

Proposed by the Academy of Dijon

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

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DISCOURSE
ON THE ORIGIN
AND THE

FOUNDATIONS OF INEQUALITY
AMONG MEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] However important it may be, in order to judge soundly regarding Man's natural state, to consider him from his origin, and to examine him, so to speak, in the first Embryo of the species, I shall not follow his organization throughout its successive developments: I shall not pause to search in the animal System what he may have been at the beginning, if he was eventually to become what he now is; I shall not examine whether, as Aristotle thinks, his elongated nails were at first hooked claws; whether he was as hairy as a bear and whether, walking on all fours, (iii) his gaze directed to the Earth, and confined to a horizon of a few paces, determined both the character and the limits of his ideas. I could form only vague and almost imaginary conjectures on this subject: Comparative Anatomy has as yet made too little progress, the observations of Naturalists are as yet too uncertain to permit establishing the basis of a solid argument on such foundations; so that, without resorting to the supernatural knowledge we have on this point, and without taking into account the changes that must have occurred in man's internal and the external conformation, as he gradually put his limbs to new uses, and took up new foods, I shall assume him always conformed as I see him today, walking on two feet, using his hands as we do ours, directing his gaze over the whole of Nature, and with his eyes surveying the vast expanse of Heaven.

[2] By stripping this Being, so constituted, of all the supernatural gifts he may have received, and of all the artificial faculties he could only have acquired by prolonged progress, by considering him, in a word, such as he must have issued from the hands of Nature, I see an animal [135] less strong than some, less agile than others, but, all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all: I see him sating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first Stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied.

[3] The Earth, abandoned to its natural fertility (iv), and covered by immense forests which no Axe ever mutilated, at every step offers Storage and shelter to the animals of every species. Men, dispersed among them, observe, imitate their industry, and so raise themselves to the level of the Beasts' instinct, with this advantage

that each species has but its own instinct, while man perhaps having none that belongs to him, appropriates them all, feeds indifferently on most of the various foods (v) which the other animals divide among themselves, and as a result finds his subsistence more easily than can any one of them.

[4] Accustomed from childhood to the inclemencies of the weather, and the rigor of the seasons, hardened to fatigue, and forced to defend naked and unarmed their life and their Prey against the other ferocious Beasts or to escape them by running, Men develop a robust and almost unalterable temperament; The Children, since they come into the world with their Fathers' excellent constitution and strengthen it by the same activities that produced it, thus acquire all the vigor of which the human species is capable. Nature deals with them exactly as the Law of Sparta did with the Children of Citizens; It makes those who have a good constitution strong and robust, and causes all the others to perish; differing in this from our societies, where the State kills Children indiscriminately before their birth by making them a burden to their Fathers.

[5] Since his body is the only tool which savage man knows, he puts it to various uses of which our bodies are incapable for want of practice, and it is our industry that deprives us of the strength and the agility which necessity obliges him to acquire. If he had had an ax, could his wrist have cracked such solid branches? If he had had a sling, could he have thrown a stone as hard by hand? If he had had a ladder, could he have climbed a tree as nimbly? If he had had a Horse, could he have run as fast? Give civilized man [136] the time to gather all his machines around him, there can be no doubt that he will easily overcome Savage man, but if you want to see an even more unequal contest, have them confront each other naked and unarmed, and you will soon recognize the advantage of constantly having all one's strengths at one's disposal, of being ever ready for any eventuality and of, so to speak, always carrying all of oneself along with one (vi).

[6] Hobbes contends that man is naturally intrepid, and seeks only to attack, and to fight. An illustrious Philosopher thinks, on the contrary, and Cumberland and Pufendorf also maintain, that nothing is as timid as man in the state of Nature, and that he is forever trembling, and ready to flee at the least noise that strikes him, at the least movement he notices. This may be so with regard

to objects he does not know, and I do not doubt that he is frightened by every new Sight that presents itself to him, whenever he cannot distinguish between the Physical good or evil he can expect from it, nor compare his strength with the dangers he has to outrun; circumstances that are rare in the state of Nature, where everything proceeds in such a uniform fashion, and where the face of the Earth is not subject to the sudden and constant changes caused in it by the passions and the inconstancy of Peoples assembled. But Savage man, living dispersed amongst the animals, and early finding himself in the position of having to measure himself against them, soon makes the comparison and, feeling that he surpasses them in skill more than they do him in strength, learns to fear them no more. Set a bear or a wolf against a sturdy, agile, courageous Savage, as they all are, armed with stones, and a good stick, and you will see that the danger will at the very least be mutual, and that after several such experiences, ferocious Beasts, disinclined as they are to attack one another, will not readily attack man, whom they will have found to be just as ferocious as themselves. As for the animals that really do have more strength than he has skill, he is in the same position with regard to them as are the other weaker species which none the less continue to subsist; with this advantage on man's side that, since he runs just as well as they, and can find almost certain refuge in trees, he has the initiative in any encounter, as well as the choice of [137] fleeing or fighting. Let us add that it does not seem that any animal naturally wars against man, except in the case of self-defense or of extreme hunger, or that any bears him those violent antipathies that seem to announce that one species is destined by Nature to serve as fodder for the other.

[7] These are undoubtedly the reasons why Negroes and Savages worry so little about the ferocious beasts they might meet up with in the woods. In this respect the Caribs of Venezuela, among others, live in the most profound security and without the slightest inconvenience. Although they are almost naked, says François Corréal, they do not hesitate boldly to take their chances in the woods, armed only with bow and arrow; yet nobody has ever heard of a single one of them being devoured by beasts.

[8] Other, more formidable, enemies against which man has not the same means of defense are the natural infirmities, childhood, old age, and illnesses of every kind: Melancholy signs of our weak-

ness, of which the first two are common to all animals, and the last belongs primarily to man living in Society. As regards Childhood, I even note that, since the Mother carries her child with her everywhere, she can feed it much more readily than can the female of a number of animals, forced as they are to wear themselves out going back and forth, one way to find their food, the other to suckle or feed their young. It is true that if the woman happens to perish, the child runs a considerable risk of perishing with her; but this danger is common to a hundred other species whose young are for a long time not in a condition to forage for themselves; and while Childhood lasts longer among us, life also does, so that everything remains more or less equal in this respect (vii); although there are other rules regarding the duration of the first period of life and the number of young, (viii) which do not pertain to my Subject. Among Old people, who act and perspire little, the need for food diminishes together with the capacity to provide for it; And since Savage life keeps gout and rheumatisms from them, and old age is the one of all ills which human assistance can least alleviate, they eventually expire without anyone's noticing that they are ceasing to be, and almost without their noticing it themselves. [138]

[9] Regarding illnesses, I shall not repeat the vain and false declarations against Medicine by most healthy people; but I shall ask whether there is any solid evidence to conclude that in Countries where this art is most neglected man's average life span is shorter than in those where it is cultivated with the greatest care; And how could it be, if we inflict upon ourselves more ills than Medicine can provide Remedies! The extreme inequality in ways of life, the excess of idleness among some, the excess of work among others, the ease with which our appetites and our sensuality are aroused and satisfied, the excessively exotic dishes of the rich, which fill them with inflammatory humors and wrack them with indigestions, the bad food of the Poor, which most of the time they do not even have, and the want of which leads them greedily to overtax their stomachs when they get the chance, the late nights, the excesses of every kind, the immoderate transports of all the Passions, the fatigues and exhaustion of the Mind, the innumerable sorrows and pains that are experienced in every station of life and that constantly gnaw away at men's souls; Such are the fatal proofs that most of our ills are of our own making, and that we would have avoided

almost all of them if we had retained the simple, uniform and solitary way of life prescribed to us by Nature. If it destined us to be healthy then, I almost dare assert, the state of reflection is a state against Nature, and the man who meditates is a depraved animal. When one considers the good constitution of Savages, at least of those we have not ruined with our strong liquors, when one realizes that they know almost no other illnesses than wounds and old age, one is strongly inclined to believe that the history of human diseases could easily be written by following that of civil Societies. Such at least is the opinion of Plato who, on the basis of certain Remedies used or approved by Podalirius and Machaon at the siege of Troy, judges that various diseases which these remedies should have brought on were at that time not yet known among men. And Celsus reports that dieting, which is nowadays so necessary, was only invented by Hippocrates. [139]

[10] With so few sources of illness, man in the state of Nature has, then, little need for remedies, and even less for Doctors; in this respect too, the human species is no worse off than all the others, and one can easily find out from Hunters whether they come across many unhealthy animals in their treks. They do find some with massive, very well-healed wounds, that had bones and even limbs broken and knit with no other Surgeon than time, no other regimen than their ordinary life, and are no less perfectly cured for not having been tormented by incisions, poisoned by Drugs, or exhausted by fasts. In short, however useful well-administered medicine may be among us, it is in any event certain that while the sick Savage abandoned to himself alone has nothing to hope for but from Nature, in return he has nothing to fear but from his illness, and this often makes his situation preferable to ours.

[11] Let us therefore beware of confusing Savage man with the men we have before our eyes. Nature treats all animals abandoned to its care with a partiality that seems to indicate how jealous it is of this right. The Horse, the Cat, the Bull, even the Ass are, most of them, larger in size, all of them have a sturdier constitution, greater vigor, force, and courage in the forests than in our homes; they lose half of these advantages when they are Domesticated, and it would seem that all our care to treat and to feed these animals well only succeeds in bastardizing them. The same is true of man himself: As he becomes sociable and a Slave, he becomes weak,

timorous, groveling, and his soft and effeminate way of life completes the enervation of both his strength and his courage. Let us add that the difference between one man and another in the Savage and in the Domesticated condition must be even greater than that between one beast and another; for since animal and man were treated alike by Nature, all the conveniences which man gives himself above and beyond those he gives the animals he tames are so many particular causes that lead him to degenerate more appreciably.

[12] To go naked, to be without habitation, and to be deprived of all the useless things we believe so necessary is, then, not such a great misfortune for these first men nor, above all, is it such a great obstacle to their preservation. [140] While their skin is not very hairy, they do not need it to be in warm Countries, and in cold Countries they soon learn to appropriate the skins of the Beasts they have overcome; though they have only two feet for running, they have two arms to provide for their defense and for their needs; Their Children may walk late and with difficulty, but the Mothers carry them with ease: an advantage not enjoyed by the other species where the mother, when pursued, finds herself compelled to abandon her young or to adjust her pace to theirs. * Finally, unless one assumes the singular and fortuitous concatenations of circumstances, of which I shall speak in the sequel, and which could very well never have occurred, it is for all intents and purposes clear that he who first made himself clothes or a Dwelling thereby provided himself with things that are not very necessary, since he had done without them until then, and since it is not evident why he could not have tolerated as a grown man a mode of life he had tolerated from childhood.

[13] Alone, idle, and always near danger, Savage man must like to sleep and be a light sleeper like the animals which, since they think little, sleep, so to speak, all the time they do not think: Self-preservation being almost his only care, his most developed faculties

* There may be a few exceptions to this. For example that of the animal from the province of Nicaragua which resembles a Fox, has feet like a man's hands and, according to Corréal, has a pouch under its belly into which the mother puts her young when she has to flee. This is probably the same animal which in Mexico is called *Tlaquitzin*, and to the female of which Laet attributes a similar pouch serving the same purpose.

must be those that primarily serve in attack and defense, either in order to overcome his prey or to guard against becoming another animal's prey. By contrast, the organs that are perfected only by softness and sensuality must remain in a state of coarseness which precludes every kind of delicacy in him; and since his senses differ in this respect, his touch and taste will be extremely crude; his sight, hearing and smell most acute. Such is the animal state in general, and, according to Travelers' reports, it is also that of [141] most Savage Peoples. It is therefore not surprising that the Hottentots of the Cape of Good Hope can sight Ships with the naked eye as far out on the high seas as the Dutch can with Telescopes, nor that the Savages of America track the Spaniards by smell just as well as the best Dogs might have done, nor that all these Barbarous Nations tolerate their nakedness without discomfort, whet their taste with hot Peppers, and drink European Liquors like water.

[14] Until now I have considered only Physical Man; Let us now try to view him from the Metaphysical and Moral side.

[15] I see in any animal nothing but an ingenious machine to which nature has given senses in order to wind itself up and, to a point, protect itself against everything that tends to destroy or to disturb it. I perceive precisely the same thing in the human machine, with this difference that Nature alone does everything in the operations of the Beast, whereas man contributes to his operations in his capacity as a free agent. The one chooses or rejects by instinct, the other by an act of freedom; as a result the Beast cannot deviate from the Rule prescribed to it even when it would be to its advantage to do so, while man often deviates from it to his detriment. Thus a Pigeon would starve to death next to a Bowl filled with the choicest meats, and a Cat atrop heaps of fruit or of grain, although each could very well have found nourishment in the food it disdains if it had occurred to it to try some; thus dissolute men abandon themselves to excesses which bring them fever and death; because the Mind depraves the senses; and the will continues to speak when Nature is silent.

[16] Every animal has ideas, since it has senses; up to a point it even combines its ideas, and in this respect man differs from the Beast only as more does from less. Some Philosophers have even suggested that there is a greater difference between one given man and another than there is between a given man and a given beast; It

is, then, not so much the understanding that constitutes the specific difference between man and the other animals, as it is his property of being a free agent. Nature commands every animal, and the Beast obeys. Man [142] experiences the same impression, but he recognizes himself free to acquiesce or to resist; and it is mainly in the consciousness of this freedom that the spirituality of his soul exhibits itself: for Physics in a way explains the mechanism of the senses and the formation of ideas; but in the power of willing, or rather of choosing, and in the sentiment of this power, are found purely spiritual acts about which nothing is explained by the Laws of Mechanics.

[17] But even if the difficulties surrounding all these questions left some room for disagreement about this difference between man and animal, there is another very specific property that distinguishes between them, and about which there can be no argument, namely the faculty of perfecting oneself; a faculty which, with the aid of circumstances, successively develops all the others, and resides in us, in the species as well as in the individual, whereas an animal is at the end of several months what it will be for the rest of its life, and its species is after a thousand years what it was in the first year of those thousand. Why is man alone liable to become imbecile? Is it not that he thus returns to his primitive state and that, whereas the Beast, which has acquired nothing and also has nothing to lose, always keeps its instinct, man again losing through old age or other accidents all that his *perfectibility* had made him acquire, thus relapses lower than the Beast itself? It would be sad for us to be forced to agree that this distinctive and almost unlimited faculty, is the source of all of man's miseries; that it is the faculty which, by dint of time, draws him out of that original condition in which he would spend tranquil and innocent days; that it is the faculty which, over the centuries, causing his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues to bloom, eventually makes him his own and Nature's tyrant (ix). It would be frightful to be obliged to praise as a beneficent being him who first suggested to the inhabitant of the Banks of the Orinoco the use of the Slatas he ties to his Children's temples, and which insure at least a measure of their imbecility, and of their original happiness.

[18] Savage Man, left by Nature to bare instinct alone, or rather compensated for the instinct he perhaps lacks, by faculties capable

of initially making up for it, and [143] of afterwards raising him far above nature, will then begin with purely animal functions: (X) to perceive and to sense will be his first state, which he will have in common with all animals. To will and not to will, to desire and to fear, will be the first and almost the only operations of his soul until new circumstances cause new developments in it.

[19] Regardless of what the Moralists may say about it, the human understanding owes much to the Passions which, as is commonly admitted, also owe much to it: It is by their activity that our reason perfects itself; We seek to know only because we desire to enjoy, and it is not possible to conceive why someone who had neither desires nor fears would take the trouble to reason. The Passions, in turn, owe their origin to our needs, and their progress to our knowledge; for one can only desire or fear things in terms of the ideas one can have of them, or by the simple impulsion of Nature; and Savage man, deprived of every sort of enlightenment, experiences only the Passions of this latter kind; his Desires do not exceed his Physical needs (xi): The only goods he knows in the Universe are food, a female, and rest; the only evils he fears are pain, and hunger; I say pain, and not death, for an animal will never know what it is to die, and the knowledge of death, and of its terrors, is one of man's first acquisitions on moving away from the animal condition.

[20] If I had to do so, I could easily buttress this sentiment with facts, and show that in all Nations of the world, progress of the Mind proportioned itself exactly to the needs, which Peoples received from Nature, or to which circumstances subjected them, and consequently to the passions, which inclined them to satisfy these needs. I would show the arts being born in Egypt, and spreading with the floodings of the Nile; I would follow their progress among the Greeks, where they were seen to burgeon, grow, and rise to the Heavens amid the Sands and Rocks of Attica, without being able to take root on the fertile Banks of the Eurotas; I would point out that in general the Peoples of the North [144] are more industrious than those of the south because they can less afford not to be so, as if Nature wanted in this way to equalize things, by endowing Minds with the fertility it denies the Soil.

[21] But without resorting to the uncertain testimonies of History, who fails to see that everything seems to remove from Savage

man the temptation as well as the means to cease being savage? His imagination depicts nothing to him; his heart asks nothing of him. His modest needs are so ready to hand, and he is so far from the degree of knowledge necessary to desire to acquire greater knowledge, that he can have neither foresight nor curiosity. The spectacle of Nature becomes so familiar to him that he becomes indifferent to it. Forever the same order, forever the same revolutions; he lacks the wit to wonder at the greatest marvels; and it is not to him that one will turn for the Philosophy man needs in order to be able to observe once what he has seen every day. His soul, which nothing stirs, yields itself to the sole sentiment of its present existence, with no idea of the future, however near it may be, and his projects, as limited as his views, hardly extend to the close of day. Such is still nowadays the extent of the Carib's foresight: He sells his Cotton bed in the morning and comes weeping to buy it back in the evening, for not having foreseen that he would need it for the coming night.

[22] The more one meditates on this subject, the greater does the distance between pure sensations and the simplest knowledge grow in our eyes; and it is impossible to conceive how a man could, by his own strength alone, without the help of communication, and without the goad of necessity, have crossed so great a divide. How many centuries perhaps elapsed before men were in a position to see any other fire than that of Heaven? How many different chance occurrences must they have needed before they learned the most common uses of this element? How many times must they have let it go out before they mastered the art of reproducing it? And how many times did each one of these secrets perhaps die together with its discoverer? What shall we say about agriculture, an art requiring so much labor and foresight: dependent on other arts, which can quite obviously be pursued [145] only in a society that has at least begun, and which we use not so much to draw forth from the Earth foods it would readily yield without agriculture as to force it to [conform to] the predilections that are more to our taste? But let us suppose that men had multiplied so much that natural produce no longer sufficed to feed them; a supposition which, incidentally, would point to one great advantage for the human Species in this way of living: Let us suppose that without forges, and without Workshops, the tools for Farming had dropped from Heaven into the Savages' hands; that these men had overcome the mortal hatred

they all have of sustained work; that they had learned to foresee their needs sufficiently far ahead, that they had guessed how to cultivate the Earth, sow seed, and plant Trees; that they had found the art of grinding Wheat and of fermenting grapes; all of them things which the Gods had to be made to teach them, for want of conceiving how they could have learned them on their own; what man would, after all this, be so senseless as to torment himself with cultivating a Field that will be despoiled by the first passer-by, man or beast, fancying this harvest; and how will everyone resolve to spend his life doing hard work when the more he needs its rewards, the more certain he is not to reap them? In a word, how can this situation possibly dispose men to cultivate the Earth so long as it has not been divided among them, that is to say so long as the state of Nature is not abolished?

[23] Even if we should wish to suppose a Savage man as skillful in the art of thinking as our Philosophers make him out to be; even if, following their example, we should make of him a Philosopher as well, who discovers alone the most sublime truths, who by chains of extremely abstract reasoning establishes for himself maxims of justice and reason derived either from the love of order in general, or from the known will of his Creator; In a word, even if we should suppose him to have a mind as intelligent and as enlightened as it must be, and, indeed, is found to be, heavy and stupid, what use would the Species derive from all this Metaphysics, which could not be communicated and would perish with the individual who [1746] had invented it? What progress could Mankind make, scattered in the Woods among the Animals? And how much could men perfect and enlighten one another who, having neither a fixed Dwelling nor any need of one another, might perhaps meet no more than twice in their life, without recognizing and speaking with one another?

[24] If one considers how many ideas we owe to the use of speech; How much Grammar exercises and facilitates the operations of the Mind; if one thinks about the inconceivable efforts and the infinite time the first invention of Languages must have cost; if one adds these reflections to those that preceded, then one can judge how many thousands of Centuries would have been required for the successive development in the human Mind of the Operations of which it was capable.

[25] Let me be allowed briefly to consider the perplexities regarding the origin of Languages. I could leave it at here quoting or retating the Abbé de Condillac's investigations of this matter, all of which fully confirm my sentiment, and which perhaps suggested his first idea to me. But since the manner in which this Philosopher resolves the difficulties he himself raises regarding the origin of instituted signs shows that he assumed what I question, namely some sort of society already established among the inventors of language, I believe that I ought to supplement the reference to his reflections with reflections of my own, in order to exhibit these same difficulties in the light best suited to my subject. The first difficulty that arises is to imagine how languages could have become necessary; for, Men having no relations with one another and no need of any, one cannot conceive the necessity or the possibility of this invention if it was not indispensable. I would be prepared to say, as many others do, that Languages arose in the domestic dealings between Fathers, Mothers and Children: but not only would this fail to meet the objections, it would be to commit the fallacy of those who, in reasoning about the state of Nature, carry over into it ideas taken from Society, and always see the family assembled in one and the same dwelling and its members maintaining among themselves as intimate and as permanent a union as they do among us, where so many common interests [1747] unite them; whereas in this primitive state, without Houses or Huts or property of any kind, everyone bedded down at random and often for one night only; males and females united fortuitously, according to chance encounters, opportunity, and desire, without speech being an especially necessary interpreter of what they had to tell one another; they parted just as readily; (xii) The mother at first nursed her Children because of her own need; then, habit having made them dear to her, she went on to feed them because of theirs; as soon as they had the strength to forage on their own, they left even the Mother; And since almost the only way to find one another again was not to lose sight of one another in the first place, they soon were at the point of not even recognizing each other. Note, further, that since the Child has all of its needs to explain, and hence has more things to say to the Mother than the Mother has to the Child, it is the child that must contribute most to the invention, and that the language it uses must largely be of its own making; which

for when a Giant and a Dwarf travel the same road, every step they take will give the Giant an added advantage. Now if one compares the prodigious variety of educations and ways of life that prevails in the different orders of the civil state with the simplicity and the uniformity of animal and savage life, where all eat the same foods, live in the same [161] fashion, and do exactly the same things, it will be evident how much smaller the difference between man and man must be in the state of Nature than in the state of society, and how much natural inequality in the human species must increase as a result of instituted inequality.

[49] But even if Nature displayed as much partiality in the distribution of its gifts as is claimed, what advantage would the more favored enjoy at the expense of the others in a state of things that allowed for almost no relations of any sort between them? Where there is no love, of what use is beauty? Of what use is wit to people who do not speak, and cunning to those who have no dealings with one another? I constantly hear it repeated that the stronger will oppress the weak, but explain to me what the word oppression here means? Some will dominate by violence, the others will groan, subject to all their whims! this is precisely what I see among us, but I do not see how the same could be said about Savage men, whom it would even be rather difficult to get to understand what subjection and domination are. A man might seize the fruits another has picked, the game he killed, the lair he used for shelter; but how will he ever succeed in getting himself obeyed by him, and what would be the chains of dependence among men who possess nothing? If I am tormented in one place, who will keep me from going somewhere else? Is there a man so superior to me in strength, and who, in addition, is so depraved, so lazy, and so ferocious as to force me to provide for his subsistence while he remains idle? He will have to make up his mind not to let me out of his sight for a single moment and to keep me very carefully tied up while he sleeps, for fear that I might escape or kill him: that is to say that he is obliged to incur willingly a great deal more trouble than he seeks to avoid and than he causes me. After all this, what if his vigilance relaxes for a moment? What if an unexpected noise make him turn his head? I take twenty steps into the forest, my chains are broken, and he never sees me again in his life.

[50] Without needlessly drawing out these details, everyone must [162] see that since ties of servitude are formed solely by men's mutual dependence and the reciprocal needs that unite them, it is impossible to subjugate a man without first having placed him in the position of being unable to do without another; a situation which, since it does not obtain in the state of Nature, leaves everyone in it free of the yoke, and renders vain the Law of the stronger.

[51] Having proved that Inequality is scarcely perceptible in the state of Nature and that its influence there is almost nil, it remains for me to show its origin and its progress through the successive developments of the human Mind. Having shown that *perfectibility*, the social virtues and the other faculties which natural man had received in potentiality could never develop by themselves, that in order to do so, they needed the fortuitous concatenation of several foreign causes which might never have arisen and without which he would eternally have remained in his primitive condition; it remains for me to consider and bring together the various contingencies that can have perfected human reason while deteriorating the species, made a being wicked by making it sociable, and from so remote a beginning finally bring man and the world to the point where we now find them.

[52] I admit that since the events I have to describe could have occurred in several ways, I can choose between them only on the basis of conjectures; but not only do such conjectures become reasons when they are the most probable that can be derived from the nature of things and the only means available to discover the truth, it also does not follow that the consequences I want to deduce from mine will therefore be conjectural since, on the principles I have just established, no other system could be formed that would not give me the same results and from which I could not draw the same conclusions.

[53] This will exempt me from expanding my reflections about how the lapse of time makes up for the slight likelihood of events; about the astonishing power of very slight causes when they act without cease; about the impossibility, on the one hand, of rejecting certain hypotheses without, on the other hand, being in a position to attach to them the certainty of facts; about how, when two facts given as real are to be connected by a sequence of intermediate facts

that are unknown or believed [163] to be so, it is up to history, if available, to provide the facts that connect them; about how, in the absence of history, it is up to Philosophy to ascertain similar facts that might connect them; finally about this, that with respect to outcomes, similarity reduces facts to a much smaller number of different classes than people imagine. It is enough for me to submit these issues for consideration to my Judges: it is enough for me to have seen to it that vulgar Readers need not consider them.

From Jean-Jacques Rousseau,
The Discourses and
other early political
writings, ed. V. Gourevitch
Cambridge University
Press, 1992

PART II

[164]

[1] The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, to whom it occurred to say *this is mine*, and found people sufficiently simple to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors Mankind would have been spared by him who, pulling up the stakes or filling in the ditch, had cried out to his kind: Beware of listening to this impostor; You are lost if you forget that the fruits are everyone's and the Earth no one's. But in all likelihood things had by then reached a point where they could not continue as they were; for this idea of property, depending as it does on many prior ideas which could only arise successively, did not take shape all at once in man's mind. Much progress had to have been made, industry and enlightenment acquired, transmitted, and increased from one age to the next, before this last stage of the state of Nature was reached. Let us therefore take up the thread earlier, and try to fit this slow succession of events and of knowledge together from a single point of view, and in their most natural order.

[2] Man's first sentiment was that of his existence, his first care that for his preservation. The Earth's products provided him with all necessary support, instinct moved him to use them. Hunger, other appetites causing him by turns to experience different ways of existing, there was one that prompted him to perpetuate his species; and this blind inclination, devoid of any sentiment of the heart, produced only a purely animal act. The need satisfied, the two sexes no longer recognized one another, and even the child no longer meant anything to the Mother as soon as it could do without her.

[3] Such was the condition of nascent man; such was the life of an animal at first restricted to pure sensations, [165] and scarcely profiting from the gifts Nature offered him, let alone dreaming of wresting anything from it; but difficulties soon presented themselves; it became necessary to learn to overcome them: the height of Trees which prevented him from reaching their fruits, competition from the animals trying to eat these fruits, the ferociousness of the animals that threatened his very life, everything obliged him to attend to bodily exercise; he had to become agile, run fast, fight vigorously. The natural weapons, branches and stones, were soon

at hand. He learned to overcome the obstacles of Nature, fight other animals when necessary, contend even with men for his subsistence, or make up for what had to be yielded to the stronger.

[4] In proportion as Mankind spread, difficulties multiplied together with men. Differences of terrain, Climate, seasons, could have forced them to introduce differences into their ways of living. Barren years, long and harsh winters, scorching all-consuming Summers, required renewed industry on their part. On seashores and Riverbanks they invented line and hook; and became fishermen and Fish-eaters. In forests they made bows and arrows, and became Hunters and Warriors. In cold Countries they covered themselves with the skins of the beasts they had killed; Lightning, a Volcano, or some happy accident acquainted them with fire, a new resource against the rigors of winter: They learned to conserve this element, then to reproduce it, and finally to prepare the meats they had previously devoured raw.

[5] This repeated interaction of the various beings with himself as well as with one another must naturally have engendered in man's mind perceptions of certain relations. The relations which we express by the words great, small, strong, weak, fast, slow, fearful, bold, and other such ideas, compared as need required and almost without thinking about it, finally produced in him some sort of reflection, or rather a mechanical prudence that suggested to him the precautions most necessary for his safety.

[6] The new enlightenment that resulted from this development increased his superiority over the other animals by acquainting him with it. He practiced setting [166] traps for them, he tricked them in a thousand ways, and although a number of them might surpass him in strength at fighting, or in speed at running; in time he became the master of those that could be useful, and the scourge of those that could be harmful to him. This is how his first look at himself aroused the first movement of pride in him; this is how, while as yet scarcely able to discriminate ranks, and considering himself in the first rank as a species, he was from afar preparing to claim first rank as an individual.

[7] Although others of his kind were not for him what they are for us, and he had scarcely more dealings with them than with the other animals, they were not neglected in his observations. The conformities which time may have led him to perceive between

them, his female, and himself, led him to judge regarding those he did not perceive, and seeing that they all behaved as he would have done in similar circumstances, he concluded that their way of thinking and of feeling fully corresponded to his own, and this important truth, once it was firmly settled in his mind, made him follow, by a premonition as sure as Dialectics and more rapid, the best rules of conduct to observe with them for his advantage and safety.

[8] Taught by experience that love of well-being is the sole spring of human actions, he was in a position to distinguish between the rare occasions when common interest should make him count on the help of his kind, and the even rarer occasions when competition should make him suspicious of them. In the first case he united with them in a herd, or at most in some kind of free association that obligated no one and lasted only as long as the transient need that had formed it. In the second case everyone sought to seize his own advantage, either by open force if he believed that he could do so; or by skill and cunning, if he felt he was the weaker.

[9] This is how men might imperceptibly have acquired some crude idea of mutual engagements and of the advantage of fulfilling them, but only as far as present and perceptible interest could require; for foresight was nothing to them and, far from being concerned with a distant future, they did not even give thought to the next day. If a Deer was to be caught, everyone [167] clearly sensed that this required him faithfully to keep his post; but if a hare happened to pass within reach of one of them, he will, without a doubt, have chased after it without a scruple and, after catching his prey, have cared very little about having caused his Companions to miss theirs.

[10] It is easy to understand that such dealings did not require a language much more refined than that of Crows or of Monkeys, which troop together in approximately the same way. Some inarticulate cries, many gestures, and a few imitative noises must, for a long time, have made up the universal Language, [and] the addition to it, in every Region, of a few articulated and conventional sounds — the institution of which is, as I have already said, none too easy to explain — made for particular languages, crude, imperfect and more or less such as various Savage Nations have now. I cover multitudes of Centuries in a flash, forced by time running out, the abundance of things I have to say, and the almost imperceptible

progress of the beginnings; for the more slowly events succeeded one another, the more quickly can they be described.

[11] This initial progress finally enabled man to make more rapid progress. The more the mind became enlightened, the more industry was perfected. Soon ceasing to fall asleep underneath the first tree or to withdraw into Caves, they found they could use hard, sharp stones as hatchets to cut wood, dig in the ground, and make huts of branches which it later occurred to them to daub with clay and mud. This was the period of a first revolution which brought about the establishment and the differentiation of families, and introduced a sort of property; from which there perhaps already arose a good many quarrels and Fights. However, since the stronger were probably the first to make themselves dwellings they felt they could defend, it seems plausible that the weak found it simpler and safer to imitate them than to try to dislodge them: and as for those who already had Huts, a man must rarely have tried to appropriate his neighbor's, not so much because it did not belong to him as because it was of no use to him, and he could not get hold of it without risking a very lively fight with the family that occupied it. [168]

[12] The first developments of the heart were the effect of a new situation that brought husbands and Wives, Fathers and Children together in a common dwelling; the habit of living together gave rise to the sweetest sentiments known to man, conjugal love, and Paternal love. Each family became a small Society, all the better united as mutual attachment and freedom were its only bonds; and this is when the first difference was established in the ways of living of the two Sexes, which until then had had but one. Women became more sedentary and grew accustomed to looking after the Hut and Children, while the man went in quest of the common subsistence. As a result of their slightly softer life, both Sexes also began to lose something of their ferociousness and vigor: but while each separately grew less fit to fight wild beasts, in exchange it became easier to assemble in order to resist them together.

[13] In this new state, with a simple and solitary life, very limited needs, and the implements they had invented to provide for them, men enjoyed a great deal of leisure which they used to acquire several sorts of conveniences unknown to their Fathers; and this was the first yoke which, without thinking of it, they imposed on themselves, and the first source of evils they prepared for their

Descendants; for not only did they, in this way, continue to weaken body and mind, but since these conveniences, by becoming habitual, had almost entirely ceased to be enjoyable, and at the same time had degenerated into true needs, it became much more cruel to be deprived of them than to possess them was sweet, and men were unhappy to lose them without being happy to possess them.

[14] Here one gets a somewhat better view of how the use of speech is imperceptibly established or perfected in the bosom of each family, and one can further conjecture how various particular causes could enlarge language, and accelerate its progress by making it more necessary. Great floods or earthquakes surrounded inhabited Areas with waters or precipices; Revolutions of the Globe broke off portions of the Continent and carved them into Islands. It seems likely that a common Idiom was formed earlier among men brought into closer proximity with one another in this fashion, and forced [169] to live together, than among those who roamed freely through the forests of the Mainland. Thus it is very possible that Islanders, after their first attempts at Navigation, introduced the use of speech among us; and it is at least very likely that Society and languages arose in Islands and were perfected there before they were known on the Continent.

[15] Everything begins to change in appearance. Men, who until now had roamed in the Woods, having become more settled, gradually come together, unite in various troops, and finally in every region form a particular Nation united in morals and character, not by Rules or Laws, but by the same kind of life and of foods, and the influence of a shared Climate. Permanent proximity cannot fail in the end to give rise to some bond between different families. Young people of the opposite sex live in adjoining Huts, the transient dealings demanded by Nature soon lead to others, no less sweet and more permanent as a result of mutual visits. They grow accustomed to attend to different objects and to make comparisons; imperceptibly they acquire ideas of merit and of beauty which produce sentiments of preference. The more they see one another, the less they can do without seeing one another more. A tender and sweet sentiment steals into the soul, and at the least obstacle becomes an impetuous frenzy; jealousy awakens together with love; Discord triumphs, and the gentlest of all passions receives sacrifices of human blood.

[16] As ideas and sentiments succeed one another, as the mind and the heart grow active, Mankind continues to grow tame, contacts expand and bonds tighten. It became customary to gather in front of the Huts or around a large Tree: song and dance, true children of love and leisure, became the amusement or rather the occupation of idle men and women gathered together. Everyone began to look at everyone else and to wish to be looked at himself, and public esteem acquired a price. The one who sang or danced best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most skillful, or the most eloquent came to be the most highly regarded, and this was the first step at once toward inequality and vice: [170] from these first preferences arose vanity and contempt on the one hand, shame and envy on the other; and the fermentation caused by these new leavens eventually produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence.

[17] As soon as men had begun to appreciate one another and the idea of consideration had taken shape in their mind, everyone claimed a right to it, and one could no longer deprive anyone of it with impunity. From here arose the first duties of civility even among Savages, and from it any intentional wrong became an affront because, together with the harm resulting from the injury, the offended party saw in it contempt for his person, often more unbearable than the harm itself. Thus everyone punishing the contempt shown him in a manner proportionate to the stock he set by himself, vengeance became terrible, and men bloodthirsty and cruel. This is precisely the stage reached by most of the Savage Peoples known to us; and it is for want of drawing adequate distinctions between ideas, and noticing how far these Peoples already were from the first state of Nature, that many hastened to conclude that man is naturally cruel and that he needs political order in order to be made gentle, whereas nothing is as gentle as he in his primitive state when, placed by Nature at equal distance from the stupidity of the brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man, and restricted by instinct and by reason alike to protecting himself against the harm that threatens him, he is restrained by Natural pity from doing anyone harm, without being moved to it by anything, even after it has been done to him. For, according to the axiom of the wise Locke, "*Where there is no property, there can be no injury.*"

[18] But it should be noted that beginning Society and the already established relations among men required in them qualities different

from those they derived from their primitive constitution; that, since morality was beginning to enter into human Actions and since, before there were Laws, everyone was sole judge and avenger of the offenses he had received, the goodness suited to the pure state of Nature was no longer the goodness suited to nascent Society; that punishments had to become more severe in proportion as the opportunities to offend became more frequent, and that the terror of vengeance had [171] to take the place of the Laws' restraint. Thus, although men now had less endurance, and natural pity had already undergone some attenuation, this period in the development of human faculties, occupying a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our amour propre, must have been the happiest and the most lasting epoch. The more one reflects on it, the more one finds that this state was the least subject to revolutions, the best for man (XVI), and that he must have left it only by some fatal accident which, for the sake of the common utility, should never have occurred. The example of the Savages, almost all of whom have been found at this point, seems to confirm that Mankind was made always to remain in it, that this state is the genuine youth of the World, and that all subsequent progress has been so many steps in appearance toward the perfection of the individual, and in effect toward the decrepitude of the species.

[19] So long as men were content with their rustic huts, so long as they confined themselves to sewing their clothes of skins with thorns or fish bones, to adorning themselves with feathers and shells, to painting their bodies different colors, to perfecting or embellishing their bows and arrows, to carving a few fishing Canoes or a few crude Musical instruments with sharp stones; In a word, so long as they applied themselves only to tasks a single individual could perform, and to arts that did not require the collaboration of several hands, they lived free, healthy, good, and happy as far as they could by their Nature be, and continued to enjoy the gentleness of independent dealings with one another; but the moment one man needed the help of another; as soon as it was found to be useful for one to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property appeared, work became necessary, and the vast forests changed into smiling Fields that had to be watered with the sweat of men, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to sprout and grow together with the harvests.

[20] Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts the invention of which brought about this great revolution. For the Poet it is gold and silver; but for the Philosopher it is iron and wheat that civilized men, and ruined Mankind. Indeed, both were [172] unknown to the Savages of America who have therefore always remained such; even other Peoples seem to have remained Barbarians as long as they engaged in one of these Arts without the other; and perhaps one of the best reasons why Europe had political order, if not earlier then at least more continuously and better than the other parts of the world, is that it is both the most abundant in iron and the most fertile in wheat.

[21] It is very difficult to conjecture how men came to know and to use iron: for it is not plausible that they imagined on their own extracting ore from the mine and doing what is required to prepare it for smelting, before they knew what the outcome would be. On the other hand, it is even less plausible to attribute this discovery to some accidental fire, as mines are formed only in arid places bare of trees and plants, so that it might seem that Nature had taken precautions to withhold this fatal secret from us. The only remaining alternative, then, is that some extraordinary event, such as a Volcano throwing up molten metal, will have given its Witnesses the idea of imitating this operation of Nature; even then, they must also be assumed to have had a good deal of courage and foresight to undertake such strenuous labor and to anticipate so far in advance the advantages they might derive from it; which really only accords with minds already more skilled than these must have been.

[22] As for agriculture, its principle was known long before its practice was established, and it is scarcely possible that men constantly engaged in drawing their subsistence from trees and plants would not fairly soon have the idea of how Nature proceeds in the generation of Plants; but their industry probably turned in that direction only rather late, either because trees which, together with hunting and fishing, provided their food, did not require their care, or for want of knowing the use of wheat, or for want of implements to cultivate it, or for want of anticipating future need, or, finally, for want of means to prevent others from appropriating the fruit of their labor. Once they had become more industrious, they probably began by cultivating a few vegetables or roots with sharp stones or pointed sticks [173] around their Huts, long before they knew

how to thresh and grind wheat, and had the implements necessary for large-scale cultivation, to say nothing of the fact that, in order to devote oneself to this occupation and sow fields, one has to decide to take an initial loss for the sake of great future gain; a foresight that is very alien to the turn of mind of Savage man who, as I have said, has trouble giving thought in the morning to his needs in the evening.

[23] The Invention of the other arts was therefore necessary to force Mankind to attend to the art of agriculture. As soon as men were needed to melt and forge iron, others were needed to feed them. The more the number of workers increased, the fewer hands were engaged in providing for the common subsistence, without there being any fewer mouths to consume it; and as some had to have foods in exchange for their iron, the others finally discovered the secret of using iron to increase foods. Thus arose on the one hand Plowing and agriculture, and on the other the art of working metals and multiplying their uses.

[24] From the cultivation of land, its division necessarily followed, and from property, once recognized, the first rules of justice necessarily followed: for in order to render to each his own, each must be able to have something; moreover, as men began to extend their views to the future and all saw that they had some goods to lose, there was no one who did not have to fear reprisals against himself for the wrongs he might do to another. This origin is all the more natural as it is impossible to conceive the idea of nascent property in any other way than in terms of manual labor: for it is not clear what, more than his labor, man can put into things he has not made, in order to appropriate them. Since labor alone gives the Cultivator the right to the produce of the land he has tilled, it consequently also gives him a right to the land, at least until the harvest, and thus from one year to the next, which, as it makes for continuous possession, is easily transformed into property. When the Ancients, says Grotius, gave Ceres the title *legislarix* and a festival celebrated in her honor the name *Thesmophoria*, they thereby indicated that the division [174] of land produced a new kind of right. Namely the right of property different from that which follows from natural Law.

[25] Things in this state could have remained equal if talents had been equal and if, for example, the use of iron and the consumption

of foods had always been exactly balanced; but this proportion, which nothing maintained, was soon upset; the stronger did more work; the more skillful used his work to better advantage; the more ingenious found ways to reduce his labor; the Plowman had greater need of iron, or the smith greater need of wheat, and by working equally, the one earned much while the other had trouble staying alive. This is how natural inequality imperceptibly unfolds together with unequal associations, and the differences between men, developed by their different circumstances, become more perceptible, more permanent in their effects, and begin to exercise a corresponding influence on the fate of individuals.

[26] Things having reached this point, it is easy to imagine the rest. I shall not pause to describe the successive invention of the other arts, the progress of languages, the testing and exercise of talents, the inequalities of fortune, the use or abuse of Wealth, nor all the details that attend them and which everyone can easily add. I shall limit myself to a brief glance at Mankind placed in this new order of things.

[27] Here, then, are all our faculties developed, memory and imagination brought into play, amour propre interested, reason become active, and the mind almost at the limit of the perfection of which it is capable. Here are all natural qualities set in action, every man's rank and fate set, not only as to the amount of their goods and the power to help or to hurt, but also as to mind, beauty, strength or skill, as to merit or talents, and, since these are the only qualities that could attract consideration, one soon had to have or to affect them; for one's own advantage one had to seem other than one in fact was. To be and to appear became two entirely different things, and from this distinction arose ostentatious display, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their wake. Looked at in another way, man, who had previously been free and independent, is now so to speak subjugated by a [175] multitude of new needs to the whole of Nature, and especially to those of his kind, whose slave he in a sense becomes even by becoming their master; rich, he needs their services; poor, he needs their help, and moderate means do not enable him to do without them. He must therefore constantly try to interest them in his fate and to make them really or apparently find their own profit in working for his: which makes him knavish and artful with some, imperious and harsh with the

rest, and places him under the necessity of deceiving all those he needs if he cannot get them to fear him and does not find it in his interest to make himself useful to them. Finally, consuming ambition, the ardent desire to raise one's relative fortune less out of genuine need than in order to place oneself above others, instills in all men a black inclination to harm one another, a secret jealousy that is all the more dangerous as it often assumes the mask of benevolence in order to strike its blow in greater safety: in a word, competition and rivalry on the one hand, conflict of interests on the other, and always the hidden desire to profit at another's expense; all these evils are the first effect of property, and the inseparable train of nascent inequality.

[28] Before its representative signs were invented, wealth could scarcely consist in anything but land and livestock, the only real goods that men can possess. Now, once inheritances had increased in number and size to the point where they covered all the land and all adjoined one another, men could no longer aggrandize themselves except at one another's expense, and the supernumeraries whom weakness or indolence had kept from acquiring an inheritance of their own, grown poor without having lost anything because they alone had not changed while everything was changing around them, were obliged to receive or to seize their subsistence from the hands of the rich; and from this began to arise, according to the different characters of the poor and the rich, domination and servitude, or violence and plunder. The rich, for their part, had scarcely become acquainted with the pleasure of dominating than they disdained all other pleasures, and using their old Slaves to subject new ones, they thought only of subjugating and enslaving their neighbors; like those ravenous wolves which once they have tasted human flesh [176] scorn all other food, and from then on want to devour only men.

[29] Thus, as the most powerful or the most miserable claimed, on the basis of their strength or of their needs, a kind of right to another person's goods, equivalent, according to them, to the right of property, the breakdown of equality was followed by the most frightful disorder: thus the usurpations of the rich, the Banditry of the Poor, the unbridled passions of all, stifling natural pity and the still weak voice of justice, made men greedy, ambitious, and wicked. A perpetual conflict arose between the right of the stronger and the

right of the first occupant, which only led to fights and murders (xvii). Nascent Society gave way to the most horrible state of war: Humankind, debased and devastated, no longer able to turn back or to renounce its wretched acquisitions, and working only to its shame by the abuse of the faculties that do it honor, brought itself to the brink of ruin.

*Shocked by the novelty of the evil,
at once rich and miserable,
He seeks to escape his wealth,
and hates what he had just prayed for.*

[30] It is not possible that men should not at last have reflected on such a miserable situation, and on the calamities besetting them. The rich, above all, must soon have sensed how disadvantageous to them was a perpetual war of which they alone bore the full cost, and in which everyone risked his life while only some also risked goods. Besides, regardless of how they painted their usurpations, they realized well enough that they were only based on a precarious and abusive right, and that since they had been acquired solely by force, force could deprive them of them without their having any reason for complaint. Even those whom industriousness alone had enriched could scarcely base their property on better titles. No matter if they said: It is I who built this wall; I earned this plot by my labor. Who set its boundaries for you, they could be answered; and by virtue of what do you lay claim to being paid at our expense for labor we did not impose on you? Do you not know that a great many of your brothers perish or suffer from need of what you have in excess, and that you required the express and unanimous [177] consent of Humankind to appropriate for yourself anything from the common subsistence above and beyond your own? Lacking valid reasons to justify and sufficient strength to defend himself, easily crushing an individual, but himself crushed by troops of bandits; alone against all, and unable, because of their mutual jealousies, to unite with his equals against enemies united by the common hope of plunder, the rich, under the pressure of necessity, at last conceived the most well-considered project ever to enter the human mind: to use even his attackers' forces in his favor, to make his adversaries his defenders, to instill in them other maxims and to

give them different institutions, as favorable to himself as natural Right was contrary to him.

[31] To this end, after exhibiting to his neighbors the horror of a situation that armed all of them against one another, that made their possessions as burdensome to them as their needs, and in which no one found safety in either poverty or wealth, he easily invented specious reasons to bring them around to his goal: "Let us unite," he told them, "to protect the weak from oppression, restrain the ambitious, and secure for everyone the possession of what belongs to him: Let us institute rules of Justice and peace to which all are obliged to conform, which favor no one, and which in a way make up for the vagaries of fortune by subjecting the powerful and the weak alike to mutual duties. In a word, instead of turning our forces against one another, let us gather them into a supreme power that might govern us according to wise Laws, protect and defend all the members of the association, repulse common enemies, and preserve us in everlasting concord."

[32] Much less than the equivalent of this Discourse was needed to sway crude, easily seduced men who, in any event, had too much business to sort out among themselves to be able to do without arbiters, and too much greed and ambition to be able to do for long without Masters. All ran toward their chains in the belief that they were securing their freedom, for while they had enough reason to sense the advantages of a political establishment, [178] they had not enough experience to foresee its dangers; those most capable of anticipating the abuses were precisely those who counted on profiting from them, and even the wise saw that they had to make up their mind to sacrifice one part of their freedom to preserve the other, as a wounded man has his arm cut off to save the rest of his Body.

[33] Such was, or must have been, the origin of Society and of Laws, which gave the weak new fetters and the rich new forces (xviii), irreversibly destroyed natural freedom, forever fixed the Law of property and inequality, transformed a skillful usurpation into an irrevocable right, and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjugated the whole of Mankind to labor, servitude and misery. It is easy to see how the establishment of a single Society made the establishment of all the others indispensable, and how, in

order to stand up to united forces, it became necessary to unite in turn. Societies, multiplying and expanding rapidly, soon covered the entire face of the earth, and it was no longer possible to find a single corner anywhere in the universe where one might cast off the yoke and withdraw one's head out of the way of the often ill-guided sword everyone perpetually saw suspended over it. Civil right having thus become the common rule of the Citizens, the Law of Nature no longer obtained except between different Societies where, under the name of Right of nations, it was tempered by a few tacit conventions in order to make commerce possible and to replace natural commiseration which, losing in the relations between one Society and another almost all the force it had in the relations between one man and another, lives on only in a few great Cosmopolitan Souls who cross the imaginary boundaries that separate Peoples and, following the example of the sovereign being that created them, embrace the whole of Mankind in their benevolence.

[34] The Bodies Politic thus remaining in the state of Nature among themselves soon experienced the inconveniences that had forced individuals to leave it, and this state became even more fatal among these great Bodies than it had previously been among the individuals who made them up. From it arose the National Wars, Battles, murders, reprisals that [179] make Nature tremble and that shock reason, and all those horrible prejudices that rank among the virtues the honor of spilling human blood. The most honest men learned to count it as one of their duties to slay their kind; in time men were seen to massacre one another by the thousands without knowing why; and more murders were committed in a single day's fighting, and more horrors at the capture of a single town, than had been committed in the state of Nature for centuries together over the entire face of the earth. Such are the first discernible effects of the division of Mankind into different Societies. Let us return to their institution.

[35] I know that some have attributed other origins to Political Societies, such as conquest by the more powerful, or the union of the weak; and the choice between these causes does not make a difference to what I want to establish: however, the cause of their origin which I have just given seems to me the most natural for the following reasons: 1. That, in the first case, the Right of conquest, since it is not a Right, could not have served as the foun-

dation for any other Right, for the Conqueror and the conquered Peoples always remain in a state of War with one another unless the Nation, restored to full freedom, voluntarily chooses its Victor as its Chief. Until that time, regardless of what may have been the terms of capitulation, as they were based on nothing but violence and are consequently null by this very fact, there can, on this hypothesis, be neither genuine Society, nor Body Politic, nor any Law other than that of the stronger. 2. That, in the second case, the words *strong* and *weak* are equivocal; that during the interval that separates the establishment of the Right of property or of the first occupant and the establishment of political Governments, the meaning of these terms is better conveyed by the terms *poor* and *rich*, because in fact, prior to the Laws, a man had no other means of subjugating his equals than by attacking their goods or making some of his own over to them. 3. That the Poor having nothing to lose but their freedom, it would have been a great folly for them to deprive themselves voluntarily of the only good they had left without gaining anything in exchange; that the rich, on the contrary, being so to speak sensitive in every part of their Goods, it was much easier to hurt them, and that they consequently [180] had to take more precautions to protect themselves against getting hurt; and that, finally, it is reasonable to believe that a thing was invented by those to whom it is useful rather than by those whom it harms.

[36] Nascent Government had no constant and regular form. For want of Philosophy and of experience, only present inconveniences were noticed, and men gave thought to remedying the others only as they became manifest. Despite all the labors of the wisest Lawgivers, the Political state always remained imperfect because it was almost a product of chance and because, having begun badly, time revealed its flaws and suggested remedies but could never repair the vices of the Constitution; it was constantly being patched; whereas the thing to do would have been to begin by purging the threshing floor and setting aside all the old materials, as Lycurgus did in Sparta, in order afterwards to erect a good Building. Initially Society consisted of but a few general conventions which all individuals pledged to observe, and of which the Community made itself the guarantor toward each one of them. Experience had to show how weak such a constitution was, and how easily offenders could escape conviction or punishment for wrongs of which the Public

alone was to be both witness and judge; the Law had to be eluded in a thousand ways, inconveniences and disorders had to keep multiplying; before it finally occurred to them to entrust the dangerous custody of the public authority to private individuals, and to commit to Magistrates the task of getting the People's deliberations heeded: for to say that the Chiefs were chosen before the confederation was established, and that the Ministers of the Laws existed before the Laws themselves, is an assumption not worthy of serious refutation.

[37] It would be no more reasonable to believe that Peoples initially threw themselves unconditionally and irrevocably into the arms of an absolute Master, and that the first means of providing for the common safety that proud and untamed men imagined was to rush headlong into slavery. Indeed, why did they give themselves superiors if not to defend them against oppression, and to protect their goods, their freedoms and their lives, which are, so to speak, the constitutive [181] elements of their being? Now since in the relations between man and man the worst that can happen to one is to find himself at the other's discretion, would it not have been against good sense to begin by surrendering into the hands of a Chief the only things they needed his help to preserve? What equivalent could he have offered them for the concession of so fine a Right; and if he had dared to exact it on the pretext of defending them, would he not straightway have received the answer of the Fable: What more will the enemy do to us? It is therefore incontrovertible, and it is the fundamental maxim of all Political Right, that Peoples gave themselves Chiefs to defend their freedom, and not to enslave them. *If he have a Prince, said Pliny to Trajan, it is so that he may preserve us from having a Master.*

[38] Politicians propound the same sophisms about the love of freedom that Philosophers propounded about the state of Nature; on the basis of the things they see, they judge of very different things which they have not seen, and they attribute to men a natural inclination to servitude because of the patience with which the men they have before their eyes bear theirs, not realizing that it is as true of freedom as it is of innocence and virtue that one appreciates their worth only as long as one enjoys them oneself, and loses the taste for them as soon as they are lost. I know the delights of your Country, said Brasidas to a Satrap who was comparing the life of

Sparta with that of Persepolis, but you cannot know the pleasures of mine.

[39] As an untamed Steed bristles its mane, stamps the ground with its hoof, and struggles impetuously at the very sight of the bit, while a trained horse patiently suffers whip and spur, so barbarous man will not bend his head to the yoke which civilized man bears without a murmur, and he prefers the most tempestuous freedom to a tranquil subjection. Man's natural dispositions for or against servitude therefore have to be judged not by the degradation of enslaved Peoples but by the prodigious feats of all free Peoples of guard against oppression. I know that the former do nothing but incessantly boast of the peace and quiet they enjoy in their chains, and that *they call the most miserable servitude peace*: but when I see the others sacrifice pleasures, rest, wealth, [182] power, and life itself for the sake of preserving this one good which those who have lost it hold in such contempt; when I see Animals born free and abhorring captivity smash their heads against the bars of their prison; when I see multitudes of completely naked Savages scorn European voluptuousness and brave hunger, fire, the sword, and death in order to preserve nothing but their independence, I feel that it is not for Slaves to reason about freedom.

[40] As for Paternal authority, from which some have derived absolute Government and the whole of Society, without invoking Locke's or Sidney's proofs to the contrary, it suffices to note that nothing in the world is farther from the ferocious spirit of Despotism than the gentleness of this authority which looks more to the advantage of the one who obeys than to the utility of the one who commands; that by the Law of Nature the Father is the Child's master only as long as it needs his assistance, that beyond that point they become equal, and that then the son, perfectly independent of the Father, owes him only respect and not obedience; for gratitude is indeed a duty that ought to be performed, but it is not a right that can be exacted. Instead of saying that civil Society is derived from Paternal power, it should, on the contrary, be said that this power derives its principal force from civil Society: an individual was recognized as the Father of many only once they remained assembled around him; the Father's goods, of which he is genuinely the Master, are the bonds that keep his children dependent on him, and he may [choose to] give them no more of a share of his estate