect le plus imposant, où l'on ne voyait que de superbes rues, des palais de marbre et d'or. En entrant par le faubourg Saint-Marceau, je ne vis que de petites rues sales et puantes, de vilaines maisons noires, l'air de la malpropreté, de la pauvreté, des mendiants, des charretiers, des ravaudeuses, des crieuses de tisanes et de vieux chapeaux. Tout cela me frappa d'abord à tel point, que tout ce que j'ai vu depuis à Paris de magnificence réelle n'a pu détruire cette première impression, et qu'il m'en est resté toujours un secret dégoût pour l'habitation de cette capitale. (Ibid., p. 159)

The greatest inequalities are always to be found in the big cities. Their charming skylines—the residences and businesses of the wealthy—are all buttressed by the "filthy and fetid" streets of the squalid and poor. That was Jean-Jacques' impression, and the most beautiful architectures and gardens could not shake it. It was not only the city that reviled him, but its people and habits too. "La solitude est toujours triste à la ville" [Solitude is always miserable in the city], Rousseau would later write to the Countess d'Houdetot, remarking upon urban indifference.<sup>234</sup> Alone with

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<sup>234</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettres Morales*, in *Oeuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 4, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 1114: "La solitude est toujours triste à la ville. Comme tout ce qui nous environne montre la main des hommes et quelque objet de société, quand on n'a pas cette société, l'on se sent hors de sa place [...]. C'est tout le contraire à la campagne, les objets y sont riants et agréables, ils excitent au recueillement et à la rêverie on s'y sent au large hors des tristes murs de la ville et des entraves du préjugé. Les bois, les ruisseaux, la verdure écartent de notre cœur les regards des hommes, les oiseaux voltigeant çà et là selon leur caprice nous offrent dans la solitude l'exemple de la liberté [...]."

nature, solitude heals the soul. For the sights and sounds of trees, birds and flowing rivers unburden the mind, allowing it to wander into a “reverie” and therein rediscover the sentiment of existence. Alienated, however, among a heterogenous mass of unknowns indifferent to our suffering, solitude deals a harsh blow to our humanity.

How could that be? For do not the greatest lovers of humanity, all those self-professed “citizens of the universe”, live in the big city? This was a charade according to Jean-Jacques. The cosmopolitan only waxes poetic about our ever-increasing duties to humanity, not least of all to foreign peoples on the other side of the world, so that he can step over the corpse of his neighbor and think himself virtuous all the same. With great prescience, Rousseau thus identifies one of the prototypical traits of the cosmopolitan progressive, what one calls “virtue-signaling” today, which means *convincing* others of your virtue without *doing* anything virtuous.<sup>235</sup> As Rousseau advises in *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762): “Défiez-vous de ces cosmopolites qui vont chercher loin dans leurs livres des devoirs qu'ils dédaignent de remplir autour d'eux. Tel philosophe aime les Tartares, pour être dispensé d'aimer ses voisins.” [Beware of these cosmopolitans who go to great lengths in their books to find duties that they disdain to fulfill around themselves. Such a philosopher loves the Tartars, in order to dispense with loving his neighbors.]<sup>236</sup> If appearances reign supreme in the big city, then it is because everyone there profits by them, the usurer with his interest rates, the actor with his plays, etc. On the contrary, if the common good reigned in

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<sup>235</sup> Geoffrey Miller describes this concept in *Virtue Signaling: Essays on Darwinian Politics and Free Speech* (Cambrian Moon, 2019).

<sup>236</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, in *Oeuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 4, ed. , ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), book I, p. 249.



Rome, then it owed to “the taste of the first Romans for the life of the countryside”, where one does not deal in appearances but rather honest labor.<sup>237</sup>

So too did the *philosophes* and their salons greatly distress Jean-Jacques. In his *Lettre à d’Alembert* (1758), he compared the Parisian salon to a “serrail” [seraglio], the castle in which Turkish sultans lodged their hordes of slave-girls.<sup>238</sup> But rather than being managed by a sultan, the Parisian seraglio is always overseen by some woman, and rather than being entertained by slave-girls, she instead amuses herself with the *philosophes*, whom Rousseau accuses of being “more effeminate than she”. (Rousseau, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p. 93) Again however, Rousseau accuses the *philosophes* of merely virtue-signaling. For he notices how they avoid more difficult subjects, and instead confirm the women’s’ sensibilities and prejudices, so that flattering them without loving them, they can “usurp [...] all their rights”, that is, more bluntly, so they can exploit their sexual favors:

On les flatte sans les aimer; on les sert sans les honorer; elles sont entourées d’agréables, mais elles n’ont plus d’amans; et le pis est que les premiers, sans avoir les sentiments des autres, n’en usurpent pas moins tous les droits. (*Ibid.*, p. 95)

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<sup>237</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris : Gallimard, 1965), book IV, chapter IV, p. 445 : “On connoît le goût des premiers Romains pour la vie champêtre. Ce goût leur venoit du sage instituteur qui unit à la liberté les travaux rustiques et militaires, et reléga pour ainsi dire à la ville les arts, les métiers, l’intrigue, la fortune et l’esclavage [...]”

<sup>238</sup> “[...] lâchement dévoués aux volontés du sexe que nous devrions protéger & non servir, nous avons appris à le mépriser en lui obéissant, à l’outrager par nos soins railleurs; & chaque femme de Paris rassemble dans son appartement un serrail d’hommes plus femmes qu’elle, qui savent rendre à la beauté toutes d’hommages, hors celui du cœur dont elle est digne. Mais voyez ces mêmes hommes toujours contraints dans ces prisons volontaires, se lever, se rasseoir, aller & venir sans cesse à la cheminée, à la fenêtre, prendre & poser cent fois un écran, feuilleter des livres, parcourir des tableaux, tourner, pirouetter par la chambre, tandis que l’idole étendue sans mouvement dans sa chaise longue, n’a d’actif que la langue & les yeux.” (Rousseau, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p. 93)

Rousseau thought that big city denatured men and women. Surrounded by nothing but human art or artifice, the most ontologically impoverished form according to Plato's view, the urbanite lives in a world of appearances. Rousseau's classical sensibilities reveal themselves here. For as Leo Strauss observes, the distinction between a *philosophe* and a *classical philosopher* might be expressed as follows: whereas the former opposes reason to authority, the latter opposes reason to appearance. Rousseau is not opposed to authority as such, especially not republican authority, but he is violently opposed to the world of appearances.

Hence, the *grand monde* of *philosophes* rekindled Rousseau's classicism and romanism. Visions of Fabricius standing before King Pyrrhus, his virtue incorruptible, poured into his mind, and on the road to Vincennes he experienced an "illumination".<sup>239</sup> All those Plutarchian heroes, ennobling the world spirit by their actions alone, came rushing back to the wayward Genevan. Thus he built up a pyre and thereupon immolated his artistic ambitions, resolving instead to wage war on the world of appearances. The patriotic sacrifices of his Genevan ancestors had, in the end, shaped the die from which Rousseau's heart had been cast. And so he would become the

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<sup>239</sup> Rousseau describes his "illumination" in his second *Lettre à Malesherbes*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 1, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 1135: "J'allois voir Diderot, alors prisonnier à Vincennes; j'avais dans ma poche un Mercure de France que je me mis à feuilleter le long du chemin. Je tombe sur la question de l'Académie de Dijon qui a donné lieu à mon premier écrit. Si jamais quelque chose a ressemblé à une inspiration subite, c'est le mouvement qui se fit en moi à cette lecture: tout-à-coup je me sens l'esprit ébloüi de mille lumières [...]. Oh Monsieur si j'avois jamais pu écrire le quart de ce que j'ai vu et senti sous cet arbre, avec quelle clarté j'aurais fait voir toutes les contradictions du système social; avec quelle force j'aurais exposé tous les abus de nos institutions; avec quelle simplicité j'aurais démontré que l'homme est bon naturellement, et que c'est par ces institutions seules que les hommes deviennent méchants. Tout ce que j'ai pu retenir de ces foules de grandes vérités qui dans un quart d'heure m'illuminèrent sous cet arbre, a été bien faiblement épars dans les trois principaux de mes écrits; celui sur l'inégalité, et le traité de l'éducation; lesquels trois ouvrages sont inséparables, et forment ensemble un même tout. Tout le reste a été perdu, et il n'y eut d'écrit sur le lieu même que la prosopopée de Fabricius."

“patron saint of the enemies of intellectuals” as Isaiah Berlin will later refer to him.<sup>240</sup> Though I suspect that Rousseau would have relished the title, for it was neither the classical philosopher nor even the scientist whom he opposed, but the intellectual: neither a statesman, nor even apt to consider himself a citizen of his country, he stands above everyone and everything, rejecting every form of authority so that he alone can lay claim to it, not in order to *do* anything, but only to *signal* his virtue from upon high, and perhaps to oblige others. He is everything that is meant by the word *critic*: neither doing nor belonging to anything, he deigns to judge everything, most especially all the prejudices—what free peoples call morality and common sense—that make common society agreeable. Depriving a people of their national virtues and reducing everything to a matter of economic interest, he establishes what Aristotle identifies as the preconditions of tyranny, and thereby delivers the host into the mouth of absolute monarchists and oligarchs.<sup>241</sup> Self-satisfied, he believes that he has made them all free, for the glint in the tyrant’s fangs, he reasons, can only be the reflection of *les lumieres*. “What have we gained” by all those “writers who regard [...] the sciences, the arts, luxury, commerce, and laws” as “the linchpins of society”,

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<sup>240</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, “The Idea of Freedom”, in *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on the Modern Thought*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 135: “Rousseau is a poor, or rather deliberately self-blinded, sociologist, who threw dust in the eyes of many generations by representing as a rustic idyll or Spartan simplicity—the immemorial wisdom of the land—what is, in fact, an expression of that small-town bourgeois and class-conscious outlook [...]. In short, he was a militant lowbrow and the patron saint of the enemies of intellectuals, long-haired professors, avant-garde writers and the intelligentsia—the advanced thinkers—everywhere.”

<sup>241</sup> Aristotle discusses the relation between money-getting and tyranny throughout the *Politics*, and particularly in the context of whether or not the happiness of the individual and the state ought to be regarded as one: “There remains to be discussed the question, Whether the happiness of the individual is the same as that of the state, or different? Here again there can be no doubt—no one denies that they are the same. For those who hold that the well-being of the individual consists in his wealth, also think that riches make the happiness of the whole state, and those who value most highly the life of a tyrant deem the city the happiest which rules over the greatest number; while they who approve an individual for his virtue say that the more virtuous a city is, the happier it is.” See Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. B. Jowett, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), book VII, 2.1-3, p. 208.

Jean-Jacques asks in the preface to his play *Narcisse ou l'Amant de lui-même* (1752).<sup>242</sup> “A lot of babble, moneyed men and reasoners, that is to say, the enemies of virtue and common sense.” (Rousseau, *Narcisse ou l'Amant de lui-même*, p. 969) The intellectual, as Rousseau imagines him, is a deracinated cosmopolitan who blends bourgeois sociability with hollow political activism.

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<sup>242</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse ou l'Amant de lui-même*, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 2, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 968 – 969. My translation.

## Chapter VIII: Scientific Progress, Moral Decline and Power

### VIII. i. *Libido Sciendi*: Scientific Progress and the Autonomous, Cartesian Subject

Our goal here is to identify the different classical arguments that Rousseau advances in the first *Discours*. As de Jouvanel maintains, the main thrust of Rousseau's critique is that *libido sciendi*, or the desire for knowledge, ultimately serves the ends of *libido sentiendi*, or the desire for physical pleasure. Put differently, when a society primarily organizes itself around scientific progress, license and moral decadence follow—the prejudice against Epicureanism or what Plato calls the “city of pigs” is therefore maintained.<sup>243</sup> In the context of the Enlightenment, scientific progress not only entails advances in physics and the mechanical arts, i.e., technology, but also the radical reframing of fields like epistemology and ethics, and ultimately our understanding of man and his relationship to society. This also means that the relationship between commerce, meritocracy, and tolerance on the one hand, and scientific progress on the other hand, is more profound than it might seem at first glance. For the former do not merely facilitate advances in physics, but more fundamentally increase the *autonomy the scientific man*. At the heart of the Enlightenment concept of scientific progress, one finds the Cartesian subject, whose knowledge no longer depends on a preexisting ontological hierarchy—as one finds in Plato or Aristotle for

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<sup>243</sup> See Plato, *The Republic*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed., John M. Cooper, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 1011, 372d-e, where Socrates discusses what Glaucon calls the “city of pigs”, which represents the desires of the lowest order of men—those with iron or bronze souls—who seek pleasure rather than honor or knowledge. Socrates will then demonstrate to Glaucon that the desire for pleasure easily transforms into one for luxury, which exceeds the needs of a healthy city and thus sickens it: “If you were founding a city for pigs, Socrates, he replied, wouldn't you fatten *them* on the same diet? Then how should I feed these people, Glaucon? I asked. In the conventional way. If they aren't to suffer hardship, they should recline on proper couches, dine at a table, and have the delicacies and desserts that people have nowadays. All right, I understand. It isn't merely the origin of a city that we're considering, it seems, but the origin of a *luxurious* city.”

instance—but instead serves as a self-sufficient ground. Scientific progress therefore ultimately depends upon the autonomy of the subject, who acquires all knowledge methodologically, and rejects what is simply passed down (i.e., national traditions) or revealed (i.e., religion).

By taking Descartes' radical epistemological turn as the foundation of scientific progress, we can also understand why the latter entails (1) the gradual and methodological accumulation of knowledge, typified by Fontenelle's vision of progress; (2) the rejection of everything else as mere "prejudice", which is characteristic of Voltaire's reflections on the nation and religion; and (3) the attempt to comprehend man in radically autonomous terms, and to make the individual the self-sufficient foundation of knowledge—this being the ambition of Hume's science of man, which purports to grant us knowledge of the "necessary principles" on which "human society is founded" with a superior degree of certainty than Newton achieves in physics. Indeed, one will object that Fontenelle, Voltaire and Hume are all highly critical of Descartes' epistemology, and this is very true.<sup>244</sup> However, each preserves—and in Hume's case, deepens—the fundamental epistemological shift that Descartes effectuates: in distinction to Plato, Aristotle and Scholastic thinkers, Descartes denies that the subject is grounded within some ontological hierarchy, and instead makes the subject his own ground. That is, if Plato thinks that the highest activity of the mind consists in the contemplation of the Ideas, which possess a superior degree of being and

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<sup>244</sup> For Fontenelle's divergence from Cartesian epistemology, see Leonard M. Marsak, "Bernard de Fontenelle: The Idea of Science in the French Enlightenment", in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 49, no. 7 (1959): 1 – 64: "Convinced that the senses are the source of all knowledge, Fontenelle was led to deny specifically the "clear and distinct idea" of Descartes and, with it, the entire Cartesian ontology. He did this in two ways: first, by positing the real existence of matter, that is known by its secondary as well as its primary qualities, and second, by insisting that even our notion of the infinite is derived from our experience with the finite." (p. 30) The divergences from Descartes' epistemology are more well-known in the case of Voltaire and Hume, for both made experience rather than intellection the starting point of knowledge.

teach us about virtue, beauty and the like;<sup>245</sup> and if Aristotle holds that the mind merely presents a potentially, which must be aroused by *Nous*, in virtue of which we acquire our connection with the world and learn our true purpose in life;<sup>246</sup> then Descartes reasons that “clear and distinct” knowledge of these things is impossible, and that only if we “get rid of *all* our previous wisdom, renounce *all* our opinions, and make ourselves free of *all* blindly accepted certainties, [and] reject *all* existing authorities” can we arrive at the one certainty: *ego cogito ergo sum*.<sup>247</sup> Thus the *ego*, the pure undifferentiated individual, becomes the starting point and foundation of knowledge, the ultimate authority. Of course, as we shall below, this does not mean that Descartes denies the existence of God or some higher metaphysical order, but because the individual must first draw these into question in order to then affirm them, their authority is weakened in his favour of his own, opening the door to subsequent secular doctrines.

Fontenelle’s view of progress as the linear accumulation of knowledge, which turns the mind into some immense warehouse where parcels of knowledge are neatly stacked up, simply would not make sense to Plato or Aristotle, for whom the universe itself is the warehouse, as it were. For Plato in particular, harmony is the original state, not some infinitely perfectible goal off

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<sup>245</sup> See Zuzana Parisnukova, *David Hume, Sceptic* (New York: Springer, 2016), p. 4 – 5: “For Plato, philosophical knowledge is rather contemplation on the divine that brings the ultimate joy (eudaimonia). Philosophers are able to get into the proximity of Ideas when they contemplate the highest virtues and values, like beauty, justice, truth, love or numbers; philosophers are thus able to ‘touch’ the highest idea of Good. In this picture, our souls have in themselves an intermediary, a spiritual force, to help them to approach the essences; it is a daimon, daemon, Socrates’ daimonion.”

<sup>246</sup> See Zuzana Parisnukova, *David Hume, Sceptic*, p. 6: “*Nous* causes motion by waking the desire in the lower spheres of being to reach the same or the maximum possible perfection and get to the closest proximity of *Nous*. In Aristotle’s words, *Nous* ‘causes motion as being an object of love, whereas all other things cause motion because they are themselves in motion’.”

<sup>247</sup> See Zuzana Parisnukova, *David Hume, Sceptic*, p. 8. Parisnukova is citing from Alexander Koyré, “Introduction”, in *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*. Trans. E. Anscombe and P.T. Geach (New York: Pearson, 1979), p. vii–xlv.

in the distance.<sup>248</sup> The same Cartesian thread is also woven into Voltaire's thought. Owing to his endorsement of Lockean epistemology, which makes the subject the foundation of knowing by conceiving of it as a "*tabula rasa*", neither predisposed nor bound to this or that end, man might make of himself what he wishes. However, even more so than Locke, who "naïvely presumed that primary qualities come from external things", (Parisnukova, *David Hume, Sceptic*, p. 16) Hume conceived of the subject as radically autonomous. For his "science of man" was in fact a "science of the mind", which made psychological experience the ground of knowledge. As Zuzana Parisnukova writes in *David Hume, Sceptic* (2016):

Hume's philosophy grew from this [Cartesian] foundation though Hume endeavoured to create a new science of man, not of nature. But he took it for granted that philosophy starts with man and his mind, not with Being and its ontological structure. Hume considered the mind and its operations a primary focus of philosophy and the basis of other sciences. In this sense epistemology was a foundational discipline, though in the end Hume had to accept defeat regarding the rational foundations of knowledge. The fact that Hume turns to experience while Descartes turns to pure intellectual insight testifies to a secondary level of differences. The new focus of philosophy, the status of the mind, and the rejection of metaphysics represent their common ground. The problem of

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<sup>248</sup> Contra Thucydides, Plato argues that harmony is not some fleeting reward that city states might win when they manage to briefly triumph in war and against vice; rather, harmony is the natural state of man, having direct support from the heavens. See Leo Strauss, "Thucydides: The Meaning of Political History" in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 101: "Plato [...] believed in the primacy of rest, Greekness, harmony. Plato and Thucydides agree as to this—that for man, rest and Greekness and peace are the highest. But according to Plato, the highest for man and the highest in man is akin to the highest simply, to the principle or principles governing the whole; whereas according to Thucydides, the highest in man is not akin to the highest simply. According to Plato, the highest in man, man's humanity; has direct cosmic support. According to Thucydides, the highest in man lacks such support: man's humanity is too remote from the elements to be capable of receiving such support."



establishing access to – or the mere existence of – the world was a new challenge to be faced, after the world and our knowledge about it lost the unproblematic self-evidence that it had in the age of metaphysics. These issues constitute the deepest form of scepticism and link Hume to Descartes. Hume understood these implications of the position of the autonomous self perfectly, unlike some of his fellow-empiricists (e.g. Gassendi or Locke). (Parisnukova, *David Hume, Sceptic*, p. 2)

It is precisely because this new, radically autonomous individual can be found at the core of the Enlightenment concept of scientific progress that something more than the mere advancement of physics is meant by the latter. In order to progress the sciences, so the reasoning goes, all of society must be reframed, which does not simply mean promoting commerce and meritocracy. For if such things prove beneficial to the sciences, then it is ultimately because they grant more authority to the individual, who does not exist within some external ontological order, but whose own internal psychological order is the basis of all things.

### **VIII. ii. *Libido Sentiendi*: Neo-Epicureanism and Progressivism**

The question is now the following: what is the link between scientific progress qua *libido sciendi* and moral degeneration qua *libido sentiendi*? To begin with, the radical epistemological shift effectuated by Descartes uproots man from his place in the ontological hierarchy, and thus closes off the highest realm of being where virtue, justice, beauty and the divine ends by which man might orientate himself lie waiting. Hence, reason is no longer a key to the heavens, to the highest forms and the greatest happiness, as Aristotle so idyllically describes this elysian power

of the mortals.<sup>249</sup> Rather, in Descartes, reason appears more like a tool, wielded by a man who is so narrowly circumscribed that he is at pains to prove that God exists outside of his mind. For as Immanuel Kant will later point out, Descartes' ontological argument for the existence of God, which reasons that the concept of a perfect being implies its existence, conflates the existence of "an object of pure thought" with that of an empirically or sensibly verifiable object.<sup>250</sup> Given the precarity of this argument—which Hume also rejects on the basis of its *a priori* nature—the Cartesian subject is dangerously close to being trapped within its own subjectivity. For God is in Descartes' philosophy our assurance of the outside world. Thusly cast into the ontological void, and on the precipice of, in the worst case scenario, being no more than a disembodied mind, a lost soul traipsing across the nightmare world of a great demonic illusionist, modern man must regain his sense of orientation. This is not to criticize Descartes' epistemology, which played no

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<sup>249</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 198, X.VII.1178b: "[...] everyone assumes that they are at least alive and therefore engage in activity, since we do not take them to sleep like Endymion. So if we remove from a living being the possibility of action, and furthermore the very possibility of producing anything, what is left apart from contemplation? So the god's activity, which is superior in blessedness, will be contemplative; and therefore the human activity most akin to this is the most conducive to happiness. There is an indication of this in the fact that the other animals have no share in happiness, being completely deprived of the activity in question. For while the life of the gods is entirely blessed, and that of human beings is so to the extent that it contains something like this sort of activity, none of the other animals is happy, because they have no share at all in contemplation. Happiness, then, extends as far as contemplation, and the more contemplation there is in one's life, the happier one is, not incidentally, but in virtue of the contemplation, since this is honourable in itself. Happiness, therefore, will be some form of contemplation."

<sup>250</sup> Immanuel Kant levels this critique in a chapter entitled *The Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of the Existence of God* from his *Critique of Pure Reason*: "The proposition, 'God is omnipotent', contains two concepts, each of which has its object God and omnipotence. The small word 'is' adds no new predicate, but only serves to posit the predicate in its relation to the subject. [...] The content of both must be one and the same; nothing can have been added to the concept, which expresses merely what is possible, by my thinking its object (through the expression 'it is') as given absolutely. Otherwise stated, the real contains no more than the merely possible. A hundred real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers. For as the latter signify the concept, and the former the object and the positing of the object, should the former contain more than the latter, my concept would not, in that case, express the whole object, and would not therefore be an adequate concept of it. My financial position is, however, affected very differently by a hundred real thalers than it is by the mere concept of them [...]" See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan and Co., 1929), p. 504 – 505; A598 – 599, B626 – 627)

small role in the development of the modern scientific method, but only to underline its radical implications. Every domain of thought will, in the years to come, be affected.

Circumscribed to the narrow subjectivity of the Cartesian ego, man has limited options for regaining his bearings. One seems to be Epicureanism. As we discussed in previous sections, if Epicureanism is revived around this time by Gassendi and then adopted by *honnêtes hommes* like Fontenelle, then it owes to a certain congruency between Epicurus' reductionist ontology, which reduces everything to arrangements of matter and basic forms, and increasingly popular attempts to mathematize phenomena in order to explain them.<sup>251</sup> Of course, Epicurus not only reduces the world to matter and basic forms, but also frames his ethics within this world-view, explaining how humans can navigate life without divine providence, teleology or transcendental knowledge of virtue, justice and beauty: they must take pleasure and pain as their sole guiding lights, to the extent that these are immanently self-evident. The Epicurean will insist, of course, that his prescriptions are not morally degenerate. Gassendi, for instance, goes to great lengths to show the parallel between Epicurean and Christian morality—in addition to sanitizing certain radically heterodox conclusions of the ancient master. Within the century however, Fontenelle will popularize a version of Epicureanism that is not only less apologetic to Christian orthodoxy, but also less capable of defending itself against the accusation of moral corruption. One speaks of salon-Epicureanism; that Epicureanism which, always waxing poetic about how sweet and delightful virtue is, made Carlyle sick to his stomach; that Epicureanism which no longer cared to ask whether and when virtue and voluptuousness are at odds, and was therefore even further

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<sup>251</sup> We discussed this theme in Part I, Chapter IV, Section III.

removed from the thankless Herculean labours of Cicero and the Humanists. It is precisely this salon-Epicureanism, which finally replaces noble actions with polite speech and cosmopolitan progressivist virtue-signaling, that Jean-Jacques considers a consequence of the reestablishment of the sciences and arts. For these luxuries engender idle, selfish and hollow men, confirming that *libido sentiendi* is a thousand routes to moral decline, and perhaps only a few toward virtue. How different was the virtue of frugal and laconic men like Lycurgus, Cato the Elder and Brutus, so Rousseau will remind the *philosophes*!

Fontenelle's progressivism, which is grounded on the Cartesian subject as we discussed above, would also constitute an instance of *libido sentiendi*, not only for Rousseau, but also the Christian forerunners of progressivism. This is true for different reasons however. If one recalls, Bacon holds that the goal of Christianity is to free man from the endless pagan cycles of history, where civilizations rise and fall in perpetuity, and to restore him to the Garden of Eden. But this is not a goal of man's making. And indeed, the very reason that such a goal must be imposed on him, owes to the fact that he is tainted by original sin, and thus predisposed to *libido sentiendi*. Progress, for Bacon, is therefore not an affirmation of either man's autonomy or authority, but quite the contrary, of his submission to the Lord. Although it is not Christian theology but rather ancient wisdom that inspires Rousseau's critique of progress, the theme is the same: man is not in control of his destiny. (Rousseau's for believing this are utterly unique however, as I shall explain in the last chapter.)

Surely Rousseau, whom commentators have frequently associated with the concept of authenticity, i.e., the authoring one's own ends, could not have leveled such a critique!<sup>252</sup> We will not descend here into a discussion of Rousseau's status as a precursor of authenticity, which is fraught with all the difficulties of attributing a post-modern concept to a modern philosopher. Rather, it will suffice to say that aspects of this critique are borne out across the oeuvre of Jean-Jacques. In the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (1754) for instance, he compares modern man to Glaucus, who, in Plato's account, desires to become an immortal god and thus independent from the constraints of time and history, but is instead transformed into a monster.<sup>253</sup> And both in his *Discours sur l'économie politique* (1758) and *Du contrat social* (1762), Rousseau draws upon the wisdom of Sallust and Plutarch, who were wont to remind us that nations degenerate to the extent that their institutions are changed, and no longer reflect the desires, or common good, that first compelled men to form them.<sup>254</sup> Once this natural bond has been eroded, no amount of legislation can restore it: "quand la philosophie a une fois appris au peuple à mépriser ses coutumes, il trouve bientôt le secret d'éluder ses loix. Je dis donc qu'il en est des mœurs d'un

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<sup>252</sup> For the relationship between Rousseau and the concept of authenticity, see Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 27: "Rousseau frequently presents the issue of morality as that of our following a voice of nature within us. This voice is most often drowned out by the passions induced by our dependence on others, of which the key one is 'amour propre' or pride. Our moral salvation comes from recovering authentic moral contact with ourselves. Rousseau even gives a name to the intimate contact with oneself, more fundamental than any moral view, that is a source of joy and contentment: 'le sentiment de l'existence.'"

<sup>253</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 122: "[...] semblable à la statue de Glaucus que le tems, la mer et les orages avoient tellement défigurée, qu'elle ressembloit moins à une Dieu qu'à une Bête féroce, l'ame humaine altérée au sein de la société par mille causes sans cesse renaissantes, par l'acquisition d'une multitude de connoissances et d'erreurs, par les changements arrivées à la constitution des Corps, et par le choc continuel des passions, a, pour ainsi dire, changé d'apparence au point d'être presque méconnoissable [...]."

<sup>254</sup> See, for instance, Rousseau's discussion of the Roman censure in book IV, chapter VII of *Du contrat social*, p. 459: "Les opinions d'un peuple naissent de sa constitution; quoique la loi ne règle pas les mœurs, c'est la législation qui les fait naître; quand la législation s'affoiblit les mœurs dégénèrent, mais alors le jugement des Censeurs ne fera pas ce que la force des loix n'aura pas fait. Il suit de-là que la Censure peut être utile pour conserver les mœurs, jamais pour les rétablir. Etablissez des Censeurs durant la vigueur des loix; si-tôt qu'elles l'ont perdue, tout est désespéré; rien de légitime n'a plus de force lorsque les loix n'en ont plus."

peuple comme de l'honneur d'un homme ; c'est un trésor qu'il faut conserver, mais qu'on ne recouvre plus quand on l'a perdu." [once philosophy teaches a people to despise its customs, it soon finds the secret of eluding the laws. I say therefore that the mores of a people are like the honor of a man; they are a treasure that must be conserved, but which ones does not recover after losing.] (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 971)

### VIII. iii. *Libido Dominandi*: The Science of Man, or Scientism

We therefore see how Fontenelle's salon-Epicureanism and secular progressivism will qualify for Rousseau as instances of *libido sciendi* expressing itself as *libido sentiendi*. That being said, Rousseau will certainly not argue that the former necessarily entails the latter. Rather, this only occurs when society is primarily organized around the sciences, and *libido sciendi* becomes its dominant and guiding desire. This means that Rousseau is not anti-science but instead anti-scientism, to use a contemporary phrase. For scientism is characterized by the attempt to erect science as the sole authority, and consequently the dismissal of all others, including traditional, religious and national authority.<sup>255</sup> Voltaire's attempt to justify Lockean epistemology and thus religious tolerance by praising Newton's physical discoveries, Hume's attempt to found morality on a "science of man", Turgot's contention that civilizations are merely steppingstones on the

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<sup>255</sup> For a definition of scientism see Ian Hutchinson, *Monopolizing Knowledge: A Scientist Refutes Religion-denying, Reason-destroying Scientism* (Massachusetts; Fias Publishing, 2011), p. 14: "My single sentence definition of scientism focuses on this underlying and foundational aspect: "Scientism is the belief that all valid knowledge is science." However, the repercussions of this viewpoint are so great that scientism rapidly becomes much more. It becomes an all-encompassing world-view; a perspective from which all of the questions of life are examined; a grounding presupposition or set of presuppositions which provides the framework by which the world is to be understood. Therefore, from scientism spring many other influences on thought and behavior, notably the principles that guide our understanding of meaning and truth; the ethical and social understanding of who we are and how we should live; and ultimately our answers to the 'big questions': our religious beliefs."

road to scientific progress, etc., all reflect this goal. Of course, each of these philosophers would argue that it is not himself, but rather man in general, whom he intends to authorize.

The belief that the people would benefit the most from science, and that science would replace religion and tradition as their guiding lights, goes to the heart of the Enlightenment and the modern understanding of democracy. However, it is precisely this contention that Rousseau rejects. Moreover, it is in these terms that Leo Strauss frames his study of the *Premier discours*:

Modern democracy might seem to stand or fall by the claim that 'the method of democracy' and 'the method of intelligence' are identical. To understand the implications of this claim one naturally turns to Rousseau, for Rousseau, who considered himself the first theoretician of democracy, regarded the compatibility of democracy, or of free government in general, with science not as a fact which is manifest to everyone but rather as a serious problem.<sup>256</sup>

Rousseau's perception of science as a potential source of domination owes, according to Strauss, to his reading of Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), which was published a few years before the *Discours*. There, Montesquieu identifies virtue as the principle of free government, while emphasizing its superfluity in monarchies, where the average man does not promote or vote on the laws, and is therefore not expected to do as he says, which requires honesty and courage.<sup>257</sup> The sort of virtue that Montesquieu has in mind here is ancient and republican in

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<sup>256</sup> See Leo Strauss, "On the Intentions of Rousseau," in *Social Research*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1947): 455-486, p. 456.

<sup>257</sup> See Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois* (Paris : Gallimard, 1995), III, 3, p. 32. "Mais, dans un État populaire, il faut un ressort de plus, qui est la *vertu*. Ce que je dis est confirmé par le corps entier de l'histoire, et est très conforme à la nature des choses. Car il est clair que dans une monarchie, où celui qui fait exécuter les lois se juge au-dessus des

nature, being inspired by thinkers like Xenophon, who considered idleness and hence the arts to be vices: “La plupart des arts, dit Xénophon, corrompent le corps de ceux qui les exercent; ils obligent de s'asseoir à l'ombre, ou près du feu: on n'a de temps ni pour ses amis, ni pour la république.” [Most arts, claims Xenophon, corrupt the body of those who practice them; they oblige one to sit in the shade, or next to the fire: one does not have time for friends, nor for the republic.] (Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, IV, 8, p. 43) While Strauss demonstrates that Rousseau strays from Montesquieu in certain regards, he argues that his thesis in the *Premier discours* is essentially the following: while virtue is useless in despotic governments, it is the basis of free ones, which reject those things that attend the arts (e.g., luxury and idleness) and that despots popularize to destroy virtue; hence “he attacks the Enlightenment as a pillar of despotism or of absolute monarchy.” (Strauss, “On the Intention of Rousseau,” p. 457)

This thesis is interesting especially since Strauss advanced it years before Habermas set out to prove its general validity in the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. According to Strauss, the dissymmetry between the method of democracy and the method of intelligence that Rousseau identifies is akin to the dissymmetry between the body and the mind. Rousseau more or less agrees with Hobbes that physical self-preservation is the impetus behind forming political societies: “L'esprit a ses besoins, ainsi que le corps. Ceux-ci sont les fondements de la société [...]” [The mind has its needs, just as the body. The latter are the foundations of society] (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 6) But participating in society requires forsaking one's natural freedom for a civil and therefore constrained freedom, which requires one to be active, social

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lois, on a besoin de moins de vertu que dans un gouvernement populaire, où celui qui fait exécuter les lois sent qu'il y est soumis lui-même, et qu'il en portera le poids.”



and contribute to a certain idea of the common good. However, it is precisely natural freedom that the philosopher and the mind in general require. For contemplating the truth—though a kind of activity—requires physical inactivity, solitude and the ability to reject what is commonly accepted. But when the philosopher attempts to enlighten the citizen, he not only corrupts the latter by causing him to call into question his commitment to the republic, but also philosophy itself, which becomes entangled with political power. The negative effects of such attempts are all too apparent today, when protesting in the name of science (e.g., climate change) or some social theory (e.g., critical race theory) is very fashionable, despite the general inability of the protestors to cite a single article or empirical study to justify their protests. Instead, one finds signs comparing whatever threat is identified by the “science” to fictional characters from films and television series—modern versions of the theater that Rousseau also wanted banned. At the same, this pressures academies to publicly endorse one “science” or another, and to censor dissenting views, no matter how well-founded. Unironic slogans like “believe science” perfectly demonstrate how public institutions and the state invoke “science” to funnel public resources into the hands of those “scientists” who popularize such subjects, and to undermine rigorous science—popularizing climate science for instance undermines its validity. Rousseau’s *Discours* presages the effects of democratizing science with greater lucidity than any Enlightenment text I believe.

Strauss concludes that unlike his contemporaries, Rousseau perceives this antagonism between science and democracy because he accepts, like the ancients, the natural inequality of humans. However, unlike the ancients, he does not think that this natural inequality should be reflected in political inequality. Instead, he argues that political equality can only be preserved

by segregating scientists and philosophers from the people, and limiting them to “teaching the peoples their duties” (Strauss, “On the Intentions of Rousseau,” p. 479); otherwise, the people will be led to call into question the origins of their nation and thus the common good, but will be unable to understand that, despite the somewhat fantastical nature of these, they must be maintained. Recall the passage above: “I say therefore that the mores of a people are like the honor of a man; they are a treasure that must be conserved, but which ones does not recover after losing.” (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 971) Rousseau believes that there are no other means of binding a people together and convincing them to respect the political equality of each citizen—and political equality is essential to society, since the latter’s *raison d’être* is the preservation of each individual. In short, Rousseau neither trusts the people to act rationally, nor the intellectuals to act disinterestedly.

Despite the natural freedom in which they are based, science and philosophy seem to be inclined to political power, insofar as they owe their origin to luxury and leisure, which itself is a luxury.<sup>258</sup> Rousseau, of course, is not the first to attribute science and philosophy to luxury and leisure, for Aristotle clearly does so in his *Metaphysics*: “the sciences which relate neither to pleasure nor yet to the necessities of life were invented, and first in those places where men had leisure.”<sup>259</sup> Nevertheless, science and philosophy seek power because they require these luxuries, which can only be obtained politically. But to obtain them in a democracy, they must convince the people of their worth. This can be achieved without undermining the democracy by

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<sup>258</sup> “Le défaut de leur origine ne nous est que trop retracé dans leurs objets. Que ferions-nous des arts, sans le luxe qui les nourrit?” (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. xx)

<sup>259</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, vol. 17, trans. H. Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), I, 981b.

practicing philosophy and science and private, and limiting the intellectual's interaction with the people to teaching or fortifying their existing duties. However, when intellectuals teach the truth about the origin of society, or more precisely, our ignorance about it, then it undermines the democracy. This explains why Rousseau affirms Hobbes doctrine that self-preservation is the origin of society while also denouncing his "dangereuses rêveries" [dangerous fantasies] (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 28) in the *Premier discours*. While Rousseau does agree with Hobbes on the matter of self-preservation, he certainly does not think that this goal is best achieved by enshrining private property and making commerce the lynchpin of society:

Nos Ecrivains regardent tous comme le chef-d'œuvre de la politique de notre siècle les sciences, les arts, le luxe, le commerce, les loix, et les autres liens qui resserrant entre les hommes les nœuds de la société par l'intérêt personnel, les mettent tous dans une dépendance mutuelle [...]." (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 968).

Indeed, private property and commerce are rooted in physical necessity, but they are also among those things that divide humans the most—this is the fundamental paradox of civilization that Rousseau identifies according to Pierre Manent.<sup>260</sup> Rather, Rousseau believes that society can only achieve its original goal of ensuring the self-preservation of its members by playing a trick

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<sup>260</sup> See Pierre Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne*, p. 145 – 146: "Dès lors, la société est corrompue radicalement par suite de cette origine contradictoire. En effet, dans a société moderne, les hommes ne se veulent réunis que par le besoin qu'ils appellent l'intérêt. Ils mettent donc au principe de leur union ce qui est un principe de séparation."

on them, as it were, and by “persuading”<sup>261</sup> them of its mystical origins—hence the role of the great legislator in *Du contrat social*.

To be precise, it is not the true philosopher or scientist who desires power, for he knows that leisure can always be obtained in the fashion of Diogenes. Rather, it is the half-philosopher or half-scientist, who is unprepared to accept natural freedom and solitude. As Rousseau would remark in works like his *Discours sur l'économie politique*, one can often determine the strength of another's truth by how viciously the mob persecuted him in this life.<sup>262</sup> The philosopher does not and cannot live for the people, who demand his death while he lives, and worship him after he dies. The half-philosopher/scientist on the other hand is fundamentally characterized by his attempts to *popularize* his doctrines and thereby acquire the mob's approval. Hence Rousseau's assertion in the *Premier discours* that the *philosophes* seek only to distinguish themselves: “Ô fureur de se distinguer, que ne pouvez-vous point?” [Oh the mania of distinguishing oneself, what can't it wreck?] From this perspective, the origin of scientism, which makes “science” the sole authority in society, can be traced back to the democratization of science. To be sure, the sciences had been advanced up until this point to expand the power of Louis XIV's monarchy, and the *philosophes*—such as Diderot and those who published the *Encyclopédie*—genuinely believed that the fruits of science could be shared among the people. But Rousseau was more

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<sup>261</sup> As Rousseau explains there the great legislature does not “convince” using reason, but instead “persuades” the people to respect the laws: “Ainsi donc le législateur ne pouvant employer ni la force ni le raisonnement, c'est une nécessité qu'il recoure à une autorité d'un autre ordre, qui puisse entraîner sans violence et persuader sans convaincre.” (Rousseau, *Du Contrat social*, p. 383)

<sup>262</sup> “La vertu de Socrate est celle du plus sage des hommes : mais entre César et Pompée, Caton semble un dieu parmi les mortels. L'un instruit quelques particuliers, combat les sophistes, et meurt pour la vérité : l'autre défend l'État, la liberté, les lois, contre les conquérants du monde, et quitte enfin la terre quand il n'y voit plus de patrie à servir.” (Rousseau, *Discours sur l'économie politique*, p. 255)

pessimistic, and understood that philosophy and science consume nations like great furnaces. Turgot and more elitist *philosophes* seem to have perceived this as well, as discussed above.

While de Jouvenel's reading of the *Premier discours* focuses on the connection between *libido sciendi* and *libido sentiendi*, one can argue that Rousseau is equally drawing a connection there between the former and Augustine's *libido dominandi*: the will to power.<sup>263</sup> Of course, to argue this is not to merely impose an Augustinian framework upon the Genevan. Yes, Rousseau is not an Augustinian. He not only rejects the doctrine of original sin, but also accuses the Saint of dwelling on its gloomy consequences.<sup>264</sup> But the influence of Augustine on Rousseau cannot be denied, for his *amour sui* [vanity] plays a central role in his thinking, even before he explicitly mobilizes the term in the *Deuxième discours*. It was from Jansenists like Pierre Nicole and Blaise Pascal that Rousseau inherited the concept, already translated as *amour propre* and prominent in their works. In his manuscript on *amour propre* for instance, Pascal writes that "we hate the truth, we hide from it; we want to be flattered, we flatter ourselves; we love to be deceived; we deceive. [...] Man is thus nothing but a disguise, a liar and a hypocrite, to himself and others."<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> As Augustine expresses in the *City of God*, *libido dominandi* is the main impetus of pagan Rome, which is not organized around the glory of God, but that of men, who happily betray one another and seek personal power in names of equality and freedom. See the preface of Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, vol. 1 (Lipsiae, 1825), p. 4 (*praefatio*, 5): "Unde etiam de terrena civitate, quae cum dominari adpetit, etsi populi serviant, ipsa ei dominandi libido dominatur, non est praetereundum silentio quidquid dicere suscepti buius operis ratio postulat et facultas datur." Regarding the connection between this desire and others, Augustine also explains how the "*carnis concupiscentia*" (i.e., *libido sentiendi*) of Cain inspired in him the *libido dominandi* whereby he murdered his brother. See p. 46; XXIX, 25.

<sup>264</sup> See the *Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont, 1762 octobre*, p. 936-938 : "D'abord il s'en faut bien, selon moi, que cette doctrine du péché originel, sujette à des difficultés si terribles, ne soit contenue dans l'écriture, ni si clairement ni si durement qu'il a plu au rhéteur Augustin & à nos Théologiens de la bâtir; & le moyen de concevoir que Dieu crée tant d'âmes innocentes & pures, tout exprès pour les joindre à des corps coupables, pour leur y faire contracter la corruption morale, & pour les condamner toutes à l'enfer, sans autre crime que cette union qui est son ouvrage?"

<sup>265</sup> See Blaise Pascal, "Texte amour propre," in *Copies manuscrites du XVIIe siècle*. Accessed February 23, 2021. <http://www.penseesdepascal.fr/Hors/Hors2-moderne.php>: "Nous haïssons la vérité, on nous la cache; nous voulons être flattés, on nous flattés, on nous flatte; nous aimons à être trompés, on nous trompe. [...] L'homme n'est donc que déguisement, que mensonge et hypocrite, et en soi-même et à l'égard des autres."

What is more, for Pascal, *amour propre* is the fountainhead of those Augustinian desires, those rivers of fire, that inundate the world and drown the truth. Drawing the three together as one unholy triumvirate of concupiscence, he asserts in the *Pensées* that: “Everything of the world is concupiscence of the flesh or concupiscence of the eyes or pride of life. *Libido sentiendi, libido sciendi, libido dominandi*. Unhappy is the cursed earth that these three rivers of fire consume rather than watering.”<sup>266</sup>

To note, Pascal equates *libido dominandi* with pride [orgueil]. Pride, as he writes in the text on *amour propre*, is opposed to the truth, insofar as it makes one dependent upon others, requiring one to flatter, dissemble and in short, pursue one’s “self-interest.” So profound is the opposition between self-interest and the truth, Pascal contends—in a line that might have been Rousseau’s own<sup>267</sup>—that “the truth is useful to those to whom it is told, but disadvantageous to those who say it, because they make themselves hated.”<sup>268</sup> One therefore discovers in Pascal a different formulation of the opposition above between civic liberty and philosophical freedom, the latter requiring solitude to remain uncorrupted—or, if practiced in society, a Socratic death wish. Hence the absurdity of philosophy becoming “fashionable” and “elegies” in the names of scientists. Pascal claims that a prince must be ignorant, since he can only surround himself with self-interested philosophers. The same must apply to a people to whom philosophers ingratiate

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<sup>266</sup> See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées sur la religion et quelques autres sujets* (Paris : Abraham Wolfgank, 1627), pensé XXVII, p. 186 : “Tout ce qui est au monde est concupiscence de la chair ou concupiscence des yeux ou orgueil de la vie. *Libido sentiendi, libido sciendi, libido dominandi*. Malheureuse la terre de malédiction que ces trois fleuves de feu embrasent plutôt qu’ils n’arrosent.”

<sup>267</sup> “Jamais vue particulière ne fouilla le désir d’être utile aux autres qui m’a mis la plume à la main, et j’ai presque toujours écrit contre mon propre intérêt.” (Rousseau, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p. 120)

<sup>268</sup> “dire la vérité est utile à celui à qui on la dit, mais désavantageux à ceux qui la disent, parce qu’ils se font haïr.” (Pascal, “Texte amour propre”)

themselves. For who dares to speak the truth that displeases them? Surely not those who have had the good “fortune” to be employed by them, and to have accrued many objects that might be lost: “each degree of good fortune that improves our standing in the world brings us further from the truth” (Pascal, “Texte amour propre”). Of course, as in the case of Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques does not admit to being inspired by Pascal in the *Premier discours*; however, the same rigid opposition between self-interest and the truth underpins the text, where the *philosophes* are consistently accused of being “orgueilleux raisonneurs” [prideful reasoners] (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 12) complicit in the enslavement of man.

The *philosophes* are proud, first and foremost, of their “vain talents” (Ibid., p. 15). Hence why “they smile disdainfully at those old words Fatherland and Religion” (Ibid., p. 19), on which the untalented must rely as a means of solidarity and thus self-preservation.<sup>269</sup> But they are not as talented as they imagine themselves to be. For if they were, then they would appreciate, as Socrates does in the *Crito*, the extent to which they are indebted to their countries, even if they are imperfect. Moreover, they fail to perceive how their ivory towers, erected upon the corpses of nation and religion, might easily become corrupted by pride, and transformed into towers of Babel where the truth is only a means to bursaries, distinctions and awards. There is a problem with Rousseau’s critique however, as Michael Locke McLendon points out in *The Psychology of Inequality: Rousseau’s “Amour-Propre”*.<sup>270</sup> For it is precisely the sort of Roman civic virtue that Rousseau mobilizes here that Augustine regards as the fountainhead of *libido dominandi* in the

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<sup>269</sup> “Ils sourient dédaigneusement à ces vieux mots de Patrie et de Religion, et consacrent leurs talens et leur Philosophie à détruire et avilir tout ce qu’il y a de sacré parmi les hommes.”

<sup>270</sup> Michael Locke McLendon, *The Psychology of Inequality: Rousseau’s Amour-Propre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

*City of God*: “The civic virtue and patriotism expressed by the citizens living under the general will, Augustine might argue, most likely reflects little more than the traditional, vicious form of *amour-propre*.” (p. 187) This might be true. But recall, Rousseau, like Augustine, does not think that the stain of *amour propre* can be removed without trace from the human heart. If we are to have *amour propre*, then it best that we have a version that tends toward equality, and the preservation of the political community. Incidentally, *thymos* [θυμός] or “spiritedness” plays a very similar role in Plato’s *Republic*, where it is recognized as inferior to reason, but also as an essential part of the republic capable of inspiring justice when properly orientated.



## Chapter IX: Rousseau's First *Discours*: Simplicity vs. Civilization

### IX. i. Rhetoric or Prophecy: The Prosopopoeia of Fabricius Delivered to the Moderns

In the first chapter of this part, we outlined the differences between the *philosophes'* reading of ancient history and Rousseau's. The former consider the Romans a pack of brigands, while the latter's admiration for their simple and honest virtues compels him to rail against the urbanity, cosmopolitanism and progressivism of the *philosophes*. Affirming the classical disdain for appearances, Rousseau regards these as hollow virtue-signaling. In the second chapter, we then outlined and addended the theoretical framework within which de Jouvenal makes sense of Rousseau's critique in the *Premier discours*. There, Rousseau does not merely argue that the *philosophes'* promotion of scientism leads to moral degeneracy, but also that such promotion offers a path to distinguishing themselves and therefore acquiring power: *libido sciendi* leads then both to *libido sentiendi* and *libido dominandi*. It is against this backdrop that we hope to elaborate Rousseau's arguments proper in the *Discours*, to which we now turn.

To recall, the question posed by the Académie de Dijon in 1750 was the following: "if the reestablishment of the sciences and the arts has contributed to purifying mores". (Ibid., p. 1) As he later expresses in a letter to Malesherbes in 1765, it was on the road to Vincennes to visit his then friend Diderot, who had been imprisoned there for his *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749), that Rousseau experienced the "illumination" from which flowed his polemic against "the science of man" in the first *Discours*. Browsing the Académie de Dijon's pamphlet on the side of the road, the themes of the first and second *Discours*, in addition to those of *Émile*, came rushing to him. His mind swirling with visions, he stumbled against a tree—perhaps resembling the one under

which Newton discovered the secrets of gravity as Voltaire recounted in the *Lettres*—and felt impelled forthwith to compose the “prosopopée” [prosopopoeia] of Fabricius:

Tout ce que j'ai pu retenir de ces foules de grandes vérités qui dans un quart d'heure m'illuminèrent sous cet arbre, a été bien faiblement épars dans les trois principaux de mes écrits; celui sur l'inégalité, et le traité de l'éducation; lesquels trois ouvrages sont inséparables, et forment ensemble un même tout. Tout le reste a été perdu, et il n'y eut d'écrit sur le lieu même que la prosopopée de Fabricius. (Rousseau, *Lettre à Malesherbes*, p. 1136)

Hence, when Rousseau delivered his first *Discours* to the Académie de Dijon, he would imagine himself as Fabricius speaking before a modern audience. Although, as we shall see, Diderot will dispute this claim, it is worth describing here the sort of hero that Rousseau has in mind.

We know Caius Fabricius Luscinus from Plutarch's story of the Molossian King Pyrrhus.<sup>271</sup> Considered inferior only to Alexander the Great in the art of commanding, Pyrrhus invaded Italy in the Second Century B.C. with the ambition of taking Rome, only to be rebuffed after a series of costly battles.<sup>272</sup> Having captured a number of Roman soldiers, an ambassador by the name of Fabricius was sent to negotiate with the King. Fabricius was a man of little means, but Pyrrhus neither succeeded in bribing him, nor in impressing the rustic with his elephants.<sup>273</sup> And when

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<sup>271</sup> See Plutarch, *Pyrrhus*, in *The Parallel Lives*, vol. IX, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), p. 401 – 413.

<sup>272</sup> From whence comes the phrase “pyrrhic victory”.

<sup>273</sup> Plutarch recounts these episodes in *Pyrrhus*, p. 407 – 409: “After this, an embassy came from the Romans to treat about the prisoners that had been taken. The embassy was headed by Caius Fabricius, who, as Cineas reported, was held in highest esteem at Rome as an honourable man and good soldier, but was inordinately poor. To this man,

Fabricius discovered that the King's physician was planning to poison him for profit, he wrote to Pyrrhus, both forewarning him and insisting on Rome's intention to win by means of skill rather than deception. So magnanimous was the comportment of this poor man from the countryside that Pyrrhus insisted on freeing the prisoners without recompense, causing Rome to respond in kind. So too did Fabricius mock the Epicurean philosophy spreading across Greece at the time, for as Plutarch recounts:

At supper [...] Cineas, by accident, had occasion to speak of Epicurus, and explained the opinions his followers hold about the gods and the commonwealth, and the objects of life, placing the chief happiness of man in pleasure, and declining public affairs as an injury and disturbance of a happy life, removing the gods afar off both from kindness or anger, or any concern for us at all, to a life wholly without business and flowing in pleasures. Before he had done speaking, "O Hercules!" Fabricius cried out to Pyrrhus, "may Pyrrhus and the Samnites entertain themselves with this sort of opinions as long as they are in war with us." (Plutarch, *Life of Pyrrhus*, p. 409)

Fabricius embodies the Roman ethos: frugal, rustic, stolid, honorable and distrustful of all those philosophers who would persuade men to be otherwise. He is the opposite of the *philosophes*: luxurious, urban, verbose, a virtue-signaler and disdainful of patriots.

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then, Pyrrhus privately showed kindness and tried to induce him to accept gold, not for any base purpose, indeed, but calling it a mark of friendship and hospitality. But Fabricius rejected the gold, and for that day Pyrrhus let him alone; on the following day, however, wishing to frighten a man who had not yet seen an elephant, he ordered the largest of these animals to be stationed behind a hanging in front of which they stood conversing together. This was done; and at a given signal the hanging was drawn aside, and the animal raised his trunk, held it over the head of Fabricius, and emitted a harsh and frightful cry. But Fabricius calmly turned and said with a smile to Pyrrhus: 'Your gold made no impression on me yesterday, neither does your beast to-day.'

Rousseau confirms in the *Confessions* the epiphany that he experienced under the tree, and immediately relating the “prosopopoeia of Fabricius” that he wrote there: “j’étois dans une agitation qui tenoit du délire. Diderot l’aperçût; je lui en dis la cause, et je lui lus la prosopopée de Fabricius écrite en crayon sous un Chêne.” [I was in an agitated state of delirium. Diderot perceived it; I told him the cause, and read him the prosopopoeia of Fabricius written in pencil under an oak.] (Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 351) Diderot, however, remembers things differently. And according to Jean-François Marmontel’s account, Rousseau came to Diderot expressing his intention to affirm the moral benefits of scientific and artistic progress, and only resolved to argue the contrary on the advice of his friend Diderot. Marmontel reconstructs the conversation in which Diderot informs Voltaire of this:

J’étais [...] prisonnier à Vincennes ; Rousseau venait m’y voir. [...] Un jour, nous promenant ensemble, il me dit que l’Académie de Dijon venait de proposer une question intéressante, et qu’il avait envie de la traiter. [...] Quel parti prendrez-vous ? lui demandai-je. Il me répondit : ‘Le parti de l’affirmative.’ C’est le pont aux ânes, lui dis-je ; tous les talens médiocres prendront ce chemin-là, et vous n’y trouverez que des idées communes, au lieu que le parti contraire présente à la philosophie et à l’éloquence un champ nouveau, riche et fécond. ‘Vous avez raison, me dit-il [...]’.<sup>274</sup>

Thus, Diderot is purported to claim that Rousseau’s *Premier discours* was inspired by nothing more than contrarianism and the desire to distinguish himself by his eloquence. This would mean

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<sup>274</sup> See Jean-François Marmontel, *Mémoires*, in *Œuvres complètes de Marmontel*, vol. 1 (Paris: A. Belin, 1819), book VII, p. 223

that Rousseau is a hypocrite, for his critique of the *philosophes*—that they contradict common sense and virtue with eloquence only in order to distinguish themselves—would apply especially to him.

Indeed, many contemporary commentators seem to agree with Diderot, at least in part. Ernst Cassirer refers to the first *Discours* as “a mere rhetorical display piece”, and contends that because “this rhetoric has lost its hold on us; it [the *Discours*] no longer has the overwhelming power over us that it had on his [Rousseau’s] contemporaries”.<sup>275</sup> François Bouchardy confirms Cassirer’s analysis in his introduction to the first *Discours* in the Pléiade, asserting that: “À la détacher de son contexte biographique, il perdrait sans doute la majeure partie de son intérêt auprès du lecteur d’aujourd’hui” [Outside of its biographical context, it would without a doubt lose the majority of its interest for today’s readers].<sup>276</sup> And should one be interested in this context, Bouchardy goes on, then one must be prepared to educe “useful suggestions” from the “hyperbolic remarks” of a troubled and agitated Rousseau. (Bouchardy, *Introduction*, p. xli) The conclusion that the first *Discours* is merely of rhetorical interest, whether it proceeds from Cassirer or Diderot, is surely one to which de Jouvenel would have objected: “Comment n’en pas reconnaître aujourd’hui le caractère prophétique?” [How could one not recognize its prophetic character today?] he asks. (de Jouvenel, *Essai sur la politique de Rousseau*, p. 32) Neither is de Jouvenel alone in thinking Rousseau’s first *Discours* prophetic. For in addition to Strauss, Roger Masters contends, “the *First Discourse* is, of all Rousseau’s philosophic works, the one which

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<sup>275</sup> See Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Peter Gay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 48.

<sup>276</sup> See François Bouchardy, “Introduction au *Discours sur les sciences et les arts.*”, in *Oeuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 3., ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. xl.

speaks most directly to the crises of our time”.<sup>277</sup> What a difference of opinions among our political theorists, for whom this text is either a mere rhetorical flourish or a veritable prophecy for the modern industrial society to come!

We will outline Rousseau’s arguments from the first *Discours* forthwith. And by showing that they constitute more than hyperbolic ravings and neo-luddite waxing poetic, make crystal clear the prophecies they reveal: that technology will no longer serve to fulfill our basic desires but will multiply artificial ones, replacing social relations with cheap stimulation and spectacles; that the most technologically advanced civilizations will be humiliated martially again and again by ruder and simpler peoples; that our politicians shall speak only of the economy and neglect national virtues, scratching their heads at why the former declines; that we shall be surrounded on all sides by clicks of cosmopolitan progressivists, virtue-signaling about foreign peoples while they step disdainfully over their countrymen; that, in sum, humanity shall lay to waste all that is local, simple and inspires love for one’s own, so that it can calculate its ‘progress’. “Given the unquestioned acceptance of the pursuit of wealth and material well-being in modern industrial society,” Roger Masters writes, “Rousseau’s insistent challenge commands attention: ‘what will become of virtue when one must get rich at any price?’” (Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau*, p. 440) No enlightenment philosopher seems to better predict the ails of industrial society and its future.

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<sup>277</sup> See Roger D. Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 443.

## IX. ii. Sallust, Tacitus and Polybius: Virtue in Simplicity and the Trappings of Civilization

We have already framed the basic thesis of the first *Discours*: the *philosophes* popularize the notion of scientific progress in order to liberate the individual from the authority of religion and the nation; in so doing however, they reduce the subject to a narrow set of selfish desires, which do not increase his autonomy, but instead put him at the mercy of absolute monarchists and oligarchs. This judgement is borne out in the opening passages of the first *Discours*:

Tandis que le Gouvernement et les lois pourvoient à la sûreté et au bien-être des hommes assemblés; les Sciences, les Lettres et les Arts, moins despotiques et plus puissans peut-être, étendent des guirlandes de fleurs sur les chaînes de fer dont ils sont chargés, étouffent en eux le sentiment de cette liberté originelle pour laquelle ils sembloient être nés, leur font aimer leur esclavage et forment ce qu'on appelle des peuples policés.

(Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 6 – 7)

As we also explained above, the *philosophes* uproot the subject from the ontological world, that place where reason is a key to divine concepts like beauty, justice and virtue. And in accordance with Descartes' epistemological shift, they make the subject his own ground, therefore opening the floodgates to *libido sciendi*. Where the desire for knowledge goes unchecked, St. Augustine warns, the desires of the flesh quickly follow. So, as de Jouvenel argues, the pursuit of scientific progress quickly degenerates, subjecting itself to the demands of *libido sentiendi*.

This process affects the *philosophes* and common men alike. With regard to the former, Rousseau writes in the first *Discours*:

Bientôt les Sciences suivirent les Lettres; à l'Art d'écrire se joignit l'art de penser; gradation qui paroît étrange, et qui n'est petit-être que trop naturelle; et l'on commença à sentir le principal avantage du commerce des muses, celui de rendre les hommes plus sociables en leur inspirant le désir de se plaire les uns aux autres par des ouvrages dignes de leur approbation mutuelle. (*Ibid.*, p. 6)

If salon-Epicureanism, the taste for *bons airs* and voluptuous virtue, is perfectly suited to the proclivities of the popularizers of science, then according to Jean-Jacques, it is not only because the pursuit of philosophy in general requires "luxury" and "idleness" (*Ibid.*, p. 19), but also owes to the fact that their philosophy in particular sets them above national institutions. Thus, unlike a thinker such as Bacon, they will not be statesmen engaged in fulfilling their duties, but instead versifiers criticizing society from their privileged salons:

L'âme se proportionne insensiblement aux objets qui l'occupent, et ce sont les grandes occasions qui font les grands hommes. Le Prince de l'éloquence fut Consul de Rome, & le plus grand, peut-être, des Philosophes, Chancelier d'Angleterre. (*Ibid.*, 29)

How then, on Rousseau's account, do the *philosophes* submit the common man to the demands of *libido sentiendi*?

This is achieved not merely by replacing national virtues with commerce and luxury, but more fundamentally by corrupting their simplicity. In a passage dripping with the regrets of those mournful Roman historians, Rousseau asserts:



Opposons à ces tableaux celui des mœurs du petit nombre de Peuples qui, préservés de cette contagion des vaines connoissances ont par leurs vertus fait leur propre bonheur et l'exemple des autres Nations. [...] tels [furent] les Germains, dont une plume, lasse de tracer les crimes et les noirceurs d'un Peuple instruit, opulent et voluptueux, se soulageait à peindre la simplicité, l'innocence et les vertus. Telle avoit été Rome même, dans les tems de sa pauvreté et de son ignorance. (*Ibid.*, p. 11)

Far from thinking that the first Romans were no more than brigands, Rousseau affirms Sallust's judgement in *Cataline's Conspiracy*.<sup>278</sup> The sons of Romulus cherished "manly virtue" above all things. (Sallust, *Cataline's Conspiracy*, p. 13; 7.5) They passed their days honing their martial prowess instead of squandering them on "prostitutes and parties" (*Ibid.*), and as such, were prepared to win their allies "by conferring kindnesses [rather] than be receiving them" (*Ibid.*, p. 13; 6.5 – 6). Nothing, in their estimation, paralleled the glory earned by courageous and noble deeds. "They thought this was true wealth" (*Ibid.*, p. 14; 7.6). And just as Rousseau will compare the virtues of Athenian poetry to those of Roman action,<sup>279</sup> Sallust writes:

It is because writers of great talent flourished there that the deeds of the Athenians are celebrated as if they were the greatest. [...] The Roman people, on the other hand, never had those resources, because their most thoughtful men were most engaged in public business. No one used their intellectual talents independent of their body, and the best

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<sup>278</sup> Sallust, *Cataline's Conspiracy*, in *Cataline's Conspiracy, The Jugurthine War, Histories*, trans. William Batstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

<sup>279</sup> See Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 7: "[...] en un mot, les apparences de toutes les vertus sans en avoir aucune. C'est par cette sorte de politesse, d'autant plus aimable qu'elle affecte moins de se montrer, que se distinguèrent autrefois Athènes et Rome dans les jours si vantés de leur magnificence et de leur éclat [...]."

men preferred action to words. They preferred that their activities be praised by others rather than that they themselves tell another's story. (*Ibid.*, p. 14; 8.3 – 5)

According to the classical view of virtue, even that of Athenians like Aristotle, action is the locus of virtue. Tacitus paints a similar picture of the German tribes in *Germania*. Hoping to curb the corruption of his fellow Romans, he describes the moral superiority of this supposed barbarian race whom civilization has yet to corrupt. The Germans are indifferent to gold and silver alike;<sup>280</sup> their generals lead by way of example, meaning that they are honest;<sup>281</sup> their men and women are chaste, and thus their marriages endure; and most of all, they make no excuse vice as merely being “the spirit of the age” or fashionable:

There is no arena with its seductions, no dinner-tables with their provocations to corrupt them. Of the exchange of secret letters men and women alike are innocent; adulteries are very few for the number of the people. [...] For prostituted chastity there is no pardon; beauty nor youth nor wealth will find her a husband. No one laughs at vice there; no one calls seduction, suffered or wrought, the spirit of the age. (Tacitus, *Germania*, p. 291)

Civilization is the process whereby man willingly enslaves himself, according to Tacitus. Though he was not merely being hyperbolic. For as he writes in *Agricola*, Rome succeeded in subduing the Britons in the end, not with iron chains but rather “liberal education”, courses in “rhetoric”,

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<sup>280</sup> See Tacitus, *Germania*, in *Dialogus, Agricola, Germania*, trans. by Maurice Hutton and William Peterson (London: William Heinemann, 1914), p. 271: “The gods have denied them gold and silver, whether in mercy or in wrath I find it hard to say; not that I would assert that Germany has no veins bearing gold or silver: for who has explored there. ^ At any rate, they are not affected, like their neighbours, by the use and possession of such things.”

<sup>281</sup> See Tacitus, *Germania*, p. 275: “They take their kings on the ground of birth, their generals on the basis of courage: the authority of their kings is not unlimited or arbitrary; their generals control them by example rather than command, and by means of the admiration which attends upon energy and a conspicuous place in front of the line.”

“fashion”, “the lounge, the bath, [and] the well-appointed dinner table.”<sup>282</sup> Cynically, he remarks: “The simple natives gave the name of ‘culture’ to this factor of their slavery” (*Ibid.* p. 207) This, of course, did not make Rome master, for she had already enslaved herself.

What Rousseau discovers in these Roman historians—and what makes his use of them more than merely rhetorical—is an alternative view of history, which he opposes to the modern doctrine of progress. Sallust and Tacitus do not think that the first men were superior because they were *wiser*, as one finds in other ancient accounts of the so-called golden age, but rather because they were *simpler*. While this conception of history is present in many Roman and late Hellenic thinkers, its clearest formulation seems to be in Polybius’ *Histories*. An historian rather than philosopher per se, Polybius skillfully traces the rise and fall of Rome. Rome begins its life, he tells us, as a small city state menaced early on by one of the greatest Mediterranean empires of the age, Carthage. Rome is poor but virtuous, and sees freedom and moral purity as one and the same. Carthage, on the other hand, is a vast, multi-cultural empire that has been made rich by trade and invented technologies that far surpass those of the Romans. They are, however, in the eyes of the Romans, a luxurious, effeminate and thus cruel and tyrannical people. Polybius describes how in the course of three wars and several centuries, this poor city state conquered the latter. The Romans, he writes, had never built a single seafaring ship when Carthage began its assault in Italy and Sicily. The Romans stole one, and with the coordination that only a state built on the common good can achieve, reorganized its entire nation overnight to build copies of

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<sup>282</sup> See Tacitus, *Agricola*, in *Dialogus, Agricola, Germania*, trans. by Maurice Hutton and William Peterson (London: William Heinemann, 1914), p. 207.

that ship, and to rebuff the Carthaginians.<sup>283</sup> But many years after they leveled Carthage, the Romans transformed into the same empire, ruled by effeminate and theatre-loving tyrants who wasted vast funds on luxurious gardens and ships. Like the stoics, Polybius believes that history is cyclical but not for metaphysical reasons (i.e., the deterioration and reformulation of matter); rather, observing Rome's trajectory, he explains the cycle of nations in moral terms, in terms of what he calls the "cycle of political revolution" [ἀνακύκλωσις] (Polybius, *Histories*, book VI. p. 289). More precisely, he argues that men first come together to form political societies in order to meet their physical needs, and then elect leaders who are superior in "bodily strength" and "courage" (Ibid., p. 279), who are best able to achieve this. But then "sociability" (Ibid.) arises, and along with notions of justice, as well as social roles. The strong and courageous give birth to weak and cowardly men, who abuse their titles. Finally, society collapses, and the opportunity arises for the strong and courageous to lead again.

This vision of history not only had a profound impact on Rousseau, but also on modern philosophers such as Vico, Montesquieu and Fénelon. In the *New Science*, Giambattista (1668 – 1774) maintains that the "simplicity" of young nations protects them from the "fraud" of "civil monarchy": "in the extreme simplicity and crudeness of a life content with the spontaneous fruits of nature, satisfied to drink the water of the springs and sleep in the caves, in the natural equality of a state in which each of the fathers was sovereign in his own family, one cannot conceive of

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<sup>283</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, vol. 1, trans. W.R. Paton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), book I, p. 61 – 63: "On this occasion the Carthaginians put to sea to attack them as they were crossing the straits, and one of their decked ships advanced too far in its eagerness to overtake them and running aground fell into the hands of the Romans. This ship they now used as a model, and built their whole fleet on its pattern."

either fraud or violence by which one man could subject all the others to a civil monarchy.”<sup>284</sup> As Patrick Hutton writes, Vico believes that as civilizations progress, man’s “life becomes institutionalized”.<sup>285</sup> That is, titles, bureaucracies and the like replace natural human relationships, and rather than seeking to satisfy the people’s needs, institutions focus on their pleasures; hence, adopting the mentality of slaves, the whole state prepares to be enslaved to another. In these final days, he writes, one uncovers within the rotting carcass of the nations a “new barbarism of oversophistication” (Hutton, “The New Science of Giambattista Vico”, *Ibid.*). Significantly, the focus on simplicity as the source of virtue causes these thinkers to reconsider the traditional Augustinian conception of the decline of nations, which made “self-love” [*amor sui*] the cause of their fall, and argued instead for founding them on a pure or selfless love for God. For it essentially argues that simplicity or barbarism makes men virtuous by restricting them to the satisfaction of their needs, that is, to the most basic expression of their self-interest. This is indeed what Rousseau expresses in the *Préface à Narcisse*, where he clarifies his position in the *Premier discours*: “Il est très-possible qu’un Sauvage fasse une mauvaise action, mais il n’est pas possible qu’il prenne l’habitude de mal faire, car cela ne lui serait bon à rien.” [It quite likely that a savage commits a bad deed, but impossible that he makes a habit of it doing bad, because that serves nobody’s interests.] (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 970)

This gives rise to an interesting dilemma: Rousseau is leveling an Augustinian critique of the *philosophes*, accusing them of *libido dominandi*, but his solution is almost anti-Augustinian,

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<sup>284</sup> Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948) book II, p. 161.

<sup>285</sup> Patrick H. Hutton summarizes Vico’s conception of history in “The New Science of Giambattista Vico: Historicism in Its Relation to the Poetics,” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 359 – 367. See p. 362.

insofar as it affirms the doctrine of self-interest. As we have discussed above, this is resolved by Rousseau's adoption of a double standard: the intellectual must be selfless, but must treat the common people as self-interested. In any case, we see here that Rousseau invokes the ancients not simply in order to improve his rhetorical style, but rather to frame his conception of history, and to oppose as thinkers like Vico did the modern, progressivist view of history. We shall later return to Rousseau's unique interpretation of history.

### **IX. iii. Plato and Cato Sapiens: The Classical Dichotomy of Reason and Appearance**

If the *philosophes* failed to see that what they called progress consisted in nothing more than these superficial trappings, whereby nations either enslaved themselves or their enemies, then it was because they rejected the classical dichotomy of philosophy, which opposed reason to appearance, replacing it with the Cartesian one, which opposed reason to authority. Though Rousseau does not state the matter in exactly these terms, throughout the *Discours* he will rely on the classical dichotomy to reproach the modern one, accusing the *philosophes* of enslaving themselves to a world of appearances:

Heureux esclaves, vous leur devez ce goût délicat et fin dont vous vous piquez; cette douceur de caractère et cette urbanité de mœurs qui rendent parmi vous le commerce si liant et si facile; en un mot, les apparences de toutes les vertus sans en avoir aucune.

(Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 7)

Rousseau does not merely draw on Tacitus and Sallust, however, in order to demonstrate that the *philosophes* are slaves to the world of appearances. For he also invokes the method of that

ancient philosopher in whose teachings this classical dichotomy is perhaps the most apparent, Socrates. To recall, Socrates establishes three categories of being in *The Republic*: there are the forms, which are made by God and possess the greatest share of being; then individual objects, which are made by men and inferior in being to the first; and finally imitations of things, such as paintings, which are the most ontologically impoverished of all three.<sup>286</sup> To the three categories of being there corresponds three types of knowledge: the one who uses objects possesses true knowledge of them, just as the jockey knows the form and function of horses best; the one who makes things knows them second best, since, for instance, the manufacturer of bridles can only hope to attain the “right opinion” about horses on the advice of the jockey; finally, the imitator of things knows them least of all, as the painter might have an uninformed opinion of the speed and endurance of horses, for example, but nonetheless represent them.<sup>287</sup> Socrates’ ontological and epistemological categories reflect the classical dichotomy between reason and appearance, for what is known merely by the senses and the passions, such as paintings and poems reveal to us, is inferior to what is known by experience and reflection. Here, artists multiply appearances

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<sup>286</sup> Socrates explains the three types of being in Plato, *The Republic*, p. 1206; 597b – c: “We get, then, these three kinds of beds. The first is in nature a bed, and I suppose we’d say that a god makes it, or does someone else make it? No one else, I suppose. The second is the work of a carpenter. Yes. And the third is the one the painter makes. Isn’t that so? It is. Then the painter, carpenter, and god correspond to three kinds of bed? Yes, three.”

<sup>287</sup> Socrates explains the three types of knowledge in Plato, *The Republic*, p. 1206; 601d – 602a: “It’s wholly necessary, therefore, that a user of each thing has most experience of it and that he tell a maker which of his products performs well or badly in actual use. A flute-player, for example, tells a flute-maker about the flutes that respond well in actual playing and prescribes what kind of flutes he is to make, while the maker follows his instructions. Of course. Then doesn’t the one who knows give instructions about good and bad flutes, and doesn’t the other rely on him in making them? Yes. Therefore, a maker—through associating with and having to listen to the one who knows—has right opinion about whether something he makes is fine or bad, but the one who knows is the user. That’s right. Does an imitator have knowledge of whether the things he makes are fine or right through having made use of them, or does he have right opinion about them through having to consort with the one who knows and being told how he is to paint them? Neither. Therefore an imitator has neither knowledge nor right opinion about whether the things he makes are fine or bad. Apparently not. Then a poetic imitator is an accomplished fellow when it comes to wisdom about the subjects of his poetry! Hardly.”

without understanding them and thereby sow confusion, while philosophers cut through these falsities to learn the true nature of things.

Although Rousseau does not explicitly refer to these categories of being and knowing in the first *Discours*, he does draw on Socrates' method from the *Apology*, wherein the former are reflected. For there Socrates concludes that, despite the impression the poets might at first give with their sweet sounding and impassioned verses, they are deprived of "any understanding of what they say."<sup>288</sup> And if even Socrates himself fails to comprehend what they mean, he is wiser than they, since he has taken the time to reflect on the matter and to conclude that "I do think I know what I do not know". (Plato, *Apology*, p. 21; 21d) His avowed ignorance therefore reflects the classical dichotomy between reason and appearance, being the disposition of a philosopher who gives appearances no quarter. There is no doubting that this passage from the *Apology* had a profound influence on Rousseau's first *Discours*, for he incorporated a long, but also very liberal translation of it into his polemic there:

'Des Poètes, continue Socrate, j'ai passé aux Artistes. Personne n'ignoroit plus les Arts que moi; personne n'étoit plus convaincu que les Artistes possédoient de fort beaux secrets. Cependant je me suis aperçu que leur condition n'est pas meilleure que celle des Poètes et qu'ils sont, les uns et les autres, dans le même préjugé. Parce que les plus habiles d'entre eux excellent dans leur Partie, ils se regardent comme les plus sages des hommes. Cette présomption a terni tout-à-fait leur savoir à mes yeux: de sorte que me

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<sup>288</sup> See Plato, *Apology*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis; Hackett Publishing Company, 1997) p. 22; 22c.



mettant à la place de l'Oracle, et me demandant ce que j'aimerois le mieux-être, ce que je suis on ce qu'ils sont, savoir ce qu'ils sont appris on savoir que je ne sais rien; j'ai répondu à moi-même et au Dieu: Je veux rester ce que je suis.' 'Nous ne savons, ni les Sophistes, ni les Poètes, ni les Orateurs, ni les Artistes, ni moi, ce que c'est que le vrai, le bon et le beau. Mais il y a entre nous cette différence, que, quoique ces gens ne sachent rien, tous croient savoir quelque chose, au lieu que moi, si je ne sais rien, au moins je n'en suis pas en doute. De sorte que toute cette supériorité de sagesse qui m'est accordée par l'Oracle, se réduit seulement à être bien convaincu que j'ignore ce que je ne sais pas.'

(Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 13)

Rousseau insists however: what at first seems to be a gift reserved for the Oracle's favorite son, is in truth the wisdom of simple and incorruptible Romans like Cato the Elder.

Cato was born a plebian, but won by his military accomplishments multiple consulships, and even the honor of censor—as Plutarch recounts in the *Parallel Lives*. Preferring honor to wealth, and hateful of excess and its displays, he wore the same vestment year-round, and drank the same wine as his slaves even when he held the highest offices in Rome. He rose early to defend his friends' cases in the market, and never once hesitated to upset the wrong people, as it were, having been the defendant in no less than fifty cases.<sup>289</sup> His reputation as an honest Roman triumphed upon the petty conspiracies of decadent aristocrats, always suffering higher taxes under Cato, though he frequently insisted, as Plutarch writes, “that he preferred to do right

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<sup>289</sup> See Plutarch, *The Life of Cato the Elder*, p. 345: “It is said that he was defendant in nearly fifty cases, and in the last one when he was eighty-six years of age. It was in the course of this that he uttered the memorable saying: ‘It is hard for one who has lived among men of one generation, to make his defense before those of another.’”

and get no thanks, rather than to do ill and get no punishment; and that he had pardon for everybody's mistakes except his own". (Plutarch, *The Life of Cato the Elder*, p. 327) When he was censor, a group of Athenian philosophers visited Rome to dispute a tax hike, and began instructing the Roman youth in their ideas while waiting for their case to be heard. The populus rejoiced at how civilized their boys were becoming, but Cato Sapiens—or Cato the Wise as they would later call him—knew better. For here were the vanquished teaching their vanquishers, distracting them from the fulfillment of the very same duties that had propelled them to victory, and all the while passing themselves off as “lovers of wisdom”. Thus, Cato took their case from the bottom of the stack of complaints, had it heard that day, and immediately expelled the philosophers. Now, by the standards of the *philosophes*, Cato the Censor would surely be a brute, but by Rousseau’s, his wisdom paralleled that of Socrates. For he too understood that knowledge and virtue have less to do with words, which always afford some opportunity for artifice and deception, than with actions:

Socrate avoit commencé dans Athènes, le vieux Caton continua dans Rome, de se déchaîner contre ces Grecs artificieux et subtils qui séduisoient la vertu et amolliçoient le courage de ses concitoyens. (Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 14)

For Rousseau, Cato the Elder embodies the ideal of the selfless philosopher, whose interactions with the public are limited to fortifying or “teaching the peoples their duties” (Strauss, “On the Intentions of Rousseau,” p. 479). Cato’s instructions are designed to prevent the people from being seduced by appearances, and while they might remain ignorant of many philosophical doctrines, they will know virtue.

## Chapter X: Rousseau's First *Discours*: Actions vs. Words

### X. i. Aristotle, Plato and Seneca: On the Classical Dichotomy between Action and Words

The dichotomy between actions and words goes to the very heart of the ancient concept of virtue. In Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, virtue or *aretê* is synonymous with "excellence", and as such, not only concerns excellence in forming moral judgements, but also in athletic and martial affairs.<sup>290</sup> Thus, Achilles and Ulysses are virtuous to the extent that they are excellent warriors. Virtue depends here on success, and neither Achilles nor Ulysses would have been regarded as virtuous had they been continually bested by their foes. This means that Homeric virtue can be reduced to successful action, which is reflected in Aristotle's account of virtue. For, as Alasdair Macintyre points out in *After Virtue*: "To be vicious is, on Aristotle's view, to fail to be virtuous. [...] It is therefore very difficult in Aristotelian terms to distinguish between failure to be good on the one hand and positive evil on the other [...]." (Macintyre, *After Virtue*, p. 176) Aristotelean virtue places great emphasis on successful action, to the point that it regards the conclusion of any moral argument as the successful undertaking of what has been suggested in the premises: "[...] la conclusion qui découle des deux prémisses, c'est l'action. [...] 'Je dois faire quelque chose de bon ; or une maison est quelque chose de bon', et l'on fait aussitôt une maison. [...] Que donc l'action soit la conclusion, c'est manifeste."<sup>291</sup> In the world of Aristotelean virtue, where one is

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<sup>290</sup> For the meaning of virtue in Homer, see Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 122: "The word *aretê*, which later comes to be translated as 'virtue', is in the Homeric poems used for excellence of any kind; a fast runner displays the arete of his feet (*Iliad* 20. 411) and a son excels his father in every kind of arete-as athlete, as soldier and in mind (*Iliad* 15. 642)."

<sup>291</sup> See Aristotle, *Les Mouvements des animaux*, trans. Pierre-Marie Morel (Paris, GF Flammarion : 2013), p. 63, 701a10-25.

required to do what he says in order to make his case, people have a logical obligation to ignore all those do-nothing critics reigning down their judgements from upon high.

The case is somewhat different in Plato. Indeed, Socrates considers philosophy a way of life, claiming in the *Apology* that it would be impossible for him to conduct himself otherwise.<sup>292</sup> He would refuse, however, to become a statesman if it required him to abandon the pursuit of philosophy. For he responds negatively to the charge of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*:

Philosophy is no doubt a delightful thing, Socrates, as long as one is exposed to it in moderation at the appropriate time of life. But if one spends more time with it than he should, it's a man's undoing. For even if one is naturally well favored but engages in philosophy far beyond that appropriate time of life, he can't help but turn out to be inexperienced in everything a man who's to be admirable and good and well thought of is supposed to be experienced in. Such people turn out to be inexperienced in the laws of their city or in the kind of speech one must use to deal with people on matters of business, whether in public or private, inexperienced also in human pleasures and appetites and, in short, inexperienced in the ways of human beings altogether. So, when they venture into

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<sup>292</sup> See Plato, *Apology*, p. 33; 37e-38a: "Perhaps someone might say: But Socrates, if you leave us will you not be able to live quietly, without talking? Now this is the most difficult point on which to convince some of you. If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the god, you will not believe me and will think I am being ironical. On the other hand, if I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men, you will believe me even less."

some private or political activity, they become a laughingstock, as I suppose men in politics do when they venture into your pursuits and your kind of speech.<sup>293</sup>

There is much in Callicles' critique that resonates with Rousseau's own in the first *Discours*, where the latter's 'liberal translation' of the *Apology* skillfully omits Socrates' visit with the statesmen, whom he considers more ignorant than he, the philosopher. We will return to this matter soon enough. For the time being however, it should suffice to show that, despite Socrates' judgment regarding the inferiority of politicians, action is doubtless central to his understanding of virtue, the general thrust of the dialogues being this: do not act without knowing, for ignorance is the cause of vice, and vice the undoing of the soul. Unlike Aristotle, Socrates appears to be content with the internal rewards of virtue, and even confirms in the *Apology* that no evil can be visited on the man who has not himself done evil.<sup>294</sup> Such is not the case for Aristotle, for whom virtue has both external preconditions (e.g., wealth) as well as rewards (e.g., political influence). That being said, it neither seems to be Plato's nor Aristotle's account of virtue at work in Rousseau's first *Discours*, but rather Seneca's, which presents the ideal of the Roman statesman.

In *De Providentia*, Seneca maintains that that greatest exemplar of Stoic virtue is not the philosopher dialoguing in the forum, but rather the statesman who, surrounded on all sides by moral decay and the hardships with which Fortuna tests better men, resolves to battle tyranny.

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<sup>293</sup> See Plato, *Gorgias*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 829; 484c – e.

<sup>294</sup> See Plato, *Crito*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 36; 41c – d: "You too must be of good hope as regards death, gentlemen of the jury, and keep this one truth in mind, that a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death, and that his affairs are not neglected by the gods."

According to Seneca, such a man was Cato the Younger. When the Republic was overburdened with vice, on the verge of being swallowed up by the sea, Cato refuses to abandon ship:

I do not know, I say, what nobler sight the Lord of Heaven could find on earth, should he wish to turn his attention there, than the spectacle of Cato, after his cause had already been shattered more than once, nevertheless standing erect amid the ruins of the commonwealth.<sup>295</sup>

“Cato the Immortal” Seneca calls him in *De Constantia*.<sup>296</sup> There was Hercules grappling with the Nemean lion, and Cato with the unbridled ambition of Caesar. And to battle the latter, Cato had to be wiser than Hercules:

[...] in Cato the immortal gods had given to us a truer exemplar of the wise man than earlier ages had in Ulysses and Hercules. [...] Cato did not grapple with wild beasts—the pursuit of these is for the huntsman and the peasant; he did not hunt down monsters with fire and sword, nor did he chance to live in the times when it was possible to believe that the heavens rested on one man's shoulders. In an age when the old credulity had long been thrown aside, and knowledge had by time attained its highest development, he came into conflict with ambition, a monster of many shapes, with the boundless greed for power which the division of the whole world among three men could not satisfy. He stood alone against the vices of a degenerate state that was sinking to destruction

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<sup>295</sup> See Seneca, *De Providentia*, in *Seneca: Moral Essays*, vol. 1, trans. John W. Basore (London: William Heinemann, 1928), p. 11; 2.9-10.

<sup>296</sup> See Seneca, *De Constantia*, in *Seneca: Moral Essays*, vol. 1, trans. John W. Basore (London: William Heinemann, 1928), p. 51; 2.9.

beneath its very weight, and he stayed the fall of the republic to the utmost that one man's hand could do to draw it back [...]. (Seneca, *De Constantia*, p. 50 – 53; 2.1 – 2)

Rousseau neither mentions Seneca nor Cato the Immortal in the first *Discours*. That being said, no modern text inspires Rousseau's Fabrician prosopopoeia more than Montaigne's essay *Du pédantisme*, which is one of the very few that he explicitly cites here or elsewhere.<sup>297</sup> And in this uncharacteristically un-Epicurean essay, it is Seneca, with all his insistence on patriotism and the wise statesman, whom Montaigne fashions into the enemy of pedants and academic quibblers. In demonstrating the influence of this essay on Rousseau's *Discours*, it should be possible to show how Seneca's understanding of virtue is operative there. Of course, there is little questioning the influence of Seneca on Rousseau's subsequent oeuvres. In the *Discours sur l'économie politique*, Rousseau will raise Cato the Immortal above Socrates, just as Seneca had done.<sup>298</sup> And in his novel *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, he reproduces Seneca's judgement in *De Providentia* that virtue is tested by the hardships of Fortuna, in the same that a father designs the most difficult trials for his strongest sons.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> See Montaigne, *Du pédantisme*, in *Les Essais*, ed. Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien and Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), I.XXIV p. 138 – 149.

<sup>298</sup> See Rousseau, *Discours sur l'économie politique*, p. 225: "Osons opposer Socrate même à Caton: l'un étoit plus philosophe, et l'autre plus citoyen. Athènes étoit déjà perdue, et Socrate n'avoit plus de patrie que le monde entier : Caton porta toujours la sienne au fond de son cœur ; il ne vivoit que pour elle et ne put lui suivre. La vertu de Socrate est celle du plus sage des hommes : mais entre César et Pompée, Caton semble un dieu parmi les mortels. L'un instruit quelques particuliers, combat les sophistes, et meurt pour la vérité : l'autre défend l'état, la liberté, les lois contre les conquérans du monde, et quitte enfin la terre quand il n'y voit plus de patrie à servir. Un digne élève de Socrate seroit le plus vertueux de ses contemporains ; un digne émule de Caton en seroit le plus grand."

<sup>299</sup> See *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, in *Œuvres Complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 2, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), part II, letter XI, p. 224: "c'étoit l'Athénien buvant le ciguë, c'étoit Brutus mourant pour son pays; c'étoit Regulus au milieu des tourments, c'étoit Caton déchirant ses entrailles, c'étoient tous ces vertueux infortunés qui te faisoient envie, et tu sentoies au fond de ton cœur la félicité réelle que couvraient leurs maux apparents." And see Seneca, *De Providentia*, p. 17; 3.7: "The same is true of Fortune. She seeks out the bravest

## X. ii. Montaigne and the Enemies of Pedantry: Seneca, Xenophon, Spartans and Diogenes

Montaigne begins his essay on *Pédantisme* remarking that the men whom he considers “most gallant” are also those who hate pedantry the most. (Montaigne, *Du pédantisme*, p. 138) For a gallant man is one who has earned many honors by noble deeds, but a pedant the inverse of this, having a great deal of knowledge but never making use of it. Thus, a pedant is one who possesses useless knowledge.<sup>300</sup> But his existence is not indifferent to us, since he also burdens many, especially the youth, with the dead weight of his ideas. Seneca was particularly aware of this phenomenon, as Montaigne quotes him from the *Epistulae Morales* saying: “*Non vita, sed scholae discimus*” [We do not study for life, but only for school]”. (Ibid., p. 145) The Roman Stoic was not alone this judgement, Montaigne continues, for when the Spartan Agesilaus was asked what boys should instead learn, he responded: “*Ce qu’ils doivent faire estans hommes*” [What they must do as men]. (Ibid., p. 148) Rousseau surely read the essay on *Pédantisme*, given that he cites the latter passage in the first *Discours*, referencing Montaigne there: “*Que faut-il donc qu’ils apprennent? Voilà certes une belle question! Qu’ils apprennent ce qu’ils doivent faire étant hommes*”. [What then should they learn? That is indeed a good question! They should learn what they must do as men.] (Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 24) This, however, was only one of many passages from Montaigne’s essay that Rousseau reproduces in the *Premier discours*.

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men to match with her; some she passes by in disdain. Those that are most stubborn and unbending she assails, men against whom she may exert all her strength. Mucius she tries by fire, Fabricius by poverty, Rutilius by exile, Regulus by torture, Socrates by poison, Cato by death. It is only evil fortune that discovers a great exemplar.

<sup>300</sup> Or, as Cicero says in *De Officiis*, “*Nequicquam sapere sapientem, qui ipse sibi prodesse non quiret*” [That the wise man who cannot profit by his own knowledge knows nothing]. (p. 206)



Amongst those who praised virtuous actions and despised hollow speech, were not only Spartans and stoic Romans, but also Diogenes of Sinope. An enemy of appearances, he fulfilled his bodily functions in public;<sup>301</sup> an enemy of pride, he asked Alexander the Great to move from his sunlight;<sup>302</sup> an enemy of flattery, he mocked Aristippus' for modeling an effeminate robe from Persia to please a tyrant;<sup>303</sup> and a lover of simplicity, he threw away his cup upon watching a child drink with his hands, astonished that he had needlessly complicated his life for so long.<sup>304</sup> Such qualities predisposed the cynic of Sinope—perhaps more than any other man—to sniffing out pedants. Hence, Montaigne explains how Diogenes reproached men for spending their time learning so that they could avoid improving themselves, suggesting instead that they play some tennis, which would at least improve their body:

[Diogène] se moquoit des grammariens qui ont soin de s'enquérir des maux d'Ulysses, et ignorent les propres ; des musiciens qui accordent leurs fleutes et n'accordent pas leurs meurs ; des Orateurs qui estudient à dire justice, non à la faire. Si nostre ame n'en va un meilleur bransle, si nous n'en avons le jugement plus sain, j'aymeroy aussi cher que mon

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<sup>301</sup> See Diogenes Laertius, *Diogenes of Sinope*, in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, trans. R.D. Hicks (London: William Heinemann, 1925), p. 71; 69: "It was his habit to do everything in public, the works of Demeter and of Aphrodite alike."

<sup>302</sup> "When he was sunning himself in the Craneum, Alexander came and stood over him and said, 'Ask of me any boon you like.' To which he replied, 'Stand out of my light.'" (Diogenes, *Diogenes of Sinope*, p. 41; 38)

<sup>303</sup> See Montaigne, *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*, II, XII, p. 617 : "Dionysius le tyran offrit à Platon une robe à la mode de Perse, longue, damasquinée et parfumée ; Platon la refusa, disant qu'estant un homme, il ne se vestiroit pas volontiers de robe de femme ; mais Aristippus l'accepta, avec cette responce que nul accoutrement ne pouvoit corrompre un chaste courage. Ses amis tançoient sa lascheté de prendre si peu à cœur que Dionisius luy eust craché au visage : Les pescheurs, dict-il, souffrent bien d'estre baignés des ondes de la mer depuis la teste jusqu'aux pieds pour attraper un goujon."

<sup>304</sup> "One day, observing a child drinking out of his hands, he cast away the cup from his wallet with the words, 'A child has beaten me in plainness of living.' He also threw away his bowl when in like manner he saw a child who had broken his plate taking up his lentils with the hollow part of a morsel of bread." (Diogenes, *Diogenes of Sinope*, p. 39; 37)

escolier eut passé le temps à jouer à la paume ; au moins le corps en seroit plus allègre.

(Montaigne, *Du pédantisme*, p. 143)

Rousseau recalls Diogenes' advice in the first *Discours*, arguing that if our preceptors are neither willing to teach "temperance, humanity, [nor] courage", nor "speak of God", nor even permit the "the sweet name of the Fatherland" to be mentioned, then the youth would benefit more from being taught tennis, for at least then they would not be idle: "J'aimerais autant, disoit un Sage, que mon écolier eût passé le tems dans un Jeu de paume, au moins le corps en seroit plus dispos. Je sais qu'il faut occuper les enfants, et que l'oisiveté est pour eux le danger le plus à craindre." [I would rather, said the sage, that my student had passed his time playing tennis, so at least his body would be fit. I know that one must keep children occupied, and that laziness is for them a danger to be feared.] (Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 24)

Pedantry is characterized by burdensome knowledge to the extent that it weighs down the spirit and the body, preventing us from making decisions and taking action. Insofar as this is true, the greatest enemies of the former also place the greatest emphasis on the latter. Among the men who cherish virtuous action the most, Montaigne counts the Roman stoics Seneca and Cicero, the Spartan Kings Lycurgus and Astyages, the cynical Diogenes of Sinope, and Socrates' other biographer Xenophon, who had far more admiration for the sage's self-discipline than his epistemology.<sup>305</sup> What unites these classical thinkers in their high estimation of virtuous action

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<sup>305</sup> Xenophon defends Socrates' character throughout the *Memorabilia* by demonstrating, again and again, (1) his self-mastery [enkrateia] over bodily desires, (2) his endurance [karteria] for physical pain and (3) his self-sufficiency [autarkeia]. As he opens his defense: "It appears to me a wonder also that some were persuaded that Socrates corrupted the young. To begin with, in addition to what has been said, he was the most continent [enkrateia] of all human beings in matters of sex and appetite. Then, he had the greatest endurance [karteria] with regard to winter,

is their determination, above all else, to master themselves. As Montaigne recounts in his essay, when Xenophon was asked why he sent his boys to be raised in Sparta, he responded: “ce n’est pas pour y apprendre la Rhétorique ou Dialectique, mais pour apprendre (ce dict-il) la plus belle science qui soit : à sçavoir la science d’obeïr et de commander.” [it is neither for them to learn rhetoric or dialectic, but to learn (he says) the most beautiful science in existence, that is, the science of obeying and commanding.](Montaigne, *Du pédantisme*, p. 149) According to Xenophon, the most beautiful science is learning how to obey and command, both oneself (morality) and others (statecraft), not how to speak well. He does not therefore merely oppose reason to appearances, but reason *qua* self-mastery [*enkrateia*]. For reason can easily go astray, creating another world of abstract appearances. Thus it came to be, Montaigne writes in a third passage that will appear Rousseau’s first *Discours*, that when the Goths ravaged Greece, they made sure not to burn their libraries, so that the Greeks would continue to distract themselves and accept their slavery:

Quand les Gots ravagèrent la Grèce, ce qui sauva toutes les librairies d’estre passées au feu, ce fut un d’entre eux qui sema cette opinion, qu’il falloit laisser ce meuble entier aux ennemis, propre à les destourner de l’exercice militaire et amuser à des occupations sedentaires et oysives. (*Ibid.*, p. 149)

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summer, and all labors. Moreover, he had educated himself to have such measured needs that, although he possessed very little, he quite easily had what was enough for him. How, then, being himself of this sort, would he have made others impious, lawbreaking, gluttonous, incontinent with regard to sex, or soft with regard to labor? Instead, he rid many individuals of these things, after making them desire virtue and providing them with hopes that if they attended to themselves they would be gentlemen (noble and good).” See Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, trans. Amy Bonnette (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), in p. 5 – 6; 1.2.1-2.

Rousseau cites this passage without attributing it to Montaigne, and then adds a list of wealthy and ‘well educated’ nations that were savaged by poorer ones whose simplicity protected them from the world of appearances.<sup>306</sup>

Of the citations that Rousseau reproduces in the first *Discours* from Montaigne’s essay, the one that influenced, or perhaps confirmed, his reasoning the most was Seneca’s judgement in his letter on “The Usefulness of Basic Principles”, where the stoic proclaims “*Postquam docti prodierunt, boni desunt*” [Since the doctrines have appeared, good men have been deserted]. (*Ibid.*, p. 146) Rousseau neither attributes his words to Montaigne nor Seneca. Given, however, his numerous references to the former’s essay, and their resemblance to the latter’s own words, one can hardly doubt their origins: “Depuis que les Savans ont commencé à paroître parmi nous [...] les Gens de bien se sont éclipsés” [Since the reasoners have begun to appear amongst us ... good men have been eclipsed”. (Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 14) One need only understand what these words mean in the context of Seneca’s letter on “The Usefulness of

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<sup>306</sup> Rousseau’s words are nearly identical to Montaigne’s. see Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, p. 22: “Quand les Gots ravagèrent la Grèce, toutes les Bibliothèques ne furent sauvées du feu que par cette opinion semée par l’un d’entre eux, qu’il falloit laisser aux ennemis des meubles si propres à des occupations oisives et sédentaires. Charles VIII se vit maître de la Toscane et du Royaume de Naples sans avoir presque tiré l’épée ; et toute sa Cour contribua cette facilité inespérée à ce que les Princes et la Noblesse d’Italie s’amusoient plus à se rendre ingénieux et savans, qu’ils ne s’exerçoient à devenir vigoureux et guerriers.” For the list of luxurious nations savaged by simpler, poorer ones, see p. 20: “La Monarchie de Cyrus a été conquise avec trente mille hommes par un Prince plus pauvre que le moindre des Satrapes de Perse; et les Scythes, le plus misérables de tous les Peuples, a résisté aux plus puissans Monarques de l’Univers. Deux fameuses Républiques se disputèrent l’Empire du Monde; l’une étoit très riche, l’autre n’avoit rien, et ce fut celle-ci qui détruisit l’autre. L’Empire Romain à son tour, après avoir englouti toutes les richesses de l’Univers, fut la proie des gens qui ne savoient pas même ce que c’étoit que richesse. Les Francs conquièrent les Gaules, les Saxons l’Angleterre sans autres trésors que leur bravoure et leur pauvreté. Une troupe de pauvres Montagnards dont toute l’avidité se bernoit à quelques peaux de moutons, après avoir dompté la fierté Autrichienne, écrasa cette opulente et redoutable Maison de Bourgogne qui faisoit trembler les Potentats de l’Europe. Enfin toute la puissance & toute la sagesse de l’héritier de Charles-Quint, soutenues de tous les trésors des Indes, vinrent se briser contre une poignée de pêcheurs de harengs. Que nos politiques daignent suspendre leurs calculs pour réfléchir à ces exemples, et qu’ils apprennent une fois qu’on a de tout avec de l’argent hormis des mœurs et des Citoyens.

Basic Principles” to perceive the extent of their influence on the first *Discours*.<sup>307</sup> There, Seneca argues that such “doctrines” have increased in proportion to the ills that man has brought upon himself by forsaking simple living and “*vero labore*” [real work], and by yielding to his appetites. (Seneca, *Epistolae*, p. 109) Thus, luxury and idle time are not merely material preconditions of philosophy; they also create the need for philosophy (i.e., complex doctrines) by complicating life. But philosophy, especially the kind that does not make self-mastery its foremost goal, only compounds and complicates our desires, thus throwing humanity into a vicious cycle. Here, one can appreciate the extent to which not only Seneca’s dichotomy between action and words, but also his understanding of virtue in terms of simplicity, inspire much of Jean-Jacques’ thinking in the first *Discours*.

### **X. iii. The Cardinal Virtue of the First *Discours*: Fortitude, or *Force de l’âme***

Self-mastery, or what Cicero and St. Thomas Aquinas might have called “temperance”, is only one of the cardinal virtues mobilized by Rousseau in the first *Discours*.<sup>308</sup> And according to Victor Goldschmidt it plays second fiddle to “*la force de l’âme*” [force of the soul], which might be translated as fortitude or courage.<sup>309</sup> As Goldschmidt writes in *Anthropologie et politique: les principes du système de Rousseau*:

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<sup>307</sup> See Seneca, *Epistolae Morales*, in *Omnia Opera: L. A. Senecae, Philosophica, Declamatoria et Tragica* (Paris: M. Ehrmann, 1829), Ep. XCV.

<sup>308</sup> See Cicero, *De inventione: de optimo genere oratorum*, trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 327: “Virtue may be defined as a habit of mind in harmony with reason and the order of nature. Therefore when we have become acquainted with all its parts we shall have considered the full scope of honour, pure and simple. It has four parts: wisdom, justice, courage, temperance.” Also see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates et Washbourne, 1922), I-II-II, 61.2.

<sup>309</sup> Victor Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique: les principes du système de Rousseau* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1982), p. 67.

D'abord, Rousseau brise le cadre des vertus cardinales : non seulement, comme il le répète après Bacon, la force de l'âme est « la plus héroïque des vertus » ; « elle est la source ou le supplément des vertus qui [...] composent [l'héroïsme] » et, dans le *Discours*, suffit à définir la vertu en général. Sa supériorité sur les autres vertus qui entrent dans le canon traditionnel, se marque dans l'indépendance où elle nous dispose à l'égard des circonstances [...]. (Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique*, p. 64)

If Rousseau considers fortitude the father of all virtues, then it's because our independence and freedom depend on it more than any other. Why not justice, temperance or prudence? Though he will not articulate his famous thesis, that man's natural sentiments are good but corrupted by civilization, until his *Discours sur l'inégalité*, it is partially expressed in the accounts of Sallust, Tacitus and Seneca that he invokes here. Constrained by necessities like agricultural production and military defense, youthful nations live in a state of simplicity wherein the virtues of justice, temperance and prudence come all too naturally to men. Such is the "*Cité cynique*" [Cynic City]. (Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique*, p. 67) Justice (i.e., giving a man his due) reigns there, not because there are a thousand laws on the books, but because each man realizes the extent to which his existence depends on that of his neighbor. The people are temperate, not because they strictly discipline themselves, but because they have not yet invented a host of vices. Even their poems do not aim to please the ear, but to remind them of their duties to the gods, and of the heroic actions of their noblest ancestors.<sup>310</sup> Last of all, they are prudent because the effects

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<sup>310</sup> See Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (Paris: Librairie Associés, 1787), p. 258: "Dans l'établissement des sociétés, les hommes ne pouvaient point encore s'occuper des choses de put agrément, et les besoins qui les obligeaient à se réunir bornaient leurs vues à ce qui pouvait leur être utile ou

of poor decisions, being unmitigated by vast stores of wealth and technological advantages, are swift and harsh. What such a people truly require is courage. They must have the confidence to fulfill these virtues in the face of death, and the magnificence to take pride in them. Courage is the aegis of virtue, and ensured, as Seneca writes, that Regulus did not forsake a noble life in his last hour on the rack.<sup>311</sup> The other virtues, it might be said, need only to be relearned once they are forgotten. But a man's courage is singular. Have I fought to perfect my faculties and uphold the gifts of virtue that God has granted me, or have I idled and cowered? All men are born with the necessary qualities according to Jean-Jacques, but few have the *force de l'âme* to put them into action. And the courageous man, acting on his virtues rather than the will of another, alone is free and independent. For that is the essence of freedom, to do only what virtue commands, even in the face of death. "For life itself is slavery when one lacks the courage to die."<sup>312</sup>

Confidence, especially the confidence to present oneself without putting on airs, is one of the most important aspects of courage for Rousseau—not only in the first *Discours*, but even in his final work, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, where he concludes that he only ever lied when he lacked the "strength" and "courage" to expose his character.<sup>313</sup> Confidence means not

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nécessaire. La poésie et la musique ne furent donc cultivées que pour faire connaître la religion, les lois et pour conserver le souvenir des grands hommes et des services qu'ils avaient rendus à la société [...]." Passage quoted by Goldschmidt (*Anthropologie et politique*, p. 51)

<sup>311</sup> Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, trans. Margaret Graver and A.A. Long (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015): "Do you really think Regulus did not choose to arrive at Carthage? Clothe yourself in the mind of a great man; stand aside for a while from the opinions of the common crowd. Form an impression of virtue that is as great as its merits—virtue at its greatest and most magnificent, virtue that we should honor not with incense and garlands but with sweat and blood." (letter LXVII, p. 203)

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, letter LXXVII, p. 249.

<sup>313</sup> See Rousseau, *Rêveries* (IV, p. 1039): "Il falloit avoir le courage et la force d'être vrai toujours en toute occasion, et qu'il ne sortît jamais ni fictions ni fables d'une bouche et d'une plume qui s'étoient particulièrement consacrées à la vérité. Voilà ce que j'aurois dû me dire en prenant cette fière devise, et me répéter sans cesse tant que j'osai la porter. Jamais la fausseté ne dicta mes mensonges, ils sont tous venus de foiblesse, mais cela m'excuse très-mal.

hiding behind fine clothing and makeup, behind obsequious and polite speech, behind titles and customs, and in a word, behind appearances. A man who possesses true confidence is perfectly honest and sincere. He is, Rousseau writes, an athlete who wrestles naked, and shuns all of the vestments with which sickly and weak men conceal their deformities:

La richesse de la parure peut annoncer un homme opulent, et son élégance un homme de goût; l'homme sain et robuste se reconnoît à d'autres marques; c'est sous l'habit rustique d'un Laboureur, et non sous la dorure d'un Courtisan, qu'on trouvera la force et la vigueur du corps. La parure n'est pas moins étrangère à la vertu, qui est la force et la vigueur de l'ame. L'homme de bien est un Athlète qui se plaît à combattre nu: il méprise tous ces vils ornemens qui gêneroient l'usage de ses forces, et dont la plupart n'ont été inventés que pour cacher quelque difformité. (Rousseau, *Premier Discours*, p. 8)

The good man not only possesses *la force de l'âme* but also *du corps*, that is, both spiritual and physical fortitude. To recall, the City of Cynics is not virtuous because it possesses some special, esoteric knowledge, but rather because life there is simple and rooted in necessity, which has no need of entertainers, merchants, usurers, and in general, idlers who live on another's labor and deal only in appearances. Sowing the land and defending it with arms are the only occupations there, and to succeed in these fields, one must be "healthy" and "robust". "Quel spectacle nous presenteroit le Genre-humain composé uniquement de laboureurs, de soldats, de chasseurs et de bergers? Un spectacle infiniment plus beau que celui du Genre-humain compose de Cuisiniers,

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Avec une ame foible on peut tout au plus se garantir du vice, mais c'est être arrogant et téméraire d'oser professer de grandes vertus."



de Poètes, d'Imprimeurs, d'Orfèvres, de Peintres et de Musiciens." [What spectacle would the human race presents us with, composed uniquely of laborers, soldiers, hunters and shepherds? A spectacle infinitely more beautiful than one of the human race composed of cooks, poets, printers, engravers, painters and musicians.]<sup>314</sup> When Cato the Elder was not leading his men into battle, he was working in the fields with his slaves, and only wore one toga year round. Physical excellence might engender the arrogance of an Achilles, but also permit a Hector to express his love for his family and country. Despite our Christian and Liberal prejudices, healthy people have healthy ideas. And a healthy state is not merely a metaphor for a virtuous one, but also a precondition of it.<sup>315</sup> Richard III's twisted spine meant for his family and kingdom his twisted jealousy and vengeance.

It should be pointed out here that Rousseau's estimation of courage as the father of all virtues is not limited to his first *Discours* or early thought. For the same sentiment is expressed in his unpublished *Discours sur la vertu la plus nécessaire aux héros* (1751),<sup>316</sup> and even in his last work, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. As he clearly states in the former, courage clears and expands the mind, giving life to all the other virtues, and alone is capable of reaping their fruits in this life. One might be prudent, temperate and just in his judgements, but if he does not dare

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<sup>314</sup> See Rousseau, *Dernière réponse à M. Bordes*, p. 82.

<sup>315</sup> As Goldschmidt writes, "C'est que la portée normative du concept de nature, mis en œuvre dans le 1er Discours, se détermine essentiellement par l'idée de santé, et que cette idée, ici, suffit pour opérer la discrimination entre les sociétés pures et les sociétés corrompues." (*Anthropologie et politique*, p. 67)

<sup>316</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur cette Question: Quelle est la Vertu la plus nécessaire aux Héros ; et quels sont les Héros à qui cette Vertu a manqué ?* in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 2, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

to apply them, then they shall be squandered. "Waste no more time arguing what a good man should be. Be one."<sup>317</sup> Thus, Rousseau writes in his *Discours sur le héros*:

Voilà ce que produit la force de l'âme; c'est ainsi qu'elle peut éclairer l'esprit, étendre le génie et donner de l'énergie et de la vigueur à toutes les autres vertus; elle peut même suppléer à celles qui nous manquent [...]. La force est donc la vertu qui caractérise l'Héroïsme, et elle l'est encore par un autre argument sans réplique que je tire des réflexions d'un grand homme : les autres vertus, dit Bacon, nous délivrent de la domination des vices; la seule force nous garantit de celle de la fortune. (Rousseau, *Discours sur le héros*, p. 1273.)

Even in his final years, courage remains that first virtue for Rousseau, which should not surprise us. For Rousseau is a philosopher of the heart, and to have *courage* literally means having *cœur* [heart]. Rousseau's goal in the *Rêveries* is to determine if he is truly dignified of Juvenal's maxim "*vitam vero impendent*" [a life consecrated to the truth]. (Rousseau, *Rêveries*, IV, p. 1027) This he undertakes by examining the occasions where he invented fictions in order to save face, for instance, when Ms. Vacassin asked if he had really abandoned all of his children to the ward of the state. Rousseau concludes that his lack of strength and courage, which made him subject to the opinions of others, made him lie almost "mechanically" (*Ibid.*, p. 1034). To consecrate one's life to the truth, one must be free, and to be free, one must have the courage to sacrifice one's interests and even life. Hence, Rousseau proclaims that there are essentially two types of men,

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<sup>317</sup> See Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Francis Hutcheson and James Moor (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), bk. X, p. 126.

“l’homme du monde” [the man of the world] and “l’homme vrai” [the man of truth]; while the former is only willing to utter “the truth that costs him nothing”, the latter is prepared even “to immolate himself” for it. (*Ibid.*, p. 1031) To know the truth, one must love it more than life itself and have the courage to die for it. We shall now see what the advancements of the sciences and arts, and more precisely the *education* of men in them, has wrecked upon the courage and thus freedom of humanity.

## Chapter XI: “History’s Greatest Militant Lowbrow”: Rousseau’s Critique of the Intellectual

### XI. i. “Rousseauian Children, Happy Little Savages”: The Negative Education of Patriots

Rousseau does not criticize the arts and sciences per se, as he regards “mechanical arts” (i.e., engineering) as “useful”, and has profound respect for those “geniuses” like Descartes and Newton who set out alone to uncover the inner workings of nature.<sup>318</sup> Nor is his critique reducible to those fine arts “relating to morality” (Rousseau, *Dernière Réponse à M. Bordes*, p. 72) that convert vices like luxury and idleness into the theatrical spectacles and other false appearances that lead men further astray. Rather, Rousseau focuses mainly on the *education* of the arts and sciences, which threatens to replace man’s natural sense of right and wrong with an artificial or positive one. As early as the *Premier Discours*, one therefore discovers a critique of what might be called *positive education*, in addition to a defense of what Rousseau shall later call “negative education” in *Émile*. We can trace the concept of culture back to Cicero’s *Tusculan Meditations*, where the famous orator writes that: “as a field, though fertile, cannot yield a harvest without cultivation, no more can the mind without learning.”<sup>319</sup> Rousseau, by contrast, would argue that the human mind is not a plant that requires cultivation to bear its fruits, but once transplanted into civilized soil, requires careful attention, lest it be marred by the crook of vice. The goal of a

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<sup>318</sup> Rousseau clarifies the object of his critique in his *Dernière Réponse à M. Bordes*, p. 72 : “Les Sciences sont le chef-d’œuvre du génie et de la raison. L’esprit d’imitation a produit les beaux-Arts, et l’expérience les a perfectionnés. Nous sommes redevables aux arts mécaniques d’un grand nombre d’inventions utiles qui ont ajoutée aux charmes et aux commodités de la vie. Voilà des vérités dont je conviens de très-bon cœur assurément. Mais considérons maintenant toutes ces connoissances par rapport aux mœurs.”

<sup>319</sup> See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. Andrew P. Peabody (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1886), p. 96: “To continue the figure: as a field, though fertile, cannot yield a harvest without cultivation, no more can the mind without learning; thus each is feeble without the other. But philosophy is the culture of the soul. It draws out vices by the root, prepares the mind to receive seed, and commits to it, and, so to speak, sows in it what, when grown, may bear the most abundant fruit.”

negative education is not to augment or reshape the mind, but instead remove the constricting institutions that civilization has littered across the soil, allowing its natural expression. Like the English garden, it seeks natural harmony over man-made order.

Rousseau will not fully develop his conception of negative education until *Émile*, where every lesson is calculated to give full expression to his student's natural inclinations in a world of masked and spiritually deformed creatures. There, negative education "protects the heart from vice" without "teaching either virtue or truth", which instead must come from nature:

Si les enfants sautaient tout d'un coup de la mamelle à l'âge de raison, l'éducation qu'on leur donne pourrait leur convenir ; mais, selon le progrès naturel, il leur en faut une toute contraire. [...] La première éducation doit donc être purement négative. Elle consiste, non point à enseigner la vertu ni la vérité, mais à garantir le cœur du vice et l'esprit de l'erreur.

(Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, II, p. 323)

That being said, the basic premise of *Émile* presents itself in the *Premier discours*, as well as the *Deuxième* for that matter. In the first place, Émile learns only those truths that will prove useful for his survival, for instance cosmography. Secondly, he does not learn them from his desk, but in the world, where their necessity presents itself: Émile must first become lost in the woods in order to appreciate the true utility of cosmography. In this way, Émile's knowledge is not tied to some institution or authority, but rather to nature. Yes, his preceptor has carefully orchestrated the chain of events whereby Émile learns this science, but in so doing, has recreated the natural conditions in which man first discovered it, not in order to offer it up to some authority such as the Sun King's absolute monarchy, but rather for his own survival. The same principle applies in

the *Premier discours*, where the youth are educated by undertaking the duties that they will be obliged to fulfill as men: cultivating and defending the fatherland. There is however a significant difference here, as the former's negative education makes him an individual, while the latter's produces a patriot or citizen.

To be sure, the patriotic citizen of the  *cité cynique*  is presented differently in subsequent works like *Émile*, which, to recall, Rousseau considers part of a threefold oeuvre comprising the *Premiers* and *Deuxième Discours*. For in *Émile*, the foremost king of the  *cité cynique* , Lycurgus, is presented as having “denatured” the Spartans.<sup>320</sup> Published the same year in 1762, Rousseau's *Du contrat social* mobilizes the same language, arguing that a “great legislator” is required to “change so to speak human nature” [changer pour ainsi dire la nature] and “to persuade” people to see their fates as bound up with one another.<sup>321</sup> This would suggest that the education of patriots is anything but “negative”, and instead treats men as blank slates upon whom its positive content might be written. At first, the language of denaturalization in these subsequent works seems to suggest a break with that of the *Premiers discours*. One might attempt to resolve this seeming break by arguing that negative education only produced patriots in earlier times, since civilization had yet to thoroughly corrupt people, who might still satisfy their “natural needs” by investing in their nations. As Rousseau asks in the *Premier discours*: “Qui voudroit en un mot

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<sup>320</sup> See *Émile*, I, p. 250: “Platon n’a fait qu’épurer le cœur de l’homme ; Lycurgue l’a dénaturé. L’institution publique n’existe plus ; parce qu’où il n’y plus de patrie il ne peut plus y avoir de citoyens.” Also see p. 249: “L’homme naturel est tout pour lui : il est l’unité numérique, l’entier absolu qui n’a de rapport qu’à lui-même ou à son semblable. L’homme civil n’est qu’une unité fractionnaire qui tient au dénominateur, et dont la valeur est dans son rapport avec l’entier, qui est le corps social.”

<sup>321</sup> See Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, II. VII., p. 381: “Celui qui ose entreprendre d’instituer un peuple doit se sentir en état de changer, pour ainsi dire, la nature humaine ; de transformer chaque individu, qui par lui-même est un tout parfait et solitaire, en partie d’un plus grand tout dont cet individu reçoit en quelque sorte sa vie et son être ; de substituer une existence partielle et morale à l’existence physique et indépendante que nous avons tous reçue de la nature.”

passer sa vie à des stériles contemplations, si chacun ne consultant que les devoirs de l'homme et les besoins de la nature, n'avait de temps que pour la patrie, pour les malheureux et pour ses amis?" [Who in a word would pass his life in sterile contemplation, if everyone but consulted the duties of men and the needs of nature, having time only for the fatherland, for the unhappy and his friends?] (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 17 – 18) The problem with this reading is that Moses, Lycurgus and Numa, the three greatest legislators of nations according to Rousseau, hail from such early times, and are presented as having denatured men.<sup>322</sup>

There must however be a way of resolving this seeming contradiction. For in Rousseau's *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, where the Genevan advises the King of Poland on how to "donner aux âmes la force nationale" [instill the national character in souls] (Rousseau, *Considérations*, p. 966), he remains a proponent of negative education: "Je ne redirai jamais assés que la bonne éducation doit être négative" [I could never repeat enough that a good education must be negative.] (Ibid., p. 968). To make sense of Rousseau's negative education program for patriots, as it were, I think we must first admit that patriotism, like any institution, is artificial. That being said, Émile's preceptor mobilizes numerous artificial devices to ensure that the boy learns from the world, and exercises his natural sense of right and wrong when dealing with others. Actors, for instance, are often employed to personify a worldview that Émile must decipher in order to resolve some moral dilemma. Similarly, Rousseau believes that national identity is a product of "amour-propre" (i.e., love for one's self-image) as opposed to the

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<sup>322</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne et sur sa réformation projetée*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 956 : "Je regarde les nations modernes j'y vois force faiseurs de lois et pas un législateur. Chez les anciens, j'en vois trois principaux qui méritent une attention particulière : Moïse, Lycurgue et Numa."

healthier “amour de soi” (i.e., love for one’s true self), but it is the only form of *amour-propre* that he defends throughout his oeuvre.<sup>323</sup> For when we share a national identity with our fellows, other forms of *amour-propre* (i.e., other identities) are unable to divide and prevent us from feeling the natural sentiment of “pitié” that another’s suffering evokes in the state of nature.<sup>324</sup> Rousseau, it goes without saying, refutes any such notion of cosmopolitan identity, for instance of the kind the *philosophes* wish to cultivate, on the grounds that *pitié* is a visceral rather than intellectual sentiment, and that humans are moved more by the sight of suffering than stories of it.<sup>325</sup> Though Rousseau does not explicitly suggest mobilizing *amour-propre* to this end in the *Premier discours*, one discovers precisely this idea in the *Discours sur l’économie politique*: “Il est certain que les plus grands prodiges de vertu ont été produits par l’amour de la patrie : ce sentiment doux et vif qui joint la force de l’amour-propre à toute la beauté de la vertu, lui donne une énergie qui sans la défigurer, en fait la plus héroïque de toutes les passions.” [It is certain that the greatest prodigies of virtue were produced by love for the fatherland: this sweet and lively sentiment that joins the force of pride to the beauty of virtue, gives it an energy without

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<sup>323</sup> Rousseau first defines “amour-propre” and “amour de soi” in his *Deuxième discours*, p. 219: “L’amour de soi-même est un sentiment naturel qui porte tout animal à veiller à sa propre conservation et qui, dirigé dans l’homme par la raison et modifié par la pitié, produit l’humanité et la vertu. L’amour-propre n’est qu’un sentiment relatif, factice et né dans la société, qui porte chaque individu à faire plus de cas de soi que de tout autre, qui inspire aux hommes tous les maux qu’ils se font mutuellement et qui est la véritable source de l’honneur.”

<sup>324</sup> For a definition of the “sentiment naturel” of “pitié”, see Rousseau, *Deuxième discours*, p. 156: “Il est donc bien certain que la pitié est un sentiment naturel, qui modérant dans chaque individu l’activité de l’amour de soi-même, concourt à la conservation mutuelle de toute l’espèce. C’est elle qui nous porte sans réflexion au secours de ceux que nous voyons souffrir: c’est elle qui, dans l’état de nature, tient lieu de lois, de mœurs, et de vertu, avec cet avantage que nul n’est tenté de désobéir à sa douce voix: c’est elle qui détournera tout sauvage robuste d’enlever à un faible enfant, ou à un vieillard infirme, sa subsistance acquise avec peine, si lui-même espère pouvoir trouver la sienne ailleurs [...].”

<sup>325</sup> Rousseau discusses the limits of the sentiment of pity in his *Discours sur l’économie politique*: “Il semble que le sentiment de l’humanité s’évapore et s’affaiblisse en s’étendant sur toute la terre, et que nous ne saurions être touchés des calamités de la Tartarie ou du Japon, comme de celles d’un peuple européen. Il faut en quelque manière borner et comprimer l’intérêt et la commisération pour lui donner de l’activité.” (p. 254)



disfiguring it, in fact the most heroic of all the passions.] (Rousseau, *Discours sur l'économie politique*, p. 255) Moreover, not only does Rousseau think that patriotism safeguards our natural sentiment of pity, he also argues in a fragment entitled “De la patrie” that patriotism is grounded in the most natural sentiment of them all, *l'amour de soi-même*:

D'où il suivroit que par un effet de l'amour d'eux-mêmes tous les peuples étant également attachés aux objets de leurs appétits et de leurs habitudes qui sont aussi les instruments de leur conservation devraient avoir le même attachement pour le sol qui les nourrit dès leur naissance et qui seule offre à leurs sens ces objets. [...] Ce qu'on aime dans son pays, ce qu'on appelle proprement la patrie n'est donc pas ce qui rapporte à nos appétits et aux habitudes qui en naissent, ce n'est pas simplement le lieu, ce ne sont pas simplement les choses, l'objet de cet amour est plus près de nous.<sup>326</sup>

The artificial identity cultivated by the patriotic education program does not therefore prevent it from being understood as negative, for it secures the expression of what Rousseau will identify in the *Deuxième discours* as the two most fundamental aspects of human nature, self-love and pity. Incidentally, this interpretation should help to reduce the distance between texts like *Émile* and *Du contrat social*, since it demonstrates that the latter's efforts to *denature* man in fact leave his basic nature intact.

Rousseau is often attributed with inventing the idea that people are born naturally good and only corrupted by society. As such, he has frequently been blamed by conservative thinkers

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<sup>326</sup> See Rousseau, “De la patrie”, in *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 535 – 536.

for embarking Western nations upon a thousand crusades against ‘institutional discrimination’, ‘systematic inequality’, etc., all of which minimize the personal responsibility of the individual. This sort of criticism can be traced back to Edmund Burke, who affirms both the prejudicial and artificial nature of society, but defends them on the grounds that (1) prejudices are based upon time-tested truths, and (2) what Rousseau believes to be the vicious “mask” of custom is in fact “the decent drapery of life”.<sup>327</sup> Ever since, Burkean conservatives have blamed the Genevan for inspiring a host of anti-social movements that might be characterized as unpatriotic at best. For instance, Robert Nisbet once famously inculpated Rousseau for inspiring “the student mania of the 1960s”, a generation of lotus-eaters frolicking and fornicating in “the mud of obscenity”, in the literal “physical dirt”, all “Rousseauian children of nature, happy little savages.”<sup>328</sup> “To both liberal applauders and conservative critics,” Nisbet holds, “the student mania was an exercise in romanticism, in demonstrating how human beings are when stripped of the habits and customs of their civilization.” (Ibid.)

Now is a good time to disabuse ourselves of this interpretation of Rousseau’s education program, which if one recalls, was partly shared by the liberal theorist Isaiah Berlin, who refers to the Genevan as the grandfather of “longhaired professors”. For his part, Nisbet was trying to understand why Tocqueville’s American dream, the liberalism of the duty-bound individual, had collapsed into that of his baser brother, the hedonistic individual of the American cattle farm. If however Rousseau seemed to him a likely culprit, then it was because Nisbet had not examined

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<sup>327</sup> See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 90.

<sup>328</sup> See Robert Nisbet, *The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), p. 103 – 104.

the *Premier discours*. For there he would have found the education program that Rousseau only hints at in *Émile*, but no longer thinks possible.<sup>329</sup> We speak of course of the negative education of patriots. If, by the time of *Émile*, Rousseau has abandoned the prospect of forming patriots, then it is because he had resigned himself to the fate of young Émile, i.e., his exile to the world of French cosmopolitanism. In such a place, words like ‘patriot’ and ‘citizen’ are at best sneered at from behind a mask, and at worst twisted on its plastic lips: “Ces deux mots *patrie* et *citoyen* doivent être effacés des langues modernes. J'en sais bien la raison, mais je ne veux pas la dire ; elle ne fait rien à mon sujet.” [These two words *fatherland* and *citizen* should be effaced from the modern languages. I know the reason well, but I don’t want to say it; they have nothing to do with my subject.] (Rousseau, *Émile*, p. 250) Hence, like Robinson Crusoe, Émile shall learn the talents of a man who lives alone and scavenges in the ‘physical dirt’. Émile shall be an *individual*. My point is this: if Rousseau thinks positive education a threat to humanity’s natural sentiments and freedom, then it is not so that flower-children might venerate their ancestors’ sacrifices by dancing in the mud—the majority of which was done by hyper-socialized university students, not the farmer’s children. To the contrary, when one’s sense of right and wrong does not depend on such educational institutions, but naturally forms from his life-experiences, then he’ll be inclined to defend his neighbor and live virtuously. In favorable conditions, he becomes a patriot, while less happy ones oblige him to become an individual.

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<sup>329</sup> See *Émile*, p. 250: “L’institution publique n’existe plus, et ne peut plus exister ; parce qu’où il n’y a plus de patrie il ne peut plus y avoir de citoyens.”

## XI. ii. The Fruits of an Abstract Education: Idle, Weak, Cowardly and Slavish Men

In the *Premier discours*, Rousseau accuses the academies of making men idle, physically weak, cowardly, ignorant of their duties to God and country, and ultimately slavish. His critique, however, does not merely take aim at the academies of his day, but at education per se. For as he later clarifies in the *Préface à Narcisse*, “L’étude use la machine, épuise les esprits, détruit la force, énerve le courage, et cela seule montre assez qu’elle n’est pas faite pour nous : c’est ainsi qu’on devient lâche et pusillanime, incapable de résister également à la peine et aux passions.” [Study uses up the machine, exhausts spirits, destroys strength, saps courage, and this alone is enough to show that it is not made for us: it is also how one becomes lazy and pusillanimous, equally incapable of resisting pain and passions.] (Rousseau, *Préface de Narcisse*, p. 966) And as Goldschmidt points out, Rousseau agrees with Bacon that the arts and sciences “rendent les âmes plus douces, simples, ductiles et dociles au commandement” [make souls softer, simpler, more malleable and docile to ordering].<sup>330</sup> But if, as Rousseau maintains in the *Discours*, simplicity itself is the fount of all virtue, then it would be unnecessary to render men supple so as to impress morality upon them. Doing so, furthermore, would prove fatal to their courage, the virtue that they require above all others to express their natural sentiments and defend their freedom. In any case, Rousseau’s numerous and incendiary criticisms of education in the *Premier discours* take at aim at both its *positive* and *abstract* character.

That education must possess a negative character, permitting the youth to express their natural judgement rather than burdening them with some positive doctrine, is expressed in the

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<sup>330</sup> See *Anthropologie et Politique*, p. 51. Passage cited from Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*.

first *Discours* in passages like the following: “C’est dès nos premières années qu’une éducation insensée orne notre esprit et corrompt notre jugement.” [It’s from our first years that a senseless education ornaments our spirit and corrupts our judgement.] (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 24)

The spirit shall not suffer itself to be “ornamented”, even with images of the statues and portraits of our greatest ancestral heroes. As Rousseau continues: “Nos jardins sont ornés de statues et nos galeries de tableaux. Que penseriez-vous que représentent ces chefs-d’œuvre de l’art exposés à l’admiration publique? Les défenseurs de la patrie? ou ces hommes plus grands encore qui l’ont enrichie par leurs vertus? Non.” [Our gardens are ornamented with statues and our galleries with paintings. What do you think is represented by these masterpieces of art exposed to public admiration? The defense of the fatherland? or those even greater men who enriched it by their virtues? No.] (Ibid., p. 25) So often are patriotism and nationalism accused of being buttressed by propaganda, but recall that Rome’s exemplar of patriotism, Cato the Elder, insisted that no statue be made in his likeness after he passed on. Virtue is its own reward. The patriot does not defend his family and community so that his image might be circulated, but for their own sake. How might the youth learn to be virtuous or patriotic? For Cato the Younger, it sufficed to watch an innocent boy suffer, as Rousseau reminds us. Where simplicity is preserved and men are virtuous, Rousseau believes, “the air itself of the country seems to inspire virtue”:

Le tableau de Lacédémone est moins brillant. Là, disaient les autres peuples, les hommes naissent vertueux, et l'air même du pays semble inspirer la vertu. Il ne nous reste de ses habitants que la mémoire de leurs actions héroïques. De tels monuments vaudraient-ils moins pour nous que les marbres curieux qu'Athènes nous a laissés? (Ibid., p. 12)

Indeed, the Spartans educated their youth, but Rousseau regards their education program as a negative one that protects their judgement from vicious institutions. If this required Lycurgus to 'denature' them in some respects, as Rousseau later writes in *Émile*, then it also preserved their natural inclinations, which proved to be sources of patriotic virtue.

On the other hand, positive education uproots virtue from its natural sources, rendering it dependent on systems of thought, institutional powers, etc. Since the youth are sequestered to classrooms when they are taught such systems, they rarely have an occasion to understand their significance. Therefore, they neither learn truth nor virtue, but only how to argue about them: "ils sauront composer des vers qu'à peine ils pourront comprendre: sans savoir démêler l'erreur de la vérité, ils posséderont l'art de les rendre méconnaissables aux autres par des arguments spécieux: mais ces mots de magnanimité, de tempérance, d'humanité, de courage, ils ne sauront ce que c'est." [they'll know how to compose verses that they can hardly understand; without knowing how to distinguish error from truth, they will master the art of rendering both unrecognizable by specious arguments: but these words, magnanimity, temperance, humanity, courage, they won't know what they are.] (Ibid., p. 24) Worse yet, neither have the so-called *philosophes* who conceive of and teach such systems had any occasion for virtue. Hence, in the best case, they will become engrossed with abstractions, and in order to distinguish themselves, make absurd claims: "L'un prétend qu'il n'y a point de corps et que tout est en représentation. L'autre, qu'il n'y a d'autre substance que la matière ni d'autre dieu que le monde. [...] Ô grands philosophes !" [One claims that the body does not exist and that everything is a representation of it. The other, that there is no other substance than matter nor god than the earth.] (Ibid., p.

27) A far more dangerous possibility, however, is that their “vie facile et agréable”<sup>331</sup> from behind the desk convinces them that virtue, country and God—in a word, everything their forefathers fought and died for in order to make their existence so “facile and agreeable”—appear to them as pointless superfluities: “Mais ces vains et futiles déclamateurs vont de tous côtés, armés de leurs funestes paradoxes; sapant les fondements de la foi, et anéantissant la vertu. Ils sourient dédaigneusement à ces vieux mots de Patrie et de Religion, et consacrent leurs talents et leur Philosophie à détruire et avilir tout ce qu'il y a de sacré parmi les hommes.” [But these vain and futile declaimers will from all sides, armed with their fatal paradoxes, sap the foundations of faith, and annihilate virtue. They smile disdainfully at these old words, Fatherland and Religion, and consecrate their talents and their Philosophy to destroying and swallowing everything that is sacred amongst men.] (Ibid., p. 19) What makes such positive education programs possible is *luxury*, but what makes them so dangerous is their *abstract* character, their removal from the concrete vicissitudes of life.

If Rousseau praises Cato the Elder in the first *Discours* for expelling the Greek academics from Rome, insisting that the youth already knew their duties and had only to fulfill them, then it's because he understood the concrete nature of virtue, that is, its need to be practiced, and realized that it could not be grasped abstractly. Thus, as Rousseau writes there: “Depuis que les savants ont commencé à paraître parmi nous, disaient leurs propres philosophes, les gens de

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<sup>331</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à Grimm*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 64: J'ai fait voir que les Sciences et les Arts énervent le courage. M. Gautier appelle cela une façon singulière de raisonner, et il ne voit point la liaison qui se trouve entre le courage et la vertu. Ce n'est pourtant pas, ce me semble, une chose si difficile à comprendre. Celui qui s'est une fois accoutumé à préférer sa vie à son devoir, ne tardera guères à lui préférer encore les choses qui rendent la vie facile et agréable.”

bien se sont éclipsés. Jusqu'alors les Romains s'étaient contentés de pratiquer la vertu, tout fut perdu quand ils commencèrent à l'étudier." [Since the reasoners have begun to appear amongst us, said their own philosophers, good men have been eclipsed. Until now, the Roman had been content to practice virtue, but everything was lost when they began to study it.](Ibid., p. 14) The difference between a concrete and abstract education is one between "reasonable" men and mere "reasoners", between "felicity" and "weakness", between "humanity" and "politeness", between the Epicurean state of having all of our pleasures "outside" of us and the Stoic one of containing them "within" ourselves, as Rousseau's *Lettres Morales* to M. d'Houdetot highlight:

Nous le sommes, s'écrient-ils tristement, que de ressources pour le bien être, quelle foule de commodités inconnues à nos pères, combien nous goûtons de plaisirs qu'ils ignoraient. Il est vrai, vous avez la mollesse, mais ils avaient la félicité ; vous êtes raisonneurs, ils étaient raisonnables ; vous êtes poils, ils étaient humains ; tous vos plaisirs sont hors de vous, les leurs étaient en eux-mêmes. (Rousseau, *Lettres morales*, p. 1089.)

Simplicity not only protects men from all those "commodities" to which they become attached and will do anything, no matter how treacherous and cowardly, to preserve. It also ensures that we do not abstract ourselves from the world, where pain and adversity separate the wheat from the chaff, the virtuous from the vicious. No study of courage will ever make the difference between the man who sacrifices himself for his comrades and the one who betrays them. "Mon cœur s'est purifié à la coupelle de l'adversité" [My heart is purified by the cup of adversity.] (Rousseau, *Rêveries*, p. 1000). It is in this light that Rousseau explains in the first *Discours* Bacon's superiority to the *philosophes*: "L'âme se proportionne insensiblement aux objets qui l'occupent,



et ce sont les grandes occasions qui font les grands hommes. Le prince de l'éloquence fut consul de Rome, et le plus grand, peut-être, des philosophes, chancelier d'Angleterre." [The soul unconsciously proportions itself to the objects that occupy it, and it is great occasions that make great men. The prince of eloquence was consul of Rome, and the greatest of philosophes, perhaps, was the chancellor of England.] (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 29). Bacon learned more about virtue as a statesman than he ever did in his study, Rousseau maintains. By contrast, the *philosophes* learn virtue from one of the most commodious places in all the world, the salon percolating with its *faineants* and *bons airs*.

Virtues like courage are acquired in the course of life, but the 'well-educated' man, i.e., the product of an abstract and positive education, idles away at his desk. The free man, having learnt honesty by watching lies destroy an innocent man, feels virtue a part of himself, and is thus willing to fight and die for it. But to the 'well-educated' man, it is simply part of a system, something to be discussed but not necessarily acted upon. Idling at his desk, the 'well-educated' man lacks the physical strength and courage to fight for what he professes. Yes, he forms a fist with his right hand, but an open palm for the university and his donors with the left. Principles are important to him, but not more than an "easy and agreeable life". For him, God and nation are at best ideas, and at worst prejudices to be exploited or criticized: "ce doux nom de patrie ne frappera jamais l'oreille [de vos enfants]; et s'ils entendent parler de Dieu, ce sera moins pour le craindre que pour en avoir peur." (Ibid., p. 24). Aside from whatever "talents" or 'expertise' that he possesses, he has spent a lifetime fleeing from the duties on which his existence depends.

### XI. iii. The *Philosophe*, or the Enemy of the People

Rousseau's *Premiers discours* is a polemic aimed at all those “beaux esprits” and “gens à la mode” who, calling themselves “philosophes”, would have been “fanatique[s] du temps de la Ligue” (*Ibid.*, p. 3). In our previous analyses, the *philosophe* proved to be a mixture of scientism, activism and sociability. Born from the artificial salon world of the *honnête homme*, where one must always please but “never shock”, the *philosophe* is a hyper-socialized creature.<sup>332</sup> Indeed, as César Chesneau Dumarsais expresses in praise of the “Philosophe” in his contribution to the *Encyclopédie*, “Le tempérament du philosophe, c'est d'agir par esprit d'ordre ou par raison ; comme il aime extrêmement la société, il lui importe bien plus qu'au reste des hommes de disposer tous ses ressorts à ne produire que des effets conformes à l'idée d'honnête homme.” [The temperament of the *philosophe* is to act with a mind to order or with reason; as he loves society in the extreme, it is more important to him than the majority of men to dispose of all his resources to alone produce results in conformity with the idea of an *honnête homme*.]<sup>333</sup> According to Rousseau, the *philosophe* is not a scientist but a popularizer thereof, not a virtuous man but a virtue-signaler, not a Socratic self-master but a social reformer with pleasant Epicurean

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<sup>332</sup> The concept of “hypersocialization” is increasingly invoked by critics of 21<sup>st</sup> century technocracy and those who would diagnose the pathologies of social media: see, for example, Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 94 – 95. However, we might trace the concept back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to the salon-world that valued “bons airs” above all else—see chapter IV for a discussion of this phenomenon. Other commentators have traced the first diagnosis of hyper-socializations back to Molière and La Bruyère; see Cédric Cornet, “Une masculinité en crise à la fin de la XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle ? La critique de l'efféminé chez La Bruyère”, in *Genre & Histoire*, vol. 2 (Spring 2008): 1 – 19: “Deux perceptions fortement ambivalentes de la masculinité coexistent au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle : d'un côté le rustre mal dégrossi, hyposocialisé, proche de la nature (de la rusticité d'un Monsieur de Pourceaugnac moliéresque à l'animalité paysanne chez La Bruyère1), de l'autre, le courtisan, construction sociale artificielle hypersocialisée.”

<sup>333</sup> Emphasis mine. See César Chesneau Dumarsais, “Philosophe”, in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. The ARTFL Project. Accessed August 20, 2020. [https://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/getobject\\_?p.92:22./var/artfla/encyclopedie/textdata/IMAGE/](https://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/getobject_?p.92:22./var/artfla/encyclopedie/textdata/IMAGE/)

penchants. To sing encomiums to Newton, to expatiate on the plight of the Tartars, to propitiate the salon mistress and regale Holbach's dinner guests, these simultaneously made one "fashionable" [à la mode] and philosophical. The term "bel esprit" [beautiful mind] is of course a pejorative, signifying an individual possessing all the distinctions and pretensions of knowledge, but nothing resembling the thing itself. Hence, if Jean-Jacques believes that the 18<sup>th</sup> century *philosophe* might have been a "fanatic in the time of the Crusades", then it is because, despite whatever actual "talents" that he might possess, he "extremely loves society".

In Arthur Melzer's view, these critiques of the *philosophes* make Rousseau the first modern anti-intellectual, "the first to denounce the modern intellectual as a secular priest and the first to warn [...] of the transformation of modern philosophy into 'ideology,' that is, into a dangerous new source of partisan crusading and sectarian persecution as well as, more generally, of intellectual tyranny and personal dependence."<sup>334</sup> For Rousseau, the *philosophe* is essentially an upstart, a man who hopes "to distinguish" (*Ibid.*, p. 19) himself through his "vain talents" (*Ibid.*, p. 15) and thereby acquire power. In the end however, he proves either a cowardly or fanatical conformist. His lack of genuine insight means that it is not he, but rather Machiavelli's prince who benefits most from his attempts to subvert his country, making the *philosophe* ultimately a useful idiot of sorts:

Puissances de la terre, aimez les talents, et protégez ceux qui les cultivent. Peuples policés, cultivez-les : heureux esclaves, vous leur devez ce goût délicat et fin dont vous

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<sup>334</sup> See Arthur M. Melzer, "The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity", in *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996): 344 – 360, p. 349.

vous piquez; cette douceur de caractère et cette urbanité de mœurs qui rendent parmi vous le commerce si liant et si facile; en un mot, les apparences de toutes les vertus sans en avoir aucune. (*Ibid.*, p. 7)

We have already elaborated upon many of the ways in which the *philosophe* delivers his nation into the tyrant's maw, deracinating and individualizing citizens, extoling vice, etc. There remains however an interesting critique of this phenomenon in the first *Discours*, according to which the *philosophes* attempt to make the admiration of "talents" the basis of society, as opposed to the veneration of virtues, beliefs and national loyalties. In the healthy state, the greatest merits are bestowed on the magnanimous man giving back to his community, the faithful man reassuring his people of the good and its rewards, the soldier sacrificing himself for their defense. But the *philosophes* wish to establish what might called a value-neutral meritocracy, where the highest accolades are instead laid upon to the most talented artists and scientists. A prolific scientist or watchmaker is indeed praiseworthy, but such talents can only flourish if the virtues required for maintaining social bonds are maintained.

Once the old heroes, the exemplars of virtue and self-sacrifice, are displaced by the new ones—artists, actors, intellectuals, inventors of gadgets, millionaires, etc.—the nation is made vulnerable for a host of reasons. In the first place, the talents of such people rarely prove useful for discerning virtue or leading nations, which is made evident both by the superficiality of their principles and their near universal conformity to them. The reasons for this have already been explained: such people typically make their living by appearances. Secondly, when these talents replace the old virtues that disdain appearances, nothing prevents a people from pursuing them

merely for the sake of “distinguishing” oneself, as opposed to producing something “useful” for his neighbor and country:

Voilà ce qu'à la longue doit produire partout la préférence des talents agréables sur les talents utiles, et ce que l'expérience n'a que trop confirmé depuis le renouvellement des sciences et des arts. Nous avons des physiciens, des géomètres, des chimistes, des astronomes, des poètes, des musiciens, des peintres; nous n'avons plus de citoyens; ou s'il nous en reste encore, dispersés dans nos campagnes abandonnées, ils y périssent indigents et méprisés. (Rousseau, *Premiers discours*, p. 26)

Reading Rousseau's critique, one thinks of all those intellectuals who, flattering themselves as elites, revile and denigrate all those supposedly 'backward', 'fly-over state' 'hicks' and 'trailer trash' who, having nothing left but God and country, are cruelly mocked for the paltry shreds of hope to which they cling.<sup>335</sup> The joke however is on this inflated clique, which brings us to the third point. For, yes, they care only about distinguishing themselves, and will thus utter the greatest absurdities: “Celui-ci avance qu'il n'y a ni vertus ni vices, et que le bien et le mal moral sont des chimères. Celui-là, que les hommes sont des loups et peuvent se dévorer en sûreté de conscience.” [This one claims that there are neither virtues nor vices, and that moral good and evil are chimeras. That one, that men are wolves and can devour themselves in good conscience.] (Ibid., p. 27) However, given that they seek to distinguish themselves only to win riches or favor,

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<sup>335</sup> As Rousseau argues in the *Préface de Narcisse*, the *philosophe's* “amour-propre” is inflated at a direct inversion proportion to his mocking hatred of the common man: “Bientôt il réunit en sa personne tout l'intérêt que les hommes vertueux partagent avec leurs semblables : son mépris pour les autres tourne au profit de son orgueil ; son amour-propre augmente en même proportion que son indifférence pour le reste de l'univers. La famille, la patrie deviennent pour lui des mots vides de sens : il n'est ni parent, ni citoyen, ni homme ; il est Philosophe.” (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 966)

what they utter is never distinct or unique, but always determined by convention. Newton and Descartes had something new to say, and both distanced themselves from the academies.

Fourthly, such ‘talented’ persons are rarely independently wealthy, and must therefore rely on patrons who either seek power, or have already come to the conclusions that they wish their ‘experts’ merely to affirm. To recall, it was not Bacon’s noble King Solomon from the *New Atlantis* who founded the first academies in France, but an absolute monarchist who exhausted the kingdom’s resources bringing war to its neighbors. Neither does one discover those selfless herculean laborers from the caves of Bensalem in these first academies, but rather *philosophes* and popularizers like Fontenelle. As Rousseau asserts in his *Observations or Réponse au Roy de Pologne*, the notion of a paid philosopher presents a serious problem:

*Dans aucun tems les richesses n’ont été l’appanage des Sçavans. C’est en cela même que le mal est plus grand, les riches et les sçavans ne servant qu’à se corrompre mutuellement. Si les riches étoient plus sçavans, ou que les sçavans fussent plus riches; les uns seroient de moins lâches flatteurs; les autres aimeroient moins la basse flatterie, et tous en vaudroient mieux.*<sup>336</sup>

We observe how easily a tyrant might establish himself in a nation organized by such ‘talented’ persons, whom our contemporary word “expert” describes well. For they are paid by the rich and powerful to come to their conclusions, alienate the common man, disdain national loyalties,

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<sup>336</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Observations de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, de Genève: Sur la Réponse qui a été faite à son Discours*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 50.

beliefs and virtues, and are willing to say anything to distinguish themselves, i.e., gain acceptance among their peers.

Fifth and finally, a nation that venerates the so-called ‘talented’ above all its members risks destabilizing those egalitarian institutions on which freedom depends. To be sure, virtue is not a perfectly egalitarian institution, as some are by nature more robust and therefore require fewer devices to conceal their flaws, as it were—Rousseau also makes this point in the *Rêveries* where he claims that he only ever lied, or told “fictions”, to conceal a certain natural weakness and timidity.<sup>337</sup> That said, even the poorest man, a soldier like Fabricius, might prove himself an exemplar of Roman virtue. One does not require wealth, a beautiful voice, a dexterous hand, or great intelligence to be honest, temperate or just. Thus Rousseau writes:

D'où naissent tous ces abus, si ce n'est de l'inégalité funeste introduite entre les hommes par la distinction des talents et par l'avilissement des vertus? Voilà l'effet le plus évident de toutes nos études, et la plus dangereuse de toutes leurs conséquences. On ne demande plus d'un homme s'il a de la probité, mais s'il a des talents; ni d'un livre s'il est utile, mais s'il est bien écrit. Les récompenses sont prodiguées au bel esprit, et la vertu reste sans honneurs. (Rousseau, *Premiers discours*, p. 25)

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<sup>337</sup> See Rousseau, *Rêveries*, p. 1039: “Cette devise m’obligeoit plus que tout autre homme à une profession plus étroite de la vérité, et il ne suffisoit pas que je lui sacrifiasse par-tout mon intérêt & mes penchans, il falloit lui sacrifier aussi ma foiblesse, et mon naturel timide.”

Virtue, Rousseau concludes the first *Discours*, is the “sublime science of simple souls” [science sublime des âmes simples] whose principles are “engraved upon every heart” [gravés dans tous les cœurs] and available for all to practice. (Ibid., p. 30)

#### **XI. iv. The Critical Reception of the *Premier discours***

When the Académie de Dijon awarded Rousseau first place for his *Premier discours*, he received both praise from figures like the King of Poland, but also sharp criticism those like M. Lecat. In a series of subsequently published letters in which he responds to them, as well as in his *Préface à Narcisse*, Rousseau both clarifies his position in the *Premier discours* and reveals some of his influences. In the *Lettre à Grimm* for instance, he writes that “Herodotus, Justinus, Quintus Curtius [and] Tacitus” all demonstrated that simple peoples might be modest without clothing, and eat raw meat without being viscous.<sup>338</sup> And in the *Lettre à Lecat*, it becomes clear that many of his criticisms in the *Premier discours* were also leveled at the scholastic and mystic thinkers: “Les Peuples avoient perdu le sens commun, non parce qu’ils étoient ignorans, mais parce qu’ils avoient la bêtise de croire sçavoir quelque chose, avec les mots d’Aristote et l’impertinente doctrine de Raymond Lulle.” [The people had lost common sense, not because they were ignorant, but because they had the stupidity to believe something with the words of Aristotle and the impertinent doctrine of Raymond Lull.]<sup>339</sup> That being said, Rousseau insists in these responses that he is criticizing the arts and sciences in general. Yes, he concedes in the opening

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<sup>338</sup> « Le moyen qu’on ne puisse jamais supposer de la pudeur à des gens qui vont tout nus, et de la vertu à ceux qui mangent de la chair crüe ? Il faudra donc disputer. Voilà donc Hérodote, Justin, Quinte-Curce, Tacite [...]. » (Rousseau, *Lettre à Grimm*, p. 61)

<sup>339</sup> Rousseau, *Lettre à M. Lecat*, in in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 101 – 102.



passages of his *Dernière réponse à M. Bordes* that the “mechanical arts” are “useful” (Rousseau, *Dernière réponse à Bordes*, p. 72), but he later affirms that “Everything is a source of evil beyond physical necessity” [Tout est source de mal au-delà du nécessaire faire physique. La nature ne nous donne que trop de besoins ; et c’est au moins une très-haute imprudence de les multiplier sans nécessité] (p. 95). Incidentally, one is reminded here of Vico’s account of the decline of nations, which seek to satisfy physical necessities in their first stage, to produce what is useful in their second stage, and to satisfy their pleasures in their final stage, where, adopting the mentality of the slave, they prepare to be physically enslaved by another nation.

If Rousseau’s responses to the critical reception of his *Discours* merit our attention, then it’s because he further fleshes out his cyclical view of history there. That is, while he affirms that virtue is rooted in physical necessity in his letter to M. Bordes, he also explains in both his letter to the King of Poland (i.e., his *Observations*) and in the Préface à Narcisse that one cannot hope to repair the morality of a civilization once it is corrupted, and again make physical necessity its main impetus:

Arrêtons-nous un instant sur cette dernière conséquence, et gardons-nous d’en conclure qu’il faille aujourd’hui brûler toutes les Bibliothèques et détruire les Universités et les Académies. [...] on n’a jamais vu de peuple une fois corrompu, revenir à la vertu. En vain vous prétendriez détruire les sources du mal ; [...] leurs cœurs une fois gâtés le seront toujours ; il n’y a plus de remède, à moins de quelque grande révolution presque aussi à craindre que le mal qu’elle pourroit guérir, et qu’il est blâmable de désirer et impossible de prévoir. (Rousseau, *Observations*, pp. 55 – 56)

While our present age seems to have forgotten this, “revolution” is not a progressivist concept but instead one founded on the cyclical view of history, which Rousseau opposes to the former. But as Rousseau also maintains, it is “reprehensible to desire and impossible to predict” such a revolution: reprehensible because it would both be violent and utterly confound all those who have consecrated their lives to pleasure; and impossible to predict because Rousseau does not consider history a science in the same way as, say, Hegel and Marx.

Moreover, while Rousseau regards the arts and sciences as corrupting, he also believes that they’re the last form of virtue that exists in Modernity, even if they are but a thin “varnish” [verniss] (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 972) covering our vicious hearts. Rousseau compares the taste for the arts and sciences to medicine, and more precisely, the very ignorant medicine of his day. He explains that once a man acquires the habit of seeking remedies, that even if they are useless, his system nonetheless becomes dependent upon them, and would even collapse if they were denied.<sup>340</sup> To be sure, Seneca invokes the same medical analogy in his own *Letters* to criticize the multiplication of philosophical *docti*. Thus, Rousseau does believe that the sciences and arts are useful in a sense—perhaps in the same way that it useful to slowly wean the addict off, rather than forcing him to go cold turkey, as it were. Civilizations must be allowed to slowly degenerate, with each generation feeling the effects of pleasure-seeking and vice slightly more,

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<sup>340</sup> “Mais quand un peuple est une fois corrompu à un certain point, soit que les sciences y aient contribué ou non, faut-il les bannir on l’en préserver, pour le rendre meilleur, ou pour l’empêcher de devenir pire ? C’est une autre question dans laquelle je me suis positivement déclaré pour la négative. Car premièrement, puisqu’un peuple vicieux ne revient jamais à la vertu, il ne s’agit pas de rendre bons ceux qui ne le sont plus, mais de conserver tels ceux qui ont le bonheur de l’être. En second lieu, les mêmes causes qui ont corrompu les peuples, servent quelquefois à prévenir une plus grande corruption ; c’est ainsi que celui qui s’est gâté le tempérament par un usage indiscret de la médecine, est forcé de recourir encore aux médecins pour se conserver en vie ; et c’est ainsi que les arts et les sciences, après avoir fait éclore les vices, sont nécessaires pour les empêcher de se tourner en crimes ; elles les couvrent au moins d’un vernis qui ne permet pas au poison de s’exhaler aussi librement.” (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 972)

so that it can begin raising honest and courageous men again. One does not place a house cat in the wild, maybe a barn cat though. Of course, Rousseau does think that the philosopher might still furnish us with something other than the varnish of virtue, as it were. But it is a rare type of man who might do this, one who possesses both the intelligence of the scientist and the virtue of the hero:

Car vrais Sçavans sont en petit nombre, je l'avoue ; car pour bien user de la Science, il faut réunir de grands talens et de grandes Vertus ; or, c'est qu'on peut à peine espérer de quelques ames privilégiées, mais qu'on ne doit point attendre de tout un peuple.  
(Rousseau, *Observations*, p. 39)

## Chapter XII: The Critical Methodology of the *Premiers discours*: Unmasking

### XII. i. The Origins of Unmasking: Christianity and Modernity

The *Premier discours* is not a critique of the sciences and arts as such, but rather of their *institutionalization*. Positive education re-socializes the youth, replacing what has been learned in the natural course of life with artificial mores, products of one institution or another that can be easily turned on and off by their managers. Cato the Younger, Rousseau reminds us, learned justice as a young boy by watching an innocent suffer.<sup>341</sup> Abstract education, at the same time, removes any occasion for virtue, decoupling it from action, so that people might become active only when directed. Cato saved the innocent himself, but in our times, he would have tattled on the boy's tormentors, waiting for the institution to serve justice—hence why there are no more Catos. If Rousseau's critique is prophetic, as de Jouvenel believes, then it's because he unmasks the *philosophes* as a new class of bureaucratic managers, whose praise of the arts and sciences conceals their *libido dominandi*, or their desire to control such educational institutions. Hence, the *philosophe* appears the forerunner of the so-called expert, who *popularizes* science so that he might advance his political agenda in its name; he is the nascent intellectual who abominates the common man for his prejudices, and then imposes a thousand others on the genius foolish enough to partake in this travestied pursuit of the truth. What makes Jean-Jacques' critique so

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<sup>341</sup> See Plutarch, *The Life of Cato the Younger*, in *Parallel Lives*, vol. 8, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Loeb Classics, 1919), p. 241 – 243: "At another time a relation of his who was celebrating a birthday, invited Cato and other boys to supper, and the company were diverting themselves at play in a separate part of the house, older and younger together, their play being actions at law, accusations, and the conducting of the condemned persons to prison. Accordingly, one of those thus condemned, a boy of comely looks, was led off by an older boy and shut into a chamber, where he called upon Cato for help. Then Cato, when he understood what was going on, quickly came to the door, pushed aside the boys who stood before it and tried to stop him, led forth the prisoner, and went off home with him in a passion, followed by other boys also."

penetrating, I argue, is the unmasking style that he adopts in the *Premier discours*, which not only constitutes a novel form of critique, but one that shall come to characterize his entire oeuvre.

Unmasking is typically thought to be a product of modernity, a part of “the distinctively modern moral scheme” as Alasdair MacIntyre calls it in *After Virtue*.<sup>342</sup> According to MacIntyre, this scheme is trifold, not only comprising “unmasking” but also the concepts of “protest” and “rights”. (Ibid.) Each of these, he argues, centers around the idea of a pre-social individual, who is able to reflect on the mores and customs of his civilization by abstracting himself from them, as the Cartesian or modern subject no doubt does. Where there is no such pre-social individual, one’s mores and customs cannot appear to be a mask, but rather only as an integral part of the self. As MacIntyre points out, such was the case in ancient and particularly heroic civilizations:

What Finley says of Homeric society is equally true of other forms of heroic society in Iceland or in Ireland. Every individual has a given role and status within a well-defined and highly determinate system of roles and statuses. The key structures are those of kinship and of the household. In such a society a man knows who he is by knowing his role in these structures; and in knowing this he knows also what he owes and what is owed to him by the occupant of every other role and status. (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 122)

This point can be understood by highlighting the fact that epic heroes like Ulysses and Beowulf never question the moral system within which they operate, as opposed to our modern heroes,

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<sup>342</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 68: “Once we have understood this it is possible to understand also the key place that three other concepts have in the distinctively modern moral scheme, that of rights, that of protest, and that of unmasking.”

who are riddled with inner conflicts. Hence, there is no occasion for supposing that the former are hiding their true beliefs behind the mask of custom. The epic hero is one with his social role as warrior, king, etc., and this symmetry explains why the mask is not considered vicious in such civilizations. Indeed, let us not forget that Ulysses, the exemplar of virtue in Homer's epics, won the Trojan war by disguising himself as an honorary present, saved his men from the cyclops by disguising them as sheep, and restored order to his household by disguising himself as a beggar. Cleverness, hence deception, might even be regarded as Ulysses defining virtue.

There are additional reasons that unmasking does not figure into heroic civilizations. As mentioned above, virtue (or *aretê*) was for Homer synonymous with excellence.<sup>343</sup> And even for Aristotle, the man who had good intentions but failed to achieve success might be regarded as vicious. Yes, the ancients considered a man's motives, but his virtue ultimately depended on his actions. What might be discovered by looking past one's actions, or treating them as a veil, was therefore of relatively little importance. The emergence of unmasking would first require virtue to be decoupled from action, which occurs long before the modern era. Rather, it is the spirit of Christianity that first decouples the two. "Blessed are the meek", Christ utters in his sermon on the mount, "for they shall inherit the earth."<sup>344</sup> According to the Christian religion, a man might be meek, impoverished and thoroughly unsuccessful in life, but owing to the purity of his heart, considered virtuous above all others. Christianity thus trains one's judgement on the intentions of others, as opposed to their actions or any worldly glory they might reap from them. As Christ also preaches in his sermon on the mount, "Take heed that ye do not do your alms before men,

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<sup>343</sup> See chapter X. i.

<sup>344</sup> See Matthew 5:5 in *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 7.

to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”<sup>345</sup> Worldly glory belongs to the City of Man, not that of God. Aristotle regarded meekness and humbleness as vices, but it is precisely these Christian virtues that compel humanity to look past Roman law and custom, and instead examine the soul.<sup>346</sup> Man ceases to be one with his social role, thereby transforming it into a mask: “Then saith he unto them. Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that God’s.”<sup>347</sup> Outwardly one conforms to secular law, but this reveals nothing about one’s innermost beliefs.

Christianity provides the template for the modern individual, who is neither reducible to his natural abilities nor his social role.<sup>348</sup> Perhaps the relationship between the two is borne out best in the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel, whose conception of Christian reconciliation is mirrored in his theory of recognition. As Hegel writes in his *Early Theological Writings*, the Christian must refrain from avenging himself in order to reconcile his “heart” with his offender, and participate together in the divine.<sup>349</sup> Similarly, he argues in *Philosophy of Mind* that liberalism signifies the

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<sup>345</sup> Matthew 6:1 (King James Bible, p. 8)

<sup>346</sup> See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 184: “The New Testament’s account of the virtues, even if it differs as much as it does in content from Aristotle’s - Aristotle would certainly not have admired Jesus Christ and he would have been horrified by St Paul - does have the same logical and conceptual structure as Aristotle’s account. A virtue is, as with Aristotle, a quality the exercise of which leads to the achievement of the human telos.”

<sup>347</sup> Matthew 22:21 (King James Bible, p. 32)

<sup>348</sup> For more on the relationship between Christianity and modern individualism, see Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 61: “‘Dying in Christ’ means acquiring a will properly so called. It is liberation or, as Paul often calls it, the beginning of a ‘new creation’. And the act of faith required is an individual act, an internal event. Paul overturns the assumption of natural inequality by creating an inner link between the divine will and human agency. He conceives the idea that the two can, at least potentially, be fused within each person, thereby justifying the assumption of the moral equality of humans. That fusion is what Christ offers to mankind. It is what Paul means when he speaks of humans becoming ‘one in Christ’. That fusion marks the birth of a ‘truly’ individual will, through the creation of conscience.”

<sup>349</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 237, on the message of the crucifixion: “In reconciliation with one who hurts us, the heart no longer stands on the right acquired in opposition to the offender. By giving up its right, as its hostile farce, to the evil genius of the other, the heart reconciles itself with him, and thereby has won just so much for itself in the

triumph over the seemingly endless dialectic between the master and slave throughout history; that is, one race asserts itself as the master of another, grows weak through its dependence on them, and is then vanquished and enslaved by its former slave race.<sup>350</sup> This cycle, he holds, can only be broken if the master and slave set aside all their hatreds and differences, and recognize one another as being fundamentally individuals who are equally desirous of freedom. Only then can they form a liberal society, where 'rights' are not the victor's spoil, the heritage of one class or faction, but instead based upon the individual being of each person. At any rate, our primary objective here is not to demonstrate the extent to which Christianity motives the conception of the modern individual, but only to understand how "unmasking", "rights" and "protest" all find themselves in his orbit.

As MacIntyre reminds us, the ancients never spoke of 'rights'.<sup>351</sup> If a man possessed the privileges of land and freedom, then it was because his ancestors shed their blood conquering a territory and their sweat cultivating it. He was therefore the material result of their actions, and no argument was required to enjoy his privileges. For these were not the fruits of *rights*, which can always be disputed, but rather of *duties* successfully fulfilled. The ancients spoke of duties,

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field of life, has made friendly just so much life as was hostile to it, has reconciled the divine to itself; and the fate it had aroused against itself by its own deed has dissolved into the airs of the night."

<sup>350</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1894), p. 57, on the resolution of the master-slave dialectic: "Universal self-consciousness is the affirmative awareness of self in another self: each self as a free individuality has his own 'absolute' independence, yet in virtue of the negation of its immediacy or appetite without distinguishing itself from that other. Each is thus universal self-conscious and objective; each has a 'real' universality in the shape of reciprocity, so far as each knows itself recognized in the other freeman, and is aware of this in so far as it recognizes the other and knows him to be free."

<sup>351</sup> See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 69: "It would of course be a little odd that there should be such rights attaching to human beings simply *qua* human beings in light of the fact, which I alluded to in my discussion of Gewirth's argument, that there is no expression in any ancient or medieval language correctly translated by our expression 'a right' until near the close of the middle ages: the concept lacks any means of expression in Hebrew, Greek, Latin or Arabic, classical or medieval, before about 1400, let alone in Old English, or in Japanese even as late as the mid-nineteenth century."



not rights. One was a free Athenian, Germanic, etc., but never a mere individual who possessed the right to enjoy privileges simply in virtue of existing. Thus, in the ancient world, there was no occasion for the slave to unmask his master as a mere individual, and say for instance: “you see we are both the same, and therefore deserve equal privileges”. Unmasking and the demand for rights (i.e., protest) only become prominent in the modern era, where the natural law theories of philosophers like Hobbes, Locke and even Rousseau begin to gain traction. For, by supposing the existence a pre-social individual in the state of nature, a man who is not the product of the victories and losses of one tribe or another, they create a new standard. It is no coincidence that protesters often demand a *revolution*, in other words, a full cyclical return to this original state of humanity.

To summarize, unmasking becomes possible where: (1) humans are divorced from their social roles (e.g., freeman vs. slave, woman vs. man, Greek vs. Barbarian, etc.) and conceived of as individuals as such; and (2) virtue no longer signifies excellence, and is thereby divorced from successful action. These divorces create distance between humans and the world around them. The ontological significance of the individual waxes, while that of his natural abilities and social roles wanes, until the latter ultimately appear as no more than masks. Because Christianity and Modernity both contribute to the conception of the pre-social individual, they can be regarded as necessary conditions for the emergence of unmasking. The Christian tears away the masks of race, sex and secular law, revealing the pre-social soul: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) The Modern lifts the Courtesan’s mask to reveal the pre-social individual, a naturel self who has failed to exercise his rights and freedoms. However, as we shall see there

are other conditions that prevent Christian and Modern authors alike from pursuing the unmasking method without reservation, as Rousseau will.

## **XII. ii. Unmasking the Christian: Hypocrisy in Molière's *Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur***

MacIntyre regards unmasking as a part of “the distinctively modern moral scheme”, and as such, does not consider Christianity as a condition for its development. I believe this to be an oversight however. For not only does Christianity seem to provide a template for the pre-social individual, as we see above. It also serves as one of the contexts in which the unmasking style is first articulated, Molière's *Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur* (1664).<sup>352</sup> Hoping to expose the hypocrisy of Tartuffe, Elmire tells her husband, “Je vais par des douceurs, puisque j’y suis réduite, faire poser le masque à cette âme hypocrite.” [I will by kindnesses, because I’m obliged, place the mask upon this hypocritical soul.] (Ibid., p. 97) To unmask means to expose the hypocrite, who merely creates the appearance of virtue. “Démêlez la vertu d’avec ses apparences” [Distinguish virtue from its appearances] (Ibid., p. 109) is the advice that Cléante gives to his family. Tartuffe hides “a soul subjugated to interest” [une âme à l’intérêt soumise] (Ibid., p. 34) behind the mask of “saintly fervor” [sainte ferveur] (Ibid.), which in the end proves itself no more than a “venal and mercantile devotion” [dévotion métier et marchandise] (Ibid.). On the path to Heaven he pursues his fortune.<sup>353</sup> Thus, it is Christianity that provides an occasion for Tartuffe’s abuses. But this is no coincidence, as Christianity places virtue beyond the pale of action, requiring one to judge others on the bases of their intentions, which can more easily be dissimulated and masked.

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<sup>352</sup> Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière, *Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1894)

<sup>353</sup> Molière, *Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur*, p. 34: “Par le chemin du Ciel courir à leur fortune [...].”

This helps to explain William Barclay's observation that "In the New Testament, there is no sin more strongly condemned than hypocrisy".<sup>354</sup> For hypocrisy is the sin that threatens the moral framework of Christianity the most. The word hypocrisy derives from the classical Greek *ὑπόκρισις* [*hupokrisis*]. But as Barclay explains, *hupokrisis* does not signify a vicious or immoral act among the ancient Greeks:

The curious thing is that in classical Greek these words [*hupokrisis* and *hupokrites*] have no ill favour and no bad meaning whatsoever [...]. In classical Greek the basic meaning of *hupokrites* is 'one who answers'. The verb *hupokrinesthai* is the standard for 'to answer'. [...] An orator, Demosthenes can be called by one of the critics an exceptional and many-talents *hupokrites*. (Barclay, *New Testament Words*, p. 140 - 141)

*Hupokrisis* might also be translated as 'delivery', referring to the way in which the statesman or poet delivers his lines. Thus, when Demosthenes was asked what the most important aspect of oratory is, he famously responded "*hupokrisis, hupokrisis, hupokrisis*".<sup>355</sup> Neither does Aristotle regard *hupokrisis* negatively in his *Rhetoric*. Yes, unlike his "writing style", it is not suited for the pursuit of the truth, but this in no way implies that *hupokrisis* is deceptive or vicious; rather, he maintains, it should simply be reserved for prose and poetry, for which his "writing style" is not suited.<sup>356</sup> At worst, *hupokrisis* is an oratory style from which more straightforward men abstain,

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<sup>354</sup> See William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), p. 140.

<sup>355</sup> See Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators*, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 10, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 418, 845b.

<sup>356</sup> See Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civil Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 227, III. xii. 2. 1413b: "Written style is most exact; the agonistic style is very much a matter of delivery. Of the latter there are two species; for one form is ethical, the other emotional. Thus, actors are on the lookout for plays of these sorts, and the poets for these kinds of actors. But [poets] who write for the reading public are [also]

as in the case of Hyperides.<sup>357</sup> Thus, it never approaches the level of vice of the ancient Greeks, whose moral framework is significantly different from the Hebrew and Christian ones.

Indeed, as Barclay indicates, one of the first texts in which *hupokrisis* takes on a negative moral sense is the *Septuagint*, or the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (BC) Greek translation of the Old Testament.<sup>358</sup> *Hupokrisis* does not however acquire its modern meaning from there, where it is more akin to something like “law-breaker”.<sup>359</sup> In Barclay’s reading, the modern meaning of hypocrisy appears to come from the New Testament, and particularly the passages from Matthew that I have cited in the previous section:

The *hupokrites* is the man who goes in for play-acting goodness, for what has been called ‘theatrical goodness’. He is the man who wants everyone to see him give alms (Matt. 6.2), to see him pray (Matt. 6.5), to know that he is fasting (Matt. 6.16). [...] The true motives of the people who asked Jesus the question about paying tribute were not to get information and guidance but to entangle Jesus in his words. They are *hupokritai* (Mark 12.15; Matt. 22.18). [...] The *hupokrites* is the man who hides an evil heart under a cloak

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much liked, for example, Chaerephon (for he is as precise as a professional prose writer [*logographos*]), and Licymnius among the dithyrambic poets. On comparison, some written works seem thin in debates, while some speeches of [successful] orators seem amateurish when examined in written form. The cause is that [their style] suits debate. Thus, things that are intended for delivery, when delivery is absent, seem simple minded, since they are not fulfilling their purpose [...].”

<sup>357</sup> See Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators*, p. 445, 850a-b: “It is said that in addressing the public he did not employ the actor’s art [ἀνευ ὑποκρίσεως], that he merely related the facts of the case and did not bore the jurors even with these.” For a further discussion of this topic, see Mike Edwards, “*Hypokritēs* in Action: Delivery in Greek Rhetoric”, in *Profession and Performance: Aspects of Oratory in the Greco-Roman World* (London: University of London Press, 2013), p. 17.

<sup>358</sup> See Barclay, *New Testament Words*, p. 142

<sup>359</sup> “In Job 20.5 Aquila [who made revisions to the Septuagint in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC] has *hupokrites* and the Septuagint has *paranomōs*, which means ‘transgressor’, a ‘law-breaker’. In Isa. 32.6 Aquila has *hupokrisis*, and the Septuagint has *anōma*, which means ‘lawless things’.” (Ibid.)

of piety. The Pharisees were like that (Matt. 23.28). In the end, *hypokrites* is under condemnation of God (Matt. 24.51). (Barclay, *New Testament Words*, p. 142)

Tartuffe therefore appears guilty of a quintessentially Christian sin. His cupidity and adulterous gaze, vices that are hardly particular to Christianity, pale in comparison to the hypocritical mask of righteousness that makes all his other sins possible. By contrast, for classical playwrights like Sophocles and Aristophanes, hypocrisy never seems to fundamentally menace the moral order. True, Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen* mask themselves as men to subvert the government and impose communism, but female nature is ultimately the culprit, not the mask.<sup>360</sup> The Ancients conceived of femininity as being deceptive, with not only Aristophanes expressing this view,<sup>361</sup> but many others like Xenophon<sup>362</sup> and the Roman fabulist Phaedrus.<sup>363</sup> In this way, the classical

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<sup>360</sup> See Aristophanes, *The Assemblywomen*, in *Aristophanes: Frogs, Assemblywomen, Wealth*, vol. 4, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 238. As Henderson writes in the "Introduction" to the piece, "[...] in *Assemblywomen* allusions to the political status quo are few, and serve mainly to motivate its abolition in favor of a radically new system, a communal utopia under female governance. As in *Lysistrata* a heroine, Praxagora ("Woman Effective in Public"), leads her fellow Athenian women in a plot to save Athens from male misgovernance: the women disguise themselves as men, pack the Assembly, vote to transfer power to themselves [...]."

<sup>361</sup> In Aristophanes' play *The Women at Thesmophoria*, for instance, the women decide to kill Euripides for calling them "adultery-addicts", "wine-swillers", "betrayers", etc., rather than correcting their behavior, so that they can continue deceiving the state and their husbands. See Aristophanes, *The Women at Thesmophoria*, trans. Stephen Halliwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 117 – 118; 398 – 431 : "We can no longer do all the things that we *used* to do. / He's made it impossible—such are the terrible views, / That he's taught our husbands to hold [...] / His downfall has got to be plotted, one way or another, / Whether using poison or some other method instead. / We've got to destroy him!"

<sup>362</sup> See Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, trans. E. C. Marchant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 447 – 448, 10.2-11, where Ischomachus explains to his wife the male equivalent of wearing makeup: "Thereupon Ischomachus took up his parable. 'Well, one day, Socrates, I noticed that her face was made up: she had rubbed in white lead in order to look even whiter than she is, and alkanet juice to heighten the rosy colour of her cheeks; and she was wearing boots with thick soles to increase her height. So I said to her, 'Tell me, my dear, how should I appear more worthy of your love as a partner in our goods, by disclosing to you our belongings just as they are, without boasting of imaginary possessions or concealing any part of what we have, or by trying to trick you with an exaggerated account, showing you bad money and gilt necklaces and describing clothes that will fade as real purple?'"

<sup>363</sup> See for instance Phaedrus' fable of "The Young Man and the Courtesan" in *The Comedies of Terrence and the Fables of Phaedrus*, trans. Henry Thomas Riley (London: George Bell & Sons, 1887), IV. xxviii., p. 451: "While a perfidious Courtesan was fawning upon a Youth, and he, though wronged *by her* many a time and oft, still showed himself indulgent to the Woman, the faithless *Creature thus addressed him*: 'Though many contend *for me* with *their*

concept of femininity seems to approximate the modern notion of hypocrisy the most. There is however a major differences between the two, since female deceptions are only vicious insofar as they conceal *la faiblesse feminine* (e.g., the female proclivity for communist government over more competitive forms of rule, as expressed in the *Assemblywomen*). By contrast, women who mask themselves as men in the pursuit of manly virtues are frequently rewarded in the ancient world. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for example, Ligdus resolves to kill any daughter that his wife Telethusa births, as he cannot afford a dowry.<sup>364</sup> Giving birth to a girl, Telethusa is visited by the goddess Isis, who advises her to raise the girl as a boy. The child is named Iphis, and on the eve of her marriage, is rewarded by the goddess and transformed into a man. "Now as she walked the girl stepped into manhood." (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p. 265)

By contrast, it is Tartuffe's hypocrisy as such that offends Cléante the most, and serves as the object of the play. Cléante appreciates however that there are limits to unmasking—which distinguishes Molière from Jean-Jacques, who pursues unmasking much further as we shall see. Tartuffe must be unmasked, but Cléante knows that self-righteous unmasking can itself become a mask. His exemplars of virtue are therefore more "humane" in their judgements, less inclined to "censor" others, and lead by way of their "actions" rather than by proselytizing:

Mais les dévots de cœur sont aisés à connoître. / Notre siècle, mon frère, en expose à  
nos yeux / Qui peuvent nous servir d'exemples glorieux : / Regardez Ariston, regardez  
Périandre, / Oronte, Alcidas, Polydore, Clitandre ; / Ce titre par aucun ne leur est

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gifts, still do I esteem you the most." The Youth, recollecting how many times he had been deceived, replied: 'Gladly, my love, do I hear these words; not because you are constant, but because you administer to my pleasures.'

<sup>364</sup> See Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Horace Gregory (New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 261 – 266.

dé battu ; / Ce ne sont point du tout fanfarons de vertu ; / On ne voit point en eux ce faste insupportable, / Et leur dévotion est humaine, est traitable ; / Ils ne censurent point toutes nos actions : / Ils trouvent trop d'orgueil dans ces corrections ; / Et laissant la fierté des paroles aux autres, / C'est par leurs actions qu'ils reprennent les nôtres. (Molière, *Tartuffe*, p. 35)

In short, the exemplar of Christian virtue must be willing to unmask a brazen hypocrite such as Tartuffe, but must be willing to accept the imperfections of the common man, lest he be sucked into a purity spiral. Interestingly, Cléante prescribes moderation here by recoupling virtue with “action”, which deprives the hypocrite of his greatest weapon: language. Moderation, Molière understands, is the remedy for Christianity’s greatest sin. In Molière’s comedy, *Le Misanthrope*, Philinte expresses the same sentiment to his friend Alceste, whom he accuses of expecting too much from men: “And be charitable to human nature; Do not scrutinize it with great austerity, And regard its faults with some tenderness.”<sup>365</sup> Rousseau, one must not forget, took the side of Alceste in his *Lettre à d’Alembert*, dismissing Philinte as a “phlegmatic reasoner” whose hollow musings on the nature of man are calculated only to serve his own interests, to ease his mind and make polite conversation as he dines in luxury.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> See Molière, *Le Misanthrope*, in *Les Oeuvres de M. Molière*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Pierre Husson, 1725), p. 186: “Et faisons un peu grâce à la nature humaine; Ne l'examinons point dans la grande rigueur, Et voyons ses défauts, avec quelque douceur.”

<sup>366</sup> See Rousseau, *Lettre à d’Alembert*, p. 36: “Philinte est le Sage de la Pièce; un de ces honnêtes gens du grand monde, dont les maximes ressemblent beaucoup à celles des fripons; de ces gens si doux, si modérés, qui trouvent toujours que tout va bien, parce qu'ils ont intérêt que rien n'aille mieux; qui sont toujours contents de tout le monde, parce qu'ils ne se soucient de personne; qui, autour d'une bonne table, soutiennent qu'il n'est pas vrai que le peuple ait faim; qui, le gousset bien garni, trouvent fort mauvais qu'on déclame en faveur des pauvres; qui, de leur maison bien fermée, verraient voler, piller, égorger, massacrer tout le genre-humain sans se plaindre: attendu que Dieu les à doués d'une douceur très-méritoire à supporter les malheurs d'autrui. On voit bien que le flegme raisonneur de celui-ci est très-propre à redoubler et faire sortir d'une manière comique les emportements de l'autre.”

### XII. iii. Unmasking the Courtesan: “la masque de l’hypocrisie” in La Bruyère’s *Caractères*

For Molière, unmasking means exposing the hypocrite by “distinguishing virtue from its appearances”, a form of moralism that becomes possible in the Christian context, where virtue depends more on one’s motives than the success of one’s actions. However, Christianity is not the only institution that provides an occasion for unmasking in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Equally ripe for unmasking are all those *faineans*, *âmes universelles*, and *honnêtes gens* of the French court and salon, that *grand monde* where the Epicurean quest for *bons airs* means never taking business and science seriously, nor saying anything that might *choquer le jugement*.<sup>367</sup> Before Rousseau unmasked the *philosophes* in the *Discours*, la Bruyère unmasked would-be *honnêtes hommes* in *Les Caractères* (1687), lifting “le masque de l’hypocrisie [qui] cache la malignité” [the mask of hypocrisy that hides malignance.].<sup>368</sup> La Bruyère’s mocking caricatures of their superficiality, effeminateness, conformity, vanity, politeness and pleasure-seeking bear such a resemblance to Rousseau’s own criticisms of the *philosophes*, that the former’s influence on the latter appears undeniable. Like Molière however, la Bruyère recognizes that there are limits to unmasking, and does not pursue the procedure to the extent that Rousseau does, as we shall see.

La Bruyère’s *Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce siècle* is a modern version of Theophrastus’ own *Characters*.<sup>369</sup> A student of Aristotle, Theophrastus endeavors there to personify the vices identified in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, describing the typical comportment of, say, the flatterer, the coward, the backbiter, etc. Interestingly, Theophrastus personifies what might be translated

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<sup>367</sup> See chapter IV for a study of the French courts and salons of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>368</sup> Jean de la Bruyère, *Les Caractères de la Bruyère, suivis des Caractères des Théophraste* (Paris: Librairie d’Abel Ledoux, 1836), p. 233.

<sup>369</sup> Theophrastus, *The Characters of Theophrastus*, trans. J. M. Edmonds (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).



as “dissembling”; however, he does not chose the Greek word *ὑπόκρισις* [*hypokrisis*] to explain this phenomenon, as one might suppose, but rather *ειρωνεία* [*eironeia*], which literally means “one who acts on the stage” and is the etymology of our word “irony”.<sup>370</sup> Theophrastus defines dissembling as “an affection of the worse in word and deed” (Theophrastus, *Characters*, p. 41). The dissembler therefore feigns, exaggerates and downplays his emotions, which do not accord with his actions and words. Unlike the hypocrite, he is not hiding his true motives, but rather his emotions. He’s a dramatic. The difference between the Christian and pagan moral frameworks becomes particularly apparent when we examine La Bruyère’s translation of this classical work, which the Frenchman published with his own *Caractères*. La Bruyère does indeed translate the Greek *eironeia* as “dissimulation”, but he places a spurious phrase at the end of his translation of Theophrastus’ chapter on dissembling: “Ces manières d’agir ne partent point d’une âme simple et droite, mais d’une mauvaise volonté, ou d’un homme qui veut nuire ; le venin des aspics est moins à craindre.” (La Bruyère, *Caractères*, p. 388) The serpent’s “venom [...] is to be feared less” than the dissembler, La Bruyère writes. Theophrastus makes no such reference to the serpent, the primeval deceiver of the Old Testament, nor does he ever speak of the dissembler with such enmity. This might be regarded as further proof that Christianity provides the moral framework in which the concept of hypocrisy gains traction, and thereby makes unmasking possible.<sup>371</sup> La

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<sup>370</sup> See Harold C. Knutson, “Three Characters in Search of a Vice: The Hypocrite in Theophrastus, Joseph Hall and La Bruyère”, in *Dalhousie French Studies* 27 (Summer 1994): 51 – 63: “With this background in place, we may now examine the first of our three Characters (Edmonds 41-43), the one that Theophrastus rather innocuously calls “the dissembler” (or “the dissimulator,” “the insincere man,” depending upon the translation). The Greek word rendered as “dissembler” is *eiron*, not *hypokrites*, as one might expect; the latter still carried in Classical times the relatively neutral meaning of ‘one who acts on the stage’”. (p. 55)

<sup>371</sup> It should be noted that La Bruyère did not produce the first modern version of Theophrastus’ *Characters*, but rather Joseph Hall, Bishop of Exeter. In his *Characters of Virtue and Vice* (1608), Hall also manifests a tendency to render *eironeia* through the lens of the Christian moral framework, and even translates the word as “hypocrisy”. See Joseph Hall, *Characters of Virtue and Vice*, in *The Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall*, vol. IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1863), p. 106.

Bruyère's *Caractères* is, I believe, an attempt to see the *grand monde* of the court through the lens of this moral framework, and rather than exposing the sinner, hopes to unmask something secular: the vanity of self-proclaimed *honnêtes hommes*. In words that sound like Jean-Jacques' own, La Bruyère affirms in the preface that "l'amour-propre est dans l'homme la cause tous ses faibles" [vanity is the cause of all man's weaknesses] (Ibid., p.382).

La Bruyère further develops the concept of unmasking not only (1) by applying it within a secular context, but also (2) by creating a catalogue of masks. Molière only exposes one type of hypocrite, Tartuffe. Relying on Theophrastus' *Characters* however, La Bruyère paints a portrait of every vice that hides behind the courtesan's mask. And although the characters—Théodote, Narcisse, Isphis, etc.—that La Bruyère exposes are fictional, they often bore such a resemblance to specific courtesans that his readers were inspired to unmask their living models.<sup>372</sup> Whether this is an indented consequence or not, it means that, in distinction from Molière, La Bruyère is also (3) encouraging the practice of unmasking. Let us then analyze some of the characters that this modern Theophrastus exposes.

In a chapter entitled "De la société et de la conversation", La Bruyère unmasks the man without character and wit,<sup>373</sup> who does everything to seem like a "homme universel", boasting about all the places that he has visited, all the books that he has read, all the courtesans in Paris

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<sup>372</sup> See Knutson, "Three Characters in Search of a Vice: The Hypocrite in Theophrastus, Joseph Hall and La Bruyère", p. 58 - 59: "Thus French criticism invariably refers to La Bruyère's portraits, a practice all the more justified as the author often had real people in mind in his satirical images. A whole literature of clés followed in the wake of the book's success; while many of the attributions are conjectural, a number seem entirely convincing."

<sup>373</sup> "Un caractère bien fade est celui de n'en avoir aucun." (La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, p. 77)

whom he knows, etc., but has nothing original or intelligent to say about these subjects. Such is the character Arrias, or superficiality manifest:

Arrias a tout lu, a tout vu, il veut le persuader ainsi ; c'est un homme universel, et il se donne pour tel [...]. Quelqu'un se hasarde de la contredire, et lui prouve nettement qu'il dit des choses qui ne sont pas vrais. Arrias ne se trouble point, prend feu au contraire contre l'interrupteur : 'Je n'avance, lui dit-il, je [ne] raconte rien que je ne sache d'original: je l'ai appris de Sethon, ambassadeur de France dans cette cour [...].' (Ibid., p. 79)

Note the use of hyperbole here: "Arrias has read everything, has seen everything". To unmask, certain features of the mask must first be highlighted. The character must be caricaturized. The danger of unmasking presents itself early on, for Arrias might respond by unmasking La Bruyère as an exaggerator; hence, the unmasker always risks being unmasked himself. Nevertheless, La Bruyère equally takes aim at the distinctions of class and material wealth of which a man might boast in order to appear universal or worldly:

il ne vous coûtera bientôt pour le connaître que de l'avoir écouté : vous saurez son nom, sa demeure, son pays, l'état de son bien, son emploi, celui de son père, la famille dont est sa mère, sa parenté, ses alliances, les armes de sa maison ; vous comprendrez qu'il est noble, qu'il a un château, de beaux meubles, des valets, et un carrosse. (Ibid., p. 82)

If any passage in this chapter influenced Rousseau however, then it was La Bruyère's critique of *la politesse*: "La politesse n'inspire pas toujours la bonté, l'équité, la complaisance, la gratitude; elle en donne du moins les apparences, et fait paraître l'homme au dehors comme il devrait être

intérieurement.” [Politeness does not always inspire goodness, equity, complicity, gratitude; it gives at least the appearance of these, and makes man seem on the outside how he ought to be on the inside.] (Ibid., p. 86) Politeness masks what one “ought to be on the inside”, being the product of “imitation” and merely reflective of “time”, “place” and “people” (Ibid.).

That being said, la Bruyère does not roundly condemn politeness as Rousseau does. Rather, despite thinking that it is natural only in a few, he believes that it makes the talents and virtues of others agreeable to us: “Il y a des tempéraments qui ne sont susceptibles que de la politesse; et il y en a d'autres qui ne servent qu'aux grands talents, ou à une vertu solide. Il est vrai que les manières polies donnent cours au mérite, et le rendent agréable [...]” [There are temperaments that are only susceptible to politeness; and there are others that are suited only to great talents, or to a hardy virtue. It's true that polite manners find their expression in merit, and make it agreeable.] (Ibid., p. 86 - 87) Rousseau, to recall, considered politeness the enemy of virtue, and accused the so-called talented of using it to ridicule the common man's virtue and conceal their own viciousness. The case is different with la Bruyère, who does not intend to altogether abandon the model of the *honnête homme*, but instead highlight and repair its corruption. For as he states in the chapter “Des jugements”: “L'honnêteté, les égards et la politesse des personnes avancées en âge de l'un et l'autre sexe me donnent bonne opinion de ce qu'on appelle le vieux temps.” [The honesty, the respect and the politeness of persons advanced in age of both sexes gives me a good opinion of what we call olden times.] (Ibid., p. 246) Previous generations of *honnêtes hommes* were more honest and polite in La Bruyère's judgement. And if they wore “the veil of modesty”, then it did not prevent them from penetrating another's

“heart”, for one should never expect to be able to judge others “at first glance” and with such ease. Returning to La Bruyère’s passage on the mask in “Des jugements”:

Il ne faut pas juger des hommes comme d'un tableau ou d'une figure, sur une seule et première vue : il y a un intérieur et un cœur qu'il faut approfondir. Le voile de la modestie couvre le mérite, et le masque de l'hypocrisie cache la malignité. Il n'y a qu'un très petit nombre de connaisseurs qui discerne, et qui soit en droit de prononcer ; ce n'est que peu à peu, et forcés même par le temps et les occasions, que la vertu parfaite et le vice consommé viennent enfin à se déclarer. (Ibid., p. 233)

While La Bruyère encourages us to unmask the hypocrite, he also encourages us to don the veil of modesty, for like Molière, he appreciates that self-righteous unmasking itself easily becomes a form of hypocrisy. The soul is not so easily plumbed, which is why “there are but a very small number of connoisseurs who should discern, and have the right to pronounce” their judgments. And though, like Rousseau, La Bruyère wishes to deflate “l’orgueil dont nous sommes gonflés” [the pride with which we are inflated] (Ibid., p. 225) and expose the human “heart”, it is not the unmasking style that he adopts, but another.

An admirer of the previous generation of *honnêtes hommes*, I believe that La Bruyère is nostalgic for the *sprezzatura* style, a term that Baldassare Castiglione famously coined in *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528).<sup>374</sup> *Sprezzatura* might be translated as “nonchalance” or the “artless art”. Difficult to define, but easy to explain by example, *sprezzatura* is the man in a tailored Italian suit

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<sup>374</sup> Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901).

who has carelessly done his tie. He appears graceful, but without design and art. As Castiglione writes, *sprezzatura* is the first rule of grace:

But having before now often considered whence this grace springs, laying aside those men who have it by nature, I find one universal rule concerning it [...] and that is to avoid affection to the uttermost [...] and, to use possibly a new word, to practice in everything a certain nonchalance that shall conceal design and show that what is done and said is done without effort and almost without thought. (Castiglione, *Cortegiano*, p. 35)

La Bruyère seems to be harkening back to this style, for in his attempt to unmask the hypocrite without disturbing the veil of modesty, he refers us to the woman who displays a “*grâce naïve*” [naïve or artless grace] (Ibid., p. 235) and “*ne perd rien à être négligée*” [loses nothing by being negligent or nonchalant] (Ibid.). The *sprezzatura* style can be found throughout *Les Caractères*. For instance, in “*De la mode*”, La Bruyère writes that “*le philosophe se laisse habiller par son tailleur : il y a autant de faiblesse à fuir la mode qu’à l’affecter*” [the philosopher allows himself to be dressed by his tailor: there is as much weakness in fleeing fashion as there is in following it.] (Ibid., p. 267) In other words, the philosopher is fashionable, but does not try to be so.

#### **XII. iv. Unmasking the *Philosophe*: Rousseau’s *Premier discours* and *Préface à Narcisse***

As we have already seen, Rousseau’s goal in the *Premiers discours* is to expose the *libido sentiendi* and *dominandi* that come packaged with the *libido sciendi* driving the reestablishment of the sciences and arts, or more simply, to expose the *philosophes*’ much vaunted progress as moral corruption and power-seeking. Again, it is not science and art as such that he is criticizing

here, but rather the effects of their *institutionalization* and *popularization*. Rousseau, however, does not content himself with excoriating Enlightenment progress. For he also takes aim at the *beaux esprits* popularizing it, stripping away their masks of culture and politeness, and exposing them as effeminate hypocrites who live in a world of appearances.<sup>375</sup> La Bruyère simply desires to reform the *honnête homme*; Rousseau, on the other hand, dreams of Cato Sapiens smashing the persona underfoot. On the one hand, Rousseau adopts the unmasking method without the reservations of La Bruyère and Molière, insisting that even the veil of modesty must be torn to shreds along with Alexander the Great's Persian robe. On the other, he is not merely interested in unmasking hypocritical *philosophes*, but also employs the method to unearth the  *cité cynique* and recover the natural virtues "engraved" upon our hearts. In this sense, the *Premier discours* inspires the *Deuxième*. For in order to completely unmask man, one must return to the state of nature, and study man's natural sentiments in their purest form.

In the *Premier discours*, Rousseau characterizes "the Enlightenment" [les lumières] as a "uniform and perfidious veil of politeness" [voile uniforme et perfide de politesse] (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 8) that conceals and gives free reign to man's basest vices. To be sure, the *philosophes* frankly advocated for vices like luxury and idleness, believing them to be not only beneficial to society at large, but also to the goal of advancing knowledge. Therefore, when he refers to the Enlightenment as a veil, Rousseau is painting these goals as deceptive. In the first place, the doctrine of self-interest, which pits men and their "vain talents" (Ibid., p. 15) against

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<sup>375</sup> "Dites-nous, célèbre Arouet, combien vous avez sacrifié de beautés mâles et fortes à notre fausse délicatesse, et combien l'esprit de la galanterie si fertile en petites choses vous en a coûté de grandes." (Rousseau, *Premiers discours*, p. 21)

one another, fails to understand how quickly this meritocratic battle devolves into a battle “to distinguish” (Ibid., p. 19) oneself, whereby even the most talented are crushed by sycophants, flatters and those who will do anything to acquire the appearance of merit. Indeed, this critique closely parallels St. Augustine’s in the *City of God*, where he contends that the Romans initially conceived of their civic virtues to ensure that no tyrannical monarch would ever threaten their freedom again, but gradually came to practice them only to acquire social capital. From this it follows that the scientific institutions around which the *philosophes* hope to organize society will likewise become corrupted by those who are happy to betray the truth to win distinctions and honors. As we have discussed above, the intellectual achieves this by popularizing one scientific view or another, which in the eyes of the public is not merely a method of inquiry but rather an authority to be “trusted” and “believed”. As a result, any dissent from this view, no matter how rigorous, is regarded as “heretical” and “bigoted” in the eyes of the public, which is made to do the bidding of these popularizers. Again, Rousseau confirms Pascal’s view that self-interest and the truth cannot be reconciled.

While there are notable differences between Rousseau’s critique and those of Augustine and Pascal, one might ask if Rousseau’s adds depth to their arguments, or simply points them at different targets. In addition to exposing the hypocrisy of Roman virtue, Augustine even uses the rhetoric of the mask in the *City of God*. In the following passage for instance, he implores us to cast off the false “coverings” [*tegmen*] and deceptive “whitewashes” [*dealbationes*] of pride and glory and to inspect ourselves “sincerely” [*sincero*]: “Fallacia igitur tegmina et deceptoriae dealbationes auferantur a rebus, ut sincero inspiciantur examine. Nemo mihi dicat: Magnus ille atque ille, quia cum illo et illo pugnavit et vicit.” (Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 3, XIV, p. 114). The



difference between Rousseau and Augustine here can be ascribed to the greater demands that the Genevan makes on sincerity, which are a consequence of his belief in the natural goodness of man. The nature of these demands is only hinted at in the *Premier discours*, where Rousseau praises “rusticity” (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 7) as the source of virtue, which he considers to be “engraved upon the heart” (*Ibid.*, p. 30). This belief only becomes clear in the *Deuxième*, where Rousseau explicitly affirms humanity’s natural innocence. Yes, he affirms that humanity is like Glaucus irreparably corrupted. That being said, we still find ourselves one step closer to the possibility of human purity than in Augustine, whose doctrine of original sin precludes this possibility entirely. Rousseau’s narrative, by contrast, is like that of Plato’s Atlantis, which shall forever seduce men into the depths of the ocean. What I mean to say is this: Augustine, despite his language, does not subscribe to the doctrine of unmasking, for not only do his views about original sin, grace and the soul prevent him from doing so, but he also believes that only Christ can lift the veil. By contrast, Rousseau, despite his claim that man’s innocence is lost, will affirm the contrary throughout his life. In the *Confessions* for instance, he claims that when we betray others, it is not because we “have ceased to be just and good in the soul,” but owes instead to the “situations” and circumstances to which we passively submit.<sup>376</sup> It is the pure heart that yearns to be unmasked,<sup>377</sup> not the one tainted by original sin.

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<sup>376</sup> See Rousseau, *Les Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau*, in *Œuvres complètes*, v. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 56: “J’en ai tiré cette grande maxime de morale, la seule peut-être d’usage dans la pratique, d’éviter les situations qui mettent nos devoirs en opposition avec nos intérêts, et qui nous montrent notre bien dans le mal d’autrui, sûr que, dans de telles situations, quelque sincère amour de la vertu qu’on y porte, on faiblit tôt ou tard sans s’en apercevoir, et l’on devient injuste et méchant dans le fait, sans avoir cessé d’être juste et bon dans l’âme.”

<sup>377</sup> As Peter Baehr argues, it is Rousseau’s belief in the purity and simplicity of the heart that inspires his unmasking method, and explains other thinkers were unwilling to adopt. Montaigne, for instance, despises the “dissembler” whose “cowardly and servile humor goes to hide behind the mask,” and even writes “I mortally hate him.” (Cf. “De

On the other hand, in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, one encounters a thinker who believes that the soul is deeply flawed, and can only be saved by the “Grace” of the Lord.<sup>378</sup> Moreover, as Siedentop points out, Augustine cautions against any notion that God’s grace can fully heal or perfect the soul: “For Augustine, it was a fundamental mistake to suppose that the church could become a conspicuous society of ‘perfect’ Christians. Grace did not work like that. [...] No human institution could attain perfection” (Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, p. 108-109). As a result, Augustine advises that even the “spiritual” person who possesses “knowledge of God” should refrain from passing judgement, and instead teach morality through his or her actions. Even “carnal men” are excused by this account, which teaches that even the wisest cannot be certain that the sinner has not taken grace into his or heart:

Here all are equal in thy spiritual grace where, as far as sex is concerned, there is neither male nor female, just as there is neither Jew nor Greek, nor bond nor free. [...] [E]ven though a man is now spiritual and renewed by the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created him, he must be a doer of the law rather than its judge. Neither does the spiritual man judge concerning that division between spiritual and carnal men which is known to thy eyes, O God, and which may not, as yet, be made manifest to us by their external works, so that we may know them by their fruits [...]. (St. Augustine,

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la praesumption”) That being said, Montaigne also admits that all men wear many faces throughout their lifetime, not because they wish to deceive, but because the soul is complex: “Non seulement le vent des accidens me remue selon son inclination, mais en outre je me remue et trouble moy mesme par l'instabilité de ma posture; et qui y regarde primement, ne se trouve guere deux fois en mesme estat. Je donne à mon ame tantost un visage, tantost un autre, selon le costé où je la couche. Si je parle diversement de moy, c'est que je me regarde diversement. Toutes les contrarietez s'y trouvent selon quelque tour et en quelque façon.” (Cf. “De l'inconsistance de nos actions.”) For Baehr’s discussion of Montaigne, cf. *The Unmasking Style in Social Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 139 – 140. <sup>378</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 113: “What shall “wretched man” do? “Who shall deliver him from the body of this death,” except thy grace through Jesus Christ our Lord [...].”

*Confessions*, p. 207-208)

For Augustine, the heart is veiled, not by man's actions or institutions, but by God himself, who alone can lift it. This is affirmed in the *City of God*, where he cites St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians: "Nos vero omnes, revelata facie gloriam Domini speculantes, in eadem imaginem transformamur a claritate in claritatem, tamquam a Domini Spiritu."<sup>379</sup> This passage describes the fulfillment of the New Covenant with Christ, which, as St. Paul states, removes the "veil that lies over their heart" [velamen positum est super cor eorum] since the days of Moses.<sup>380</sup> Unlike the mask, the veil has a strong religious connotation—which is no doubt why authors like Holbach and Marx use the terminology of "unveiling" in their critiques of Christianity. For Rousseau, on the other hand, there is no such sacred veil covering the heart.

In the *Premier discours*, Rousseau does indeed reproach the *philosophes* for attempting to remove "the dense veil with which [Nature] covered all her designs" [Le voile épais dont elle a couvert toutes ses opérations] (Rousseau, *Premier discours*, p. 15), even though, as we know, he will do precisely this in the *Deuxième discours*. One can interpret this reproach in two ways. Either Rousseau is pretending here to be one of those unexceptional common men to whom he advises ignorance, which, as Strauss points out, is part of his rhetorical strategy, or he genuinely believes this to be true, and thus remains closer to Augustine here than in subsequent works. It is difficult to determine which is true. Nevertheless, it is in subsequent works like the *Préface à*

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<sup>379</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, in *The Works of Augustine*, vol. 2, trans. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh : T & T Clarke, 1871), 22, XIX, p. 538. See 2 Cor. 3:18. Vulgate Bible. Bible Foundation and On-Line Book Initiative. Accessed Feb. 20, 2021. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=2+Corinthians+3.18&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0060>

<sup>380</sup> 2 Corinthians 3.15. Jerome. Vulgate Bible. Bible Foundation and On-Line Book Initiative. Accessed Feb. 20, 2021. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=2+Corinthians+3.15&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0060>

*Narcisse*, the *Deuxième discours* and *Émile* that Rousseau will flesh out the unmasking style that he invokes here, and transform it into a method. Two things occur in these works: firstly, nature is unmasked, and secondly, those whom Rousseau unmasks are no longer treated as hypocrites but instead *involuntary hypocrites*, i.e., the victims of “situations.” Treating people as victims of circumstance also represents a departure from Augustine, because it requires depriving them of their autonomy in a way that former was not prepared to do. Both of these points will become clear in what follows.

Rousseau’s *Préface à Narcisse* (1752) continues the critique that he leveled against the *philosophes* in the *Premier discours*, and abandons the veil for the secular concept of the mask. Depicting the arts and sciences as a “simulacre public” [public simulacra] (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 972) there, he accuses the *philosophes* of wearing the “mask of virtue”:

Ce simulacre est une certaine douceur de moeurs qui supplée quelquefois à leur pureté, une certaine apparence d’ordre qui prévient l’horrible confusion, une certaine admiration des belles choses qui empêche les bonnes de tomber tout-à-fait dans l’oubli. C’est le vice qui prend le masque de la vertu, non comme l’hypocrisie pour tromper et trahir, mais pour s’ôter sous cette aimable et sacrée effigie l’horreur qu’il a de lui-même quand il se voit à découvert. (*Ibid.*)

Interestingly, Rousseau writes that it’s not the hypocrite whom we hopes to unmask, but rather the man who wears “this amiable and sacred effigy” to evade his own reflection, to escape “the horror that he has of himself when he sees himself uncovered”. Make no mistake, the man who is unable to gaze upon his own reflection is far more insidious than the hypocrite. For while the

latter knows that he is a deceiver, the former deceives involuntarily, by second nature. Nothing prevents Tartuffe from removing his mask in private and gazing upon his own reflection, just as *Le Neveu de Rameau* cynically and frankly embraces his own hypocrisy—which is admirable in a way.<sup>381</sup> More wretched than Ovid’s Narcissus, who is enamored with his own face, Rousseau’s is in love with his mask. Thus, in Rousseau’s play *Narcisse*, Valere does not fall in love with his own reflection, but rather with a portrait of himself made to resemble a woman, covered in makeup and observing all the fashionable trends of the day. Spending hours in his *toilette*, Valere is the feminized product of salon culture, a travestied and artificial man enthralled by his effeminate mask.<sup>382</sup> He does not primarily deceive others, but himself. This updated version of Narcissus is the *hyper-socialized* human. Thoroughly corrupted by the *institutionalization* of every aspect of life, the sciences and arts being only one, he deceives without design. An unwitting sprezzatura, he resembles nothing of “the good man [...] who contents himself to fight in the nude” [l’homme du bien ... qui se plaît à combattre nu]” (Rousseau, *Premiers discours*, p. 8).

The hyper-socialized man is already contrasted with the “savage” [Sauvage] (Rousseau, *Préface à Narcisse*, p. 970, footnote) in the *Préface*, where the former is accused of advancing his self-interest at the expense of others, and the latter praised for advancing his alongside his fellows: “Among the savages [...] nothing causes them to deceive one another; public esteem is

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<sup>381</sup> See Denis Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, in *Œuvres choisies de Diderot*, vol. 2 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1880), p. 54. In the words of *Lui*: “Quand je lis le Tartuffe, je me dis : Sois hypocrite, si tu veux ; mais ne parle pas comme l’hypocrite. Garde des vices qui te sont utiles ; mais n’en aie ni le ton ni les apparences qui te rendraient ridicule. Pour se garantir de ce ton, de ces apparences, il faut les connaître. Or, ces auteurs en ont fait des peintures excellentes. Je suis moi et je reste ce que je suis ; mais j’agis et je parle comme il convient.”

<sup>382</sup> See Rousseau, *Narcisse ou l’amant de lui-même*, p. 1010. As Lucinde expresses, “Valere est, par sa délicatesse et par l’affectation de sa parure, une espèce de femme cachée sous des habits d’homme, et ce portrait, ainsi travesti, semble moins le déguiser que le rendre à son état naturel.”

the only good to which each aspires” [Parmi les sauvages ... rien ne les porte à se tromper l’un l’autre ; l’estime publique est le seul bien auquel chacun aspire]. (Ibid.) As in the first *Discours*, Rousseau has the  *cité cynique*  of early Rome in mind here. Though this nation was founded by “a troop of bandits” [une troupe des], Rousseau states—no doubt affirming the judgement of those like Diderot—within a “few generations the most virtuous people who ever existed” [peu de générations le plus vertueux people qui ait jamais existé] (Ibid.) appeared there. To be clear, what Rousseau is affirming here is that circumstances make the savage good, since, unlike the hyper-socialized man, he can only pursue his self-interest by supporting his small community. In fact, Rousseau even contends that if the savage does an evil deed, he cannot make it a “habit” (Ibid.), because there is nothing to gain from it in the long run in simple societies, where a few betrayals suffice to destroy the whole tribe. Here too Rousseau diverges from Augustine, as his solution is to recreate the circumstances in which Roman civic virtue was born, so as to align the self-interest (i.e., what he shall call  *l’amour de soi-même*  in the second  *Discours* ) of society’s members. Rousseau is mainly interested in how circumstances corrupt the soul, rather than our individual choices. And this interest, which leads him to focus upon the  *unwitting hypocrite* , will also lead him to reimagine how we see the subject in the  *Deuxième discours* . When for instance Durkheim, Weber and other sociologists examine the reasons behind religion, they are studying the different social goals that believers  *unwittingly*  accomplish. That is, they are unmasking the true reasons behind their faith while also denying that the believers themselves autonomously decide on them—for if they did, then such studies would be pointless.

For Rousseau’s predecessors, unmasking serves to expose the incongruence between a man’s actions and intentions, and therefore to paint him as a hypocrite. This method of critique

supposes a moral framework that separates men from their actions, social status, etc., in order to study the being behind them. In the Christian context, that being is the soul, and unmasking exposes the hypocritical sinner. For Rousseau however, this being is the pre-social man, who might not even know his true intentions—especially if he lacks theoretical knowledge of the state of nature. In short, Rousseau calls into question our autonomy or authorship over our intentions. Rousseau, of course, was not the first thinker to articulate this pre-social individual in the state of nature, as Hobbes had done so before him. However, he is the first to adopt the unmasking style in order to formulate a critique of society that makes the pre-social individual its point of reference, and we see how effective this critique is, for Rousseau even mobilizes it in the *Deuxième discours* to unmask Hobbes ‘artificial’ natural man.

While we cannot pursue the subject to great length here, this should help us understand how Rousseau, despite expressing a hatred for hypocrisy throughout his life,<sup>383</sup> often excuses his own hypocrisy. For instance, in the *Rêveries*, Rousseau plainly contends that morality would have been satisfied if, rather than lying, he merely told a young girl to mind her business when she asked him if he had abandoned all of his kids at the orphanage.<sup>384</sup> Rousseau is interested in hypocrisy, not as an abuse of autonomy, but rather as a product of circumstance. Hence why he

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<sup>383</sup> Consider, for instance, his response to the King of Poland in the *Observations*, where he thrashes Rochefoucauld’s claim that “l’hypocrisie est un hommage que le vice rend à la vertu.” There, he writes that hypocrisy is no more than a “cloak” for concealing meanness: “Non, couvrir sa méchanceté du dangereux manteau de l’hypocrisie, ce n’est point honorer la vertu; c’est l’outrager en profanant ses enseignes; c’est ajouter la lacheté et la fourberie à tous les autres vices; c’est se fermer pour jamais tout retour vers la probité.” (Rousseau, *Observations*, p. 52)

<sup>384</sup> “Il y a quelque temps que M. Foulquier m’engagea contre mon usage à aller avec ma femme dîner, en manière de pique-nique, avec lui et son ami Benoît chez la dame Vacassin, restauratrice, laquelle et ses deux filles dînèrent aussi avec nous. Au milieu du dîner, l’aînée, qui est mariée et qui était grosse, s’avisa de me demander brusquement et en me fixant si j’avais eu des enfants. Je répondis en rougissant jusqu’aux yeux que je n’avais pas eu ce bonheur. Elle sourit malignement en regardant la compagnie : tout cela n’était pas bien obscur, même pour moi.” (Rousseau, *Rêveries*, p. 1034)

claims that he only lied “mechanically” [mechanically]<sup>385</sup> in this case. Rousseau’s understanding of human intentionality clearly presents a danger here. For not only does it allow one to avoid responsibility for obviously insensitive acts, such as this one, but it also tends to deprive people of their autonomy, even if the author claims that his goal is to restore autonomy. For instance, Freud’s conception of the id-ego-superego structure has its merits, and might be justly used to “uncover” desires,<sup>386</sup> but one can easily see how accusing an advocate of chastity of unwittingly desiring to have sex with his mother can be abusive. The same is true of Marx, who exposes or unveils God as a fiction and means of exploitation,<sup>387</sup> and of Adorno and Marcuse, who unmask the White liberal family as crypto-fascists.<sup>388</sup> In each of these cases, a second model for society is proposed, and anyone who fails to meet its standards is regarded not as hypocritical, but as an unwitting phony, mental patient, oppressor or authoritarian. Such critiques ultimately rely on Rousseau’s unmasking style, which does not content itself with excoriating a few artificers, as La

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<sup>385</sup> In *Les Rêveries*, Rousseau presents the lies and fictions that he invented throughout his life as “l’effet machinal de [son] embarras” (p. 1034), as if they were merely the consequence of his artificial or social self, whose concern for appearances made lying second nature.

<sup>386</sup> Freud, for instance, speaks of “uncovering” [aufdecken] the “unconscious repressed roots” of moral guilt in *Das Ich und das Es* (Göttingen: Liwi Verlag, 2020), p. 30, footnote #2: “Der Kampf gegen das Hindernis des unbewußten Schuldgefühls wird dem Analytiker nicht leicht gemacht. Man kann direkt nichts dagegen tun, indirekt nichts anderes, als daß man langsam seine unbewußt verdrängten Begründungen aufdeckt, wobei es sich allmählich in bewußtes Schuldgefühl verwandelt.”

<sup>387</sup> Marx speaks of a religion as an “illusion” [Illusionen] hiding behind a “veil of tears” [Jammertales] in *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, in *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. I (Berlin: Verlag, 1972), p. 378: “Die Aufhebung der Religion als des *illusorischen* Glücks des Volkes ist die Forderung seines *wirklichen* Glücks. Die Forderung, die Illusionen über seinen Zustand aufzugeben, ist die *Forderung, einen Zustand aufzugeben, der der Illusionen bedarf*. Die Kritik der Religion ist also im *Keim* die *Kritik des Jammertales*, dessen *Heiligenschein* die Religion ist.”

<sup>388</sup> See *The Authoritarian Personality* (London: Verso, 2019), p. 150, where Adorno compares explicit fascism to the implicit fascism of “large numbers of ordinary citizens”: “We can now consider the ethnocentric solution to problems of group conflict. The ingroup must be kept pure and strong. The only methods of doing this are to liquidate the outgroups altogether, to keep them entirely subordinate, or to segregate them in such a way as to minimize contact with the ingroups. The first method represents politicalized ethnocentrism— fascism and the dissolution of democratic values. This method so obviously violates traditional American values of nonviolence, fairness, and equal opportunity that it has found relatively little support in this country. The second and third methods are supported, however, by large numbers of ordinary citizens.”



Bruyère does, but instead condemns all of society as artificial, clearing the way for other models to take its place. This becomes evident in the second *Discours*, to which we shall return. For the moment, we must determine the role played by autonomy and sincerity in Rousseau's account of unmasking, as his versions of these differ from the ancients'.

## **XII. v. Unmasking the Self: Rousseau's Reconceptualization of Autonomy and Sincerity**

We have determined the aspects of Rousseau's unmasking style that distinguish it from his predecessors', and qualify it as a unique method of philosophical inquiry. The foundation of this method, as we have also seen, is buttressed by numerous sources from antiquity. (1) When Rousseau frames scientific progress as a potential source of moral decay and an opportunity for power-hungry pseudo-scientists to subvert the nation, Augustine's argument that *libido sciendi* is often attended by desires for luxury and power—*libido sentiendi* and *libido dominandi*—is in the background. (2) In contrast to this degenerate city of man, as it were, Rousseau proposes the ideal city—the  *cité cynique*—that he discovers in Roman authors like Tacitus, Sallust, and perhaps most importantly Seneca. Reflecting on the simplicity of earlier times, Seneca argues that philosophical doctrines [*docti*] multiply in proportion to our desires [*libidos*]. Drawing on these ancient authors, modernity is characterized by all the desires that humanity has amassed since its early days, and to cite Epictetus' maxim, by the multiplication of “that which does not depend on us.” In this light, the *docti* of so-called progress appear as no more than justifications for moral degeneracy and human dependency. A walk through nature no longer suffices to put man's mind at ease. He needs spectacles—in Rousseau's day, the theatre, and in ours, movies, television, pop fiction, pornography and so forth. The Spartan spoke his truth in the forum, but the *philosophe*

must wade through the social networks of the salon, the vast bureaucracies of academia, and in short, make himself subservient to a list of institutions. On the other hand, in the *cit  cynique* there reigns Xenophon’s ancient ideal of autarky [*autarkeia*], or self-sufficiency [*auta + arkeia*]. To attain self-sufficiency, one must not only master one’s environment, but first and foremost one’s desires; hence the ideal of self-mastery [*en + krateia*]. Rousseau’s ideal of autonomy, which means self-law [*auto + nomos*] in Greek, ultimately stems from these ancient moral ideals. But his account of them is unique, if not more profound.

Rousseau’s conception of these differs insofar as the Genevan believes that autonomy requires something more in the modern era, where the exponential growth of rules, customs, academies and institutions in general not only expands our desires, but also—through a process of socialization—multiplies the number of masks that we must wear. Again, one must first become an “expert,” “respectable,” “enlightened,” etc., to state the truth. Modernity is a great mask factory. Thus, the modern autonomous man must not only master his desires, but also recover his sense of self, what Jean-Jacques calls “mon  me [...] d chir e” [my shredded ... soul] in a letter to M. de Saint-Germain.<sup>389</sup> If modernity furnishes the individual with a unique opportunity for discovering his sense of self, then according to Rousseau, it is because modern hyper-socialization makes the ‘self’ known by its lack, by the inner void one feels after being ran through its institutional shredders. Recovering one’s sense of self not only means mastering the desires—for material wealth, social acceptance, etc.—that typically cause one to accept the law

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<sup>389</sup> See Rousseau, *Rousseau   M. de Saint-Germain, February 26, 1770*, in *Oeuvres compl tes de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 25 (Bruxelles: Th. Lejeune, 1888), p. 100: “[...] enfin l’on aura soin de r pandre une telle horreur de mois sur ma route, qu’  chaque pas que je ferai,   chaque objet que je verrai, mon  me soit d chir e: ce qui n’emp chera pas que, trait  comme Sancho, je ne re oive partout cent courbettes moqueuses, avec autant de compliments de respect et d’admiration : ce sont de ces politesses de tigres qui semblent vous sourire au moment qu’ils vont vous d chirer.”

of another contrary to one's own will, but also removing the masks and determining one's true self, which is captured by concepts like "amour de soi-même" [self-love] in the *Deuxième discours* and "le sentiment d'existence" [the sentiment of existence] in the *Rêveries*. This sense of self contrasts with one's identity, which is captured by the concept of "amour propre" [vanity]. However, and this must be emphasized, Rousseau does not entirely reject *amour propre*, and would no doubt accuse those who wish to overcome all "identity politics" whatsoever as having a superficial understanding of humanity. Indeed, as Michael L. McLendon persuasively argues in *The Psychology of Inequality: Rousseau's 'Amour-Propre'*, the concept of *amour propre* has its roots in Augustine's *amour sui*, and played a central role in the work of Jansenists like Pierre Nicole and Blaise Pascal; however, despite the fact that each regarded *amour propre* as one of the main sources of vice and corruption, in the end not one argues that it can or should be abolished.<sup>390</sup> Likewise, lest one abandons society to become a *promeneur solitaire*, Rousseau believes that the corrupting effects of identity and the desire to distinguish oneself are best mitigated by adopting a national identity, which promotes a practical and easily fulfilled sense of sympathy for one's neighbor, as opposed to the nebulous sympathy of the cosmopolitan. To be clear, Rousseau prioritizes this identity because he thinks that it reduces the effects of identity more than any other—of course, Augustine, who primarily directed his critique of *amour sui* at the pagan Roman Republic, would not agree. Moreover, it should be clear that autonomy for

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<sup>390</sup> See Michael L. McLendon, *The Psychology of Inequality: Rousseau's Amour-Propre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 84: "Thus, as with Augustine, the neo-Augustinians make no effort to reconcile competing views of *amour-propre* in their works. They appear to accept the darker strands of Augustine's thought that pride in excellence is a dangerous sin. They then minimize these concerns by embracing the most optimistic strands of thinking in Augustine and make them the mainsprings of their political thought, even arguing that pride in excellence and rationality is a net social positive."

Rousseau precludes many identities, such as those based on consumption or spectacles, e.g., being a ‘Marvel fan’.

Indeed, I would even argue that for Rousseau, the man or woman who self-prescribes the law never *chooses* his or her identity. Rather, he or she discovers it in the organic bonds of their community, in what Rousseau calls the “general will.”<sup>391</sup> As Pierre Manent has indicated, from the perspective of the people, this will applies generally or indiscriminately, but from the perspective of humanity as such, it is anything but general. For it is not reducible to laws that apply to humans as such, but rather to the particular character of a people, their history, their mores, and ultimately what Rousseau refers to as the “national physiognomy” imprinted upon their souls. (See Rousseau, *Considérations*, p. 960). In other words, and as Strauss also confirms, one discovers one’s individuality within one’s national philosophy:

According to Rousseau, civil society is essentially a particular, or more precisely a closed, society. A civil society, [Rousseau] holds, can be healthy only if it has a character of its own, and this requires that its individuality be produced or fostered by national and exclusive institutions. Those institutions must be animated by a national ‘philosophy’ by a way of thinking that is not transferable to other societies: ‘the philosophy of each people is little apt for another people.’ (Strauss, “On the Intentions of Rousseau, p. 473)

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<sup>391</sup> In “Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Origins of Autonomy,” *Inquiry* 54:5 (2011): 478 – 493, Friedrich Neuhausser similarly recognizes the paradoxical nature of Rousseau’s account of autonomy, which requires us to submit to the general will to restore our autonomy. However, I disagree with Neuhausser about the nature of this submission. For he seems to primarily understand it in terms of (1) “material equality” (p. 488) and (2) “equal moral authority” (p. 491). I do not disagree that (1) but rather (2), as I believe that for Rousseau, autonomy certainly means submitting to a higher authority (the “common good”), which pertains to the character or identity of a people. This aspect of Rousseau’s vision of autonomy seems to be lacking in Neuhausser’s account.

The idea that the citizen must choose his national identity in order to freely give himself the law seems paradoxical. For, as we've established above, while this national identity allows a people to form very real bonds, and augments perfectly natural sentiments like pity, the identity itself is not natural. Further, those philosophers and scientists who are not antagonistic to the nation, but instead teach the people their duties, are meant to achieve this by consciously advocating for something artificial. The question thus arises: is Rousseau's position here not hypocritical? Is he not merely swapping one mask for another? Ruth W. Grant answers this question well, and in a way that is consistent with Strauss' and Manent's readings. In *Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics* (1999), she argues that Rousseau's moralism is not as uncompromising as his rhetoric and commentators often suggest. As she indicates, Rousseau makes clear in the fourth promenade of the *Rêveries* that he is not opposed to lying per se. Rather, he is only opposed to lying for his own benefit, but gladly does so for that of others. As Grant writes: "Speaking loosely and anachronistically, Rousseau seems to lean in a Kantian direction in acting on his own behalf and in a consequentialist direction in acting on behalf of others."<sup>392</sup> This double standard seems to be rooted in Rousseau's belief that people are not rational in the way that philosophers like Habermas and Kant presume them to be. This is an interesting take, for Kant claims that it was Rousseau who inspired his faith in the common man,<sup>393</sup> which likely contributed in some way to

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<sup>392</sup> Ruth W. Grant, *Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 121.

<sup>393</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Remarks in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, trans. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 20: 44: "I myself am a researcher by inclination. I feel the entire thirst for cognition and the eager restlessness to proceed further in it, as well as the satisfaction at every acquisition. There was a time when I believed this alone could constitute the honor of mankind, and I despised the rabble who knows nothing. Rousseau has set me right. This blinding prejudice vanishes, I learn to honor human beings, and I would feel by far less useful than the common laborer if I did not believe that this consideration could impart a value to all others in order to establish the rights of humanity."

the categorical imperative, and thus the demand that men always treat one another as rational beings. In any case, it follows that citizens cannot be expected to respect the conditions of the social compact, i.e., political equality, without some guile.

If this is true, then Rousseau seems to avoid the accusation of hypocrisy, which assumes that one is lying *in one's own interest*. It does not however change the fact that he is advocating for a sort of mask, i.e., national physiognomy. Then again, society is essentially corrupt, so one cannot hope to entirely liberate him from the mask, lest he be sent back to the state of nature. In this way, Grant's thesis, which seeks to close the distance between Rousseau and Machiavelli would also seem to bring the Genevan closer to Burke, who cautions against tearing down what he calls "the decent drapery of life." Likewise, Rousseau would caution against Poles, Germans, Frenchmen, etc., from discarding their "national physiognomy" to instead become Europeans. Rousseau's reasons for wanting to conserve this drapery, as it were, are very different however. In fact, they are not conservative at all, but rather forward-looking. For reaffirming this identity promises greater autonomy and sincerity. Having examined this paradox, we can now examine how these two concepts motivate Rousseau's unmasking critique.

Baehr argues that Rousseau fired "the opening salvo in the unmasking war", tracing the Genevan's impetus to his insistence on the uniquely modern "qualities of sincerity, authenticity and, probably at their root, autonomy" (Baehr, *The Unmasking Style*, p. 17). Because he is more interested in describing the "ingredients", "theoretical cogency" and "political effects" (Ibid., p. 9) of unmasking than writing a genealogy of the style, Baehr does not explain exactly why these qualities compelled Rousseau to push unmasking further than either Molière or Montaigne. He

is however relying upon Lionel Trilling's reading of Rousseau in *Sincerity and Authenticity* which, interestingly enough, purports to uncover these qualities in the first *Discours*.<sup>394</sup>

According to Trilling, the primary focus of Rousseau's critique of the sciences and arts is their socializing aspect, or their capacity "to render men more sociable by inspiring in them the desire to please themselves and others" [de rendre les hommes plus sociables en leur inspirant le désir de se plaire les uns aux autres] (Rousseau, *Premiers discours*, p. 6). This passage is cited by Trilling, who finds its motivation in something like "English sincerity" and a modern sense of "personal autonomy". By contrast with its French version, English sincerity requires that one be able to "communicate without deceiving or misleading" (Ibid., p. 58). Emerson paints a portrait of such sincere Englishmen in his *English Traits* (1909) for instance, claiming that: "They require you to be of your own opinion, and they hate the coward who cannot in practical affairs answer yes or no. They dare to displease, nay, they will let you break all the rules if you do it natively and with spirit. You must be somebody; then you may do this or that as you will."<sup>395</sup> Rousseau, who thinks that the *beaux arts* in particular make men weak, idle, cowardly and slavish—as we have seen above—would surely have admired such men.<sup>396</sup> Trilling therefore concludes that "English sincerity was at the heart of Rousseau's political thought. The work which won for Rousseau his initial fame was the so-called *First Discourse*, to which the concept of sincerity is central." (Ibid., p. 60) Characteristics like cowardice and laziness not only prevent one from expressing oneself sincerely however, but more importantly, from developing a sense of "personal autonomy"

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<sup>394</sup> See Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 60 – 63 and 94.

<sup>395</sup> Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 125 – 126. This passage is cited from Ralph Waldo Emerson's *English Traits*, ed. H. M. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 66 – 67.

<sup>396</sup> See XI. ii. The Fruits of an Abstract Education: Weak, Idle, Cowardly and Slavish Men.

(Ibid.). Drawing on David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, Trilling identifies this autonomy-deficient individual as the "other-directed" man, who, lacking not only the ancient virtue of "self-sufficiency" but also the modern one of "self-definition" (Ibid., p. 66), passes through life as "a reiterated impersonation":

Rousseau is concerned to foster a human type whose defining characteristic is autonomy, the will and strength to make strict choice among the elements of our enforced life in society. Put it that he is aesthetically revolted by the trashiness of what, some twenty years ago, David Riesman called the 'other-directed' personality, [...] whose whole being is attuned to catch the signals sent out by [...] institutional agencies of the culture, to the extent that he is scarcely a self at all, but, rather, a reiterated impersonation. (Ibid.)

Again, Rousseau's autonomous man is not only free from desire, but also from all those modern institutions, those so-called mask factories, where men and women are hollowed out.

Just as Rousseau's conception of autonomy differs from the stoical one, so too does his understanding of sincerity, which is neither reducible to the virtue that Aristotle describes in his *Nicomachean ethics*, nor to this early modern English version. For after unmasking these *beaux esprits* in his *Premier discours*, and then all of society in his *Deuxième discours*, Rousseau must prove himself sufficiently autonomous to be dignified of unmasking the world. In other words, he must unmask himself and reveal the purity of his heart to the world. Hence the *Confessions*, at the beginning of which Rousseau expresses his ambition to "unveil his interior": "I presented myself such that I was; detestable and vile when I was; good, generous, sublime when I was; I unveiled my interior such as you saw yourself." [Je me suis montré tel que je fus ; méprisable et



vil quand je l'ai été, bon, généreux, sublime, quand je l'ai été : j'ai dévoilé mon intérieur tel que tu l'as vu toi-même.] (Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 5) Reflecting on the significance of Rousseau's *Confessions*, Trilling writes that: "The person who is depicted in that great work may repel us; but the author of the *Discourses* has the more power over us because he is the subject of the *Confessions*. He is the man; he suffered; he was there." (Ibid., p. 24) In other words, Rousseau's unmasking style ultimately obliges him to adopt the autobiographical one, and to pursue a type of sincerity that Aristotle would have judged self-deprecating and thus extreme. Subsequent unmaskers have not dared to unmask themselves with the same sincerity, detracting no doubt from their credibility—for instance, we only know of Marx's betrayal of his wife from his private letters and secondary sources.<sup>397</sup> In any case, Rousseau's autobiographical works are based on the same social vs. pre-social dichotomy, and seek to sincerely expose the author's hypocrisies and flaws as the effects of socialization by retreating to the pre-social self. Hence, the opening lines of the *Rêveries* read: "Me voici donc seul sur la terre, n'ayant plus de frere, de prochain, d'ami, de société que moi-même. Le plus sociable et le plus aimant des humains en a été proscrit par un accord unanime." [Thus alone on earth, having not brother, no fellow, no friend, no society but myself. The most sociable and the most loving of humans was proscribed from it by unanimous accord.] (Rousseau, *Rêveries*, p. 995) For Rousseau, autobiography is an exercise in

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<sup>397</sup> See Mary Gabriel, *Love and Capital: Karl and Jenny Marx and the Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012), p. ii : "those who wanted to keep Marx perched atop a socialist pedestal fought for years to deny that he was the father of Helene Demuth's son, Freddy. Letters existed in the archives in Moscow in which party members discussed Freddy's birth, but Joseph Stalin, when told of them by David Ryazanov, director of the Marx-Engels Institute, called it a "petty affair" and instructed Ryazanov to "let it be buried deep in the archives." The letters were not publishes for some fifty years."

self-unmasking, an attempt to discover the pre-social or natural self, or what Rousseau shall ultimately call the “le sentiment de l’existence” [the sentiment of existence] (Ibid., p. 1047).

Finally, Trilling uncovers something like a nascent version of authenticity in the *Premier discours*. However, we must tread carefully here, for authenticity is a concept unfamiliar to the Enlightenment, and only became a part of our vocabulary following Martin Heidegger’s use of the term in *Being and Time* (1927). There, authenticity [*Eigentlichkeit*] means something along the lines of “being one’s own” or “being at home” in the world.<sup>398</sup> But these are concepts that can only be made sense of within the context of Heidegger’s radical ontology, the explication of which would require a lengthy digression. Suffice to say, this ontology would regard Rousseau’s *sentiment of existence* as an inauthentic mode of being, given its dependence on romantic and humanist ideals that fail to reflect the limits of man’s (or *Dasein*’s) spatio-temporal being. To be more precise, the romantic reduction of nature per se to an idyllic state of nature, as well as the humanist reduction of humanity to a universal model (i.e., *l’homme sauvage*), both presuppose an ability to grasp and pin down the essential aspects of existence once and for all, and thereby deny or cover up the existential limits of our being from which we derive meaning. For instance, my limited nature, and ultimately my mortality, mean that I can only dedicate my affections to so many people in a lifetime, but my love for them appears all the more meaningful because of this. And just as I cannot truly love humanity as such, neither can I truly love nature as such—as

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<sup>398</sup> See Somogy Varga, “Authenticity”, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified February 20, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/authenticity/>: “The most familiar conception of “authenticity” comes to us mainly from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* of 1927. The word we translate as ‘authenticity’ is actually a neologism invented by Heidegger, the word *Eigentlichkeit*, which comes from an ordinary term, *eigentlich*, meaning ‘really’ or ‘truly’, but is built on the stem *eigen*, meaning ‘own’ or ‘proper’. So the word might be more literally translated as ‘ownedness’, or ‘being owned’, or even ‘being one’s own’, implying the idea of owning up to and owning what one is and does.”

some abstract concept. Rather, nature becomes meaningful to me, becomes something worthy of preserving, when I recognize all the ways that it determines and guides my being. The forest passage that I walked as a youth, the eagles convening on an icy lake soaked in red dawn, these experiences make nature a part of me, precluding any possibility of becoming a purely abstract subject that might stand above it. When I recognize the influence of such experiences over me, over the possibilities of my being, I am “my own” or “at home” in the world. Authenticity might then be defined as an appreciation for our limits, which in turn keeps us ‘open’ to new forms of meaning, and ultimately Being per se.<sup>399</sup> This should not however make us think of all those so-called ‘open-minded’ types that Lasch identifies as members of the “cult of authenticity”, those a-historical hedonists whose hallowed motto is ‘do your own thing’, and who become indignant at the slightest contradiction of their universalist creed of individualism and progressivism;<sup>400</sup> no doubt, few are willing to swallow the pills that Heidegger is offering.<sup>401</sup> As for Jean-Paul Sartre’s

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<sup>399</sup> Heidegger explains the concept of “openness” [Offenheit] in his essay “What is Metaphysics?”, which was presented to a general audience, and is therefore more accessible. See Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 283: “Once ‘existence’ is understood correctly, the ‘essence’ of Dasein can be thought, in whose openness Being itself announces and conceals itself, grants itself and withdraws; at the same time, this truth of Being does not exhaust itself in Dasein, nor can it by any means simply be identified with it after the fashion of the metaphysical proposition that all objectivity is as such also subjectivity.”

<sup>400</sup> See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in the Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 4 – 5: “Having no hope of improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement: getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to “relate,” overcoming the “fear of pleasure.” Harmless in themselves, these pursuits, elevated to a program and wrapped in the rhetoric of authenticity and awareness, signify a retreat from politics and a repudiation of the recent past.”

<sup>401</sup> Heidegger’s philosophy is much more conservative than his use of words like “openness” would suggest. See for instance Gregory B. Smith, *Martin Heidegger: Paths Taken, Paths Opened* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), p. 39: “In general, the young Heidegger makes it clear that he saw the need for authority and tradition, especially in the face of the subjectivist individualism of the modern world. He opposed what he saw as the rootless anomie of modern life.”

and Jacques Derrida's views on authenticity, they are largely derived from Heidegger's, and are no closer to Rousseau's philosophy.

Now, to be sure, no such concept of authenticity presents itself in the *Premiers discours*, where Trilling holds that "authenticity" (Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 94) is reducible to something like "not being a Parisian, or, at its most vivid, [...] having a weekend cottage, a gun, and some friends to drink and shoot with". (Ibid.) As we have seen, the concept of authenticity minimally requires (1) appreciating that our ontological limits are the source of meaning in life, and therefore (2) rejecting the sort of universalist and reductionist claims about humanity and nature that are typically found in metaphysics. Trilling's conception of authenticity lacks both of these elements; thus, we should not conclude that Rousseau's unmasking of the *philosophes* in the *Premier discours* inspires him to adopt an authentic perspective of the world. However, one might argue that the seeds of authenticity are planted in the *Rêveries*—and although Heidegger commented on the text, one might even establish a connection between the two if one were so inclined, for the former heavily inspired Hölderlin's poem *Der Rhein*, with which Heidegger was enamored.<sup>402</sup> The question therefore becomes the following: given that Rousseau's unmasking style—at least partly—motivates his reconceptualization of autonomy and sincerity, and that he goes in search of these virtues in his *Rêveries*, might we say that his unmasking style ultimately leads him to plant the seeds of authenticity? Indeed, Jean-Jacques disavows metaphysics upon

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<sup>402</sup> See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Der Rhein*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1953), p. 148-156, where he refers to Rousseau on the Lac de Bienne: "Das Himmlische, von selber umfängt / Es unbezwungen, lächelnd / Jetzt, da er ruhet, de Kühnen. / Halbgötter denk' ich jetzt / Und kennen muß ich die Tauern, / Weil oft ihr Leben so / Die sehrende Brust mir beweget. / Wem aber, wie, Rousseau, dir, / Unüberwindlich die Seele / Die starkausdauernde ward / [...] Dann scheint ihm oft das Beste, / Fast ganz vergessen da, / Wo der Stral nicht brennt, / Im Schatten des Walds / Am Bielersee in frischer Grüne zu seyn, / Und sorglosarm an Tönen, / Anfängern gleich, bei Nachtigallen zu lernen."

retreating into the forest, resolving to follow only those precepts that his heart confirms.<sup>403</sup> But more interestingly, his disavowal is not inspired by empiricism or any other philosophy of the day. No, he does this because he wishes “to circumscribe” [circonscrire] (Rousseau, *Rêveries*, p. 1040) himself, or cut off all of the artificial and mechanical aspects of his social being. While such circumscription is only framed within the social vs. pre-social dichotomy, rather than some deeper ontological context, it nonetheless introduces this idea that the truth or the “*sentiment de l’existence*” (Ibid., 1047) is to be uncovered within our limits, where the particular surges forth and reveals our being. And this is precisely what occurs in the *Rêveries* where, circumscribed, “the sound of the waves” and “the flux and reflux” (Ibid., p. 1045) of the waves send him into that reverie where the sentiment of existence exposes itself to him. This method of discovering oneself through the particular, of liberating oneself from the universal and the categories in which it places us, pushes the notion of autonomy *qua* self-definition in the direction of authentic being. In such a state, the inability to reduce anyone to one category or another not only makes them mask-less, but un-maskable. For there is no universal model—for instance, the state of nature—in virtue of which one might be unmasked. At the same time, we see here precisely why authenticity is not a virtue for Jean-Jacques, who remains firmly planted within the social vs. pre-social dichotomy, or the model of the state of nature.

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<sup>403</sup> “Je me suis toujours dit: tout cela ne sont que des arguties et des subtilités métaphysiques, qui ne sont d’aucun poids auprès des principes fondamentaux adoptés par ma raison, confirmés par mon cœur, et qui tous portent le sceau de l’assentiment intérieur dans le silence [404] des passions.” (Rousseau, *Rêveries*, p. 1018)

### XVIII: Conclusion: The Unmasking Machine

#### XIII: i. “Fondateur des sciences de l’homme”: Rousseau according to Lévi-Strauss

In his essay, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau: fondateur des sciences de l’homme”, Claude Lévi-Strauss famously argues that the Genevan founded “les sciences humaines” by reconceiving of the subject and its relation to society.<sup>404</sup> Lévi-Strauss pieces together Rousseau’s science of man from several of his works and letters, but neither mentions the *Premier discours* nor the *Préface à Narcisse* where we first discover the unmasking method. The academic consensus concerning the former’s unoriginality, or merely rhetorical significance, is thus affirmed. However, I believe that the framework that Lévi-Strauss identifies as the basis of Rousseau’s science of man is the very same one that his unmasking method depends on. As I do not intend to deny Lévi-Strauss’ conclusion that this framework serves as the latter’s foundation, my goal here is to determine the extent to which the unmasking method is tied up with social sciences like sociology. While we have identified the different ways in which particular social scientists (e.g., Freud, Marx and Adorno) mobilize Rousseau’s unmasking method, we might wonder whether social scientists in general depend on this method, which has significant normative implications. For as we’ve seen above, the moral framework of the Ancient Greeks and Romans seems to preclude it.

Indeed, Lévi-Strauss does not think that Rousseau was the first to study humanity, or to do so from a humanist perspective. His argument, rather, is that Rousseau laid the foundations

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<sup>404</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau: fondateur des sciences de l’homme”, *Maison de Rousseau et de la littérature*, accessed July 20, 2020, <http://www.espace-rousseau.ch/f/textes/levi-strauss1962.pdf>. Hereafter cited as “J.-J. Rousseau; fondateur”.

for a uniquely modern science of man, one that made studies like ethnology, anthropology and sociology possible. According to Lévi-Strauss, the cornerstone of this foundation is his rejection of Descartes' *cogito*, which presupposes our ability "to pass directly from the interiority of man to the exteriority of the world, without seeing that between these two extremes there exist the societies, the civilizations, in other words the universes of man".<sup>405</sup> If Rousseau sheds new light on these concepts, then it is because his subject is neither a *social animal* (i.e., Aristotle) nor an *individual* capable of perfectly abstracting itself from society (i.e., Descartes). Instead, Rousseau conceives of a *socialized animal*. Unlike the former, his social aspect is unnatural, but unlike the latter, he cannot so perfectly abstract himself from it. Rousseau's subject possesses something like an *enduring unnatural aspect*, which is reflected in his comparison of man to Glaucus in the *Deuxième discours*, Glaucus being a poor fisherman who wishes to become a god but is instead transformed into a monster. Man, wishing to raise himself above nature, forms civilizations, but becomes deformed in them. Hence why Lévi-Strauss maintains that Rousseau studies the "he" (i.e., the social self) before attempting to understand the "me" (i.e., the self as such), which has the effect of exposing the tensions between individuals on the one hand, and social institutions, culture, etc., on the other:

[...] l'homme doit se connaître comme un 'il', avant d'oser prétendre qu'il est un 'moi'. La révolution rousseauiste, préformant et amorçant la révolution ethnologique, consiste à refuser des identifications obligées, que ce soit celle d'une culture à cette culture, ou celle

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<sup>405</sup> "Descartes croit passer directement de l'intériorité d'un homme à l'extériorité du monde, sans voir qu'entre ces deux extrêmes se placent des sociétés, des civilisations, c'est-à-dire des mondes d'hommes." (Lévi-Strauss, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau: fondateur des sciences de l'homme", p. 3)

d'un individu, membre d'une culture, à un personnage ou à une fonction sociale, que cette même culture cherche à lui imposer. (Lévi-Strauss, "J.-J. Rousseau: fondateur", p. 3)

This 'he' represents the middle term between "the exteriority of the world" and "the interiority of man". 'His' social aspect is not entirely natural, but at the same, 'he' cannot easily distinguish himself from it. For the essence of this aspect is appearance, dissimulation and falsehood. Thus, by focusing on the *socialized animal*, Rousseau understands society in a new light, as that which *seems*. And to be sure, it is precisely in these terms that Christian Smith defines sociology in his famous book *The Sacred Project of American Sociology*: "a great deal of sociology is devoted to showing that the ordinary world of everyday life as it *seems* to most people is not *really* what is going on—in short, to debunking appearances."<sup>406</sup> Does Rousseau's unmasking method not have the same goal as well, debunking the *philosophes'* appearances?

The corollary of Rousseau's *unnatural socialized animal* is the *natural asocial animal*, or *l'homme sauvage*. Though Rousseau neither conceives of *l'homme sauvage* nor *l'état de nature* as ideals, refuting on a perennial basis Voltaire's accusation that he wishes to restore humanity to such a state,<sup>407</sup> these concepts no doubt serve as points of reference for studying society and its corruption. In the words of Lévi-Strauss, Rousseau inverts the poles of research, studying the "society of nature" in order to understand "the nature of society":

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<sup>406</sup> See Christian Smith, *The Sacred Project of American Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. ix.

<sup>407</sup> See Voltaire, *Lettre à Jean-Jacques Rousseau, August 30, 1755*, in *Oeuvre complètes de Voltaire*, vol.38 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1880, p. 447: "J'ai reçu, Monsieur, votre nouveau livre contre le genre humain ; je vous en remercie ; vous plairez aux hommes à qui vous dites leurs vérités, et vous ne les corrigerez pas. Vous peignez avec des couleurs bien vraies les horreurs de la société humaine dont l'ignorance et la faiblesse se promettent tant de douceurs. On n'a jamais employé tant d'esprit à vouloir nous rendre Bêtes. Il prend envie de marcher à quatre pattes quand on lit votre ouvrage."



Car, s'il est vrai que la nature a expulsé l'homme, et que la société persiste à l'opprimer, l'homme peut au moins inverser à son avantage les pôles du dilemme, *et rechercher la société de la nature pour y méditer sur la nature de la société*. Voilà, me semble-t-il, l'indissoluble message du *Contrat social*, des *Lettres sur la Botanique*, et des *Rêveries*. (Lévi-Strauss, "J.-J. Rousseau: fondateur", p. 6)

Again, Rousseau is not the first philosopher to describe a pre-social state of nature. Long before Hobbes, Lucretius conceives of such a state in *De rerum natura*. There is a significant difference however. For in these other accounts, civilization is not considered the *accidental* consequence of the state of nature, and therefore deprived of its validity. But this is precisely what Rousseau argues in the *Deuxième Discours*, where man acquires technology and thus civilization by "some accidental fire" [quelque incendie accidentel] (Rousseau, *Deuxième discours*, p. 172) that he finds by the foot of a volcano, and later reproduces in spite of all the "précautions" (Ibid.) that nature had taken against its discovery. Like Prometheus, man steals fire from an unwitting Nature, but in the end proves the greater victim of the crime: "But that fine son of Iapetos outwitted him / And stole the far-seen gleam of weariless fire / In a hollow fennel stalk, and so bit deeply the heart / Of Zeus, the high lord of thunder, who was angry / When he saw the distant gleam of fire among men, / And straight off he gave them trouble to pay for the fire".<sup>408</sup> This accident needs to be qualified however. For if society were purely accidental, that is, lacking any reason or end, then it would be *essentially* unnatural, and thus unworthy of the kind of study that Rousseau's *sciences humaines* entail. Rather, it would simply merit destruction.

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<sup>408</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, in *Anthology of Classical Myth*, trans. Stephen M. Trzaskoma, R. Scott Smith and Stephen Brunet (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2016), p. 147.

Given that Lévi-Strauss does not address this problem, we might turn to Pierre Manent's reading in *Naissances de la politique moderne*, where he maintains that, for Rousseau, "society is not [...] bad by itself but, so to speak, by history. History could therefore have been otherwise, it seems, and consequently society as well. However, such is not the case."<sup>409</sup> If history resulted in the corrupt society in which we now live, then it's because the accident of technology serves our *needs*, as opposed to our *passions* and *sentiments*. Once agricultural tools are invented, and humans become attached to parcels of land, the natural talents of a few permit them to obtain a greater share at the expense of others, which the former protect by conceiving of notions like property rights and money, and by founding so-called "societies" on them—as John Locke does for instance. Thus, this accident, which allows man to fulfill his needs in an unprecedented way, results in the creation of societies based on unnatural principles that suppress our passions and sentiments, notably our sympathy. As Rousseau writes in the second *Discours*, "property rights differ from those resulting from natural law" [le droit de propriété différent de celui qui résulte de la loi naturelle] (Rousseau, *Deuxième discours*, p. 174). The problem, to be more precise, is that society is founded here on that which also drives men furthest apart. In Manent's words:

Dès lors, la société est corrompue radicalement par suite de cette origine contradictoire. En effet, dans a société moderne, les hommes ne se veulent réunis que par le besoin qu'ils appellent *l'intérêt*. Ils mettent donc au principe de leur union ce qui est un principe de

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<sup>409</sup> "La société n'est donc pas mauvaise par nature mais, pour ainsi dire, par histoire. L'histoire aurait donc pu être autre, semble-t-il, et la société aussi, par le fait même. Pourtant il n'en est pas ainsi." (Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne*, p. 154)

séparation. Ce qui tend de soi à la satisfaction solitaire, comment sera-ce le ciment d'une bonne société ? (Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne*, p. 145 – 146)

Manent turns to Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (1781)<sup>410</sup> in order to piece together the society that history could have produced, had this accident not raised humanity's needs over its passions. While this alternative society is not, strictly speaking, natural, one might call it *healthy* to the extent that it gives expression to our natural sentiments—as one finds in the  *cité cynique* or Rousseau's republic of patriots.<sup>411</sup>

The difference between the healthy and unhealthy society can be gleaned from the one between the Italian and German societies. As Rousseau explains in the *Essai*, the hostile environment of the North required its inhabitants to adopt a language of necessity, one that would permit them to plan for the long winters—hence the logical but unmelodious nature of the German tongue. By contrast, “nature does so much for the inhabitants [of the South] that they have almost nothing to do” (Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, p. 408), and can therefore develop a language for expressing their *passions*, serenading lovers, etc. Societies form around both languages, but for different reasons, “aidez-moi” [help me] being the foundation of the first, and “aimez-moi” [love me] that of the second, where *agriculture* is undoubtedly far less demanding. (Ibid) It goes without saying that Rousseau regards Italian, the so-called language of lovers, as having only a paltry share of the impassioned and musical element of some of the first languages, and even believes it far closer to German than these. In any case, Manent argues that

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<sup>410</sup> See Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 5, ed., Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond. Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

<sup>411</sup> See chapter XI, sections I and II, where I explain that Rousseau's  *cité cynique* and patriotic republic are founded on a form of negative education designed to permit our natural sentiments their greatest expression.

a society's symbols either reflect our *needs* or our *passions*, with money (which is abstract and calculable) being the supreme expression of the former, and the latter restricting itself to what is local and particular (e.g., national identity).<sup>412</sup> The accidental society that serves as the object of Rousseau's science of man is thus unhealthy insofar as it suppresses our sentiments, but can be healed by studying the cultural symbols and concepts in which suppressive forces take hold. As Lévi-Strauss writes, Rousseau fleshes out the dichotomy between the 'state of nature' and the 'nature of the state' by elaborating a "triple passage, from nature to culture, from sentiments to the intellect, from animality to humanity".<sup>413</sup> Culture, concepts and even our humanity are each presented as that which *seems*, and more precisely, *conceals* our nature, passions and animality. The invention of the modern social sciences therefore rests on the conception of society as *that which conceals*, or alternatively, as that which *masks*.

That which is concealed, however, is not reducible to these terms (i.e., nature, passions and animality), but instead fundamentally concerns our autonomy. In a word, society conceals man from himself. Or better yet, man conceals himself from himself, hiding his "shredded" and self-alienated soul behind all the images and ornaments that our social institutions provide. The corollary of the *society that conceals* is the autonomous subject, whose autonomy is defined as

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<sup>412</sup> Regarding the abstract nature of money, Manent writes: "Le péché de l'argent, son essence funeste est qu'il n'est qu'un signe abstrait. Or, le signe est plus pauvre que la chose qu'il signifie. Plus l'argent se multiplie, au fur et à mesure que le désir des richesses se répand et s'accroît, plus ce signe devient abstrait, chargé de représenter toujours plus de réalités qualitativement diverses. L'argent absorbe progressivement la profusion multiple du monde humain réel." (Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne*, p. 139) As Manent also explains, what Rousseau calls the "general will" is not general at all, but rather refers to the particular identity and historical situation of a people. It is this particular symbol, which is far less susceptible to abstraction, that binds a people: "la volonté générale est volonté de l'identité, et non pas de l'identité morte et impersonnelle, mais volonté de l'être le plus individuel de la vie historique : la nation ou la cité." (p. 176)

<sup>413</sup> "Car, s'il est possible de croire qu'avec l'apparition de la société, se soit produit un triple passage, de la nature à la culture, du sentiment à la connaissance, de l'animalité à l'humanité - démonstration qui fait l'objet du *Discours*." (Lévi-Strauss, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Fondateur des sciences de l'homme", p. 4)

freedom from institutional influences. The basic question posed by this subject, as Lévi-Strauss argues, is neither ‘what do I know?’ nor ‘do I exist?’ but instead ‘what am I?’: “Au ‘que sais-je?’ de Montaigne [...], Descartes croyait pouvoir répondre que je sais que je suis, puisque je pense; à quoi Rousseau rétorque un ‘que suis-je?’.” [To Montaigne’s ‘what do I know?’..., Descartes believed himself capable of responding that I know that I exist, because I think; to which Rousseau retorted ‘what am I?’] (Lévi-Strauss, “J.-J. Rousseau: fondateur”, p. 3) The essential structure of Rousseau’s science of man therefore appears to be the same as that of his unmasking method, not simply because the former accuses society of *concealing* its intentions, but because it treats such concealment as *involuntary*—as I have shown above, one can only be unmasked if he is unaware of the mask that he wears. Just as Rousseau imputes motives to the *philosophes* in the *Premier Discours*, he imputes them to society in general in the *Deuxième*, the principle accusation being that ‘although society purports to satisfy people’s needs, in reality it suppresses their deepest passions and sentiments’.

### **XIII. ii. The Social Sciences, and Institutionalized Unmasking**

Having shown (1) that Rousseau’s science of man is unmasking on a macroscale, and (2) that the unmasking method is not limited to certain social scientists, but instead parallels those of entire fields, such as sociology, we might now ask whether unmasking is an essential feature of the social sciences in some way. In *The Unmasking Method in Social Theory*, Baehr maintains that unmasking can be avoided in social theory by rejecting any conception of the self as static, transparent or everywhere the same. If the self cannot be pinned down, then intentions cannot be forced upon it. Montaigne, Baehr reminds us, speaks of the self in “flux”: “I give my soul now

one face, now another, according to which direction I turn it. If I speak of myself in different ways, that is because I look at myself in different ways. All contradictions may be found in me by some twist and in some fashion".<sup>414</sup> Chateaubriand, he adds, contents himself with the opaqueness of man's soul in the *Mémoires*: "You who are hidden and obscure, you whose lives are pleasing to God and work miracles, all hail to your secret virtues!"<sup>415</sup> Finally, Baehr believes that unmasking can be avoided by adopting the attitude of "conflictual pluralism" (Baehr, *The Unmasking Style*, p. 142), and admitting that our existential differences prevent us from adequately grasping the motives or passions of others. Presumably, social theories that adopt this conception of the self would deny the ontological validity of concepts that impute motives—or at least those that do so without any empirical evidence, the fruits of which are slogans like "silence is violence". One is psychologically sick, one is (insert)phobic, etc., precisely because one does nothing. Whether unmasking is an intrinsic feature of contemporary social theory, I cannot say. There is however an important difference between Rousseau's unmasking style and unmasking as a social science that might be institutionalized within a government and its bureaucratic entities, the university in particular. Rousseau did not set out to become the founder of the humanities, and I maintain that the institutionalization of unmasking within the social sciences is a contradiction.

To begin with, unmasking presents us with a seeming paradox, as the unmasker pursues his own autonomy by depriving society and its members of theirs. Rousseau seeks to repair his shredded soul by exposing the salon-world as artificial, and the *philosophes* that populate it as

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<sup>414</sup> See Baehr, *The Unmasking Style in Social Theory*, p. 140. Cited from Montaigne's *Essay*, "On the Inconsistency of Our Actions".

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

the unwitting products of custom, not scientists but popularizers thereof, not lovers of wisdom but sophists who would mock Socrates, not virtuous men but mere debaters of virtue, etc. The unmasker, of course, will claim that his goal is not to deprive his fellows of their autonomy, but instead to reveal the conditions of its possibility. The danger of this method is evident however, for the unmasked must accept the unmasker's point of reference—whether this be Rousseau's state of nature or Marx's science of history—to achieve his autonomy. When the unmasker is a dissident like Rousseau, one cannot be coerced or even forced to accept this point of reference. Hence, whatever autonomy the unmasked is deprived of is purely theoretical, since he reserves the right to scrutinize the unmasker's point of reference. Two things occur, however, when the unmasking method is institutionalized. In the first place, institutions easily become coercive and frequently forceful, and can therefore oblige the unmasked to adopt their point of reference for unmasking him. Here, one is undoubtedly deprived of his autonomy. The unmasked affirms his Christian belief in free will, the Marxist government unmasks him as an exploiter; the unmasked professes his classical liberalism, the media-academic cathedral unmasks him as an oppressor, a bigot and so forth. Institutionalized unmasking presents a second and far greater contradiction however. For if the goal of unmasking is to restore the individual's autonomy, where autonomy is defined as freedom from society's institutions, then understanding our autonomy by virtue of the point of reference that society itself manufactures, surely cannot make us autonomous. The difference here is between discovering the state of nature on one's own, perhaps on the Lac de Bienne or the shores of Rhine, and adopting society's version of nature. For society is, according to Rousseau, nature's corruption manifest.

Although Rousseau may have founded modern social science by applying his unmasking method to society, he couldn't have intended for this science to become institutionalized either within the salon or academia. After showing his play *Le Devin du village* in 1752, Rousseau was honored with a pension on the behalf of Louis XV, but refused it, preferring instead to support his career by taking odd jobs, as a secretary, tutor, music copyist, etc. His reasoning was that no man could be truthful, free and courageous if he were paid to do so:

Je perdais, il est vrai, la pension qui m'étais offerte en quelque sorte ; mais je m'exemptais aussi du joug qu'elle m'eût imposé. Adieu la vérité, la liberté, le courage. Comment oser désormais parler d'indépendance, de désintéressement. Il ne fallait plus que flatter ou me taire, en recevant cette pension : encore qui m'assurait qu'elle serait payée ? Que de pas à faire, que de gens à solliciter? (Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 380)

Herein lies the difference between Jean-Jacques and the *philosophes* who would subsequently dare, like him, to push unmasking beyond the limits that Molière and La Bruyère had respected. One such *philosophe* was the Baron d'Holbach, who inherited the unmasking method from his friend Nicholas-Antoine Boulanger (1722 – 1759) rather than Rousseau. A friend of Diderot and member of the famous *coterie holbachique*, Boulanger composed his magnum opus, *L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages* (published posthumously in 1766), before dying at the age of 37.<sup>416</sup> The goal of the work, Boulanger explains, is to lift “the veil of time” (Boulanger, *L'Antiquité dévoilée*, p. 19) behind which “the most uniform and the most useless history” (Ibid.) hides, and thereby expose that forgotten “motives” (Ibid., p. 6) that inspired our various traditions. For instance, he

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<sup>416</sup> Nicholas-Antoine Boulanger, *L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages* (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1766).



shows that the celebration of Christmas is not new, but instead a copy of other “cyclical celebrations” (Ibid., p. 124) that have a “purely astrological” (Ibid., p. 124) origin. While *L’Antiquité dévoilée* is not an explicitly atheistic work, Boulanger intends to debunk, as it were, the notion of Christian Revelation, which conceals the original and practical reasons for our traditions, causing them to become misinterpreted and perverted.<sup>417</sup> Boulanger’s book was undoubtedly the inspiration for Holbach’s notorious *Le Christianisme dévoilé ou Examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne* (1761), which the latter published under the name of his deceased friend, for fear of being unmasked as the author of an explicitly atheistic work. Unlike Rousseau, Holbach wears a mask when he unmasks society.

Holbach lacked both the erudition and subtlety of Boulanger. When Boulanger unveiled Christian beliefs and customs, he discovered those of the Ancient Greeks and Syrians, which he attempted to make sense of by relating them to a real-world event, the deluge. Holbach, on the other hand, raises his sword and utters a battle cry: “the Christian religion has no right to boast of the advantages that she procures in morality, or in politics. Tear away [...] the veil with which she covers herself [...]”<sup>418</sup> Behind the veil of Christianity, he finds—or let us say *imputes*—every

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<sup>417</sup> See Paul Sardin and Vincent Giroud, “Nicholas-Antoine Boulanger (1722 – 1759),” in *The Yale University Gazette*, 71, no. 1 (October 1996): 3 – 42, p. 32 – 32, for an explanation of Boulanger’s goals in *L’Antiquité dévoilée*: “One of Boulanger’s purposes, which was to destroy the unique standing of Judeo-Christianity as a revealed religion, could have prompted [the reader] to neglect this book. But we have already noted that the Scriptures are for him a fundamental document of the history of mankind; furthermore, it suited him to draw from the same sources as his adversaries. It was fitting to show, using the very texts which founded Judeo-Christianity, that this religion, considered by its zealots to be of an essentially different order, offered the same narratives, the same rituals, and the same festivals as the others; and that while it revealed, like them, the erring ways of man troubled by the fear of the Flood, no supernatural mark distinguished it from all others.”

<sup>418</sup> Paul-Henri Thiry Holbach, *Le Christianisme dévoilé ou Examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne*, in *Premières oeuvres* (Paris: Les Classiques du peuple, 1972). See p. 112: “Concluons donc que la religion chrétienne n’a point de titre pour se vanter des avantages qu’elle procure à la morale, ou à la politique. Ar-rachons-lui donc le voile dont elle se couvre [...]”

baseness imaginable. What are the “motives” (Holbach, *Le Christianisme dévoilé*, p. 106) behind Christianity? “Fears”, “habit”, “prejudice” (Ibid.), “wrath”, “hatred” (Ibid., p. 106), “fanaticism”, “imagination” (Ibid., p. 111), “pride” and “vanity” (Ibid., p. 124) are the motives that the Baron ascribes to the most “unsociable, turbulent, intolerant and rebellious citizens” (Ibid., p. 135), or as he refers to them elsewhere, the “pious savages” (Ibid., p. 110). Holbach is so assured of his own enlightenment, or to use a contemporary phrase, of his being ‘on the right side’ of reason, that nothing seems more prejudiced than his war against prejudice. Boulanger studied and then judged Christianity; Holbach merely prejudged it. What is more interesting, however, is that the Baron imagines an enlightened “sovereign” who “will disabuse” the people of their “chimeras”; by “authorizing tolerance” and obliging the Christian sects to debate one another, he adds, they will be forced to “unmask” themselves and render one another “mutually ridiculous”:

[...] c'est le souverain seul qui peut ramener les peuples à la raison; [...] il les détrompera peu à peu de leurs chimères, s'il en est lui-même détrompé; il empêchera la superstition de nuire en la méprisant, en ne se mêlant jamais de ses futiles querelles, en les divisant, en autorisant la tolérance des différentes sectes qui se battront réciproquement, qui se démasqueront, qui se rendront mutuellement ridicules : enfin la superstition tombera d'elle-même [...]. (Ibid., p. 142 – 143)

For Rousseau, it sufficed to protect Émile from the education system and make nature his guide to assure his autonomy and ability to penetrate the many masks of men. For Holbach however, the sovereign is charged with unveiling the chimeric illusions of men; and to be sure, tolerance does not mean here mutual respect between Catholics and Protestants, but instead spells their

mutual destruction. Tolerance means that everyone must become an atheist, because religious peoples are fundamentally intolerant—one is reminded here of what Herbert Marcuse refers to as “repressive tolerance”, the idea that true tolerance requires “intolerance against movements from the Right”.<sup>419</sup> Repressive tolerance goes hand in hand with institutionalized unmasking, as motives (e.g., hatred, violence, extremism, etc.) must first be imputed to a group to then justify their censorship by the state, or as the institutional unmaskers would say, to bestow upon them the gift of autonomy.

If Rousseau founded the human sciences as Lévi-Strauss argues, then he never intended for them to be institutionalized, or in other words, pursued by pensioned philosophers like Lévi-Strauss himself. Rousseau pioneered the modern conception of autonomy as self-definition, or as freedom from the self-alienating forces of society. One could only imagine how horrified he would be to learn of all the institutions that society had invented to inculcate man with its own superficial version of autonomy—that which cannot be destroyed is instead subverted. At first, the *philosophes* merely regarded the common man as ‘prejudiced’, and sought to *educate* him. But once the intellectual class adopted unmasking, and could impute motives, his *re-education* became their imperative. The common man therefore went from simply being erroneous in his reasoning, to being filled with hate, violence, and all things that those who love their nation and faith are routinely accused of. And because it is not one dissident, but instead society imputing the motives, one can hardly escape them. In the end, institutionalized unmasking treats people

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<sup>419</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance”, in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, ed. R.P. Wolff and B. Moore (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 109: Liberating tolerance, then, would mean intolerance against movements from the Right and toleration of movements from the Left. As to the scope of this tolerance and intolerance: ... it would extend to the stage of action as well as of discussion and propaganda, of deed as well as of word.”

as no better than “inmates of an insane asylum”, as Lasch once said in reference to the Frankfurt School.<sup>420</sup> In the Ancient world, people are judged by their actions. In the Christian one, they are judged by their intentions. And in the Modern world, they are judged by the intentions that the academic-media complex ascribes to them.

### XIII. iii. The Social Sciences, and the Unmasking Technocracy

The Marquis de Condorcet was one of the last *philosophes*, and unlike Voltaire, Holbach and Turgot, lived to see the *lumières* come to fruition, that is, to witness the French Revolution. In 1794 he was imprisoned not by Royalists, but revolutionary Jacobins who found his criticisms intolerable. Condemned to the infamous prisons of the so-called *Bourg-l'Égalité*, he perished—whether by suicide or murder—only a few days later.<sup>421</sup> “À l'exemple de Saturne, la révolution dévore ses enfants.” [By Saturn's example, the revolution devours its own children.]<sup>422</sup> Although Condorcet meditated more than the Jacobins on the tensions between social progress and libertarian freedom, he too believed that the advancement of the former would require the use

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<sup>420</sup> See Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critiques* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), p. 447: “The purpose and design of *Studies in Prejudice* dictated the conclusion that prejudice, a psychological disorder rooted in the “authoritarian” personality structure, could be eradicated only by subjecting the American people to what amounted to collective psychotherapy—by treating them as inmates of an insane asylum, as Thurman Arnold would have put it.”

<sup>421</sup> See Antoine Guillois, *La Marquise de Condorcet, sa Famille, son Salon, ses Amis, 1764 – 1822* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1897), p. 145: “La question de savoir si Condorcet avait avancé sa fin ou s'il était mort naturellement a été fort discutée. Le billet de Jean Debry, du 30 juin 1793, serait à lui seul une preuve concluante. De plus, Cabanis a toujours déclaré que Condorcet s'était empoisonné. Il y a, dans les archives de l'Institut, une lettre que ' . Fayolle écrivait à Arago, le 28 février 1842, qui n'est pas moins concluante : ‘C'est de Garat, dit-il, que j'ai appris que Cabanis avait remis à plusieurs personnes de ses amis, en 1793, ce poison (l'opium combiné avec la stramonium), qu'il appelait *le pain des frères*.’”

<sup>422</sup> Jacques Mallet de Pan, *Considérations sur la nature de la révolution de France* (London: Emm. Flon, 1793), p. 80.

of both “force” and “power”.<sup>423</sup> For instance, upon being elected to the *Académie française*, Condorcet expressed his fear that the “march of the moral sciences will be [...] slower than that of the physical sciences” given that their fruits are not immediately apparent, and there will be “need to force, so to speak, minds to receive them”:

La marche des sciences morales sera donc plus lente que celle des sciences physiques, et nous ne devons pas être étonnés si les principes sur lesquels elles sont établies ont besoin de forcer, pour ainsi dire, les esprits à les recevoir, tandis qu’en physique ils courent au-devant des vérités, et souvent même des erreurs nouvelles.<sup>424</sup>

Condorcet intimated a similar sentiment to his friend and mentor Turgot, writing that “in order to do good one must have at least as much power as good will”.<sup>425</sup> Force and power might very well be necessary to do good. Indeed, Rousseau thought as much, asserting in *Du contrat social* that those who ignore the general will “shall be forced to be free”, lest they expose themselves and everyone else to tyrannical power.<sup>426</sup> But there is a difference between what Rousseau and Condorcet wish to *force* on the common man. The former wishes to force him to undertake the

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<sup>423</sup> See Keith Michael Baker, “Scientism, Elitism and Liberalism”, in *French Prose and Criticism through 1789*, ed. by Herald Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1990), p. 416: “[Condorcet] revealed the latent tension involved in that idea between an authoritarian conception of society administered by a scientific elite upon the basis of an unequivocal scientific plan, and that of a libertarian society guided by the public interplay of subjective political action and often uninformed interests.”

<sup>424</sup> Marquis de Condorcet, “Discours de réception de M. de Condorcet”, *Académie française*, accessed August 10, 2020, <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/discours-de-reception-du-marquis-de-condorcet>.

<sup>425</sup> Marquis de Condorcet, *Lettre à Turgot, 29 juin 1770*, in *Correspondance inédite de Condorcet et Turgot, 1770 – 1779* (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1893), p. 16: “Il me semble que pour faire le bien il faut du moins autant de pouvoir que de bonne volonté et que pour empêcher le mal c’est tout le contraire.”

<sup>426</sup> “Afin donc que ce pacte social ne soit pas un vain formulaire, il renferme tacitement cet engagement, qui seul peut donner de la force aux autres, que quiconque refusera d’obéir à la volonté générale, y sera contraint par tout le corps ; ce qui ne signifie autre chose sinon qu’on le forcera à être libre, cartelle est la condition qui, donnant chaque citoyen à la patrie, le garantit de toute dépendance personnelle, condition qui fait l’artifice et le Jeu de la machine politique, et qui seule rend légitimes les engagements civils, lesquels, sans cela, seraient absurdes, tyranniques, et sujets aux plus énormes abus.” (Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, p. 364)

democratic duties on which his rights depend, while the latter wishes to force the common man to accept a view of social progress handed down to him by an elite cadre of intellectuals. Thus, the former is frequently accused of being the father of *democratic tyranny*, while the latter that of *technocratic tyranny*. As Gorman Beauchamp writes: “Technocracy [...] necessitates a ruling class of experts, which, possessed of the requisite scientific knowledge, must exercise exclusive rights to social decision making: a class of technocrat kings. The evolution of Condorcet from a revolutionary republican to a proponent of scientific oligarchy provides an instructive, concrete example of the logic of technocracy.”<sup>427</sup> It should be useful to examine the difference between these two uses of ‘force’ to grasp what exactly technocracy entails.

If Rousseau argues that, in a democracy, certain citizens must be forced to be free, then it’s because he thinks that no form of government is more demanding. “If the people were gods, they would govern themselves democratically. A government so perfect does not suit men.”<sup>428</sup> Democracy is demanding because rights are abstract, and therefore easily taken for granted, or uncritically multiplied. Thus, their maintenance depends on the fulfillment of attending duties, which, by contrast, are concrete. One theoretically has the right to his property, but if in reality everyone salted their fields, then no crops would grow and the nation would starve to death. In some cases, it is therefore necessary to impose particular duties (e.g., to use one’s land well) on people in order to prevent them from abusing their rights, weakening the nation, and exposing it to oligarchical and tyrannical powers. When a family does not make good use of its property,

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<sup>427</sup> Gorman Beauchamp, “The Dangers of Oligarchy: Condorcet and the Logic of Technocracy”, in *Humanitas* 22, no. 1 and 2 (2009): 23 – 32, p. 26.

<sup>428</sup> “S’il y avoit un peuple de Dieux, il se gouverneroit démocratiquement. Un Gouvernement si parfait ne convient pas à des hommes.” (Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, p. 406)

and must sell it either to foreign parties or oligarchs, their children are deprived of their means of subsistence, and made dependent upon the powerful. Rousseau—and Thomas Jefferson for that matter—both conceive of the dutiful, middle-class landowner as the basis of democracy.<sup>429</sup> On the other hand, commentators like Isaiah Berlin maintain that when a people imposes such duties upon itself, their rights become dependent upon a particular version of the good; what it means to use one's land or resources well is contestatory, and if the minority is forced to adopt what the majority regards as good to exercise its rights, then according to Berlin, the former are subject to democratic tyranny.<sup>430</sup> Of course, this poses no problem for Rousseau, who believes that the abstract and alienating nature of society ought to be mitigated by forming democratic nations around our passions, which always have a local flavor. Hence why, as I've shown above, the "common good" at the heart of the "general will" refers to the national identity of a people, or as Rousseau calls it, their "national physiognomy".<sup>431</sup> For Jean-Jacques, the diverse passions of the various peoples of the world cannot be satisfied within those vast, homogenizing liberal states constructed around 'the economy'. My intention here is not defend this view, but only to highlight the fact that Rousseau thinks that force is necessary to keep humanity rooted in what

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<sup>429</sup> On Jefferson's middle-class agrarian ideal, see Thomas Jefferson, *Letter to Rev. James Madison, October 28, 1785*, in *Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), p. 196: "The small landholders are the most precious part of a state." For Rousseau's own version of this ideal, see his "système rustique" in his *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 907.

<sup>430</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 208: "Rousseau does not mean by liberty the 'negative' freedom of the individual not to be interfered with within a defined area, but the possession by all, and not merely by some, of the fully qualified members of a society of a share in the public power which is entitled to interfere with every aspect of every citizen's life."

<sup>431</sup> "Donnez une autre pente aux passions des Polonais, vous donnerez à leurs âmes une physionomie nationale qui les distinguera des autres peuples, qui les empêchera de se fondre, de se plaire, de s'allier avec eux, une vigueur qui remplacera le jeu abusif des vains préceptes, qui leur fera faire par goût et par passion ce qu'on ne fait jamais assez bien quand on ne le fait que par devoir ou par intérêt." (Rousseau, *Considérations*, p. 960 – 961)

is concrete, while Condorcet wishes to forcibly render humanity more abstract, to universalize, systematize and calculate the human race.

As opposed to the *cit  cynique*, everything is calculable in the *cit  technocratique*, most notably our passions, which Condorcet subjects to his “social mathematics”. Whereas Rousseau thinks that society corrupts man, Condorcet believes that society perfects him, and conceives of his social mathematics in the *Tableau g n ral des sciences* (1793) as a catalyst to this process:

Comme toutes ces applications sont imm diatement relatives aux int r ts sociaux, ou   l’analyse des op rations de l’esprit humain, et que, dans ce dernier cas, elles n’ont encore pour objet que l’homme perfectionn  par la soci t , j’ai cru que le nom de *math matique sociale*  tait celui qui convenait le mieux   cette science.<sup>432</sup>

Condorcet’s social mathematics mobilizes probability theory and statistics to address a host of economic, legal and social problems, such as the fair distribution of tax burdens, the probability that a jury comes to a just conclusion, that one candidate will be elected over others, etc. These represent uncontroversial applications of Condorcet’s method. But he also proposes measuring and estimating “the veritable force of motives of belief”, which will allow us to understand why, “for example, [...] a fact improbable in itself is nonetheless defended by imposing testimonies”, and “to bring the day of reason to those objects long ago abandoned to the seductive influences of the imagination, interest or the passions”.<sup>433</sup> In theory, this “mathematical” method might be

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<sup>432</sup> Marquis de Condorcet, *Tableau g n ral de la science, qui a pour objet l’application du calcul aux science politiques et morales*, in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, vol. 1 (Paris : Firmin Didot Fr res, 1847 – 1849), p. 540.

<sup>433</sup> “Le calcul des probabilit s nous apprend   conna tre,   mesurer la v ritable force des motifs de cr dibilit  [...]. Le m me calcul apprendra  galement   estimer les motifs de cr dibilit  de m me genre, ou d’une nature diverse, qui



applied to simply understand what makes people tick, as it were, what passions are satisfied by doing x and y. But Condorcet clearly has a political goal in mind, expressing his desire “to strike the final blows to superstition”, and to prove “why a sort of defiance so constantly accompanies the great *lumières*, while intrepid conviction is the share of ignorance.”<sup>434</sup> Before studying them, he already knows what unreasonable madness that “the priests and their stupid or hypocritical instruments”<sup>435</sup> are hiding behind the mask of faith. Thus, here again we encounter the notion that science—and particularly the purest science, mathematics—will disabuse man of his religious prejudices, and place him on the upward-bound, linear path to moral progress.

Condorcet, however, distinguishes himself from predecessors like Fontenelle, believing that social mathematicians will one day perfect this method, replacing the need for virtues such as courage and sacrifice,<sup>436</sup> and even that of government itself.<sup>437</sup> As Frank Manuel writes in the

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peuvent se combiner ou se combattre relativement à une même proposition : comme, par exemple, lorsqu’un fait improbable en lui-même est cependant appuyé sur des témoignages imposants. L’application du calcul à ces dernières questions aura l’avantage de porter le jour de la raison sur des objets longtemps abandonnées aux influences séductrices de l’imagination, de l’intérêt ou des passions.” (Condorcet, , *Tableau général de la science*, p. 555)

<sup>434</sup> “C’est par ce seul moyen que l’on peut à la fois porter les derniers coups à la superstition comme au pyrrhonisme, à l’exagération de la crédulité comme à celle du doute. C’est alors qu’on verra comment et pourquoi la force du sentiment qui nous porte à croire, s’affaiblit à mesure que les motifs de crédibilité sont appréciés avec plus d’exactitude ; et, par conséquent, pourquoi une sorte de défiance accompagné si constamment les grandes lumières, tandis qu’une conviction intrépide est le partage de l’ignorance.” (Condorcet, , *Tableau général de la science*, p. 556)

<sup>435</sup> See the Marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain*, in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, vol. VI, (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1847), p. 244: “Il arrivera donc, ce moment où le soleil n’éclairera plus sur la terre que des hommes libres, ne reconnaissant d’autre maître que leur raison ; où les tyrans et les esclaves, les prêtres et leurs stupides ou hypocrites instruments n’existeront plus que dans l’histoire et sur les théâtres.”

<sup>436</sup> “Le projet de rendre tous les hommes vertueux est chimérique : mais pourquoi ne verroit-on pas un jour les lumières, jointes au génie, créer, pour des générations plus heureuses, une méthode d’éducation, un système de lois qui rendroient presque inutile le courage de la vertu ? Dirigé par ces institutions salutaires, l’homme n’auroit besoin que d’écouter la voix de son cœur, et celle de sa raison.” (Condorcet, “Discours de réceptions”)

<sup>437</sup> In a note to his *Reception Speech at the French Academy*, Condorcet expresses that: “If, on the other hand, the theory of the constitution of the states and the sciences of legislation and administrations have fixed principles—if, human nature being given and ideas of right and justice well established, all these sciences consist in deducing the consequences of these principles in such a way that all particular questions relating to these subjects are decided according to those vague principles of political utility or wealth. Almost nothing will remain arbitrary; government

*Prophets of Paris*, “With the accumulation of sufficient data and the application of the calculus of probabilities the state could be run by social mathematics—without debates. With one leap the first sociologist of scientific creativity traversed the age of middle-class parliamentarism and arrived at the ideal of the all-knowing scientific technician as the ruler of society.”<sup>438</sup> Condorcet not only grounds morality in the sciences, but also imagines scientists as the leaders of society, reminding us of Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. In his *Fragment sur l’Atlantide*, the Marquis asserts that: “Regarding legislation, [the learned] have as a barrier [...] the obligation to respect the rights of men. [...] But regarding institutions of public instruction, and the encouragements that it will be their duty to give to those who cultivate the sciences, there can be only one guide, the opinion of men illuminated by these objects, necessarily foreign to the masses.”<sup>439</sup> But there’s a crucial difference between Bacon’s version and Condorcet’s, where society is the object of science just as much as science is the object of society. There, “the learned” [savants] do not merely labor in the caves, but also in the minds of men.

To recall, when Rousseau unmask the *philosophes*, he does not merely seek to expose them as hypocrites, but rather to show that they’re the unwitting servants of a corrupt system, and have therefore suppressed the passions and sense of autonomy that once flourished in the

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will scarcely be worth the effort, and the qualities of a great statesman will be education and exactness of mind rather than shrewdness and cunning.” See the Marquis de Condorcet, *Condorcet: Selected Writings*, ed. by Keith M. Baker (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1976), p. 18. Baker claims to have discovered this note among the author’s unpublished writings.

<sup>438</sup> Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris: Turgot, Condorcet, Saint-Simon Fourier, and Comte* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p. 96.

<sup>439</sup> Marquis de Condorcet, *Fragment sur l’Atlantide, ou efforts combines de l’espèce humaine pour le progrès des sciences*, in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, vol. 11 (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1847), p. 601 : “En fait de législation, ils ont pour barrière, et la nécessité de respecter les droits de hommes [...]. Mais quant aux institutions d’instruction publique, et aux encouragements qu’il serait de leur devoir de donner à ceux qui cultivent les sciences, ils ne peuvent avoir qu’un sel guide, l’opinion des hommes éclairés sur ces objets, nécessairement étrangers au plus grand nombre.”

state of nature. Similarly, when Condorcet applies his social mathematics to unmask the priests, his intention is not merely to expose them as hypocrites, but instead to paint them as slaves to those “seductive influences”. There is a difference however, for Condorcet does not hold up the state of nature as a model, but instead the future, a time when reason, science and technology reign supreme. In the future state, human beings are practically immortal,<sup>440</sup> no longer fight for resources, and therefore have no need for virtue; there is perfect equality between the citizens (including women) of a nation, as well as between nations: “Nos espérances sur l'état à venir de l'espèce humaine peuvent se réduire à ces trois points importants : la destruction de l'inégalité entre les nations; les progrès de l'égalité dans un même peuple; enfin, le perfectionnement réel de l'homme.” [Our hopes for the future state of the human race can be summarized by three important points: the destruction of inequality between nations, the progress of equality among a single people; finally, the real perfection of man.] (Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès*, p. 237) Condorcet truly believes that man will be redeemed by reason alone, and ignoring all of Rousseau's warnings in the first *Discours*, professes that “the glory of talents must soon become the first” [la gloire des talents doit bientôt devenir la première]. (Condorcet, *Fragment sur l'Atlantide*, p. 603) In many ways, Condorcet resembles something like Rousseau's parody of the *philosophe*.

Despite Condorcet's emphasis on the future and reason, and Rousseau's on the past and sentimentality, the thinkers share a common thread, for both unmask their adversaries in order

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<sup>440</sup> “Sans doute l'homme ne deviendra pas immortel ; mais la distance entre le moment où il commence à vivre et l'époque commune où naturellement, sans maladie, sans accident, il éprouve la difficulté d'être, ne peut-elle s'accroître sans cesse?” (Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau des progrès*, p. 273)

to *liberate* humanity from the corrupted passions that “bad institutions” (Condorcet, *Fragment sur l’Atlantide*, p. 611) breed. Unlike Rousseau however, Condorcet thinks that society perfects rather corrupts us, and is confident in the inherent goodness of science; thus, the Marquis does not hesitate to conceive of those institutions—particularly academia and media—that might be empowered to unmask humanity’s exploiters. In addition to imagining a future state where the government is obsolete, and society led by academics who unmask the superstitious, Condorcet praises the press for unmasking the priests and tyrants:

Ceux qui n'ont pas réfléchi sur la marche de l'esprit humain dans la découverte [...] doivent s'étonner qu'un si-long espace de temps ait séparé la connaissance de l'art d'imprimer les dessins, et la découverte de celui d'imprimer des caractères. Sans doute, quelques graveurs de planches avaient eu l'idée de cette application de leur art; [...] et il est même heureux qu'on n'ait pu en soupçonner toute l'étendue; car les prêtres et les rois se seraient unis pour étouffer, dès sa naissance, l'ennemi qui devait les démasquer et les détrôner. (Condorcet, *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès*, p. 138)

In Condorcet’s technocratic state, the academic mines motives, while the media imputes them to humanity’s masked exploiters—the priests and tyrants who corrupt their reason by seducing their passions and imagination. While he insists that the academic class must not be careful not “to fatigue the citizens with too rapid of changes”, and must allow “the brake of public opinion” (Condorcet, *Fragment sur l’Atlantide*, p. 601) to be occasionally applied, Condorcet is confident that his unmasking machine won’t be abused, that the hopes and expectations of the *lumières* won’t be swallowed up, and *libido sciendi* converted into *libido dominandi*.

If Condorcet does not perceive this danger, then it's because he believes that reason will overcome "the obstacle that the will and passions can pose to the establishment of a perpetual society for the progress of the sciences" (Ibid., p. 611). He believes, in other words, that reason alone makes man good. Rousseau rejected this notion in the *Premier discours*, where he defends ignorance and cautions against praising talents before virtue. But Louis de Bonald formulates a direct response to Condorcet in his *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux* (1796):

Les hommes ne deviennent pas meilleurs, ni plus maîtres de leurs passions, en devenant plus savants, par la même raison qu'ils ne deviennent pas meilleurs, ni plus maîtres de leurs passions, en devenant plus forts. Au contraire, la passion de dominer s'accroît avec les moyens de la satisfaire ; et cette passion dans le savant et l'homme fort est la même dans son objet, et ne diffère que par les moyens [...].<sup>441</sup>

Reason, like physical strength, grants power, but we have no assurance that, unchecked, it will produce good. Louis de Bonald's critique parallels Rousseau's: the *philosophes* fail to appreciate how intimately related the will to know and the will to power are. This, of course, makes sense, for as Strauss indicates, the Moderns conceive of reason in opposition to authority, contrary to the Ancients, who opposed it to appearance. Confident that they were fighting the war against prejudice and authority, the *savants* could hardly recognize their own prejudices and potential to abuse authority. Hence why Rousseau unmasked them, and why they, in turn, institutionalized unmasking without a second thought, giving birth to the social sciences.

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<sup>441</sup> Louis de Bonald, *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux dans la société civile, démontré par le raisonnement et par l'histoire*, *Œuvres complètes de M. de Bonald*, vol. 1 (Paris : J.-P. Migne, 1859), p. 727.

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