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JEAN - JACQUES  
ROUSSEAU  
*MORALIST*

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JEAN-JACQUES  
ROUSSEAU  
*MORALIST.*

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By  
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*'C'est celui du moraliste . . .'*  
(DIDEROT, on the Style of Rousseau, *Œuvres*,  
vol. ii, p. 339)

*'La vérité que j'aime n'est pas tant  
métaphysique que morale.'*  
(ROUSSEAU to DU PARC, 25 June 1761)



VOLUME I

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*To*  
MY WIFE





## PREFACE

'If unity, in and by itself, is thoroughly grasped by the sight or any other sense, . . . it cannot possess the quality of drawing the mind towards real existence. But if some contradiction is always combined with it in all its manifestations, making it appear the opposite of unity quite as much as unity itself, in that case a critic will be immediately required, and the mind will be compelled to puzzle over the difficulty . . .'

PLATO, *The Republic*, Bk. vii, 524-5 (Davies and Vaughan translation).

A COPY of the *Social Contract* in the book-stalls around the Odéon at Paris started this work in 1914. The following year I wrote a paper for Professor Christian Gauss at Princeton University on 'Rousseau and the Encyclopedists', which contained the substance of what is now Chapters III and V. An extensive work, 'Rousseau the Platonist', was then projected; but, on the wise counsel of my teacher and friend, Professor Norman Kemp Smith, this was given up for a time in favor of another subject, which led eventually to a publication, *Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume* (Princeton University Press, 1925). Then I returned again to my first project, though naturally, after the lapse of ten years, with a different attitude and intention. By the Spring of 1929 the first nine chapters were finished, dealing chiefly with the political thought of Rousseau. A separate essay was then composed, 'The Meaning of Obligation', for a volume *Contemporary Idealism in America* (edited by C. L. Barrett, Macmillan, N.Y. 1932); and a paper 'The Varieties of Political Obligation', for presentation at the Seventh International Congress of Philosophy at Oxford, September 1930 (*Proceedings*, Oxford University Press, 1931). A visit that same year to Savoy and Geneva, particularly to the Archives J.-J. Rousseau, gave the final impulse towards completion of the work.

My object has been to determine what the ideas of Rousseau really were. I have tried to seize hold of them in their first formation, and to follow, step by step, their own argument in his thought. To this end one must study the man himself and his own intention, without being distracted by the interpretations and prejudices which have accumulated in criticism since his time. It is necessary to scrutinise at every moment the occasions which made him write, and his studies and meditations, his friendships and relations with the world at large, his personal letters, and the unpublished fragments which disclose aims that were never quite achieved. Taking all these things together, and in the right order, one can see a meaning beyond the apparent 'contradiction'.

Biography is essential at all times for the understanding of Rousseau's thought. Two chapters have had to be almost entirely an account of his experiences. Thus Chapter XI deals with his sojourn at the Hermitage of Mme d'Épinay, which resulted in his difficulties with various friends. Without that story one can hardly appreciate the achievement represented in the *Letter to D'Alembert*, *The New Héloïse*, *Émile*, and the *Social Contract*. Again, Chapter XXI tells of the persecution that ensued, which was far from being imaginary; and this explains the latter-day individualism and democracy of Rousseau, in the *Letters written from the Mountain* and the projects regarding Corsica and Poland.

However, it has not been my intention to give a complete biography—only so much as seems essential to a knowledge of the works. It will doubtless occur to some readers that there ought to be much more said about the childhood of Rousseau, since it is commonly believed that infantile experience determines the whole cast of life and thought afterward. In practice this treatment has not appeared to be necessary. The general ideas of Rousseau are plainly derivable from literature and a long tradition. The peculiarities of his temperament and upbringing and experience do not explain such immemorial ideas, though they might, indeed, account for the particular form which he gave them in his writings. Yet even in this respect the known life and reflections of the mature man are far more revealing than the less-certain data concerning his early life.

There is no attempt in this book to interpret the apologetic writings of Rousseau, or those in which such a motive predominates—the *Confessions*, the *Dialogues*, and the *Rêveries*. What these writings tell has been kept in mind but not used as a basis of interpretation. Even the biographical accounts themselves have been written, as far as possible, only from evidence afforded by authentic letters and documents of the time.

It is also to be noted that the later political writings on Geneva, Corsica, and Poland have not been discussed as historical or diplomatic documents, but as works of general purport, offering certain moral ideas of society, politics, and religion. For my theme is not Rousseau the political scientist any more than Rousseau the apologist; it is Rousseau the Moralist.

One cannot arrive at the meaning of Rousseau without consulting many investigations as to fact, concerning manuscripts, letters, and events. For this purpose the following works other than the actual texts themselves have been invaluable: *The Political Writings of Rousseau*, by C. E. Vaughan (2 vols. Cambridge, 1915); *La Religion de J.-J. Rousseau*, by P. M. Masson (3 vols. Hachette, Paris, 1916); *Chronologie critique de la vie et*

*des œuvres de J.-J. Rousseau*, by L.-J. Courtois (vol. xv, *Annales*, 1923, and A. Jullien, Geneva, 1924); and *Correspondance générale de J.-J. Rousseau* (Dufour and Plan, vols. to date i-xviii, Colin, Paris, 1924-32). These works have been checked with each other and with many divers researches published in the *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (vols. to date i-xx, A. Jullien, Geneva, 1905-32). Several other books not specifically mentioned at any particular place in the text have had a general influence: *L'Unité de la pensée de J.-J. Rousseau*, by G. Lanson (*Annales*, 1912), and his chapter on Rousseau in the *Histoire de la littérature française* (Hachette, Paris, 1912); *J.-J. Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire*, by J. Texte (Hachette, Paris, 1909); *Du contrat social*, text and Introduction by G. Beaulavon (Rieder, Paris, 1922). The work of R. Hubert, *Rousseau et l'Encyclopédie* (Gamber, Paris, 1928), deserves special mention. Further, I acknowledge with great pleasure the courtesies of the Princeton University Library and the Library of the University of Geneva, and particularly MM. Bouvier and Aubert who gave me the opportunity to examine the manuscript of the early version of the *Social Contract* and other useful works in the Archives J.-J. Rousseau.

Some of the things in this book have been anticipated in publications of recent years. A welcome statement of essentials is given in *The Meaning of Rousseau*, by E. H. Wright (Oxford University Press, 1929). *La Pensée de J.-J. Rousseau*, by A. Schinz (Smith College Anniversary Series, 1929), is a notable work with the same comprehensive design as the present book. Several biographies have appeared, *The Early Life and Adventures of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, by A. L. Sells (W. Heffer, Cambridge, 1929), and *Rousseau*, by C. E. Vulliamy (G. Bles, London, 1931), and above all, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, by M. Josephson (Harcourt, Brace and Company, N.Y. 1931). And finally there have appeared two excellent discussions by E. Cassirer, with whose thought I find myself in the very closest agreement—'Das Problem Jean Jacques Rousseau' in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (Band xli, Berlin, 1932, pp. 177-213; 479-513) and 'Discussion' in *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* (32<sup>e</sup> Année, No. 2, Avril-Juin, 1932).

All the translations in the book are my own. A number of letters are rendered into English, and many of the significant fragments of essays which had been published in the original by Vaughan. Some of the latter are given *in extenso*, because they are so little known.

C. W. H.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

- H. Hachette edition 1905, Paris, *J.-J. Rousseau: Œuvres*.
- C.G. *Correspondance générale de J.-J. Rousseau*, Dufour, Paris, 1924 seq.
- Annales*. *Annales de la Société J.-J. Rousseau*, Geneva, 1905.
- Vaughan. *The Political Writings of Rousseau*, C. E. Vaughan, Cambridge, 1915.
- Corr. Litt.* *Correspondance littéraire de Grimm, &c.* Paris, 1877-82.

## CHAPTER I

' . . . Avec Socrate et le Divin Platon,  
Je m'exerce à marcher sur les pas de Caton.'

(Le Verger des Charmettes)

LATE in the manhood of Rousseau the moralist was born. Ordinary men who mature under parental care and acquire their moral principles through the slow and unconscious processes of habit scarcely know such discovery of themselves as moral beings. But for him it was a sudden and transforming disclosure. He was conscious of what was taking place within him, and his memory of the experience was so clear and distinct that he could long afterwards delineate his life during those days with a verisimilitude which makes it impossible for us to think it fiction.

He witnessed in himself, about his twenty-sixth year, the coming of a new life. For many years he had been something of a vagabond, irresponsible, yet ingratiating, and thus winning his way through the favor of others who were attracted by his amiable and affectionate nature. He seems to have been governed in his conduct largely by his affections. It was a need of his nature to please others, and to want to do what they liked. In this way he took the color of his social environment, and unresistingly followed the practices of those about him, not in those days possessing any idea of principles to be upheld in the face of the prevailing notions. Moreover, it was hard for him to fix upon anything for long at a time, his mind being exceedingly prone to reverie. In brief, he had grown to manhood, from the time of adolescence, without knowing any salutary discipline of the mind or heart. And then apparently, the serious progress of an illness changed the course of his life. His benefactress, Mme de Warens, had him moved to the country at Les Charmettes, in the hope of restoring him to health. There, in the rural scenes of which he was ever so genuinely fond, he slowly recovered, and with recovery came a sense of the worthlessness of his past life and the vow to make whatever remained for him something truly good.

He was very happy at Les Charmettes. But it was no passive happiness. Especially not the happiness people think of in connexion with the pleasures of sentiment. The *Confessions*, by a confusion of two distinct dates of residence there, mislead one to think that Rousseau was then rejoicing in the affections of Mme de Warens—the investigations of scholars disclose that this idyll belongs two years earlier in 1736 and that at the time of his



momentous sojourn at Les Charmettes he was living quite alone, feeling somewhat estranged from her, because she had bestowed her favors upon another. It appears that he quite forgot this, so that the various memories of his association with Mme de Warens coalesced into an ideal picture of love and rejuvenation. Yet his own account plainly shows what manner of happiness he actually enjoyed at that time. It came from a strenuous regimen of work. His mornings were given over to hard study, first and foremost of philosophy, then geometry, calculus, and the science of nature. He took up the study of Latin, and practiced writing in verse. For recreation he indulged in walks through the country-side, a little farming, playing music, and sociability with his neighbors and intimates. There is the breath of ritual in this mode of life, too, and something of a religious sentiment as to the worth of human existence and the bounty of the Creator. He was 'almost devout in the manner of Fénelon'. There are some poetical *Prayers* extant, records of such experience. And perhaps it was this religious quality of his life there which brought Mme de Warens so vividly to his recollection when he described the scene in later years, for she taught him this piety and was gratefully remembered for it.<sup>1</sup>

The moral renovation ushered in a great intellectual ambition. For Rousseau had convicted himself more of ignorance than evil intention. 'To know nothing at all, about the age of twenty-five years, and to want to learn everything is to bind oneself to making very good use of one's time.' And thus, in the midst of his piety, he turned to philosophy and mathematics and the sciences. This is not the usual way of expressing such sentiments. It was, in fact, due to a very special influence and to a discipleship, indeed, of the greatest moment for his future. He had almost become a follower of the Port-Royal moralists who were fine examples of liberal genius in the Church, for they taught the new sciences and the literatures ancient and modern, as well as the duties of man according to Scripture and the Fathers. They had produced some of the best modern textbooks for students, books on the grammar and art of language, and on logic, as the *Art de Penser*. Nevertheless the full scope and the animating spirit of his studies could not have come from the writings of these Jansenists: he distinctly tells us that their harsh theology frightened him; and he was one to be moved only by love, never by the emotion of fear. He was more attracted, in this regard, by the tempered morality of the Jesuit priests whom

<sup>1</sup> For this account of his years (1738-9) see *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, pp. 152-76, and *Correspondance Générale* (designated hereafter C.G.), vol. i, Nos. 23 and 26. Cf. Masson, *Annales* ix, pp. 37-41; Ritter, *ibid.*, xvi, pp. 182, 194.

he knew in the neighborhood, although he does not profess to have obtained from them the intellectual guidance and impetus which he recalls so distinctly in his own story. For this he renders thanks to a certain priest of the *Oratoire*, Father Lamy, whose book, *Dialogues on the Sciences*, he read and re-read—'a hundred times'.<sup>1</sup>

These *Dialogues on the Sciences* were precisely what he wanted. The sub-title runs as follows: 'In which one learns how to study the Sciences and to make use of them in order to render the Mind accurate and to form a righteous Heart.' They were both instructive and disciplinary. They contained the proper mingling of 'piety and knowledge' to appeal to a youth who had come face to face with the precariousness and brevity of a human existence on this earth. Father Lamy preached against the impurity of passion and the vanity, pride, and selfishness of men. He reminded the youthful pupil of his inevitable blindness, alike to the transitoriness of life and the truth of eternity. But he was by no means so austere as the Jansenists: 'Morality is the art of living happily.' And man can look forward to a genuine happiness, if he will but follow the rule of 'order'. The erring sinner can save himself by bringing some regularity into his daily existence, rising at a certain hour each day, working persistently at his tasks without succumbing to the temptation to divert himself with novelties, taking his repast and recreation at appointed times, and so on—the whole of his day moving according to a regimen like that of all Nature, the work of the divine Creator. And the special work prescribed for the young man was simply *study*. Intellectual discipline is an improving of the mind and heart; it educates man to the consciousness of the right and good and thus engenders moral conscience and the moral life that alone spells true happiness.

The counsels of Father Lamy were not limited to easy generalities. He directed the student who would take that way of knowledge, to learn mathematics, logic, literature, the natural sciences, philosophy, and theology. He recommended particular manuals on the scientific subjects; and for other matters, the 'originals' themselves. In regard to philosophy there were mentioned especially Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Epic-tetus, Lucretius, Descartes and his disciples, Malebranche, Gassendi, and Bayle.<sup>2</sup> Certain Greek-Latin texts were specified, for those who would not be equal to studying the ancient Greeks in the original. But Father Lamy did not expect all these authors to be read indiscriminately; he advised concentration upon one

<sup>1</sup> H., vol. viii, pp. 165, 167, 173; R. P. Bernard Lamy, *Entretiens sur les Sciences*.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Confessions* Rousseau commends his physician at Les Charmettes as being a 'great Cartesian' and interested in the philosophers; H., vol. viii, p. 165.

philosopher, so that by faithful absorption in this study the young learner might at length attain to the ultimate reward of true philosophy, the possession of 'wisdom and happiness'. These two things were what Rousseau most wanted—he therefore took Father Lamy, the philosopher-priest, as a 'guide of life' for his new career as a man.

Father Lamy had his own philosophic predilections. For he was priest of the *Oratoire* and himself under the spell of a far-famed teacher of his own order, Father Malebranche. Thus he regarded the *Recherche de la Vérité* as the fulfilment of Descartes's work, the final demonstration, indeed, of the reality of 'spiritual ideas', 'ideas', that is, in the older Platonic meaning, as directive ideals of beauty or order which exist in the mind of man before it receives the information of the senses and knows any particular things which are judged to be beautiful and good. These ideas are not of man's invention; they are implanted by God Himself in the mind and heart. They operate in all judgments of truth or right. And man's possession of these values, through the grace of God, is warrant for believing in his own 'natural goodness', sinner though he knows himself to be. For 'we are the work of God; we have no ground for believing that our nature is bad . . . amidst the corruption of man, then, we perceive the excellence of (our) nature'. Thus, 'since we are created for something truly great, being made for God, our spirit ought to be preoccupied with God alone. The first Truth of all ought to be the object of all our thoughts, and the Sovereign Good that of all the impulses of our hearts.'<sup>1</sup> There was, then, borne in upon Rousseau's consciousness a lasting conviction that the deepest and most natural movements of the human heart and mind are toward the truth and the good.

But a disciple of Malebranche would not forget the actual world of men while dwelling thus hopefully upon the destiny and happiness of mankind through divine Grace. For man spoils his life by his own ignorance and self-will. Pride and selfishness animate his thoughts all during life, and not the God who is the source and end of his being. The charity men ought to show each other, the love of others as oneself, is not expressed because passion and self-love dominate over every impulse. It is man, then, who has brought evil upon himself. And man must seek to redeem himself. And it is only by some disinterested love that the individual can lift himself above all this corruption and evil and attain to the perfections of his own nature. The helpful priests of the *Oratoire* did not hesitate to say that the 'love of truth' was one such power for good. *The Search for*

<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens*, pp. 39, 55, 114, 122.

*Truth* was what Malebranche had entitled his own masterpiece. When men seek to develop the innermost meanings of their own minds, and school themselves to the practice of righteousness as they know it in conscience, they will restore the balance of their own natures and do less injury to others. There is one great work for all—and Socrates had performed it—the deliverance of the soul through philosophy.

And Father Lamy waxed eloquent over the first great spokesman of these Socratic conceptions of education and the good life. 'We see things in Plato which approximate very closely our own religion: he devotes himself to the abstract sciences, like geometry, which takes his thought off sensible things and makes him better fitted to reflect upon spiritual realities; moreover, he has spoken most worthily of God, and of the immortality of the soul and its spiritual nature: his ethics is most elevated, and detached from things of the sensible world; and besides, he speaks divinely, and, by the force of his words quite as much as by that of his reasoning, he inspires us with the love of truth. The reading of his writings lifts the soul above all things of the world. He has sounded the depths of the heart of man. He has recognised that the state in which we are born is not that of a creature wholly innocent, that a life as unhappy as ours is the penalty of some kind of sin and that God Himself is the end of man whom He has made in His own Image. Plato's ethics is very fine, and only slightly different from that of the Christians, which makes St. Augustine say that, if Plato had seen how the Apostles changed the whole world with their teaching, he would have said: "there is the thing of which we were never able to convince man."<sup>1</sup>

It was obviously the moralist in Plato that Father Lamy (as had Augustine before him) especially admired. He showed this in another of his writings to which Rousseau had recourse in his studies: *Rhetoric or the Art of Speaking*, which includes some reflections on poetry. This book dealt specifically with the origin and significance of language and directed attention to its indispensable function of enabling men to communicate with each other and dwell together in society. Language keeps mankind from living wild and dispersed in nature. But it becomes a dangerous instrument when employed with a conscious art. For its primary function is to give expression to the emotions and attitudes of men toward things and each other, but the deliberate fashioning of speech into the forms of literature, particularly the drama, is a playing upon the passions and cultivating them beyond their natural innocence, to a pitch that renders any moral control

<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens, Discours sur la Philosophie*, pp. 283 ff.

very difficult. Here Plato's insight had been most profound. The morals of a people do change with their music. A marvelous sympathy holds between the soul's life and the cadences in which its inner meanings are voiced. Even the mere spectacle of a powerful or an illicit emotion awakens in the beholder impulses corresponding to those portrayed, so that he is carried out of himself and often transformed into an alien personality. But man's basic concern in this life is to be true to himself at all times and to hold steadfastly to his own native conceptions of truth and goodness. This steady insight is brought into jeopardy by the poetic arts. So Plato chased the poets from his ideal Republic.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Lamy considered the Christian ideal still higher than this Platonic one. 'The republic of Jesus Christ is more holy by far, as well as richer in goodness, than that of Plato.' For the mere philosopher commits errors which make him untrustworthy for those who would rely implicitly upon him for guidance in their immortal career. He is ignorant, too, of many things that simple peasants now know, thanks to the revelations of the Gospel. His philosophy has in it obscurities and great difficulties. Lamy urged, therefore, that a student should wait until he is well-matured in the discipline of philosophy before he suffers himself to be carried away by the divine Plato. He checked himself, however, with the wise observation that each pupil should follow his own interests and choose whichever philosopher is to him most revealing.<sup>2</sup>

To thoughts and appreciations such as these Rousseau was exposed, at a moment of moral crisis and very great susceptibility. He saw his own state of sin and ignorance depicted, his pride, self-will, and selfishness. But he seized eagerly upon the promise of ultimate happiness, if he would but seek wisdom and virtue. His new passion for knowledge could redeem him! He read all the books to which he was directed by the learned and wise Father Lamy, and he read them with an ardor that eventually converted their dead words into living tongues within himself. The *Confessions* tell of this: 'In reading every author, I made it a rule to adopt and follow all his ideas without mixing in any of my own or any one else, and without ever disputing his points. I said to myself: Let us begin by making a great store of ideas, be they true or false, but at least distinct, until my mind is sufficiently equipped to be able to compare them and make some choice from amongst them. That method is not without its disadvantages, I know, but it was successful in this

<sup>1</sup> *La Rhétorique ou l'Art de Parler*, 5th ed., pp. 1, 17, 56, 114, 280, 407, 450, 486, 490, and chaps. 15, 16; pt. 2, ch. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 560; cf. *Entretiens*, p. 176.

regard, that it gave me instruction. At the end of some years spent thus in thinking precisely according to others, without reflecting, so to speak, and almost without even reasoning on my own account, I discovered in myself enough of a foundation of learning to be self-sufficient, and to be able to think without the aid of any one else. Then when journeys and business deprived me of the opportunity of consulting books I spent my time going over and comparing what I had read, weighing everything in the balance of my own reason, and sometimes judging my masters. By thus having commenced so late in giving rein to my own powers of judgment I have not found that they lost any of their vigor; and now that I have published my own ideas, I have not been accused of being a slavish disciple and of laying down the law *in verba magistri*.<sup>1</sup>

The congenial writings of Lamy implanted into his mind the ancient belief that knowledge is virtue, and virtue, in turn, means happiness. Thus early, too, he was impressed with the reality of ideas that are 'spiritual' in character, distinct from the ideas of the senses which come from without, ideas within the soul itself, and wanting only to be given their release through meditation in order to show their reality and power. Conscience is the mind of man governing him by means of its inner laws. And man's lack of conscience, as he knew in his own heart, is due more to a refusal to listen than to an utter absence of such ideals. At bottom the nature of man is good, then, because it aims at the good. And Lamy offered a practical solution to any disciple who would perfect himself, a solution indeed of the philosopher rather than of the priest. It does not do merely to preach charity when men hear nothing but the call of their own selfish interests; but it might be effectual to show them their own ignorance and tempt them to eat of the tree of knowledge, for knowledge itself can become a passion, and as such a tendency toward a disinterested love of truth and goodness which might eventually triumph over self-love. This same conception of the efficacy of thought Rousseau met with again and again in the pages of the various philosophers he was reading, especially Malebranche, Leibniz, Locke, and Descartes. Their faith in intellect thus confirmed in him that newly discovered optimism about man's ultimate goodness of nature. These various beliefs he took to heart, later to speak out in his own tongue, and passing judgment, too, upon some of these early masters.

There was another suggestion lodged in his consciousness of no small importance, since it reappeared significantly later when he felt most at home among his own ideas. Lamy's version of

<sup>1</sup> H., vol. viii, pp. 169-70.

Plato's reasons for condemning dramatic poetry sowed the seed of the doctrine of his own *Letter to D'Alembert* twenty years later. It was a thought, however, somewhat disturbing to his conscience at the time. For he was already guilty of some poetical attempts, some *Prières*, the *Verger des Charmettes*, and probably a drama, *Narcisse*, which he claims to have written at the age of only eighteen. The artistic attitude coexisted uneasily in his mind with that of the religious moralist and philosopher.

Steeping himself, then, in the various books of the philosophers, he seems to have taken up the 'divine Plato'. But perhaps this pictures him as too docile a student. His writings betray an indomitable spirit of independence and a fatal inability to resist temptation whenever things were forbidden him. Lamy had sagely advised against reading Plato too soon: Rousseau omits to tell us, in the *Confessions*, whether he committed such a sin of disobedience or not. But there is a tell-tale autobiography written during those very months of study at Les Charmettes, *The Orchard of Charmettes*. It is a poem dedicated to Mme de Warens, in which Rousseau gives her an account of himself. It is the very first of his 'confessions' and a story of his daily round of occupations. We see him in his solitude: he is the spectator of the human comedy, observing men and the world through the eyes of Montaigne and La Bruyère. But he is more than a mere onlooker, for he makes it his first business every day to 'school himself with Socrates and the divine Plato, to walk in the path of virtue taken by Cato of old'. He is not merely the romance-reading youth now revelling in lovers' exploits. He is even more serious than the boy who had spent long nights enamored of the nobility of Plutarch's heroes. He resolves, at the very beginning of his day, to imitate the thought and conduct of the truly wise philosophers. Alongside his favorites from Plutarch there are now ranged, in his ardent fancy, the immortal figures of the martyred Socrates and the eloquent and moral-minded Plato. His preoccupation with Plato's *Dialogues* even creeps into his correspondence with Mme de Warens, and leads him to compare himself on one occasion with the Socrates of the colloquy with Lysias.<sup>1</sup> Thus it is evident from contemporary confessions that he was reading Plato for himself, perhaps in the Latin which he had again taken up, or in a translation available to him in the library of a neighbor, M. de Conzié, count of Charmettes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Mme de Warens, from Les Charmettes, Mar. 5, 1739 (erroneously attributed in Hachette ed. to 1747), *C.G.*, vol. i, No. 31.

<sup>2</sup> To M. Salomon, from Les Charmettes (1738), *ibid.*, No. 26. At least the *Republic* was available thus—see C. Bouvier, *La Bibliothèque des Charmettes*, p. 22.

But a certain personal influence distracted him from that concentrated study, so strongly enjoined upon him. M. de Conzié was a lover of books, an enthusiast and collector. He was not distinctively a scholar, but he desired to be *au courant* in the arts and sciences, particularly in modern France.<sup>1</sup> His interest was largely, then, in contemporary literature. From him Rousseau caught an enthusiasm for the moderns, and the habits of a bibliophile: he himself invested a good portion of his very small inheritance from his mother in books, in order to have a library of his own.<sup>2</sup> It was, doubtless, the encouragement of this same friend that emboldened him to publish an article in the *Mercure* (1738) discussing a question that had been proposed: Whether the world we inhabit is a sphere or a spheroid? It was to Conzié, also, that some first efforts at writing verse were sent for criticism. This early getting-into-print was a factor of some moment for the education of Rousseau, since it showed him the way to count for something in the world and nourished in him the ambition to make a contribution of his own to the arts and sciences. If he had never known these cravings for fame, he could not afterwards have described so vividly and truthfully the motives and effects of such pursuits.

In these early days of happiness at Les Charmettes, he really found his chief satisfactions within himself, in learning and self-development. He was giving himself the education he needed, and something, too, of the discipline. His most constant companions and friends were his books. It was reminiscence of this time, doubtless, when he later wrote in his preface to *Narcisse*: 'The charm of study very soon makes every other attachment insipid.'<sup>3</sup> And a few days after he took his final departure from this scene of the golden age of his life, he wrote back to Mme de Warens, asking that she take 'infinite care' of his library.<sup>4</sup> He had lost his heart to philosophy and letters.

An ardent moral philosopher must practice something of what he preaches. During those days under the roof of Mme de Warens he had become aware of his 'duty' to make his own livelihood and to cease depending upon her. The career to which he turned was that of tutor. Having taught himself something, he would now try to teach other youths. The impulse to do this had showed itself somewhat earlier when he tried, according to the *Confessions*, to educate a young man who was associated with him in that house. But now the enterprise

<sup>1</sup> C. Bouvier, *op. cit.*, pp. 26 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ritter, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-2; *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> H., vol. v, p. 105; Ritter, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> Apr. 23, 1740, *C.G.*, vol. i, No. 40.



seemed to be inspired by a more definite idea of the purpose of education. Perhaps there was a certain glamor for him, too, in the role of educator, on account of the eminence Plato gave it in his *Republic*. The 'philosopher', indeed, is important enough to stand alongside the 'king'. Be that as it may, Rousseau was going about his business with certain philosophical ideas in mind, to which he had to give expression, so deeply was he affected by them. After he had taken his position as tutor to the sons of M. de Mably at Lyon, about May 1, 1740, he set to work upon a *Project for Education*.

This piece of writing is an anticipation, by more than twenty years, of his final *Treatise on Education*. The first thought in its early Plan had to do with discipline. One must bring about in his pupils the right moral dispositions as an essential condition of right thinking. For the heart controls the head, and the habits and interests of man prescribe what the intellect is to see in any situation. All the factors, therefore, which contribute to the up-building of moral character must be reckoned with and wisely employed. Thus pleasure and pain, the rewards of praise and blame, are influences at all times directive of conduct; and through them the preceptor must work, so that his pupils will find 'study and virtue' actually a pleasure. The paternal example and attitude in respect to these things is another factor, and without corroboration from that source the tutor will have no authority with his charges and may even be despised by them. For children, especially those at the age of the sons of de Mably, are already wise in their own conceits and keen to spy out any weakness and inferiority of those placed over them. Such sentiments of vanity and self-love obfuscate the other natural feelings of youth and hinder their development, and they are such serious obstructions to education that they must be removed at any cost. To train the intellect without correcting these selfish habits of feeling is only to perfect an instrument of evil to minister to bad character. In fact, when the heart is already corrupted, such learning in the sciences brings about an even greater demoralisation in those of good parts than in ordinary youths. However, Rousseau was anxious to guard against the impression of disparaging scientific knowledge: 'my declared love of the sciences is well known.' But such knowledge must be instilled only after a moral basis is laid in that faculty of the soul which nourishes all forms of love whatsoever, the heart. It is important, then, to introduce the young men into the households of other people so that they will realise the value and necessity of esteeming others besides themselves and of having good manners and morals. Their play

with other children is also very essential to their education. But it must alternate with work, and never be confused with it, for the most general influence for good in all this training is the fact that it prescribes order, a time and place for everything, a discipline.

This *Plan of Education* obviously reflects the experience of its author. The need of regularity and discipline, the primary influences of the heart upon conduct, the role of new interests and of associating with others in developing disinterested habits of mind, these things he had learned in his own life. There are echoes, too, of Montaigne, La Bruyère, and Plutarch in these thoughts, as we should expect from his devotion to them, as told in the *Verger des Charmettes*. But there is, above all, the voice of Plato. Not the Plato of the *Republic* so much as that of the *Laws*, the philosopher dealing with actual men and states. For the whole structure of Rousseau's argument is to be found in the following passages from the *Laws*: 'Pleasure and pain I maintain to be the first perceptions of children, and I say that they are the forms under which virtue and vice are originally present to them. As to wisdom and true and fixed opinions, happy is the man who acquires them, even declining in years; and we may say that he who possesses them, and the blessings which are contained in them, is a perfect man. Now I mean by education that training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children; when pleasure, and friendship, and pain, and hatred, are rightly implanted in souls not yet capable of understanding the nature of them, and who find them, after they have attained reason, to be in harmony with her. This harmony of the soul, taken as a whole, is virtue; but the particular training in respect of pleasure and pain, which leads you always to hate what you ought to hate, and love what you ought to love, from the beginning of life to the end, may be separated off; and, in my view, will be rightly called education. . . . For, indeed, the discipline of pleasure and pain which, when rightly ordered, is a principle of education, has been often relaxed and corrupted in human life.' 'For entire ignorance is not so terrible or extreme an evil, and is far from being the greatest of all; too much cleverness and too much learning, accompanied with an ill bringing-up, are far more fatal.' 'At three, four, five, and even six years the childish nature will require sports; now is the time to get rid of self-will in him, punishing him, but not so as to disgrace him. . . . Children at that age have certain natural modes of amusement which they find out for themselves when they meet. And all the children who are between the ages of three and six ought to meet at the

temples of the villages, the several families of a village uniting on one spot.'<sup>1</sup> Thus the social experience of man was represented as a condition of his moral habits, and a good moral character is in turn absolutely essential to a sane and true intelligence. This set of ideas had impressed itself upon Rousseau's mind and apparently it was now dictating his own thoughts in connection with the practical business he had at hand. It is significant of the Platonic atmosphere of his thinking that he concluded his *Plan* with a pledge to do all in his power to make his pupils 'become *perfect men*'.

And it is interesting to observe that Father Lamy's *Rhetoric*, the *Port-Royal Logic*, and Abbe Plûche's *Spectacle of Nature* were the books to be employed for the intellectual portion of this course of education. There were also mentioned, as the very last means of instruction, some books on the knowledge of morality and political right, such as Pufendorff and Grotius.<sup>2</sup> These writings he deemed most valuable for a modern youth, as teaching him the principles of good and evil and the foundations of the society of which he is a part. And this allusion seems to reveal a new direction of his own interests. He had not mentioned these writings in his *Verger*; he had then been engrossed in the other aspects of philosophy, science, and literature. Somehow he had recently advanced into this new field of study himself and he was now recommending it for the young men whom he had in charge. In the year 1740 Rousseau's attention was already directed towards the moral importance of political institutions.

Ideas on the political aspect of human life were developing. They were expressed in two poetical pieces written either when at Lyon or shortly afterwards. They are *Letters* in verse, dedicated respectively to Ch. Bordes and to Parisot; but they are also 'confessions'. The first *Letter* makes a great deal of his own education in Geneva, the 'republican sentiments' of his environment and the austere religious practices. He is depicted as only a child of his own country unable to do more than sing according to his native 'Helvetic muse' and 'preach melancholy truths revolting to his readers'. These verses are the beginning of a long-continued idealisation of Geneva. In the *Letter* to Parisot he recalls even more definitely the ancient lessons of his infancy, the sanctity of duty, respect of those in authority, the love of mankind and obedience to the laws of the land. He remembers, too, that liberty is a fatal gift to man if he does not possess the virtue in him to use it wisely, to subject himself to the rule of

<sup>1</sup> *Laws*, Jowett's tr., Steph. 653, 819, 793-4; cf. *Republic*, Steph., 401-2; 491-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Projet*, H., vol. iii, p. 44.

law, and not to indulge himself in sheer license. These moral lessons, indeed, had only recently been learned, but he projected them into a remoter past, the life at Geneva. And he discovered something else about himself through his newer studies in the realm of politics. He was somebody in the State, even though an 'obscure citizen', because he was 'member of the sovereign' in a Republic. That was what he owed to Geneva. And, of course, he owed other things to Mme de Warens at Chambéry and to Parisot at Lyon. And it all culminated in a grateful thought: 'men are only what we have made them.'<sup>1</sup>

It would be a great mistake to fancy Rousseau pursuing these thoughts on society and education with any degree of single-mindedness. They were but fertile germs in his thinking. However, they were nourished further by his continued reading, for he had some of his own books forwarded to Lyon by Mme de Warens, and he worked at them in his spare time.<sup>2</sup> But he was thrown much more in the social world than at Les Charmettes, and he formed associations that exercised a different influence upon his thoughts and ambitions. Bordes and Parisot seem to have encouraged him further in his efforts to write poetry and to publish it. Thus the new environment was one calculated to cultivate in him 'worldly' ambitions of a *littérateur*.

He may be seen reckoning with these tendencies in himself in the verses of his *Letters* to these friends.

To Bordes he confesses a besetting fear of his own capacity to write verse for a French audience. His muse is too 'timid', his lyre a crude and 'rustic' one. The ideal that fills his own heart is but a relic of the ancient past, the ideal of a people who are very scrupulous about morals but easy-going and simple in their dress and adornment, meeting only the plain needs of nature. 'Why occupy myself with such a vain chimera?' What pleasure will this give to the civilised people of France? And yet he cannot force his own nature and as a poet sing the praises of the rich and powerful, for he despises them at heart. He desires very much to write, but is thus torn between his own chimerical ideals and the conventional notions that are requisite to success. He can find but one subject which he can honestly glorify in his verse: the industry of Lyon. It is, of course, the source of that wealth for which he has so great an aversion, one that Father Lamy had helped cultivate in him when he said: 'Luxury has brought disorder and confusion in republics and has consequently overthrown them.'<sup>3</sup> But

<sup>1</sup> To Bordes and Parisot, *C.G.*, vol. i, Nos. 47 and 52.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme de Warens, Oct. 24, 1740, *C.G.*, vol. i, No. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Entretiens, Première lettre de Théodore à Eugène*, p. 381.

industry is also a social tie that binds all the people in one community. The luxury it creates is good in so far as shared by all the people; and thus he could pretend to see in that 'opulent people' a 'people of kings'. So he reconciled the poet to the moralist in himself. But it seems, however, as if he were only finding plausible reasons for his adventure into literature without convincing himself. He was, in imagination, taking tentative steps toward life in a great city and trying to adjust himself to the break with the past.

But the *Letter to Parisot* discovers him recoiling from the venture. Mme de Warens has been in straits and seems to need him. He wants to go back to Les Charmettes and to a life out of the current of the world. To Parisot, who knows and fosters his literary ambitions, he makes some attempt to justify himself in this reversion. So he pictures with moving words the character of his early life in Geneva and his further education at the hands of Mme de Warens, confessing how deeply ingrained is his affection for the past and how it counteracts the pull of the new life in the city. A person of his upbringing can do nothing in French society anyhow, except act the part of 'the great declaimer, the new Don Quixote'. The Stoic maxims bred in him have, indeed, been tempered by his association with the refined Parisot so that he now believes 'nothing ought to be *outré*, not even virtue itself'; and he enjoys society with its conversation, *bon-mots*, elegance, and even its luxury, finding, indeed, only its vices intolerable. But he is conscious now that his life is already half-spent (being about thirty years of age) with nothing really to his credit, and he must dedicate himself once again to hard 'study and virtue'. It is not for him, therefore, to try to shine in the world and revel in honors and adulation. His happiness will have to be found in 'a good book, a friend, liberty and peace'.<sup>1</sup> And thus he returns in fancy to the scenes of comparative solitude. His mind goes back to its old ideas, the serious preoccupations of the moralist and philosopher. His first business is his 'duty', and in particular, his personal obligation to Mme de Warens, to help set her affairs in order and provide for her future.

In fact, however, he had been vacillating thus for about a year, between his duty and his ambition. He seems to have gone back to Chambéry, returned again to Lyon, and back again to Les Charmettes, where he was taken ill with a fever.<sup>2</sup> During his recovery he formed plans for a new venture. He still devoted himself constantly to his study and his literary work, but expected to make his real success in the realm of music, which he had

<sup>1</sup> July 10, 1742, *C.G.*, vol. i, No. 52, pp. 163-72.

<sup>2</sup> See *Chronologie, Annales*, vol. xv, p. 35.

loved from childhood. For he had now invented a new system of musical notation. It seemed to promise him the means of earning his livelihood and aiding Mme de Warens. But he had to present it in person to the *savants* of Paris; and he was relieved, doubtless, to resolve in this way his conflict between duty and pleasure. About August of the year 1742 saw him travelling to Paris, with recommendations from de Mably to the men of letters and philosophers of the intellectual metropolis.

Here it was he formed his close friendship with Diderot and Condillac, the brother of de Mably, and made many other valuable acquaintances. He won recognition as something of a musician, being formally received by the Academy of Sciences to read his *Mémoire* on musical notation. The favorable reception inspired him to develop it into a *Dissertation on Modern Music*, published in the beginning of 1743. During these months in Paris he produced more verse and printed several of his earlier pieces. The *Letter to Bordes* appeared in the *Journal of Verdun*, and was heralded as witness to the arrival of another great Rousseau, 'Rousseau No. 2'.<sup>1</sup> The *Letter to Parisot* was not yet in print, but it served in manuscript to recommend its author to a circle of distinguished ladies. Rousseau was enjoying a fair share of success, and rapidly moving toward a career in the arts.

But the heaven of Plato was still at work in his mind. Outside the limelight he was privately at work upon a labor of love, a small piece not intended for publication but for the serious usage of life. He was revising his *Plan of Education* for Mme Dupin, at whose house he was secretary and for whose son de Chenonceaux he was a governor. The added portions of this *Plan* are very revealing. They emphasise that the aim of education is to make man happy. The only way to this goal is, of course, the path of virtue. But virtue means not the extirpation of the human passions, only their moderation. And this control of the feelings is to be obtained by an extensive contact with life and the acquisition of a variety of interests and tastes. The only check upon littleness of mind and gross passions is precisely such breadth and richness of experience. For almost all the violent passions are engendered in 'solitary and melancholy' spirits. Society, then, is the true school of virtue. And although it presents youth with the dangerous spectacle of vice, it alone provides the correctives to a viciousness which is inevitably learned by men, no matter where they are reared. Social life must be faced sooner or later, and it is well to have all its good influence early. And Rousseau closes with a personal reference to his own melancholy, timidity, and indifference to the opinion of men,

<sup>1</sup> *C.G.*, vol. i, p. 144 n.

tendencies which he had been unable to overcome by any efforts of sheer will, but which, presumably, he hoped to control and amend through the aid of his friends and richer experience in Paris.

The thought expressed in his poem to Parisot still dominated his mind: 'men are only what we have made them.' And it was not long before this would become so definite and impelling as to inspire the idea of a book which he regarded, in prospect, as the masterpiece of his life. Whether it was due to the need of a more secure livelihood, or restlessness because of his unsettled frame of mind, or a positive interest in having a direct experience of political affairs, Rousseau obtained a post as Secretary to the French Ambassador at Venice. There, during 1743-4, he conceived the notion of a great book on *Political Institutions*. The idea he had in mind is stated in the *Confessions*, in fuller perspective, no doubt, and with greater clarity than was possible for him at the time. 'I had seen that all depended at bottom upon the political order, and that however one looks at it, no people would ever be anything else but what the nature of their government made them. Thus that great question of the best possible government appeared to me to reduce to the following: What is the nature of a government fitted to form the people which is most virtuous, most enlightened, wisest, and best, taking this last term in its broadest sense? I believed that question itself to be closely bound up with this other, though it were somewhat different: What is the government which, by its nature, is always nearest the law? Thence, What is law? and a series of problems of such importance.'<sup>1</sup>

These are the thoughts of a reader of Plato who has fallen under the spell of his hero, Socrates. Why was not this good and wise man allowed to end his days in honor and in the service of philosophy, to which he had consecrated himself? Plato's answer was that the State itself had not been good enough for Socrates. He portrays what wise men are obliged to do under such circumstances, men who wish to be 'true to their nature and steadfast to philosophy'. 'There is no ally with whom such a man may safely march to the succor of the just; nay, should he attempt it, he will be like a man that has fallen among wild beasts—unwilling to join in their iniquities, and unable singly to resist the fury of all, and therefore destined to perish before he can be of service to his country or his friends and do no good to himself or any one else: having, I say, weighed all this, such a man keeps quiet and confines himself to his own concerns, like one who takes shelter behind a wall on a stormy day, when

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, pp. 288-9.

the wind is driving before it a hurricane of dust and rain; and when, from his retreat, he sees the infection of lawlessness spreading over the rest of mankind, he is well content, if he can in any way live his life here untainted in his own person by unrighteousness and unholy deeds, and, when the time for his release arrives, take his departure amid bright hopes with cheerfulness and serenity.

'Well, said Adcimantus, he will certainly have effected before his departure not the least important objects.

*'Nor yet, I rejoined, the most important, if he fail to find a political constitution suited to him; for under such a constitution, he will not only himself reach a higher stage of growth, but he will also secure his country's welfare together with his own.'*<sup>1</sup>

What form of political society in Plato's eyes was suitable for a truly good man? The form of the Republic in which all are equal before the law and all share in the welfare of the whole community. Since man however perfect cannot live in solitude and must depend upon his association with others, he will wisely accept this dependence if it involves no subjection to other men but only to the common law of their mutual society. The governance of law is all that he wants. For some this control in the interests of harmony is within, for others it will ever be something from without. In any case, let there be law in all the doings of men. 'We believe it to be better for every one to be governed by a wise and divine power, which ought, if possible, to be seated in the man's own heart, the only alternative being to impose it from without; in order that we may be all alike, so far as nature permits, and mutual friends, from the fact of being steered by the same pilot. . . . And this, I continued, is plainly the intention of law—that common friend of all the members of a state—and also of the government of children, which consists in withholding their freedom, until the time when we have formed a constitution in them, as we should in a city, and until, by cultivating the noblest principle of their nature, we have established in their hearts a guardian and a sovereign, the very counterpart of our own; from which time forward we suffer them to go free.'<sup>2</sup>

According to Plato, then, the practical objectives for the philosopher who would accomplish anything in the world of men should be the reconstitution of the state so as to make a righteous power supreme over all persons, great or small, and at the same time an internal education of youth to habits of action in accord with the spirit of law. Man will be free when

<sup>1</sup> *Rep.* (Davies and Vaughan tr.), Steph., 496-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 590-1.



he has been disciplined early in self-control and when he finds a civic order which exalts law and allows him the same rights as others.

Ideas of this sort Rousseau was meditating at the time of his sojourn in Venice. His project of education had thus opened out into a far more extensive enterprise, a plan having to do with political institutions and their controlling influence upon the life of the individual. When he had first realised through Father Lamy that education is necessary to the well-being of any man, he had thrown himself whole-heartedly into a search for knowledge and truth. Now he learned, through his own study of Plato, that education itself is subject to limitations of the surrounding social order, and he was now scrutinising these ruling forces. The moralist's energies were henceforth to be directed, more and more, toward the indispensable reform of the political and social institutions.

There was thus a rationale in the very earliest thoughts of Rousseau. From the belief that knowledge is virtue, he had advanced to the perception that knowledge is not good unless it is possessed by one who already has the makings of character. And this establishment of good habits and sentiments is the primary object of education. But the training of the heart and mind in these ways is best effected through the association of youths with each other and a social environment in which human justice is recognised and enforced. The individual alone is too limited in his competence: society is necessary to his own self-improvement. But if that be true in so intimate a fashion, it is all the more important to make virtue obtain everywhere in social life, and particularly where power and prestige are lodged in government. Thus he turned to the study of politics. And he was vaguely conscious that this was the field of human knowledge in which he would be truly original, and not merely a disciple expounding the thoughts of a master.

The impulses of Rousseau were indeed not those of the scholar. He would not simply expound his Plato; he was too deeply concerned with the present needs of his own life.<sup>1</sup> He took the spirit of Plato most seriously, and, as he had devoured books in search of the saving 'knowledge', so he now persisted in trying to discover ways in which the political civilisation of Europe might be made to serve man instead of using him for its stupid and unholy ends. This is the motive that was to grow stronger in him with years and experience. The moralist had been turned away ever so slightly from the arts and knowledge to politics.

<sup>1</sup> How infatuated Rousseau was with the writings of Plato may be seen in his fancy of calling his mistress, Zulietta, his 'adorable Aspasia'. *C.G.* vol. i, No. 76.

These thoughts and fancies so reminiscent of Plato overlay, however, a still earlier body of ideas, imbibed when Rousseau had drunk so deeply of the philosophy of Father Lamy. Though Lamy had a Cartesian's regard for the intellect, he exalted conscience, as a good priest would, and thus weighted the case for 'the heart', as against reason. And while he portrayed vividly the sinfulness of man, and held Rousseau spell-bound in recognition of the damning truth, he nevertheless encouraged his disciple to believe that at bottom man is 'naturally good', because man had spiritual ideals of truth and good by which he thus condemns himself. The youth desperately needing to believe in himself believed this hopeful doctrine, and held it all his life thereafter. Through such a medium of faith in the heart and soul of men the truths he learned in Plato came to expression. The bosom friend of his days at Venice was the deeply pious young Spanish gentleman he met there, Altuna, with whom he had many a religious discussion. Religion was most intimate to his thoughts, from his experience of Geneva and the pietism of Mme de Warens as well as his new friend, but on that account he was not so ready with projects about it.

Even so, these originalities were mere broodings of the mind. They were not being formulated into any definite philosophy. The distractions of the city and the obligations of his post, to say nothing of his ill-treatment at the hand of the Ambassador, interrupted him in the prosecution of his thoughts. Moreover, he had to await some further experience of the world before he could see the precise application of his ideas. He needed more contact with the civilisation of Paris before he could translate his reflections on human nature and the reform of society into the eloquent declarations of faith and programs contained in his master-works. When he returned to Paris in October 1744 he was, doubtless, still very much the visionary.

## CHAPTER II

### *'Le Grand Déclamateur, le nouveau Don Quichotte.'*

(Épître à Parisot)

**R**OUSSEAU had long been accustoming his mind to the Greek idea of society as a veritable school for the perfecting of man. In his own poetic musings he had dallied with the thought: the life into which he had been inducted at Lyon and Paris seemed, at the time, a fortunate course of tutelage for himself. Now on his return to Paris he was to feel the bondage of the social order.

For he was back under a great handicap, encumbered with debts because the Ambassador at Venice had denied the payment due him as Secretary. Anticipating this treatment from previous irregularities in regard to his funds, he had appealed for protection and justice directly to the ministry of foreign affairs at Paris. Month after month he wrote unavailing letters.<sup>1</sup> Apparently justice was not dispensed to an individual of mean status, and especially when one of the parties in the controversy enjoyed the prerogatives of rank and wealth. On being dismissed by the Ambassador, he was forced to assume those obligations incurred in office himself, and to go into debt to certain men of affairs. The injustice of his situation, and the utter helplessness, were to rankle long within his breast, and stir up defiant sentiments.

He did not attempt to evade these financial obligations; he intended to be scrupulously honest in his own dealings. And at first, indeed, he acted the part of the noble philosopher in his superiority to the misfortunes that had befallen him, an attitude possible, it may be, because he was sheltered by a good friend in this moment of need. It was Altuna in whom he had inspired his own enthusiasm for knowledge, and also for Paris especially, as the best place to improve oneself. When he returned to Paris, therefore, he found Altuna visiting the city and was generously received by his friend and given asylum in his quarters. Through intimate association with him he seems to have been sustained in his high resolves to be the true philosopher and honest man at whatever cost. He wrote to Mme de Warens optimistically—indeed somewhat fatuously—informing her that the two of them intended 'to philosophise together for the rest of their days', untroubled by the necessity of dealing with 'filthy lucre'.<sup>2</sup> The philosophy with which they were pre-

<sup>1</sup> *C.G.*, vol. i, Nos. 85, 87, 89, 90.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 73, p. 264, Feb. 25, 1745.

occupied ran much to the discussion of religion, particularly the 'divine and sublime principles of Christianity', to judge from correspondence of later date.<sup>1</sup> And Rousseau was even then formulating some of the conceptions of religion of which much more was to be heard toward the end of his career, the views that religion is only genuine as expressed in moral conduct, and that the morality of human actions is true morality when it is an affair of 'principles'. And the faith of Plato was still working in his thought: the righteous man is he in whose heart and deeds there is manifest the rule of Law. The first impact of social injustice upon Rousseau showed him resolutely determined to be honest with himself and with others. The moralist surmounted his injuries, feeling himself intact despite them.

But Altuna was soon to return to Spain, leaving Rousseau to work out his own destiny in Paris. He was obliged to stay there to earn his livelihood and obtain the means of paying the debts he owed. He was uncomfortably aware, too, of the financial difficulties of Mme de Warens, due to her investment in wild industrial schemes. He himself had, as his only capital, an unfinished opera. Then he confronted a dismaying social fact: his opera would not be a success, indeed, not even produced at all, unless he could obtain official patronage; and he found some of his former sponsors less ready to aid him than he had been led to hope, for they seemed offended at him on account of the episode at Venice, his disagreement with his superior, the Ambassador, and his 'impudent' assertion of his own rights. Thus he realised he had incurred more liabilities on that occasion than debt, through daring to resent ill-treatment at the hands of a person of quality. His reputation itself suffered.<sup>2</sup> Without that, he, as a writer of operas, would fail to gain even a subsistence. He began to appreciate, then, how profoundly the inequalities between men in modern society affected their lives. The social distinctions of wealth, position, and power were not idle, or merely honorific; they had most vital and far-reaching effects upon individuals. They made, or unmade, the very lives of men. And this sense of the inescapable bondage of the social order created in Rousseau the longing for a real 'freedom'. Thenceforward this became the besetting desire of his life. It is betrayed in the exultation of his letter to the great Voltaire (in the first flush of his own initial success), 'I adore liberty, and I detest alike domination and servitude.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 100, p. 283, June 30, 1748.

<sup>2</sup> See letter to Du Theil, Oct. 11, 1744, No. 90, p. 260; D. Roguin, July 9, 1745, No. 94, p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* To Voltaire, Jan. 30, 1750, No. 108.

But before such apparent success Rousseau was doomed to suffer grave defeat that ever afterwards poisoned the cup of fame. When Altuna had departed, he missed the moral support he had found in companionship with him. To be sure, he had formed a growing attachment for Diderot and Condillac who were then producing the first of their philosophical pieces and like himself were in need of recognition. Yet it was not the friendship of such geniuses he wanted most, but a whole-hearted affection. And the acquaintance with Thérèse Le Vasseur, a servant at his eating-house, seemed to offer him this. They set up a *ménage* together, without the formality of marriage. He was to learn soon that he had voluntarily bound himself to still more complexities of the social order from which he could never get free.

By this commitment to a domestic life, grateful as it may in some ways have been, he was forced to continue living in Paris, and to earn his subsistence in the way society chose to allow, whether or not it suited his own peculiar character and genius. His debts were paid by means of a belated reimbursement for his services, tendered by the former Ambassador at Venice; but a livelihood had to be won for Thérèse and himself—he avows that her earnings were all devoted to supporting her own family. In order to get his opera *Les Muses Galantes* produced, he laboriously revised it so that it accorded with the wishes of those who would undertake its presentation. Some hack-work was entrusted to him, the patching up of Voltaire and Rameau's *Le Prince de Navarre*, which brought him into communication with the famous writer but yielded nothing of any pecuniary value. He tried teaching chemistry and publishing a journal, *Le Persifleur*, which amounted to nothing. The *Encyclopedia* was being started then by Diderot and D'Alembert and promised him an opportunity to win his spurs in the world of letters through his contributions on *Music*; but its publication was too long postponed to help him in any way whatsoever at this time, except to draw him closer to the friends who were engaged in this ambitious enterprise.<sup>1</sup> There was nothing to do for self-support but continue as private secretary in the service of Mme Dupin. In carrying on that useful function he incidentally found some opportunity, especially while sojourning during the summer at Chenonceaux, to prosecute his own work, his studies and his composition of verse and music, and even something toward a book on chemistry. Apparently he had accepted his social bondage with fairly good grace in the hope of maintaining

<sup>1</sup> *Annales*, vol. xv, *Chronologie Critique*, Louis J. Courtois, p. 52; on Jan. 21, 1746, permission was given for the *Encyclopedia*.

his own household and achieving his ambitions in the realm of the arts and sciences.

Suddenly a fateful crisis projected itself into his career. A child was born to Thérèse Le Vasseur. For this he was not morally prepared; he failed to meet his responsibility as a parent: the child was sent to the *Enfants Trouvés*. And for several years thereafter, according to his own testimony, whenever a similar exigency arose, he accepted this as a solution. The reasons given for this practice were very different at different times. He spoke of the careless maxims of the people around him, their light way of taking such situations and their evasions; and he attributed his weakness then to his own suggestibility, and to the connivance of Thérèse's mother in the whole affair. But he also ascribed his action to a noble motive, the resolve to act the part of the good citizen in a Platonic commonwealth and give his own children a public education and let them find their own way in the world without such dependence as his own upon the wealthy and people in high position. Again, he told in the *Confessions* how impossible it would have been to rear children in so demoralised an atmosphere as the home presided over by Thérèse's mother, an arrangement which he had been unwise enough to accept, perhaps because the management was better, or because it was the only way to have some domestic peace.<sup>1</sup> There was some truth in all these excuses. He was capable of an absurd docility to others and at the same time of a perfect infatuation with visionary ideals. But in his own heart he could not excuse himself afterwards.

And at the very time he must have had some qualms about his own lack of 'humanity', for it was in this period of bewilderment and distress that he was much disposed to seek out the company of men of the cloth whose profession it was to comfort those acknowledging personal guilt before their Deity, if not before their fellow men. He would go on various excursions with Thérèse into the country and partake of the hospitality of some village curate or vicar. He seems to have had the feeling of a need to fortify himself in powers more important than that artistic or scientific competence for which he was striving at Paris. His own moral integrity was threatened, and he dimly recognised the fact. This is shown in his letters to these men of religion whose society then meant so much to him.<sup>2</sup> There was one to M. Martin, congratulating him on having been named

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, pp. 243-5, 297 f. To Mme de Francueil, Apr. 20, 1751, C.G., vol. i, No. 113.

<sup>2</sup> The letters are sometimes ascribed to the period 1751-4; see *Annales*, vol. xv, p. 63, n. 3.

curé of Dueil, and containing 'advice to a curate'. And its first thought is that of the terribly exacting demands of 'duty' upon any man, demands more rigorous, though made by conscience itself, than anything a personal tyrant could impose. So difficult is it to attain this power of submitting the will to the 'hard yoke of reason', Rousseau adds, that no man ought ever to be required to assume the governance of the lives of others: his own is more than enough. Yet by his vocation a priest must be just such a person, a man of constant good will, serene judgment, and, in short, a true 'father'. Such a position is as honorable as it is hard to fulfil. And as a final piece of counsel he bids his reverend friend: 'Make men Christians, since it must be so, but never forget the most indispensable duty to make them *good men*.' This reflects broodings that were not yet seen by himself in the light of day, thoughts of one self-incriminated, knowing a remissness in duty, and particularly in that of being a father and a good man.<sup>1</sup>

But the animus of these thoughts was not wholly directed against himself. He hated the sight of Paris, the scene of his demoralisation, and the social scheme of life in the city which so oppressed men that they could not be true to their native humanity. Society made men bad by putting them into situations calling for more virtue than they had it in them to supply. Another letter, written in verse to M. De l'Etang, Vicar of Marcoussis, is a tirade against the viciousness of life in Paris and a plea for the 'virtuous poor' in the city whose daily companions are mostly 'black cares'. For unlike his friend in the country, the vicar, they dwell where no one is freely and sincerely hospitable. Their dwelling-place is one inhabited by fools, wits, flatterers, detractors of probity, *railleurs*, and the mean-minded of every sort, making sport of the poor men who entertained the 'chimerical ideals' of virtue. To one, then, who must live in such an atmosphere it is a supreme happiness to come upon an honest and righteous man of the country, a man not austere but with a genuine simplicity of manner and willingness to live for others and to offer them some return for what they give him.<sup>2</sup> Evidently the 'chimerical ideals' were reviving, the 'Helvetic' theme of virtue unsophisticated, and the vision of a free people living in a simple and natural society.

Thus the course of events after Rousseau's return to Paris in 1744 had produced a reversion of his thought to earlier ideas. When he first felt the touch of social life in the cities of Lyon and Paris he valued it as perfecting human nature, precisely as he

<sup>1</sup> To Martin, Aug.-Sept. 1749, *C.G.*, vol. i, No. 104.

<sup>2</sup> To M. De l'Etang, *C.G.*, vol. i, No. 105.

felt it had done to himself. Although he had steeped himself in the story of Socrates and discerned how a social order limits an individual, he had not foreseen that the working of a bad 'political constitution' could actually produce the disintegration of a man 'naturally good'. He was then hopeful enough to believe that man can meet all the requirements of his mundane existence and retain his personal integrity. There was no suspicion that the evil order round about could do anything worse than put a good man to death—not that it might make him *bad* in his own will and personality. But when he was back in Paris again he found himself forced to swallow injustice and accept bondage. He discovered his own powers of moral will attainted. The normal obligations of a human being seemed too much for him. Thus for the civilised man moral weakening seemed inevitable. The refining influences of society, the culture of the mind, seemed nothing but superficial forces diverting one from his plain duties as man and citizen. It was natural for him to look back with longing to the simpler conditions of life in the country, and to the ancestral past, as conditions favorable to vigor of conscience and natural courage and virtue.

Thoughts such as these, intimated in private to his friends, were soon to be conjured into the open. The public announcement in 1749 of a prize by the Academy of Dijon for an essay on the question, *Has the Restoration of the Arts and Sciences had a Purifying Effect upon Morals?* touched off a mind surcharged with feeling and ideas on that very topic. By a strange irony he was actually on his way to see one of the high-priests of the arts and sciences when he read this notice in the *Mercure*. He was walking on a hot summer's day to visit his bosom friend Diderot, who was imprisoned at Vincennes because of some hardy thoughts ventured in the *Letter on the Blind*. This fact itself was a reminder to him how hard it was for an honest man in such a civilisation. Perhaps he recognised in his own heart, too, how profoundly the honesty of another person could be assailed when he had to struggle along against poverty and oppression and servitude in the cities of the modern age, in order to achieve something in the arts or sciences. Whatever may have been his thoughts at the moment, however, he was certainly committed, by the whole trend of his sentiments for years, to the negative view of the question. And he had the knowledge, such books in his memory as Bossuet's *Universal History*, well read and learned by heart, years past. It is gratuitous, therefore, to credit Diderot with having given him the hint to defend the unpopular position. Undoubtedly Diderot had a great part in bringing his friend before the world, for he was generous with his assistance, offering



many suggestions to all his various associates. No doubt the pen that touched up with such sharp satire the descriptions of civilised man's life in his free translation of Shaftesbury's *Essay on Virtue and Merit* would be ready with mordant phrases to reinforce the negative argument. Diderot may well have had at this moment the important rôle that fell so often to Rousseau's admiring friends, of overcoming his timidities and encouraging him to put himself forward. Yet Rousseau seems to have astonished even his own intimates with his boldness and passion in this *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*. All the fears were gone that he had felt earlier when trying to write verse, those compunctions about thrusting the Helvetic message upon the attention of the polite world. The very announcement of such a question showed him the world of letters was willing to hear the moral note even amidst its preoccupation with refinements and brilliance. The *Mercur*e announcement unlocked the old inhibitions and released a flood of eloquence and thought strangely ringing in the ears of men of Paris. He was now emboldened to quit the attitude of tutelage which he had so long taken and to speak out for himself, 'a great declaimer' of hard truths.

The subject proposed for discussion was but his own predicament writ large on the tables of history. What has been the effect of the revival of letters and the culture of Europe upon the morals of men? The advancement in learning and art is taken for granted. But is there progress in virtue? The answer must be, emphatically, No! Men in present society exhibit revolting habits of vice, hypocrisy, insincerity, injustice, and ill will. They lack all moral disinterestedness and religion. They are bad citizens and bad men. However brilliant their social order may appear, they themselves pay for it with a demoralised existence, devoid of honesty and humanity. The conclusion seems inevitable that the advance of modern civilisation has involved a deterioration of man himself as a moral being. But this judgment might seem to be only the sour prejudice of some contemporary, some one who was a failure himself at the arts and sciences, were it not for the evidence of similar phenomena in all periods of history. The ancient and modern world alike exhibit this necessary sequence: the rise of learning and the cultivation of the graces of life go along with a decline of morals. This is the rule in human affairs, to which there may be a few, but very few, individual exceptions.

The true argument lay deeper, however, than the presentation of such regular sequences of events. The real phenomena behind the grosser ones of history were those taking place within

the human heart and mind. Both science and morals are but external evidences of the activities and purposes of the inner spirit of man. The evil causes and effects are to be located in every individual: the course of history mirrors every man's biography. For the motives of people who cultivate the arts and sciences are peculiar to them as creatures of society: they are meaningless apart from the life with others, such as the desire to display themselves and impress others, to dominate, to enjoy power, luxury, and superiority. The culture of the race is founded on such tendencies in men, tendencies which are at bottom only forms of personal vanity or pride, pride being the Christian's 'sin'. And anything thus reared upon selfish interests will only feed the flame of the passions that start it up. The arts embellish the order of inequality and cast such a spell over people that they will blindly and tamely accept a position of servitude in the scheme for the glory of the whole, and they will actually love their own chains. The native sense of freedom is dimmed or starved while their pleasure in bondage batters. What their nature really requires is obfuscated by the spurious needs that arise from living in an artificial system of human relationships. So the effects, on the whole, of the pursuit of learning and the fine arts are a wasting, throttling, and perversion of the real nature of mankind. Men can no longer rise to the great heights of devotion to God or country; they subsist mean-spiritedly in the status into which they are born, following stupidly the practice round them and never seeking or heeding any dictates of their own judgment or consciences. Human nature so lawless, impoverished, and enfeebled is no more human: it is lower than the animal because it is farther removed from its ends. It has become less real in its own kind and therefore worse, through the cultivation of these civilised arts and knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

The dark portrayal in the *Second Part* of the *Discourse* must have carried conviction to the minds of the judges at the Academy of Dijon, for they awarded him the prize. It was thus eloquence rather than logic that counted. But this distinction may be overdrawn, for the speaking-out itself was but a translation of the truth which had been revealed to Rousseau himself after all his long broodings upon life. He had thought it out for himself and was able to express it to others convincingly. Such eloquence is not divorced from truth. Yet it is interesting to note that he sought to fortify himself, in taking such a paradoxical stand, by citing Plato. He admitted afterwards, in his reply to Bordes: 'I believed that I was safeguarding myself with

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Préface to Narcisse*, H., vol. v, p. 103.

the authority of that philosopher.'<sup>1</sup> For it was Plato who roundly condemned all the artists and little-minded 'philosophers' or scientists, as influences detrimental to the education of youth and the reconstitution of society. Plato, too, had handed down the 'ancient tradition which passed out of Egypt into Greece, that some god, who was an enemy to the repose of mankind, was the inventor of the sciences'. The great master of Plato (in his *Apology*) had eulogised ignorance as preferable to the conceit of knowledge so abounding among men of all classes in society. The heroic Socrates marked himself out as the rare exception to the rule, for he was one of those 'who resisted the general torrent, and saved themselves from vice while dallying with the muses'. Here was the ideal philosopher uniting virtue with the pursuit of knowledge and beauty. Among the moderns there were but a few who deserved to stand alongside this sublime figure, perhaps Bacon, Descartes, and Newton. But the general progress of events in modern times has but repeated the predictions of Plato in his *Republic* that the glory of Greece spells a moral descent for the whole nation, whatever might happen to a Socrates. Armed with the wisdom of Plato, then, Rousseau hoped to make his judges see beyond the paradox into the deeplying truth. He was declaiming, indeed, but declaiming a message given to the world by the founder of the first of all Academies of learning, whom no modern Academicians could ignore and scorn.<sup>2</sup>

When the *Discourse* was crowned with success it gave a new turn to Rousseau's thought and life. He was carried out of his depression and made self-confident, the fearless protagonist of the ideas he had published. In this frame of mind he could no longer feel himself to be one of those 'ordinary' men doomed to give up art and science if they were to retain their virtue and morality. When accused of being inconsistent with his own principles he reminded his critics that he had represented culture as corrupting not all individuals without exception but *peoples* or nations.<sup>3</sup> He thus dared to place himself with Socrates: 'It cost Socrates his life because he said precisely the same things as myself.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, his own enterprise was more thoroughgoing and radical than that of Socrates, for the Greek sage had

<sup>1</sup> To Bordes, H., vol. i, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> H., vol. i, pp. 8, 10, 19; *Phaedrus*, 274; *Protagoras*, 381. According to the various quotations or allusions in the *Discourse* Rousseau must have acquainted himself with a considerable portion of the Platonic works. It is worthy of note that in January 1749, before the summer of the *Mercur* announcement, he had begun to study Greek, as a letter to Mme de Warens shows (*C.G.*, vol. i, No. 102, p. 287). Like every ardent reader of Plato he probably wanted to know the master in the original and not through the veil of a Latin or French version.

<sup>3</sup> H., vol. i, pp. 26, 33, 44, 52-4.

<sup>4</sup> P. 48 n.

dreamed of ridding men of their vices by the aid of philosophy, whereas he included philosophy itself amongst the evils, since it had become corrupt with the ages and was no longer the true instrument of salvation for mankind.<sup>1</sup> Into this adventure 'the new Don Quixote' plunged, assailing the order of society and its cherished arts without giving up his own practice of these arts or withdrawing from association with those who were the pillars of that society. He dared in such a moment to think his integrity would withstand the company of the muses and fellowship with the 'philosophers'. Thus he continued to write operas and verse and to collaborate in the *Encyclopædia*. He mounted to new fame with an opera *Le Devin du Village* and expected to present himself to court and receive a pension from the king. He was committed, also, to a literary career, writing answers to his various critics, old friends, Academicians, and nobility. This seemed to him only fidelity to his own ideas, as indeed it was; but the moralist was somewhat compromised by these mundane attractions and all the glory.

And the moralist was made to serve the man in a strangely deluded way. That Rousseau should have continued his artistic career seems not unnatural, but that he could still justify his practice of disposing of his own children by reference to Plato is witness to the mad character of his enthusiasm at this time. It was the height of absurdity to say, as he actually did at the time, that it was his duty as a father and citizen to take such action, and that he was only acting the part of any true member of Plato's *Republic*.<sup>2</sup> This was the invention of a new variety of 'platonic love'.

But the obsession with the ideas of Plato had other uses, valuable and enduring. It inspired him with the effort to live nobly in some respects. The duty of every member of the *Republic* was to devote himself to one occupation alone and organise his life about it instead of spending himself in trying to succeed in every possible line of endeavor and thus developing a nature without stability or integrity. Rousseau had astonishing powers of recognising the condition of his own soul. He made attempts to rectify his own conduct. Being a good hand with the pen, through his training as an engraver, he resolved to make a living by copying music. This he proceeded to do, and to continue doing for many years, so long as he lived in Paris.<sup>3</sup> Of course he could not give up his artistic pursuits and his writing in defence of the *Discourse* and he still suffered from distraction

<sup>1</sup> P. 45.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme de Francueil, Apr. 20, 1751, *C.G.*, vol. i, No. 113, p. 310.

<sup>3</sup> *H.*, vol. viii, p. 257.

despite his efforts to unify his life. But the same motive of 'imitating' the 'just' man of the *Republic* seems to have determined him in his personal reform, his giving up of fine attire and betaking himself to simpler equipment and existence. He had a genuine dislike of the love of luxury, and craved a spiritual independence of the social values to which he felt himself committed. And it is evidence of a fidelity to his ideas that he declined a well-paid financial post tendered him by M. de Francueil, in order to be free from the influences of wealth and rank.<sup>1</sup> The moralist had shaken himself loose in part from the compromising associations of the life he led in the city.

A partial emancipation, however, meant unbalanced and absurd conduct, swinging from one extreme to the other. He was for several years a person inwardly divided against himself. To fortify himself against his own pliability to others and his weaknesses, to make his independence secure, he asserted it in outrageous ways that were really cynical affronts to others. He confesses this overstrained and boorish attitude. Thus he rudely thrust aside the pension of the king at the last moment, though he was also suffering from illness. He lived in society because he needed it, yet he affected to scorn such dependence. He wanted all the time the very things he denied: the pride of pride, of which all the saints have warned men, was in his heart. The bad man described in the *First Discourse* was really himself, unchanged by victory and fame, or at least, not redeemed morally by it.<sup>2</sup> His life was, as he had a premonition, a quixotic affair. Throughout the period of several years following upon 1750 he was engaged in practices which he condemned as a philosopher; and he approved, in the same heroic role, of acts which he secretly felt to be wrong. It is little wonder that in retrospect he called his entrance into the contest for that prize of the Academy of Dijon the beginning of 'the long chain' of his misfortunes.

He had not worked out in idea, any more than in life, a solution for the problem he had posed. Of this he was aware, and he declared in his reply to Bordes that he had no proposal to make, certainly none involving the overturn of actual society or the limiting of men to the sheer necessities of nature: others more reckless would seek the remedies. His own mission was but to speak out the truth, and in practice he could do nothing but continue to cultivate the arts and sciences with the con-

<sup>1</sup> H., vol. viii, p. 258, To Mme de Créqui, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 145, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> H., vol. viii, pp. 260, 262, 268 ff.; To Lenieps, Oct. 22, 1752, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 149; cf. N. Wilde, *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. xxvi, pp. 54-71, and *Annales*, vol. xv, p. 57, n. 1.

sciousness of their important influence on morals, as was well stated in the *Préface to Narcisse*.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless there were lurking in the background certain obvious suggestions for the restoration of morals to the vast nations of Europe. Religion had always offered mankind salvation. A revival of genuine devotion might redeem their moral imperfection and neglect of their souls due to preoccupations with the delights and glories of social life. Now to call in religion meant to welcome the Church. But Rousseau had discerned the ready hand of a Jesuit in the answer to his *Discourse* sent him from the King of Poland and he would not give encouragement to that sect or any other that sought domination over men. The old Christian theology taught that men were naturally and ineradicably bad, a doctrine taking away all self-reliance and faith in the deliverances of the individual conscience. He believed, on the other hand, what he had learned years past from the Platonising priests of the *Oratoire*, that man is naturally good, and his conscience the only rightful authority. He had come to feel, moreover, that even the animal nature itself is good in its own way, so that man ought not to scorn his natural impulses or sentiments. Strongly convinced of this he could not recommend the old religion with its blighting creed. And besides, it had, like philosophy, become involved in the evil system of things, and was but one institution amongst others of society. He was in search of something more ideal which would elicit the spontaneous will and the heart of mankind without binding them to unreason and servitude.

One other idea had been constantly in his mind throughout the argument of his *Discourse* and all his replies, and this came into the open in his *Préface to Narcisse*, his final justification of his views on the whole matter. The good man no longer to be found in the cities of men is precisely the *citizen* himself. Men may fall short of their devotion to a God and to the Church of God and still survive morally, as Bayle had long since pointed out, on the strength of their native sense of right and good. But when they lack as well the spirit of loyalty to their country they do disintegrate morally. This Greek ideal he had learned in the *Republic* of Plato and in Plutarch's illustrations of ancient virtue. Moreover, it constituted part of the 'Helvetic' theme: for men of Geneva were accustomed to the thought that the good man must be the faithful supporter of the State as well as the Church. The thing in demand, then, was really a good citizenship. His discussion had showed him that all the vices of man in civilisation are to be ascribed not so much to the nature of man himself as to 'man badly governed'. The hope

<sup>1</sup> H., vol. i, pp. 65; vol. v, 107 ff.

of the future, then, is good government, exactly as Plato had declared: a good social polity will rehabilitate the morals of the various European nations. A reconstitution of society even as it now is, with all its refinements and vices and its arts and sciences, will restore to men something of their pristine vigor of conscience and a more spontaneous humanity. This was the idea working amidst the 'ferment' of thought after the success of the *First Discourse*. And the *Confessions* say that at this time he again took up his project on *Political Institutions*. In another place he tells of his solitary wanderings in the country, away from domestic fracas, in order to 'dream away at my great system'.<sup>1</sup> However quixotic his personal life had been, his mind was proving itself capable of steady advance toward a practical insight and remedy. The *Discourse* which had seemed even to some of his friends a mere *tour de force* of literature was preparing the way for a political philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> H., vol. viii, pp. 261, 289; cf. *Annales*, vol. xv, pp. 63-4, n. 3, D.

### CHAPTER III

## THE DISCOURSE ON INEQUALITY

'Le Prométhée qui crie et les avertit du danger est le citoyen de Genève.'  
(*Last Reply to an Academician of Dijon.*)

THE various discussions of the years from 1749 to 1753 had gradually defined the general problem. If people as a whole seem corrupt or deficient in morals, the source of the evil is something pervasive in their society and the remedy for it a power that is equally general—a political governance. But further, since the evil to counteract lies deep in the very heart and will of mankind, it is only to be corrected by an active power dwelling within every one. The remedy for humanity's sad plight is a power of moral control as well as a political one, a giving of law to life within and without. This was the moralist's idea and ambition. As Rousseau dreamed away at his 'great system', on his solitary walks about the country-side, he dreamed of himself, too, in the grand rôle of law-giver and educator for whole States, like the fabled Lycurgus who was greater by far among the Greeks than the man of letters, Homer, because, as Plato expressed it, he had for his disciples whole cities of good men.

The idyllic scenes of these meditations were reminiscent of *Les Charmettes*. They may have conjured up memories of the ideas and books that had fascinated him there in his first passion for improvement. He had been very fond of *The Adventures of Telemachus*, Fénelon's romantic dream of fair days and places in the world's history where the evils and injustice of the time were not known. Fénelon was eloquent for the ideals of Plato. He sketched a modern republic, a society of people occupied with their honest labors in cultivating the soil; a healthy, vigorous, simple and virtuous people, ruled by their own well-honored laws, not by mighty potentates; a people wise enough for all their simplicity to be able to choose, as the guardians of their commonwealth, men who had embodied in their own lives the principles of right they were bound to enforce in the land. Such was the vision of Fénelon, pertaining not to France alone but to all the peoples of Europe. It was the ideal of a European republic. But how desperate was the actual order! Fénelon was ardent for political reform, an impassioned critic of the system of monarchy. He charged to it most of the miseries of the people and the ruin of many a fair realm. Incessant wars were waged, wars for glory and conquest, whilst the people prayed for peace so that they might labor and till the soil and provide for their livelihood. But neither peace nor industry



would return unless the governments made the interest of the people their aim instead of the pleasure, whims, or ambitions of a King. And apparently nothing short of a sudden and violent revolution seemed ever likely to restore the right order of things in Europe. For two of the worst evils that can befall men had fastened themselves upon the people of modern society, one luxury, which corrupts their morals, the other an unjust authority which deprives them of their laws. Here, cried Fénelon, is the opportunity for some philosopher-king to 'change the interests and habits of a whole nation and give them laws'.<sup>1</sup> This was the hope and the appeal of his book. And in the musings of Rousseau there may well have been some thought of answering this call and fulfilling the prophecy.

But Rousseau was not only a dreamer. It was not in vain he had been such a far wanderer over the face of Europe before he found himself. He had seen something of political realities in his diplomatic service at Venice. And since then he had studied 'the history of morals' which taught him the difference between modern conditions and those of the Greeks. Montesquieu had recently enforced the truth of this when he pointed out in his *Spirit of Laws* (1749), a work itself inspired by Plato's *Laws* and the *Politics* of Aristotle, that the customs, traditions, and constitutions of every people were different from those of others even in the same age. And it seemed apparent, after such lessons on politics and morals, that the community in the Greek sense of a body-politic with a common language, common laws, and one religion, scarcely existed anywhere or at any time in modern Europe. So the situation was obviously not one for the direct and radical methods of a Lycurgus.

Rousseau had to think out his problem in modern terms. As regards politics there was already an extensive literature. From the time of the Renaissance and the wars of religion, writers had been busy with their pens, critical of war and the policies of States that made it inevitable. When the lives and happiness of men in every land were ruined by such civil or religious conflict they voiced the common demand that the people be considered in these momentous events. Thus there had arisen in various quarters enthusiasm for a doctrine of 'social contract' which taught that political society exists because of an agreement to which every person is a party and by which he is therefore entitled to the rights of life and security and the opportunity to pursue his lawful business in peace. This idea of the social contract appealed to Rousseau as it had to many before

<sup>1</sup> Fénelon, *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, ed. A. Cahen, vol. i, pp. 191, 213, 221, 226, vol. ii, 464, 465, 467; cf. *Dialogues des Morts*, *Œuvres*, vol. ii, p. 567 f.

him, and so profoundly, indeed, that he could never afterwards think of his own political doctrines except under that rubric. But the modern literature of government contained other special concepts in terms of which all the argument was conducted. Precedent to the social contract there was a 'state of nature'. It was limned in varying colors, sometimes as an ideal existence of simplicity, equality, and bliss which men ought still to try to recapture, even under the circumstances of their present fallen estate; again it seemed an order of existence only too happily left behind, the rude infancy of the race to which man must never return under the penalty of losing everything that makes him completely and distinctively human. Rousseau would have to choose which of these views seemed natural, or else set out anew to determine the truth. But further, however different were the views of the state of nature, one thing was generally accepted as regards the institution of political society, that it results in a 'sovereignty', a supreme authority over all, the exercise of which is vested in a 'government', that is, either 'one man or a body of men'. Sovereignty, then, was another conception to be investigated as well as the State of Nature and the Social Contract.

With the political writings of Grotius and Pufendorff Rousseau had been acquainted for some time, as early, certainly, as his first visit to Lyon in 1741. He then knew Grotius's *Rights of War and Peace*, and Pufendorff's *The Law of Nature and of Nations* and the briefer work *The Duty of Man and Citizen*—all of these in the able translations of Jean Barbeyrac. The last-named work Rousseau had planned to use with the sons of De Mably, to give them their first lessons in the facts of society and their duties as members of it. This book was a favorite with him, and evidently one where he had learned some of his own duties, especially in such wise observations on human life as this that 'nothing is more contrary to the order of human society and of civil society than a vagabond life where one has no home or ties'.<sup>1</sup> The truth of this he could verify from his own experience and he was therefore much taken with Pufendorff the moralist and inclined to be in sympathy with him on most matters. Since Pufendorff was continually attacking Hobbes, Rousseau must quite early have turned a critical attention to this writer. In fact his *First Discourse*, and several of the replies he made to criticism of it, betray a very great animus on his part against Hobbes. His vigorous assault on the doctrine of man's 'natural

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff, *Les Devoirs de l'homme et du citoyen tels qu'ils lui sont prescrits par la loi naturelle*, ed. J. Barbeyrac, 4th ed. enl., vol. ii, bk. 2, ch. 2 ('Duties of Marriage'), sect. 4, p. 297.

badness' seems, indeed, to have been aimed far less at traditional theology than at Hobbes's opinion that mankind are originally degraded and beastly and must advance to the political state where they come under civil rule and then, for the first time, begin to exhibit 'god-like' qualities.<sup>1</sup> Against such blasphemy Rousseau had indignantly asserted the 'natural goodness' of man, a goodness even in the state of nature, a goodness independently of what man attains to in the civilised order. Indeed, might it not be hazarded that the entrance into the civil state is really a case of defection rather than progress? Some of the most pious of modern writers had intimated as much. There was his favorite Bossuet, for example, who regarded civil societies as a phenomenon of the corruption and perversity into which mankind have fallen, which makes them 'unsociable and divided' instead of one fellowship in 'the general society of the human race'. And Grotius had represented a life primeval where all was in common until man suffered from a defect 'of equity and love' which produced division among them and their goods, and a grievous inequality, and this was the life in the civil state. And Pufendorff, too, was found thinking of men as being 'universal kindred' but in the course of time losing 'the memory of the universal root and the sense of the relation springing from it', and therefore lapsing into their particular civil societies.<sup>2</sup> The universal ideal of Christianity made the politics of these writers catholic, so that they could not adulate the State as Hobbes had done. And Rousseau was with them, and very much inclined to exalt the state of nature and to disparage the progress of man from it as being something like a Fall.

But everything about this state of nature was very much of a problem. How is man to be thought of in that state? What is his nature, and what his goodness? And how is the history of mankind to be represented? And finally, how are men of the present to improve their state and make themselves what they ought to be? Such were the questions, unasked in so many words, but occupying the attention of Rousseau in his meditations.

The writers on politics had given definite accounts of the nature of man and in particular of the motives which lead them to enter society and subject themselves to government. Here

<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, *Philosophical Rudiments*, Dedicatory Epistle, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture Sainte*, article 2, *Œuvres*, vol. xxiii, p. 485 f.; Grotius, *The Rights of War, &c.*, bk. 2, ch. 2 ('Of things which belong in common to all men'), sect. 1, op. cit., pp. 144-5; bk. 2, ch. 15, sect. 5, p. 339; ch. 20, sect. 44, p. 442, ch. 25, sect. 8, p. 505. Pufendorff, *The Law of Nature, &c.*, bk. 1, ch. 1, sect. 7 ('The Natural State of Man'), op. cit., p. 4.

Hobbes had again taken the floor, with a shockingly realistic picture. Man is a being ruled at all times by an unconquerable impulse of self-preservation. The best he can do about it is to be as rational as possible. The merely haphazard looking-out-for-oneself is demonstrably futile, for men only expose to others their selfish and wolfish natures and they do but elicit from others the same meanness and ferocity in turn. If they are wise enough, they will safeguard themselves against the general hostility that must result by giving a different kind of exposé, a mutual declaration of willingness to obey some rule in their actions by submitting themselves to a superior or sovereign who gives them all the security and the peace they lack in their state of nature. Once that rule is provided they are able at last to dwell together justly and virtuously, and they may even acquire then the Christian virtue of charity. All this Hobbes promised to mankind in the name of reason and the compact instituting the sovereign power.<sup>1</sup> But no one who read him could ever forget that dire first state of life, devoid of all affection and filled with the selfish desire for power, and then the next scene of the descent into the hell of universal warfare. It seemed truly a miracle that man should ever rise to sweet reasonableness and charity from such an original condition and by way of such a brutalising experience. Could human nature be so suddenly transformed by reason or by the instrumentality of a compact unless it possessed from the first some native interests in human fellowship and a natural sense of right? The more Christian writers had very different views from Hobbes. Bossuet in his *Discourse on Universal History* had spoken of a natural charity and represented the fall of men, like that of the angels, as a case of succumbing to 'self-love' when 'malignity took the place of charity'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly in Grotius it was regarded as a 'defect of equity and love'—the love being thus supposed at the outset. Antecedent to any warfare among men there is a ready feeling for others and a cognisance of their natural rights and even a sense of obligation to be faithful to covenants, for no compact can ever create of itself the duty to fulfil all contracts. So men must be conceived 'reasonable and sociable' by nature. From the very beginning they exhibit something of that interest in others which, in its higher forms, is called charity. They actually dwell together in societies before there is ever any distinctively 'civil' or political society, and they have natural rights and an equality in that state. There is, too, a veritable 'law of nature' prior to any civil law and valid for all mankind, whether at

<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, *Triplos, De Corpore Politico, Œuvres*, ed. Molesworth, vol. iv, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, pt. 2, ch. 1, *Œuvres*, vol. xxiv, p. 373.

peace or war. Even the fact that a 'law of war' exists is revealing, for it means that men heed the right without going to the full limit of frightfulness which such a one as Hobbes deemed a necessary lesson for morality. Grotius published, then, a happier view of human nature as containing some degree of genuinely charitable interest along with the aggressiveness on behalf of the self; and besides these, a capacity to perceive the right.<sup>1</sup> And this view Pufendorff carried forward, explicitly arguing against Hobbes. He recognised the fact that man looks out for his own preservation and, like Fénelon and Malebranche, by whom he seems chiefly inspired, he called this phenomenon 'love of oneself', distinguishing it, however, from the 'self-love' which has a more exclusive or 'selfish' connotation. The factor in human nature which makes relations with others possible he designated as the principle of 'sociability', a factor no less real in life than the other so much stressed by Hobbes. And human nature is truly itself only when both these principles are in a 'just equilibrium'. As Aristotle had observed—and Pufendorff was also a close student of Aristotle—all the motives and sentiments of man are liable to departure from the mean. Often the love of oneself becomes too exclusive and turns into self-love and pride, or even, as Fénelon observed, 'misanthropy'.<sup>2</sup> It is more rare, indeed, that man suffers from the utterly self-forgetful feeling in favor of some other person, the extreme of charity. But both these errors disclose something further. They show the presence in human nature of a 'reflective' principle, that is, one which enables men to deliberate and choose the good for themselves. They may do this with an exclusive view to themselves, or they may, much less frequently, sacrifice themselves to the well-being of others—in any case either of these vagaries is possible only because such power of reflection and free choice belong inherently to man. This 'liberty' as Malebranche had called it, seems, at first sight, like a very dubious gift of nature, since it makes possible these extremes of action and spoils the 'natural rectitude' of man. But happily, Pufendorff adds, the reflective power, which thus threatens man's goodness, can supply from itself the correctives. For one thing it can disclose to him the sheer folly of his own inordinate desires, and particularly the selfish ones of ambition and pride. Moreover the true aim of reason, as Aristotle had taught, is 'knowing and acting according to some general principles'. This 'obligation' of reason to

<sup>1</sup> Grotius, *The Rights of War*, &c. Preliminary Discourse, sects. 7 and 16; bk. 1, ch. 2 ('Is Any War Just?'), p. 25; bk. 2, ch. 1 ('Of the Causes of War'), sects. 4-9, pp. 131-4; ch. 2, sects. 1-2, pp. 144-5.

<sup>2</sup> Fénelon, on love of oneself and misanthropy, *Dialogues des Morts*, *Œuvres*, vol. ii, pp. 570-1.

follow principle is the great control in man over that dangerous passion or 'esteem of oneself', the first-fruits of free thought and will.<sup>1</sup>

Pufendorff was here sketching a moral philosophy as well as an account of the nature of man. And he was not the first who had done so on these lines, for he was but following ancient precedents. A similar view had been put forward in an *Essay on Virtue and Merit* by the brilliant English critic of Hobbes, the Earl of Shaftesbury, who was a Platonist. Diderot had rendered this essay into French in 1745. It was not a literal translation, as he admitted in his preface, but a treatment made with special reference to his own problems at that time: What is 'personal integrity'? How is it to be realised by mankind? He entitled the work—it was the first of his published efforts—*The Principles of Moral Philosophy*, and made Shaftesbury's only the sub-title.

Diderot had been fascinated with the Platonic notions put into modern form by Shaftesbury. The passions as such are not inherently bad, and when they are brought into harmony with each other they constitute a perfect nature. Further, they can be controlled by a natural appeal to which the soul of every man responds, that of the general good of the whole species. And reason supports this general interest because it simply is the truth that the general welfare of the whole includes that of every individual in it. Moral 'virtue or merit' in man is living up to this truth; and it results in 'personal integrity'. However, one must appreciate just at what place in human experience such virtue is relevant. For goodness has various meanings in the life of persons. There is in every one the sheer power to survive as a living entity, a primitive goodness; then, above that, an animal capacity to live actively and do things; and finally, a will to live well and in accordance with reason. It is this last form that is specifically the virtue of man. It is at once his ideal and his problem, for it is indeed hard to find what is rational and cleave to it. The difficulty does not exist in respect to the other modes of being below the level of reason and will. There the impulses and affections have a kind of natural balance and maintain themselves without need of reflective powers. They rectify themselves without other aid. So long as the race survives they do not disappear; and none detrimental to the species ever gets developed. And in this impulsive groundwork of human nature the egoism is present in no greater

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff, *Les Devoirs*, bk. 1, ch. 1, sect. 11, p. 18; ch. 3, sect. 13, n. 1, pp. 73-4; ch. 5, sects. 1-8, pp. 92-105; ch. 7, pp. 146-52; Malebranche, ch. 1, *La Recherche de la Vérité*, Simon, vol. i, bk. 1, ch. 1, p. 21; ch. 14, p. 99; bk. 3, pt. 2, ch. 7 [p. 317] ('On love of self and others'); bk. 4, ch. 1 (Summary), p. 342; ch. 5 (entire); ch. 13 (entire).

amount than the altruism—such is the nature of man without taking into account his reason. But the moment man attains to the capacity for detached reflection all such natural equilibrium or economy is disturbed. He acts from his own ideas, not from nature's intimations. And he tends to act, especially in civilised society, with a view to his own exclusive interest, and shamefully disregards others. Or else, if he has any propensity to be generous he becomes sentimental about it and injures himself by silly sacrifices. Thus man the rational being truly appears the one outstanding anomaly in Nature, as the Stoics had said, and their practical maxim, too, was still valid: Follow Nature. The purpose of Nature, manifest in the life of impulse and feeling, is a balance such that the race is cared for as well as the particular individual. And as those ancient wise men likewise said, to follow Nature is to follow Reason. For reason commends to man the ideal of the general good of the whole species. Let this, then, be the end of the reflective human will. Enthusiasm for this general end chastens all selfish will and makes even the generous one more regular and less biassed in its applications. This love of the good of the whole race heightens the intensity of all the sentiments and actions by eliminating their frustrations, and so it contributes mightily to the enjoyment of life. And along with the inner harmonising of the man through virtue comes a peaceable and happy relationship with his fellows in society. The will to act for the general good is thus the real hope of modern civilisation.<sup>1</sup> So thought the young and enthusiastic Diderot, and he meant to take some practical steps to spread the truth of this doctrine in his great project, the *Encyclopædia*, which was begun the year following the publication of his *Principles of Moral Philosophy*.

Diderot was a man, however, full of various ideas and experiments of thought. In the course of a number of years he hazarded an account of the history of mankind which was more like the views of Hobbes than of Shaftesbury. He published this in his *Sequel to the Apology of M. l'Abbé de Prades* (1752). Men exist in the herd, at first, drawn together by impulse and mutual need. In this state of nature they have a primitive idea of property because they feel they own what they have expended labor upon. There is no inequity in such a situation, for it is only reasonable to suppose that the differences of physique and mind will have some outward expression. Then life in civil society follows, an existence where men acknowledge such things as rights and duties and suffer themselves to be restrained out of

<sup>1</sup> Diderot, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. i, pp. 13, 17, 24, 26-35, 42-3, 49-56, 64-79, 84, 86, 93, 97, 101-2, 110, 121.

regard for them. How this change is possible seemed to Diderot one of the greatest problems of human life. The only conceivable view is that the race must have suffered from an unaccountable aggravation of those natural inequalities, and a dreadful experience of the evils of life when it lacks any law or regulation, and through all that at last acquired some ideas of 'natural right and equality'. The state of affairs described by Hobbes must have been true some time or other. It was from a knowledge of injustice men learned their ideals of justice. Only at the moment when the race actually faces ruin from its own blind passions does a mutual understanding become possible and the conventions or pacts arise which establish government among men: 'from the bosom of anarchy itself we see arising civil laws, political laws, &c.' Yet Diderot confessed that he had some difficulty still in believing this to be a true explanation of the beginning of civil society. And well he might, for the two transitions he had described, one from the state of nature to the state of war, and the second from the state of war to the civil state, these were reversals of direction in the progress of mankind, whereas he was generally committed to the idea of continuity in Nature and was designing the argument of the *Encyclopaedia* in support of that significant view. Meantime he let this imperfect sketch of the story of mankind stand, as first a decline from a kind of general society to a state where men were all divided and against one another, and then a progress from that condition to the civil state and government.<sup>1</sup>

During all this time from 1745 to 1753 Diderot and Rousseau had been intimate with each other. They knew each other's thoughts and appreciations. It was their mutual love of music that first brought them together, and Diderot naturally asked him to write the articles on it for the *Encyclopaedia*. They had in the first years of their friendship a common sympathy about religion, and they must have talked over some of the books they liked on that subject. But latterly Diderot had grown more sceptical and he expressed his mind in several pieces that were not published at the time, *Philosophical Thoughts* (1746), *The Walk of the Sceptic* (1747), and *The Sufficiency of Natural Religion* (1747). From this it can also be seen that Diderot was the more articulate of the two friends, composing a steady succession of writings, while Rousseau had done nothing of a discursive nature, only composing music and plays. However, there is no mistaking his influence on Diderot. For while the latter naturally turned toward science, particularly the science of life,

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres*, vol. i, pp. 453-71.



Rousseau made more of political science and expatiated on the works of Bossuet, Grotius, and Pufendorff, and the latest novelty of Montesquieu which came out the very year he was writing the *First Discourse*; and the result was the 'facile Diderot' soon came out with new political thoughts in that *Sequel to the Apology of M. l'Abbé de Prades* (1752). Diderot had a great gift for using the ideas of others; and publicist that he was, he hastened to throw them out to the republic of letters to see what would be made of them.

Rousseau needed time to meditate. It was not 'thoughts' on this or that he wanted to divulge but a comprehensive view of human life and society, something analogous to the writings of the seventeenth century, or else of the ancients, who gave a large scope to their efforts, a 'great system'. And enough of this was apparent to the editor of the *Encyclopædia* to make him ask his friend in a little while to compose the article on *Political Economy*.

Meantime an occasion arose which put the pen into the hand of this brooder on man's sad plight, and made him voice his opinions in a work of his own. The Academy of Dijon announced in November 1763 that a prize would be offered for the best discourse on the subject: *What is the Origin of Inequality among Men, and is it Authorised by Natural Law?* Nothing could have been more opportune, or designed to draw from Rousseau what was being turned over and over in his mind. There is inequality in the world of men, even the Academy did not doubt that, and he meant to show how evil a thing such social distinctions were. He would have a chance to speak his own mind about 'the blasphemer Hobbes' who seemed to glory in the civil inequalities when he wrote: 'but because we have showed that the state of equality is the state of war, and that inequality was introduced by a general consent; this inequality, whereby he whom we have voluntarily given more to, enjoys more, is no longer to be accounted an unreasonable thing.' But it is unreasonable, and many fine men had considered it so—Pufendorff, Montesquieu, and lately Burlamaqui who wrote from Geneva. And as to its origin, well, Hobbes had said: 'the inequality we now discern, hath its spring from the civil law.'<sup>1</sup> Then it certainly is not 'authorised by natural law', and that part of the question may be answered in the negative. But Hobbes had claimed that such unrighteous inequality is authorised by 'the general consent'. Supposing that were true, that both the civil law and the inequalities are founded on the

<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, *Philosophical Rudiments*, ch. 1, sect. 3; ch. 10, sect. 4, vol. ii of *Works*, pp. 7 and 130.

will of men generally, then the thing to be investigated is how men could ever come to be so minded as to want such an order of things amongst them. The question resolved itself, therefore, into a moral one, and Rousseau was prepared to deal with it in that form.

Diderot evidently thought it a fine opportunity for him. It was a chance to make a piece of scientific investigation according to a method then in vogue, of delving back into origins and then following the successive steps whereby the present order is reached. It was a phase of the 'historical, plain method' of Locke who had applied it to charting out the complex ideas of the human mind. Others were trying the same thing in less abstract matters, as regards, for instance, the geological formation of continents, the appearance of whole species of animals and plants, and even the development of society and languages, customs, laws. Distinguished work had been recently published on those lines, *The Spirit of Laws* (1749), Buffon's *Natural History* (1749), Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746) being followed by a *Treatise on the Sensations* (1754). Diderot himself had attempted 'to decompose man and make a metaphysical anatomy' in his *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb* (1751), in that case with a view to finding the 'natural order of ideas'; and in his *Sequel* he wanted to describe man 'emerging from shades of ignorance' and to 'deduce the successive advances of his knowledge'. And these various applications of the same method illuminated each other in the encyclopedic mind of Diderot. The history of the earth and of nations were accounts of grand epochs where changes took place over exceedingly long periods, and very gradually and continually, which suggested that all specific forms in Nature are due to successive modifications of one original form, every alteration as it occurs being quite imperceptible. Vast stretches of time and space could thus be supposed as the scene for the story of mankind which Rousseau was planning to write. But he need not rely on supposition alone. For there was available a certain body of evidence on the matter, the reports of explorers and voyagers which circulated everywhere during this century and interested people in the savage and primitive conditions of the race in other parts of the globe. There is no doubt that the piece of work at hand was 'more to Diderot's taste than all my other writings'. And 'most valuable counsels' must, indeed, have been proffered by the scientific-minded Diderot.<sup>1</sup>

Of course Rousseau took the counsel, as best he could. He tried to be methodical and scientific. But he had his own ideas

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 277.

and his own genius for work. He could partly assimilate his study of man to the current method; for the most part he followed his own devices and notions. And he was the author of the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, believing what he there struck out and holding that the question of morals is something very distinct from the advancement of learning, from emerging out of the shades of ignorance, and so forth. His account was not going to be one of a progress from darkness to light or from evil to good. He was even daring to make Diderot consistent with himself, whose story had gone from an ideal state of nature, a general society of mankind, to a state of war and then up again to civil society—he would continue in the vein of that first part of Diderot's history and argue that the state of man had not only gone from good to bad but also from bad to worse and must continue so to the very worst. This use of his argument Diderot afterwards felt to have been very extreme and even outrageous, but in those days of bosom friendship he admired it as a daring stroke, and no doubt he contributed all he could to perfect the satire.

But Rousseau was not satirical. He was silently following a system of 'old ideas' fashioned in the imagination of Plato and enforced by the eloquence of Fénelon and other moderns who had worked in the tradition. For Plato was one of the first to describe a moral genealogy of mankind in his ideal *Republic*. Mankind have wants that they are bound to satisfy. When they provide for their primary necessities they acquire new ones, and, gratifying them, they advance more and more toward a thoroughly luxurious life. They form cities. And their self-created avidity leads them to use the power they acquire through civic life to increase their possessions by force of arms—hence the state of war. It is the result of their organised social life. Thence arises injustice, and all the consequent demoralisation of man in civilisation. Plato thus portrayed the descent of man, and he had the insight to discern the order of causation which to a person immersed in a contemporary society would be entirely concealed, because all the phenomena there appear together—social life, luxury, insatiate human desire, war, and finally lawlessness within the State, within the individual, as well as within the general society of mankind dwelling in their different cities.

The *Laws*, however, had been the true encyclopedia of Plato's wisdom, and Rousseau had already drawn upon that work in his *Project for Education*. The *Laws* contained an ampler picture than the *Republic*, with more detail, and with historic allusion which gave reality to the theme. There Plato sketched

a scene in pre-history, and referred to many traditions of the Greeks as the indication of his meaning. It was frankly an imaginary picture. Suppose we conceive the beginning of all things in the human world, as if a deluge had swept all civilisation and arts and sciences out of existence, leaving only a few 'small sparks of the human race preserved on the tops of mountains'.<sup>1</sup> Men were few and far between. They tended their flocks, and tilled the soil. Their very desolation kindled in them natural feelings of affection and goodwill toward each other. Their infrequent meetings gave them but rare occasions for quarrelling with each other. Plenty of room existed for all, for their crops and for their agriculture. Later they worked metals and gained advantage thereby, but only over Nature, not over each other. Poverty did not obtain under such conditions, since each had as much as he could produce, and thus poverty could not be a source of difference among men. Nor had they any reason to distrust each other and their designs. Honesty, truthfulness, minding their own business—something was there of what we mean by justice. Such people needed no laws for their security or happiness. Instead, 'they lived by habit and the customs of their ancestors'. 'But here we have already a form of government', an ideal, unconstraining, family governance. But Plato did not suppose that the human race stayed at this level: Becoming is real, as Heraclitus had said, and mankind must grow in numbers and in mutual relationships. So Plato went on with his narrative of the developments in pre-history. There was a 'natural order of things'. The patriarchal government grew into a political form of government, a sovereignty. Difficulties tending to arise and policies of conquest being entertained, the statesmen who took the place of the 'fathers' formed the government known as federation, a union of the many cities that would otherwise be divided against each other. This confederation would be effected by a mutual pact of the rulers and peoples conjointly, guaranteeing the security of each city and the preservation of its constitution and peoples. And the principle of equality that was thus established amongst the States in the interest of peace and security the statesmen also applied within their several cities, so that they tended to 'equalise property'. All of this Plato delineated, as having obtained in the verimost ancient past of the Greeks, as the true elements of their political institutions: the individual, solitary but not militant, as ready to greet another with a welcome as to quarrel with him, and therefore the hospitable soul; the family with its bonds and affections;

<sup>1</sup> *Laws*, bk. 3, Steph., 677; Jowett, tr. Oxford, vol. v, pp. 56 ff.

the city-state with Laws supreme, and rulers the servants of the laws; the federation of states under a common Greek law, with no one city dominating but all co-operative in the interests of peace and humanity; and over all this fabric of relationships the presiding spirit of justice and equality.<sup>1</sup>

But swiftly Plato had turned to Greek actualities. He said nothing about the lone individuals or the family, for kings and rulers were now prominent and the sources of trouble. Their aim was 'to get the better of the established laws'. They violated their pledges and agreements. The outcome in actual history was the formation of two basic types of State, the monarchy and the democracy, the Persian and the Athenian polities. The Persian monarchy grew 'worse and worse. And we affirm the reason of this to have been, that they too much diminished the freedom of the people, and introduced too much despotism, and so destroyed friendship and community of feeling.' They 'devastated cities and sent fire and desolation among friendly cities'. As they hated others, so in turn others hated them, and reprisal followed reprisal, and eventual defeat. The Persians attacked Greece, and the Athenian democracy defeated them. The democracy had its defects, however, for 'entire freedom and the absence of all superior authority is not by any means so good as government by others when properly limited'. In time of stress the Athenian policy met its crisis. The people of Greece achieved a solidarity, and renewed their patriotism, and the ancient high fear of the laws came into their lives. But after this brief period of life true to their ideals the Athenians set themselves above the laws and tried to dominate; with that came commerce, new culture, art, music, literature, and a new freedom not only to disobey their governors but also to evade the control of the laws which all ought to observe. This was the contemporary situation with reference to which Plato wrote.<sup>2</sup>

The subject of that Third Book of the *Laws* was the origin of human government. Projecting the story into the imaginary period before recorded history, Plato had traced a natural order from the solitary individual through the family stage, through the political society, to the more general association of people in federation. The equality of every member in these diverse forms of governance was the key to this social universe and to man's good in it. To that purpose law's supremacy was essential. Here was the ideal. The actual situation had developed from the days of human record. The process went on 'little by little

<sup>1</sup> *Laws*, Steph., 677, 680-1; Jowett, 56-9; 64-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Steph., 691, 697, 698; Jowett, 72, 79-80.

during a very long period of time'.<sup>1</sup> It had its origins in the soul of man partly, and partly, too, in the exigencies of life. The spirit of getting the better of the laws turned good things to evil, sent organised cities warring, made money the thing chiefly desired because it could purchase power and indulgence, and destroyed the distinctions of right and wrong within the State and even within the mind of the individuals. So men dwelt together with division sown in their hearts and amongst their neighbors, seeking advantage, heeding no principles, and only endeavoring to establish their superiorities, the social inequalities. The course of history was thus indicated as a progress toward inequality of a moral sort.

So the *motifs* sounding in Rousseau's eloquent *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* in the year 1754 were not the expression of sheer perversity and opposition to eighteenth-century thought, but Platonic themes that had passed into the soliloquies of a stranger to Paris and there come to life again, in a language of beauty and conviction. The *Preface* announces that the search for the origin of inequality is the Socratic adventure in philosophy: Know thyself. The man of to-day is like the statue of Glaucus, with which Plato, too, had compared the soul, in the *Republic*—a being transformed by many overgrowths, due to the myriads of social forces incessantly acting upon him and to the peculiar activities arising from his own individual reason and passions. The moralist who would look into himself to find his true nature and destiny can now see nothing of the original form or figure. Nor can he discover any certain and invariable principle of existence for himself, the 'law of nature'. It is all obscured by the accretions of ages which make him what he is at present. To investigate the source of the inequalities among men, however, is to make a study of the successive changes which took place over the very long periods of human history and thus to discover what actually may have been the first condition of humanity.

This 'state of nature' for all mankind is enlightening with regard to the fundamental nature of the individual. And the story of how the race departed from its original type will tell, at the same time, how the members of the species have come to go their own separate ways and cherish the distinctions between persons which show in the inequalities of society. It is the purpose of the *Discourse* to demonstrate this origin in terms of the grand processes of a history of mankind.

Nevertheless, the argument will have to contain many 'conjectures'. For history as recorded supplies little direct evidence

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Steph., 678; Jowett, 57.

of a state of nature. The inquirer must rely upon his own observations of contemporary life. And to distinguish between the original and the developed or modified constitution of the species is a task almost impossible for one who is himself immersed in society and so thoroughly 'made' by it, so 'artificial'. How to make the crucial experiments within society itself is a problem in regard to which he must await the direction of a modern Aristotle or Pliny—that is, a Diderot or a Buffon. But Rousseau suspects that science will always prove herself unequal to this demand, and he therefore risks his own views, based on observation and reflection. His *Discourse* is but an 'hypothetical history' of mankind. For it is necessary, if we are to decide whether inequality is established by 'the law of nature', to form a conception of a state which 'exists no more, perhaps never existed at all, and probably never will exist'.<sup>1</sup> Without this conception, indeed, we have no way of describing the foundation of human society itself or of defining 'natural right'. Presumably such right and law are relative to man, but we must know what manner of man we are contemplating. Philosophers think of man as a 'moral being' from the start, with intelligence, liberty, and relations with others. They talk of the natural law as that which is demonstrably expedient for such a being to observe. They suppose him to be endowed exactly with their own sapience and subtlety of reason.<sup>2</sup> But they misinterpret the whole situation by so doing. The law they suppose to be natural simply does not hold in nature. It is nothing but 'the civil law' projected back into that condition. And such law is neither natural nor ideal, for it is a kind of regulation peculiar to civilised and sophisticated people who know at the same time how to evade it. The law of nature must really commend itself to man simply as a human being and it must, when declared by the voice of nature in each and all alike, be truly sovereign in human life. How are we to think of man, if there is to be such a law ruling in his life?

Human nature contains two principles antecedent to reason, one the interest in ourselves, the other a deep-seated repugnance to seeing others suffer or perish. Whatever ideas of natural right or law there may be must arise from the concurrence of these two principles. Such a view meets the situation better than that, for example, of Grotius or Pufendorff which supposes that men have an instinct of sociability from which their moral

<sup>1</sup> This is criticism of Pufendorff—see *The Law of Nature, &c.*, bk. 1, ch. 1, sect. 6; bk. 2, ch. 2, sect. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 2, ch. 3, sect. 1; Burlamaqui, Eng. trans. *The Principles of Natural Law and Politics*, pt. 1, ch. 1, sect. 3.

sentiments are all derived. It is confusing to think of morality as wholly social in nature. And can any instinct have so general an object as society itself? Indeed the impulses of man have always a particular and concrete end. And it is only by postulating two conjoint, original tendencies in man, for his own preservation and others', that one can conceive it possible for human beings to attain ideas of equality or inequality, and to form themselves into a body-politic and acknowledge mutual obligations to each other. The whole theory of political society thus depends upon the view of the complex pre-rational nature of man. But Rousseau is here broaching a project much larger in scope than what the Academy of Dijon contemplated and he thereupon concludes his *Preface*.

There is another preliminary observation. The subject is not physical inequality, because that has little bearing on life and happiness. What counts is the inequality called 'moral or political', because it rests on the opinions of those who enjoy or suffer it. It is established by some kind of 'convention', some tacit agreement on the part of all, which commits each and every one to accept it and loads some of them with poverty, helplessness, and wretchedness. The inequality weighing so heavily upon the lives of people is by time and usage invested with something of the quality of 'right'. Hence men cannot throw it off, because they cannot change themselves and their evaluations. And here, again, is seen the use of such 'hypothetical reasonings' about the progress from the primitive life to civilisation. It will, at least, throw light on the nature of present things, if not on the veritable origins. The argument of the *Discourse* has much the character of a speculative philosophical hypothesis. Rousseau fancies himself talking in the Lyceum of Athens, 'repeating the lessons of his masters' and having men like 'Plato and Xenocrates' as his judges.

The story opens with a description of the state of savage nature, of the physical man, his environment, the earth and its forests, and the reign of the elements over all. The human species is the same as now in figure and form. But philosophers have attributed far too highly developed traits to this savage creature. Hobbes thought of him as naturally 'intrepid': Montesquieu, Cumberland, and Pufendorff as fearfully timid.<sup>1</sup> But man is capable of both attitudes, according to the circumstances which are by no means wholly conducive either to fear or brave defiance. Experience teaches man what he must avoid and

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff cites Cumberland, *op. cit.*, bk. 2, ch. 2, sect. 9. Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 1, ch. 2, pp. 191-2, probably misinterpreted, however, by Rousseau.



attempt. The unknown will always strike terror, but it is a realm which does not loom so large for the savage as for us, with our greater extent of knowledge. Death is not naturally feared. And where man already knows himself competent to deal with situations he is not prompted to exercise his power for the sheer joy of it: animals and man will not make war on each other unprovoked. Nor is sickness so common, for it is a product of the kind of life men lead, of dissipation, irregularity, and over-stimulated activity, as Plato had portrayed in his *Republic*. For all this it might be observed, 'reflection' is responsible, and if nature has destined man to be healthy, she evidently could not have intended him to acquire this power. However, the outstanding point is not to confound the savage man with the man whom we have daily before our eyes. And the reports of voyagers testify amply to the existence of such races of beings whose physical manner of life is wholly other than that of Europeans.

But the 'metaphysical and moral' aspects of human life in this savage state are by far the most important. Every animal is but an ingenious machine to which nature has given senses in order to maintain itself in existence over against whatever tends to destroy or trouble it. This holds of man too as an animal. He is a human machine, endowed with the sense and activity to preserve himself, as many philosophers had demonstrated, and none better than Condillac in his *Human Understanding and Treatise of the Sensations*. But man is really distinguished from the animals by his capacity of freedom. He is not confined to the choices or rejections of impulse; he is free to choose as he thinks. Because of this he can make more mistakes than the animal and depart from the intentions of nature as regards himself and his own well-being. Of course animals can form 'ideas' in the mechanical fashion described by Condillac. This only shows it is not the understanding as such which constitutes the specific character of humanity but the power of free agency. A man may have the same instincts as an animal but he 'recognises that he is free to acquiesce or to resist', and it is this 'consciousness of liberty' that reveals the 'spirituality of his soul'.<sup>1</sup>

If the reality of this freedom be disputed, however, another character of virtually the same import is manifest in man. It is the very nature of humanity to 'perfect' itself. The species distinguishes itself from all others—as Diderot his collaborator insisted—by the tendency to make progress. And even the fact of human imbecility is indirect testimony to this truth. That

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Malebranche, *Recherche*, bk. 3, pt. 2, ch. 7, sect. 4, p. 307; identifying 'spirituality' with 'liberty'.

the degradation of man can be worse than any condition into which the beasts may fall proves he is not so fixed in type as they are—and he often deteriorates so badly precisely because he can aspire so high. This almost unlimited perfectibility is the source of all the misfortunes as well as the accomplishments of mankind. In the course of centuries and centuries it is this essential trait that will produce such phenomena as human learning with all its errors, and human virtue commingled with many terrible vices, and a social order of life where there is also a veritable tyranny over all Man and Nature.

The savage man, however, is one in whom this self-perfecting capacity has not yet been called into play. He is given over entirely to instinct. He perceives and he feels as the animals do. The first and almost exclusive operations of his soul as a human being are simply to will or not to will, to desire or to avoid. The passions he has are simple impulses of nature springing from physical need, the desires for food, intercourse, and rest. For all the other desires are not germane to his given condition, the passions often ascribed to him being actually those proper to a civilised man who has other needs than those of nature. Everywhere in history it is to be observed, however, that an active intelligence is conjured forth by new circumstances which give rise to new wants. Without the interest in something different from the familiar no knowledge could develop. And this observation reveals what a tremendous distance it is between the simple sensing of familiar things and the first kind of knowledge that involves the perception of a novelty. Individuals alone could do little in a savage state toward the acquisition of an understanding of their world: communication with each other and some sting of necessity alone produce, and afterwards preserve it. But this presupposes some kind of social life, at least some occupations in common as tilling the soil; and the question naturally arises: how could mankind concern themselves in such matters without having already the intelligence which these enterprises are conceived to make possible? When the ancients spoke of the inventions as gifts of the gods, they recognised this difficulty of telling what started men inventing before they could form ideas of what they would attain by their devices. The beginnings are thus a metaphysical puzzle. Is it reason that paints new objects and kindles desire? But reason must be prompted by some motive. Is man by nature, then, to seek things beyond those which are naturally satisfying to him? What could inspire in him such a motive but reflective thought?

This difficulty of origin repeats itself everywhere. Language

must be conceived to arise because of the sheer necessities of men. There is, of course, the 'cry of nature' which averts, pleads, seeks, or what not. In infancy such crying communicates need; and grown men when in distress resort to the same primitive means.<sup>1</sup> But how such natural exclamations developed into an articulate speech in definite language is as great a mystery as any human phenomenon. It is possible, indeed, to trace a genealogy of types—of words, nouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, &c., and the emergence of general ideas after particulars. But one is stopped at the very threshold of explanation. To make any useful speech possible a society must exist; and yet men who are devoid of language and its expression of meaning cannot be conceived to have any social intercourse with each other. Of course it might be suggested that they are already 'so miserable' in this state of savage nature that they do anything to leave it, and seek the society of others to that end and so improve their minds and acquire the resources of language and invention. But what could induce a being whose heart is at peace and body in health to desire any other state? With these things and with his liberty no man can know misery. Such a condition of discontent is only peculiar to the man of civilisation.

In that early state, then, mankind can have no sort of moral relations with each other, no recognised obligations, no vices or virtues. They cannot as yet be considered either good or bad, unless we use the term 'good' to denote the power to preserve themselves in existence, and evil the incapacity to do so. If the term 'virtuous' had any relevance to this condition it would have to refer to the character of giving least resistance to the simple impulses of nature, an inverted application of the term which ordinary usage simply forbids. Whether or not we are to consider this first stage of nature as 'good' depends, therefore, upon some further basis of judgment. Later we may be able to decide comparatively when we find out if there are more virtues than vices among civilised men than among savages, or if their virtues are of more real value than the manifest evil of their vices. It is altogether a matter of striking such a balance.

Meantime it must certainly be objected to Hobbes that man's natural ignorance of good and evil at this stage does not imply his 'natural wickedness'. If we are to think away the knowledge of good and ill appropriate to man in his civil state, we ought not to retain in our minds the idea of him as motivated by the exacerbated passions of the later condition. Hobbes saw only the selfish propensity of man and exaggerated its role in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Malebranche, bk. 4, ch. 13, sect. 1, p. 420.

primitive life because there are no restraints of law or reason, forgetting that a very natural check upon such a propensity exists, a check operative, indeed, even before such a positively selfish 'love' exists, namely, the natural unwillingness to see a fellow man suffer. Pity dwells alongside the impulses to take care of oneself. Even the animals exhibit it, for they own a tender affection for their little ones. Mandeville in his *Fable of the Bees*, despite his cold, calculating views, had to acknowledge the reality of an analogous human compassion. This human tendency is a fact. There is no warrant, then, for pronouncing man in the ignorant condition of nature 'bad'. It is more philosophical to suspend judgment until there is some other state with which to make a comparison.

If man cannot be called 'moral' at this stage of life, he must at any rate be credited with the rich variety of impulses and activities which he displays. Instincts lead men to do this or that action making for their preservation; other tendencies induce them to identify themselves with others of their kind, to feel for their suffering and act without reflection to relieve them of it. All are alike impulsive. And the effect of compassion as a natural feeling is precisely to moderate the violence of the love of oneself and contribute to the preservation of the whole species as well as the individuals. If any maxim could be formulated as characteristic of this state of nature it would be: 'Do thine own good with the least possible evil to others.' And the activities conforming to this principle anticipate the humane character of life which the laws, morals, and virtues later ought to produce in mankind. For only the rare individual like Socrates can acquire virtue by reason alone: men in the multitude attain it by following those primary natural feelings. In their savage mode of life they, indeed, still lack most of the dispositions which call for the exercise of a rational virtue: not being regularly in social relations they do not know vanity, deference, contempt, or esteem, and have no distinct idea of *meum* and *tuum* or of justice. It is true there would be some society of the sexes and certain passions engendered thereof, passions of violent and seemingly selfish character as of lust or jealousy. Yet here again it is well to remember the difference between the condition of nature and that where reflection and the social environment with all its customs play a determining part. The man of nature is a being of impulse: the man of society is a person who has to consider what is permitted him, who has to win and be won by many factitious means, who is susceptible to excitements of an artificial kind and sets a value on qualities that gratify his egoism as well as his native desires.

The observed impetuosity and exclusiveness of the passion of love are both products of social life.<sup>1</sup> In nature, then, the appetite of love is no special disturbance of the human economy, but takes its place along with the other impulses and compassion whose general effect is to preserve both the species and the individual.

The picture of the 'supposed' state of man in the early days is now complete. He is 'wandering in the forests, without industry, without speech, without home, without war, without ties, without any need of his fellows, without any desire to hurt them, perhaps without recognising any of them, individually, . . . but sufficing to himself alone'. No inequality of any importance can exist, no odious distinctions between men, nor any spiritual on-sidedness in their nature. The capacity to seek self-distinction and to 'improve' one's condition is there *potentially*, but it awaits the 'fortuitous concurrence of many outside causes'. Some time or other, events will come to pass so as to occasion an 'inequality' in a moral sense. That, however, is the more difficult problem for discussion in the Second Part.

Inequality is plain to be seen when a man fences off a piece of territory, declares 'this is mine', and finds his claim credited by others.<sup>2</sup> But the progress toward this state of affairs is by a slow succession of events almost imperceptible in their several effects. The savage man must somehow have been stirred to exert himself by the difficulties of satisfying his native wants; then, finding himself more competent, in this or that exigency, he continued exercising the powers he had discovered and thus formed his habits of industry. Such regular activities, carried on under the varying conditions of climate, soil, and season, required varied aids from time to time, stimulated the mind to invent them, and endowed man with a still larger equipment for the mastery over external nature. The competition with animals and the study of their ways in order to master them would teach mankind the *difference* between themselves and other species, and especially their own superiority. Here is the dawning of the invidious consciousness of self. Pride now strikes root in the savage heart. And with the acquisition of this primitive sense of the importance of his own *species* man lays the foundations for a personal arrogance to show itself in the centuries to come. This is the first step of descent.

Man, however, is still without any distinct *thought* of his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 16, ch. 13.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is made somewhat in defiance of Pufendorff who asserted 'the falsity of that vulgar saying, *meum* and *tuum* are the cause of all the wars and quarrels in the world'. Pufendorff held the distinction was 'introduced to prevent contention', op. cit., bk. 4, ch. 4, sect. 7.

personal superiority over his fellows. The intercourse with animals and others of his own species gives him an appreciation of his own likes and an intuition of the conformity of others with himself, so that he thinks of them as moved by the same love of their own being. This enables them on occasion of mutual interest to unite in the herd, a loose association without restraints and quite transitory. General notions of something like their obligations to each other and the advantages of their fulfilment would thus develop. In the course of time the race might gravitate toward a definitely social condition, the 'first revolution', which marks itself by the establishment of distinct *families* and of the lands and tools and usufructs they consider their own, a kind of property. The effect of this closer and more constant association is the creation of 'the sweetest sentiments known to men, conjugal love and paternal love'. The human heart develops to new levels of experience. And the life of people in such a domestic society, though less independent than savage life, is one of bonds sweetly-brooked, for the engagements like the joys are thoroughly reciprocal. Some of the hardness of life is mollified; men become gentlefolk. In their relative simplicity and solitude they are able to meet all their necessities and enjoy some leisure. Yet this very relief from a preoccupation with labor proves a dubious blessing, for their genius of invention, having once been called into full play by need, now turns to the contriving of comforts and to the arts of enjoyment. For a people at this stage of development is already an assemblage of families inhabiting a well-defined common territory and coming under the influence of the same climate, habits of life, and customs; they are a 'nation', as Montesquieu would observe, a people of definite social character and customs. This association gives opportunity to those of talent to display it and win special favors. Personal preferences are expressed: public esteem becomes a great desideratum, a want over and above what mere nature demands. And a people for whom these values exist have thus innocently taken the first steps toward fixing upon themselves the inequalities which will eventually weigh heavily upon each and all alike. However, in this incipient form the distinctions between persons press but little upon their lives. They are really enjoyed. Certain 'duties' of civility and deference exist, to be sure, but they are not irksome. Most savage peoples reported by travellers are people at this level. It is true they show tendencies to exact brutal vengeance for wrongs done them, not, indeed, because they are 'naturally cruel' but because they see in every injury an outrage to their own persons: they have acquired a sensitiveness to personal attitudes

which is quick to influence their conduct. Notwithstanding this irritability, however, people in this state between savagery and civilisation are about the happiest to be found. They represent a development of the race where men, though less forbearing and without their original fund of compassion, are still relatively balanced in their activities, being neither so careless as the pure savage nor so aggressively egoistic as the man of the world to-day. The sentiments of mankind have come to flourish, stupidity is outgrown, while calculating reason has not yet disturbed the economy of nature. This domesticated man is in some kind of harmony with himself and with others. No real inequality yet exists.

But fatal accidents send the race on the way of further progress. Youth must advance to full maturity and to its errors and sins. Increasing needs call for a closer and closer association of individuals as they find each other so useful. The laying in of stores of what is a man's 'own' count for much more and set up an inequality. And what especially facilitates this surplus production of goods is the acquisition of the two arts of metallurgy and agriculture—and Rousseau follows here the poetical account of Lucretius. The Encyclopedists also believed that inventions led the way to civilisation proper. But Rousseau hastens through this story, interested more in the state of man's soul than in the external affairs. 'See there, then, all our faculties developed, memory and imagination in play, self-love interested, reason made active, and the mind almost at the peak of the perfection of which it is capable. Look at all the natural qualities in action, the rank and lot of every man established; not merely the quantity of his goods and his power to aid or hurt others, but his genius, beauty, strength or cleverness, his merit or talents . . .' And with the great variety of such factitious values it becomes necessary to affect them in order to live well. Duplicity, ambition, jealousy, competition, and even malice toward their fellows steal thus into the heart of mankind. The 'rising inequality' engenders within the soul itself a host of passions ruinous to it. The man of property usurps what little others have; the poor rob all they can get; unruly men all of them. And morally they reveal a grave defect; the passions choke down 'natural pity and the voice of justice which is as yet but feeble'. The balance is now observed to be irretrievably toward a selfish interest and away from any disinterested concern in others. Outwardly this is mirrored in 'a horrible state of war', that condition so thoroughly hated by Hobbes.

But Hobbes had talked as if a miraculous transformation were effected by the convention establishing political society with its

law and government, and Diderot had followed him in this notion. Rousseau insists, however, that this next development is continuous with the preceding stage. Civil society is founded by men who have already been made bad by their generations of unequal and unbalanced life. It is simply the fruit of their scheming intelligence, nothing God-like. Those who have most to lose discern the futility of a war of each against every other one, and so they devise a way of establishing peace and security. They naturally invite others to join with them in giving mutual guarantees to respect the existing property and claims of each other, the rich assured of their actual superiority, the poor of only their foolish prospects. 'All rushed for their chains, believing that they were securing their liberty.' For the idea of having a supreme power of law over each and all alike commends itself to them, but it is not yet perceived that the exercise of this power by some 'ruler' will only fasten upon them a more grievous inequality and slavery than anything they might have suffered otherwise. In any case, the motive for the foundation of civil society is a selfish interest, a seeking to perpetuate the power over others that has been developed by accident and not by any clear right, an establishing of real inequality under cover of an ideal equality before the law, and in fact, an authorising of the rich to rule over the poor and feeble whose wills have been disarmed by the voluntary agreement they have made to participate in such a régime. 'Such was, or', Rousseau qualifies, 'should have been, the origin of society and laws.'

The establishment of one political community forces upon other peoples the same type of society and produces everywhere on earth the civilised order of existence. Commerce requires some kind of rules for dealing with the claims of different nations. These laws of nations constitute the 'law of nature' and play the part in international relations which 'natural compassion' ought to play in all the dealings of mankind. Only a few 'great cosmopolitan spirits' are capable, however, of disinterested views and actions in such a situation. The masses of men under the rule of their princes countenance horrible national wars and in the noble name of duty approve the shedding of human blood and the creation of widespread misery. War on a grand scale is an activity peculiar to man in civilisation, that is, in political units which are themselves superior to any control except that of the law of self-interest.

An institution deserving of special scrutiny in connection with the inequality of men is government. Whether the basis of it is conquest or convention is not important, though it is difficult to see how it could be established at all if it were not of some



obvious advantage to all persons affected by it. Certainly a people would not submit themselves without cause to the domination of a prince. If it did not seem 'right' in some sense, government could not possibly survive. Men who have already attained a consciousness of their own claims upon life and of their freedom will not be able to renounce them absolutely and accept a personal slavery. Consequently, it can be asserted that 'arbitrary power', instead of being the beginning of all government, must really be its last term when the 'law of the strongest' is the rule. The *Discourse*, however, is not expected to deal with the theory of political institutions as such, but only with the story of their development and their influence upon the soul of man.

Governments take different forms according to the degrees of social inequality already existing at the time of their foundation, since they are but the recognition of the social order thus far evolved. The pre-eminence of one man or family is sanctified in monarchy; of a group of families or leaders, in aristocracy; and of a people with slight distinctions of merit or wealth, in democracy. The offices in any case must be conceived in the first instance as 'elective', representing a choice or acceptance on the part of the community, and eventually they become traditional or hereditary. In the end the rulers think themselves descended of the gods and consider other men to be their creatures and slaves. This is the final state of affairs.

The various revolutions which must be conceived to have taken place in human history since that condition of primitive domesticity which, like the very original state of nature itself, was neither good nor bad, are three in number, each contributing to the fixing of an inequality without warrant in nature itself. The establishment of laws regarding persons and property is the first, and it creates the settled distinction between the rich and the poor. The institution of governing magistrates is the second, converting the former classes of society into those who have power and those subject to it. Finally, the turning of legitimate sovereignty into arbitrary rule changes the order into one where there are only masters and slaves. At this point all semblance of right in the inequality disappears. The claim to equality then reasserts itself, according to nature, and threatens the whole social organisation.

Nevertheless it is important to realise that a moral inequality among men would exist even without government. For a repudiation of the rooted evil involves a condemnation of the very spirit of man. Whenever one human being finds himself constantly associated with others his will to perfect himself induces him to make comparisons with others and selfish valua-

tions. At the outset such distinctions seem innocuous because they must be based on some recognisable talents or excellences. But these can be affected. And in the end they become subordinate to wealth which is a possession more easily communicated and acquired and displayed. To this 'ardor for making others talk of oneself, to this fury for marking ourselves out . . . we owe what is best and worst among men, our virtues and our vices, our sciences and our errors, our conquerors and our philosophers; that is to say, a multitude of evil things, as compared with a small number of good ones.' And precisely this disproportion between the good and the bad is what condemns the state of civilisation in the eyes of a moralist. The fault is not in external events, as the setting up of government, but in the nature of man himself at the stage when government becomes necessary. Man has then lost his balance. His egoism and self-interest rule within him. The outward tyranny of princes is but the signal of the inner distress of every soul. And by the very nature of things, the appearance of this despotism in external government gives rise to the analogous wilful attitude in the individuals oppressed, and leads them to overthrow their masters and precipitate themselves into a state of nature for which they are not prepared, being no longer willing to give up anything in their dealings with others, and devoid of the unreflective spontaneous sentiments of compassion. Thus the 'spirit of society' has ruined individuals by altering their natural inclinations and making them unfit to rectify the errors of their ways. The 'moral inequality' is fastened upon men with the aid of their own wills; and yet it is without any sanction whatsoever in the law of their own nature.

This concludes the *Discourse* but not the thought of the author. For there was more in his mind than could be introduced into the 'proof' of his thesis for the prize essay without seeming to contradict it, much as the later *Social Contract* is even now quite commonly supposed to do. A Platonising dream was there, a vision of Socrates who was wise in the truth that 'it was most important . . . to find a political constitution suited to him; for, under such a constitution, he will not only himself reach a higher stage of growth, but he will also secure his country's welfare together with his own'.<sup>1</sup> And Rousseau, after spending so many years in Paris, still remembered he was a citizen of Geneva.

After the *Discourse* was finished, then, he composed a *Dedication* to 'The Republic of Geneva'.<sup>2</sup> It was a tribute to his native

<sup>1</sup> *Republic*, Steph., 497 (D. and V. tr., p. 214).

<sup>2</sup> To Perdriau at Geneva, Nov. 28, 1754, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 196.

land, to its freedom and laws, its ancient standing among the nations, its virtue resisting outward and inward tyranny and at the same time fortunately prevented from doing such evil itself, and its morals and religion. These were very ideal sentiments. But the dreams slipped naturally into actual memories, of his father, a workman, who had in his shop among his tools the writings of Tacitus, Plutarch, and Grotius, and then all the ranks of those who constituted the membership of that society passed in review before his eyes, the artisans, the children, the clergy, the women of the community. It was the ideal Republic by reference to which he had just painted the black picture of actualities in the world of his real acquaintance. He had an ideal of a true society where freedom and equality and righteousness would obtain. And so his next deed tells more of his meaning than even this *Dedication*—he actually returned to Geneva, in June of the year 1754.

'Jean-Jacques Rousseau, citoyen de Genève, 1727.' A young engraver's apprentice of about fifteen years, wandering in the country about Geneva, once chalked up some castle gates with that proud inscription.<sup>1</sup> Now, twenty-seven years later, he was on his way home to reclaim the right so to inscribe himself on all the works to come from his hand. His title to it had, indeed, become doubtful after all his years of absence. For he had run away from home and taken asylum in a Catholic institution and committed himself to the faith. This he was prepared to abjure, though not, in truth, with any special feeling of theological animus. On the contrary, he made a point of stopping over, in company with Thérèse le Vasseur, at Chambéry, to visit Mme de Warens who had been largely responsible for his entering the Church. Moreover, he had actually finished the *Dedication* of his *Discourse* before setting out on his journey, but he deliberately post-dated it so as to associate it with Chambéry, the scene of his own awakening to a moral life and conscience.<sup>2</sup> The whole deed at that moment was one of renewing old ties, a binding of the man back to the persons and inspirations of his youth—it was an affair of 'religion' in a very elemental form. It was religion acted but not professed. A number

<sup>1</sup> *Annales*, vol. xv, 1923, p. 9 (year 1727); E. Ritter, *Isaac Rousseau, &c.*, in *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, vol. xxi, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Confessions* (H., vol. viii, p. 279) the reason for dating the *Dedication* at Chambéry in Savoie is given as political, to avoid all chicanery from either France or Geneva—an interpretation, it seems, due to the later condemnation of his works by those governments. At the time he betrayed no such fear or caution in his letters. Even at the time of publishing the *Émile* and *Social Contract* he was quite without trepidations on that score.

of years afterwards his profession of this personal faith was to make him an outcast, sadly disabused of his error in thinking the republic of Calvin was that of Plato. But there was no premonition of this shadow of doom as he came to the gates of the city and was made welcome by hosts of men eager to honor him and enjoy the pleasure of his company and conversation. With these new-found friends he walked the shores of Lac Léman, by daylight and by evening, and rejoicing to be with 'fellow-citizens' he opened his heart to them and made them know something more of his inmost thoughts.

During the three months at Geneva these thoughts took such form that he felt it necessary to give some hint of them to the readers of his *Discourse*, through notes appended to it. He had aroused men with his account of the grave defects of human nature and the institutions of society and left them asking: 'What of it, then?'<sup>1</sup> Are they advised to go out from their life together in cities and tear themselves away from each other and shuffle off their habit of social intercourse? It may often have seemed during the story as if the condition of solitary independence were alone good for mankind, or at the most that domestic society with its personal felicities. Indeed Rousseau had dwelt with loving care upon these epochs. His descriptions were those of moments in his own life he would like to keep for ever. Solitude was a pleasure, independence a deep need of his nature. He was himself, as he said later, 'the man of nature'. He was also the sadly-tormented soul to whom 'conjugal love and paternal affection' now truly seemed 'the sweetest sentiments known to men'. So the domestic idyll of the *Discourse* portrayed his own longings. But he was also the civilised man: he knew in himself the spoiling of nature by the factitious interests and competitions of an existence in society. Which, then, was the true state for man? This had been left ambiguous. Now the answer is ready: it is not any far-off state of nature in the wilds nor the diminished community in the form of the family, but a political society where laws are supreme, a society having the form of the Republic, something like modern Geneva.

And this is how the *Discourse* must be interpreted, in the light of these later reflections in Geneva. Mankind are not to turn back, because a return is neither possible nor desirable. Having developed into civilised creatures with the passions and interests germane to their social condition they can now be true to nature only by attaining a more perfect *civil* order of life. They have become reflective beings who seek their own good in all things and they must learn what is their real good.

<sup>1</sup> Note i of the *Discourse* sent in while the work was actually being printed.

The life that is worth living should include the expression of all the faculties of humanity, its impulses in their variety and richness, its sentiments, and its intelligence. So the statue of Glaucus must be carved anew from the stuff of which it now consists, accretions and all. It is only the pattern of human nature which is to remain the same. And that is one of balance and harmony. The life of simple impulse and that of natural sentiment are both 'good' in the sense that they are relatively complete in their kinds, that the compassionate tendencies and affections for others are fairly equal in effect to those of self-love. It is true, of course, that some features of the life of savages or primitive society appeal to the highly developed man as a relief from the passionate pursuits and egoisms of contemporary life. And sojourning in the woods undoubtedly has a restorative influence upon the soul. But the true significance of these simpler conditions is their disclosure of a natural criterion which ought to be followed when man acts reflectively and from conscious purposes and with a view to his good. There ought to be, in the opinions of men and their dealings with each other, an equality between others and oneself. It is this equality that remains to be achieved by the man of civilisation, as a virtue. The evil of the state of society is precisely this: that men have an almost wholly selfish will, that no interest in others ever nearly matches the concentrated self-interest, the ambition, the envy, the jealousy, and even the malice toward others which make their appearance in this stage. The economy of nature ought to be restored at this level of the will—it is a moral restoration of that balance that is the desideratum. And the next question is, how that moral equality is to be made possible. How can the will of man be given a new force in the interest of others so that it may become whole and sound as Nature intends? Is it by charity, the cultivating of a persistent love of others? That had long been preached to men and men are still what their civilisation has made them. Charity only has its roots in the primordial impulse of compassion which has been too long dominated and crushed by the power of self-love—it cannot arise from under the heel, and chasten its own tyrant. Even the pious Pufendorff had recognised that sad truth.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the love of God will do it? So Malebranche and many religious writers had thought. But Rousseau had no hope at this time of that power of religion—he saw everywhere institutions of society through which all these forces operated, and his attention was on these institutions. Maybe, however, they can be fashioned in such a form, at least, as to yield justice, as Plato had fancied in his *Republic* and *Laws*.

<sup>1</sup> *The Law of Nature*, bk. 2, ch. 2, sect. 1.

That was the most hopeful of these possibilities. The magisterial Bossuet had made much of love of country and justice.<sup>1</sup> The 'still feeble voice of justice', Rousseau had written in the *Discourse*, is scarcely heard in civil society. But it might yet become a voice of authority. As Plato had proclaimed, 'to cultivate justice combined with wisdom' is the way of redemption for men. That means the interest in the general good is to be established in the hearts of men whose preoccupation is self-interest, that patriotism is to counteract selfishness, and that law is to be made the 'sovereign' within both man the individual and the community, and a society in the form of the republic a reality. It was with a high 'republican enthusiasm', indeed, that the 'citizen of Geneva' returned from his three months' sojourn in his own country.

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres*, vol. xxiii; *Politique*, &c., bk. 1, sect. 6, p. 504 f.

CHAPTER IV  
UNPUBLISHED ESSAYS AND CRITICISMS

'Je vais tâcher d'examiner quelques questions de politique et de morale, agitées et résolues par plusieurs écrivains modernes et relatives aux matières sur lesquelles j'ai été obligé de méditer. J'espère aussi, par ce moyen, développer certains théorèmes que la crainte des digressions m'a fait avancer sans preuves dans d'autres écrits. Mais comme, dans tout ceci, je me propose plutôt d'attaquer des erreurs que d'établir de nouvelles vérités, j'avoue de bonne foi que, quand les ouvrages de mes adversaires ne subsisteront plus, les miens seront parfaitement inutiles. Sans vouloir être le guide de mes contemporains, je me contente de les avertir quand j'en observe un qui les égare; et je n'aurais pas besoin de les fatiguer de mes avis, si personne ne se mêlait de les conduire.' (*Sur le luxe, le commerce, et les arts*, VAUGHAN, vol. i, p. 342.)

THE *Discourse* was but part of a most remarkable 'effervescence of thought'. More ideas had been started up than could be put into its argument or added to it in notes afterward. They were not exactly relevant to the subject prescribed by the Academy of Dijon, but they were to themes in the mind of Rousseau. His imagination went ahead with them and his pen was at work independently of the *Discourse* and without fear of digression. Sure of himself, after his long apprenticeship to masters, he was now determined to develop his own ideas more completely and to refute the errors he had found in working over the old notions. The result was a varied lot of essays, 'essays of my youth', he later called them.<sup>1</sup> These were never published, and they survive, probably, in the fragments now treasured in the libraries of Geneva and Neufchâtel. They are fresh and eloquent records of thought, the first experiments toward originality of a mind of destiny.

Rousseau was still following 'the thread of his ideas' involved in the *Discourse* with its state of nature, and its conjectured history and description of the civil state of man. On all these matters he thought of something more to be said that was not expressed in the 'proof' of his prescribed thesis. He found more to criticise in Hobbes, Grotius, Pufendorff, Burlamaqui, perhaps even in Locke, and his own friend Diderot. What about that 'general society of mankind' which they all seemed to assume? His own argument started from man in a state of independence,

<sup>1</sup> On the back of a letter written to Rey on Oct. 14, 1761 (*C.G.*, vol. vi, No. 1142, p. 238 n.), there was scribbled the beginning of a sentence which may have been part of a literary testament. . . . 'I wish these essays of my youth . . .' He apologised to Rey for inadvertently having written on a piece of paper already used—the message had not been intended for Rey, but probably for Moulton to whom he planned to entrust, in the distress of that time, the manuscripts which he had never succeeded in preparing for publication.

without ties of any sort, not even such vague ones of 'general society'. He was sure he was right and he intended to prosecute his own thesis on that score of man in the natural state. But Hobbes had pretended to demonstrate that war is the inevitable consequence of life in this condition of independence without political government, whereas he had ventured to suggest that war is a phenomenon peculiar to the social order and not a condition precedent to it. The question was whether or not war is natural to man as man, or whether it has causes which can be traced in the record of history or the analysis of human nature. As regards the psychology of man, does it follow, even accepting it as Hobbes represented, that self-love must necessarily drive men into fatal conflict? For another keen observer of human society, Montesquieu, had seen the facts in a different relation, that 'the more men are together, the more vain they are, and they feel arising in them the wish to signalise themselves in little things'.<sup>1</sup> If that be the true account, why may not men learn to seek their distinction in moral qualities, in virtue, in patriotism, all of which may then serve as a restraint upon a brutal expression of their vanity and self-interest, for as Montesquieu put it, 'political virtue is a renunciation of oneself'.<sup>2</sup> After all, the things about which men are most selfish appear to be precisely those which could not exist unless there were already an organised society. And then the question arises how men actually do come into a common life together. It will not do merely to refute the notion of a necessary career of universal warfare or anarchy—one must attain to a clear understanding of the entrance of man into the civil state. What ties unite men into a body? Some had seen contracts, others sheer need and utility, others such factors as language, commerce, and other facilities of civilisation. These are all worth investigating. What, for instance, is the origin of the languages of men? And what is the influence of commerce and invention and luxury? the last an old topic of concern to the citizen of Geneva, who read anew in the *Spirit of Laws* that 'in proportion as luxury establishes itself in a republic the spirit turns toward private interest'.<sup>3</sup> Such were the questions in his mind during that memorable 'ferment of thought'.

The influence of Montesquieu was strong upon him at that time. His imagination had been opened to the historical conception of human affairs. Montesquieu taught him 'not to attribute motives to men prior to established society which are only found after society is established'. There was a great and

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu, *Esprit des Loix*, bk. 7, ch. 1, p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 4, ch. 5, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 7, ch. 1, pp. 238-9.



almost paradoxical wisdom in that maxim. The ignoring of it by the older thinkers had led them into every sort of error about the original state of mankind and the passage to the state of society. 'To carry over into remote ages all the ideas of the century in which one lives is of all the sources of error that which is the most fecund.'<sup>1</sup> But aside from any special teaching, a certain affinity must have obtained between the thought of Montesquieu and that of Rousseau, for the older writer was a man who had steeped himself particularly in the writings of Plato, Malebranche, Shaftesbury, and Montaigne—he praised them as 'four great poets'.<sup>2</sup> Such an underlying appreciation gave the ideas of Montesquieu a congeniality which made them clues for Rousseau to follow in his own sketches or essays.

The titles of these essays and fragments are significant: *On Sparta and Rome*, *The Jews*, *The Laws*, *The History of Morals*, *The Origin of Languages* (including a treatment of Music), *The State of War*, some fragments dealing with Government, and *An Examination of Plato's Republic*.<sup>3</sup> Taken all together these little studies mark out the scope of the investigations Rousseau then had in view, and the tentatives toward his great project of *Political Institutions*.

Of these essays, that on the *Origin of Languages* is *prima facie* least directly relevant to a book on political institutions. It had, indeed, a distinct history and purpose of its own, and was a piece of writing long in the making. Originally it had dealt with *The Principles of Melody*, being intended for the *Encyclopedia*, and it was started as early as 1749. Rousseau had plunged into this article on music with great ardor when the project for the *Encyclopedia* was first launched.<sup>4</sup> There are sections in it which develop the ideas of Plato and of Father Lami with regard to the moral effects of music and art. But it seems then to have been neglected, no doubt because the volumes appeared so slowly and these articles were not called for by the editors. Meantime he had become interested in the ideas of Montesquieu and of his associates, Duclos, Condillac, and Diderot, who were making their marks in the world at the same time as himself. Then came the challenge to write the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*; in this connection he introduced some ideas on the origin of language and its influence upon the moral progress or decline of mankind. The fascination of seeking origins in pre-history soon possessed him, and this apparently dictated the new title of the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 1, ch. 2, p. 191; bk. 30, ch. 14, p. 488.

<sup>2</sup> *Pensées Diverses*, *ibid.*, p. 626.

<sup>3</sup> See fragments, Vaughan, vol. i.

<sup>4</sup> To Mme de Warens, Jan. 27, 1749; *C.G.*, vol. i, No. 102; *H.*, vol. i, p. 370, n. 1.

essay, *The Origin of Languages*, the original reference to music being consigned to a sub-title: *Wherein Melody and Musical Imitation are discussed*. Thus evolved, the essay seems to have been intended as a *Note* to be put into an *Appendix* for the *Discourse*.<sup>1</sup> But it is significant that the *Essay* was not actually so employed. It was either too large and independent a piece for mere *Notes*, or else it was still in transition and unfinished. Instead, therefore, of being a mere appendage of the *Discourse* it apparently ran on to conceptions beyond the scope and purpose of the work. It may not be without some importance that when Rousseau later prepared the one complete surviving fragment of his *Political Institutions* for the press in 1761, he should have be-thought himself of publishing this *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. Of course he was then 'emptying his portfolio', anxious to have everything of significance given to the world to redeem his name from any possible stigma through misrepresentation or suppression of his writings. That impulse seems to confirm the idea that the *Essay* was part of that thread of thought which had led him to his vision of the great masterpiece on human institutions. He had a certain affection for it, and unwilling to trust his own judgment, he submitted it privately to the scrutiny of the censor, the friendly Malesherbes, who returned it with an approving note, notwithstanding the fact that the chapter which ended the work had very satirical and bitter remarks about the *Relations of Language to Government*, how, for instance, in a monarchy there arise modes of speech and writing which insult humanity, springing from the truculence of rulers and the servility of their subjects.<sup>2</sup> Eventually Rousseau himself, wary of any more struggles against authority, consigned the work to its manuscript obscurity.

The *Essay* professed only to 'develop' the ideas of the Encyclopedists with regard to human institutions. The common needs of men, their fears and desires, all tend to make them gravitate into some kinds of association. The consciousness of these mutual necessities and passions makes them aware of the fundamental likeness of their human nature and ready to adopt common ways of life, including languages, laws, governments, &c. The intelligence with which man meets these needs by means of invention and industry is part of Nature's contrivance to provide for the preservation of the species. Society itself originates through such reflective powers and purposes, and with it language, and then, political institutions. These social products vary, to be sure, according to the special needs and conditions

<sup>1</sup> *Annales*, vol. xv, p. 77, n. 1; P. M. Masson, *ibid.*, vol. ix, pp. 46-9.

<sup>2</sup> To Malesherbes, Sept. 25, 1761, and from same Nov. 18, 1761, Nos. 1133, 1177; *C.G.*, vol. vi, pp. 216, 296.

of the nations, as Montesquieu had amply proved, but there is one basic unvarying source of all human institutions, in the primary wants of mankind. This was the current theory with which Rousseau was experimenting.

What, then, are the primitive necessities of human beings? Diderot had considered them to be the immediately physical needs of nature.<sup>1</sup> But the needs of food, of protection against the elements, and even of sex tend rather to *disperse* men than bring them together, for they could not have obtained all that they wanted in one small area of the globe and they would have been thrust into an internecine conflict if they had persisted in seeking their needs in one such confined locality. It would be easier and more natural simply to spread out on the earth as the people multiplied and their divers wants increased. Thus the physical necessities have sent men from most ancient of days into different countries and climes and have produced a variety of populations, each with its distinctive national character and habit of life which depend, according to the accepted theory of Montesquieu, upon the physical peculiarities of the land and climate.<sup>2</sup> Hence there are many peoples on the earth, and not one single, homogeneous 'human race'. This variety is the law of nature. The first state of mankind is, then, one of *dispersal*, the causes of which are precisely what the writers of the *Encyclopædia* were disposed to regard as the *unifying* factor, the primary physical needs.

It is obvious that Rousseau in making these observations has reopened the entire question of the origin of society. Yet his essay only pretends to 'develop' the thesis of his associates. His scrutiny of the nature of man in the *Second Discourse*, and of its course of alteration, had been revealing to him the presence of other factors. If physical needs send men away from each other into every corner of the globe, what is it that makes all these scattered populations into peoples, nations, definite units of the species with common life and institutions?<sup>3</sup> His own new suggestion is: *other* needs than the physical—that is, *moral* needs. He warns his reader not to jump to the disparaging conclusion that he is contradicting what he had said before about needs: moral needs are what men want *of each other*, satisfactions which they cannot obtain without living together, and, moreover, these

<sup>1</sup> Diderot, *Suite de l'Apologie*, &c.; *Œuvres*, vol. i, p. 471; Rousseau, *Considérations sur l'influence des climats relativement à la civilisation*; Vaughan, vol. i, p. 352; *ibid.*, p. 335, *Histoire des Mœurs*; Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 1, ch. 2, ¶. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Rousseau, *Essai*, &c., H., vol. i, pp. 374, 385, 389.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pufendorff, *The Law of Nature*, &c., bk. 7, ch. 1, sect. 7, p. 504. 'Tis, therefore, a vain attempt, to ascribe the origin of communities to the accidents of neighbourhood, and the natural increase of man by generation.'

necessities of the heart and mind are on a level quite above the merely physical. They are such things as the passions of love, pity, and hate.<sup>1</sup> Strange as it might seem, even hatred is a thing conducive to a social existence: the more men feel inimical toward each other, the more they have need of each other's presence for the gratification of their mutually hostile sentiments. People who have reached the stage of wanting to quarrel will seek every pretext for meeting each other on common ground. But such sentiments in man can never arise without imagination, and they are, consequently, the indications of a changing human nature. To bring about this development there must have been some conspiracy on the part of Nature. Accidents and peculiar circumstances must be supposed to have thrown men together, perhaps 'to repair in common their common losses' or 'to dig wells, or, at least, to agree with each other as to their use'.<sup>2</sup> These adventitious needs play their part along with those of sentiment, and thus the race is drawn into closer relationships in certain particular areas of the world.

All these conjectures were advanced in order to prepare for Rousseau's theory of the origin of language. For speech and writing are phenomena of human association, and their origin cannot be understood independently of a view of the origin of society. Speech is born of emotional need, and is not simply an act of intelligence to meet the physical necessity of men. So its first form is the language of feeling. Hence the primacy of verse in the oldest literatures, even the laws of peoples being rendered in that form. There are, of course, notable differences in language, especially between the South and the North. In warmer climes the languages are 'daughters of pleasure not of need'; but in the northern zones, the European especially, they are 'sad daughters of necessity'.<sup>3</sup> The theory of the *Encyclopedia*, therefore, was true only of the languages of Europe. And this, Rousseau ventures to suggest, in the vein of Montesquieu, is a lack of vision in his associates: 'The great defect of Europeans is always to philosophise on the origins of things according to what goes on about them.' It requires imagination to 'pierce the night of immemorial time'.<sup>4</sup> Also to appreciate that mankind in distant eras and places could be animated by impulses other than the purely physical cravings which the sophisticated philosophers of the eighteenth century were so complacently attributing to them. The love of wisdom never inspired such

<sup>1</sup> Rousseau, *Essai*, p. 374.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 389, 392.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393. The comparison of North and South, Montesquieu, *op. cit.*, bk. 21, ch. 3; Bodin, *op. cit.*, bk. 5, ch. 1, pp. 688-90.

<sup>4</sup> Rousseau, *Essai*, pp. 383, 389.

views of the natural man but only a parochial bias of 'this century where one makes every effort to materialise all the operations of the soul, and to take away all morality from the human sentiments'.<sup>1</sup>

Rousseau's contribution to the subject was thus one of emphasising the role of the moral sentiments in the formation of human society and all the social inventions and institutions that go with it. He did not deny the existence of the physical necessities, but he ascribed to them only the function of populating the earth and dispersing mankind into the various places where they could satisfy their wants with the least inconvenience or repugnance. Were the physical needs to work otherwise, they would bring men together into a struggle for existence, and mankind in their original state would have lived at war with each other. Nevertheless, the fact is that various nations have lived for long periods in different portions of the earth. They have formed themselves into peoples. War is not the natural law of their lives. In the face of the tendency to disperse, this very coming together of men into units of society bespeaks the operation of another kind of want, a moral need, an interest men have in each other's attitudes and feelings and wills. The origin of any human association must, therefore, be something of this sort. And with the birth of a nation comes a popular dialect, customs, laws, and political institutions. Obviously, the theory thus broached in this *Essay* has a meaning much beyond the scope of its announced subject.

The deeper intention of the *Essay* is to inquire into that which actually creates the original *social bond* among men. Rousseau was quick to seize on anything which appears likely to produce unity among individuals. He even took the opportunity to exalt his own favorite art of music, as having a greater value, for example, than painting, because its meaning was purely 'moral', that is, it is not imitative of external nature, but expressive of human mood and sentiment.<sup>2</sup> But he clearly sought for something more general and effectual in socialising mankind than a fine art or language or any other agency in which the uniting of man with man comes about, as it were, inadvertently, and without any direct intention. He remarked in a footnote, and it appears to have been a significant afterthought—that even the language of a people cannot arise 'naturally' from the needs of a domestic existence, but rather from the interposition of something involving a deliberate will, that is to say, 'a more general convention'.<sup>3</sup> By implication this would apply to all the other 'human institutions'. Language and government and even the first and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384, n. 2.

fundamental act of forming society might all have their origin in some kind of general convention. The problem for the philosopher is to make the nature of any such convention precise, and above all, to take cognisance of the lessons of Montesquieu, to expect variety and not simply one type of human convention for all the diverse institutions. There ought to be a careful discrimination between the artifices that form a society, a language, a constitution of laws, or a government. The Encyclopedists' recourse to a single principle, say of 'sociability', was quite likely to preclude their making of such important distinctions. The 'social pact' might be very distinct from the 'convention' establishing language, and both of these in turn from that founding a government. The view sponsored by the *Encyclopaedia* that a contract between the rulers and subjects is the actual as well as the legitimate basis of government must have puzzled Rousseau, for in this *Essay* he tended to employ the idea of a social pact to account for the very origin of political society and, with the leaven of Montesquieu in his thought, he could not bring himself to use the same principle of the pact twice, once for the initial formation of the social bond and then again for the institution of government. He had been troubled about the function of contract even in writing his *Discourse*, where he made a careful reservation when he described the origin of government by a social contract, for he said he was only following 'the common opinion' in this argument and intimated that he had further investigations of his own to make on this subject.<sup>1</sup> At the present moment he was still in an experimental frame of mind and he pressed his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* into the service of his inquiry. It thus led on to other things beyond itself and beyond the scope of the *Discourse* for which it was at first intended, as a Note. The piece was virtually a preparation for his greater work on the subject of *Political Institutions*.

The theory of Institutions forming in his mind clearly presupposed that the state of society could never develop from a prior state of war. Though the primitive necessities of mankind increase with any growth in local population, they would not cause conflicts so long as there would be room for people to disperse: it would be less repugnant to man to wander and seek elsewhere than to engage in hostilities over some commonly wanted things. Man is not disposed naturally to enmity of his fellows; rather, like the shepherds of Plato's fancy in the *Laws*, their fellowship in their condition of need and desolation would make them welcome to each other, and kindly and compassionate. The natural man is no more egoistic than he is sympathetic

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 188.

and interested in others. But the *Encyclopedia* writers, or rather, Diderot their leading spirit, had been inoculated with the views of Hobbes as with many other things English. After allowing the primary condition of man to be one of such equableness of disposition they supposed it to have been succeeded by a parlous state of war in which for the first time the intelligence and moral powers of men were called forth, whereby they learned from the hell of warfare and human wrongdoing what 'right' or morality means, what value it is, and what they must do in order to establish it in their relations with each other. The social contract was then the great saving artifice of man. It set up an authority to enforce the rules of right.<sup>1</sup> The views of Diderot were, to be sure, a somewhat tempered Hobbism, for he insisted that the sovereign thus empowered to rule over unruly men was 'limited' by the very 'rights' or 'laws' which he had been commissioned to establish—the monarch exists for the sake of the law and order, and not for his own sake. The power of the Prince is not so absolute that he has the right to violate or abrogate the original agreement with the others which vests him with his prerogatives. But Rousseau was not content with this compromise—he had no use at any time for the ideal of 'limited monarchy' and saw in it only a way of temporising with an utterly intolerable thing. On the other hand, Diderot expressed his feeling, in later years, that Rousseau was an extremist without settled principles.<sup>2</sup> For he had seen him when he, too, was fascinated with Hobbes, imitating his eloquent denunciations of the conduct of man toward man, though in a different perspective and with a coloring peculiar to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He had known him when his admiration of Hobbes was unbounded, when he could write that that man was 'one of the finest geniuses who ever lived',<sup>3</sup> then to develop an unaccountable revulsion at the Hobbesian view of life, as something absolutely 'horrible' and 'insensate'. The truth was that as Rousseau learned to penetrate beneath the eloquence, he came to realise that the ideas were absolutely opposite to those of his own meditations, especially to those of Plato. So deeply did he come to feel this opposition that he wanted to exorcise the spell of Hobbes over his associates and to do it not by any counter-eloquence but by a philosophical examination of some of his cardinal points. The writers of the *Encyclopedia* were setting out to be the leaders of their generation, and they were being misled by Hobbes and

<sup>1</sup> Diderot, *Suite de l'Apologie*, &c., vol. i, pp. 467 ff.; the articles, *Autorité (Politique)*, vol. xiii, pp. 392-5; *Cité*, vol. xiv, pp. 187-8; D'Alembert, *Discours Préliminaire*, ed. Picavet, pp. 20, 46-7.

<sup>2</sup> Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, art. *Hobbisme*; *Œuvres*, vol. xv, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 305.

others whom they treated as 'authorities'. Thus it happened that Rousseau took a position at the opposite extreme from Hobbes on almost every count. And one of the most important papers he left unpublished was an essay devoted to the refutation of this foremost 'adversary', a man who had come to figure in his broodings as a modern Thrasymachus—'the sophist Hobbes'.<sup>1</sup>

This essay was begun to prove a 'theorem': *That the State of War has its Origin in the Social State.*<sup>2</sup> It was being said that man learns his 'natural rights' from experience of the wrongs done in a natural condition of perpetual hostility, that he acquires reflective powers under such stress of conflict and then establishes the State and with it for the first time a morality. Rousseau demanded a clearer vision, and one more honoring humanity. Plato had suggested a very different account of these things. Men possess originally in their souls an idea of justice and they can be conceived to organise their life in common, in cities, and then, as the world expands for them, in the federations of cities, all justly, and therefore morally, and without having to descend into the dire experience of warfare with each other and all manner of brutality and evil. Plato had, indeed, pictured a descent of man from an ideal community of peace and justice to the actual state of warfare obtaining amongst the peoples of his day. But his whole story dramatically changed the order of things: war comes only *after* man has actually formed a political society, and it is not the state of affairs out of which society itself arises. War is a phenomenon peculiar to man in civilisation. This, to one imbued with the ideas of Hobbes, or even with the traditional conceptions of the rise of the State, was outrageous paradox. But it was this that Rousseau now believed, not because Plato or Montesquieu taught him, but because he was discovering things about the nature of man and society alike which verified the idea.

The genius of Rousseau was pre-eminently psychological. He could see into the workings of the human soul, and scent dangers and beauties unknown to others; he perceived the forces of good as well as evil. There was truth for him in Hobbes's account of human life, of the egoism and the passions of men, their tendency to seek personal advantage and power at all times and to claim all things for themselves, exclusive of others. And from such competitive and jealous and hateful tendencies, it seems that a 'state of war' ought to ensue and be the natural expression

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> The theorem was doubtless suggested by Montesquieu, who said that *once in society* men lose their sense of weakness and therefore make bold to take liberties with each other: the equality which was amongst them ceases, and the state of war commences. *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 1, ch. 3, p. 192.



of mankind. Some of Hobbes's most damning truths he had verified in his own experience, for he had in his heart black memories, slowly receding into the past but never reaching oblivion, memories of one 'who would regard the birth of his own children as an affliction'.<sup>1</sup> The horrifying romance of Hobbes could be found everywhere illustrated in the man of civilisation. But that man was not the 'natural man' after all. In himself Rousseau was conscious of the revulsions of the 'natural man' to all such practices, and to vice and crime. There can be a return from evil to virtue. A return to Nature, moreover, that is prompted from within the soul of man himself and is not brought about by any external forces such as the authority of the State or the Sovereign. Hence the belief in 'the natural goodness of man'. Mankind are at bottom entirely competent to steer their course aright and redeem themselves from any lapses or errors. But here again Rousseau had to disagree with Hobbes, with his method of trying to save men from their folly and irrationality. Hobbes was like the preachers deepest-dyed in the belief of hell: he lavished his eloquence in portraying the desperate condition that men naturally come to themselves in order to make them run to his God for salvation, to his Leviathan, into whose hands they would commit themselves and be subject as ever-willing servants, to be ruled and disposed of by a Supreme Reason. That was Hobbes's way of bringing men to see reason. He expected that they would bind themselves by social compact to a Sovereign with authority to maintain law and order. But Rousseau, fresh from his study of language, probably remembered some of the teachings of the mild-mannered men of religion he read in his youth, like Malebranche and Father Lami and even of Plato himself, that such eloquence is chiefly emotional in its effect. To portray a scene of passion is to impress it more deeply upon the beholder, and far more so than the moral lesson of reason which might end the discourse. The sensitive part of man's nature is prompt to express itself when touched off by any 'imitation' of its own movements. When color and beauty of language are wrought into this imitative art, they heighten further its power over the passions and impart to them a high degree of tension and momentum, so that the person leaves the tale or spectacle charged with sentiments and needs but without any appropriate objects for them. Eloquence thus makes the stimulated passions outlive the virtuous dictates of reason which actually involve an ungrateful resistance to impulse. So it was with Hobbes's vivid pictures of the state of man's soul in nature. This

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 305, *L'État de guerre*.

spectacle really tended to fasten upon men the paralysing conviction of their own badness and ineradicable selfishness, so that they could see nothing better than to do as he said they always will do, namely, spend their lives trying to get power over others. They would never take the moral seriously, and adopt a political régime by cool, rigorous reason. So there is no saving mankind by this method of publishing their natural viciousness and then offering them a political theory. A moralist knows that nothing can be remedied nor any good accomplished, unless the individuals themselves are generally persuaded of the ultimate competence and worthiness of their own human nature. To inspire their wills to act, one must profess a faith in humanity, and spend one's genius in revealing the capacities of good that have not been called into energy.

'The best use to make of philosophy is to employ it to destroy the evils it itself has caused, even if one must at the same time destroy such good as is in it.'<sup>1</sup> Rousseau valued Hobbes's theory of the social compact. But he would rather have it lost in oblivion than tolerate the portrayal of human life on which it was premised. He aimed, therefore, to meet his adversary only with the weapons of philosophy, that is, by citing truer observations and giving better reasons. This was not the place, then, for eloquent discourses of his own, a counter-eloquence, as it were, but only for a dispassionate philosophical criticism, in the manner of a Socrates meeting the sophists of his day.

As he thought his way into the problem, he realised that he was taking his argument beyond the original theorem which he had set out to demonstrate: *That the State of War has its Origin in the Social State*. For in order to determine the causes of war he had turned his attention to human nature and its natural tendencies, simply to see whether men are in fact ever so completely dominated by passion and their own egoism that they are forced into a state of 'universal warfare'. He became interested in another theorem: the natural goodness of man. War is not inevitable from the nature of man. It does not belong to human life in the original state of nature. But if that be true, war like political society itself must be due to a considerable measure of 'artifice'. The remedy, then, would be to devise some still wiser artifice, to apply the human genius for invention to this evil situation, and bring the conditions of such self-destruction under a certain measure of control in the interest of the race. This thought gave rise to another set of questions. Is there any way of accomplishing the political ends sought in warfare without the destruction

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 341, *Sur le luxe*, &c. This does not refer specifically to Hobbes, but it was written at this time.

of human life and without all the practices relating to it which so damagingly pervade all the associations of men with each other even in times of seeming peace? Granting that political societies are destined to arise and that difficulties will always exist in social relationships due to the imperfect wisdom and art of man, can the activities of war ever be made subject to law, and in that sense, 'legitimate', and not so intolerable. As he followed the ramifications of his theories which were developing thus by way of criticism of Hobbes, he got so far from the original proposition that he felt obliged to cancel the title, because it no longer indicated the content and full scope of his essay. The suggested lines of thought in it were so manifold, however, that it was never destined to be finished. In some respects the essay has the appearance of being a preparatory sketch for a treatise on the Law of War and the Law of Nations, something to take the place of Grotius's work, for later, in the year 1758, Rousseau sent a communication to Rey, his publisher, that his *Principles of the Law of War* were not at all ready.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, then, this fragmentary essay left in manuscript without a title is another piece of writing that had outgrown its original intention and was halted before it could attain its full stature as a work.

The incompleteness of this essay requires that its argument be supplemented by matter from other things written about the same time. The ideas of Rousseau were being tried out in various different critical essays. The thoughts come from the pen with the freshness and revelation of meaning that sketches of an artist often show, but they must be interpreted according to the intent of the artist, otherwise they are so many strange adventures that tell no significant story.

In the opening of the fragment on War there is a finely discerned social psychology. It is granted, for the sake of argument, that men are just as thirsty for the enjoyment of power as Hobbes had represented. 'But even if it were true that such unbounded and unconquerable covetousness were developed in every man to the point that our sophist supposes, still, it would not produce that state of universal war of every man against every other, of which Hobbes dares to trace the hateful picture. That unrestrained desire to make away with all things for oneself exclusively is incompatible with the desire to destroy all one's fellows; and the victor, who, having killed all others, would have the misfortune to live alone in the world would enjoy nothing whatsoever, for the very reason that he would possess everything. Riches themselves, what are they good for, if not

<sup>1</sup> To Rey, Mar. 9, 1758, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 481, p. 300.

to be shared? What would it boot a man to have possession of the universe, if he were the only inhabitant of it? Indeed, will his stomach take all the fruits of the earth? Who will gather for him the products of all climes? Who will bring him witness to his own empire over the vast solitudes where he will never reside? What will he do with his treasures? Who will consume his provisions? Before whose eyes will he spread the glory of his power? Oh, I see. Instead of massacring everybody, he will put them all in chains, in order, at least, to have slaves. That at once changes the complexion of things; and since it is no longer a question of destroying, the state of war is really done away with. Here let the reader suspend his judgment. I shall not forget to treat of this point.<sup>1</sup>

By way of anticipation it may be noted that in a different fragment Rousseau demonstrated that such a master and slave relationship is itself but an illusory solution. For 'the tyranny and the slavery are manifestly a state of war' in disguise.<sup>2</sup> What the recourse to such a relation discloses, however, is that men even in all their selfishness really want something more genuinely social. They value 'artificial' goods which are only available when others dwell with them in some kind of community and appreciate the same things.<sup>3</sup> They desire the proprietorship of what they have appropriated, which means, the acknowledgment of their goods by others. They need eye-witnesses of their prowess and their joys. When asserting their unlimited will to have their own pleasure in a matter, they require that the minds of others shall go along with them in it and recognise its potency and then comply with its dictates. Thus the complicity of the wills of others is an absolute necessity to such egoists. Hence the imaginary conqueror in war must allow even his enemies to live, partly to make them minister to his physical wants and partly to receive from their subservience the testimony of his own importance or supremacy. It is, therefore, psychologically impossible to have men in the absolutely anti-social condition which Hobbes had described so plausibly as the natural outcome of human motives or interests. 'There is, then, no general war of man with man; and the human species has not been formed for the unique purpose of destroying itself.'<sup>4</sup>

On the contrary, the race of man must be endowed with an enduring tendency to preserve itself, and its members will have

<sup>1</sup> *L'État de guerre*, Vaughan, vol. i, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>3</sup> *Considérations sur l'influence des climats relativement à la civilisation*, op. cit., p. 352; Fragments, pp. 312-13.

<sup>4</sup> *L'État de guerre*, op. cit., p. 294; cf. p. 313. 'There is no man so fierce that he seeks to conquer another in order to kill him.'

some natural, uncalculating interest in each other.<sup>1</sup> This impulse is operative even in the most selfish and brutal of men. They want still the tributes of others and thus pay some regard in their actions to what others will think of them and do for them. Their pleasures and their power would be stale in solitary grandeur. Even when they abuse their unrighteous prerogatives obtained by guile or force and sacrifice others blindly to their own imperious wills, they evoke by their violence a widespread horror in others which unwittingly re-echoes in them, because of their socially-sensitive nature. In such human compassion Nature reasserts her rights, even in those who would put her aside in their self-will and pride. Thus the interest of man in his fellow-men is as much a present fact of human nature as the love of dominion of which Hobbes had made so much.

The portraiture of 'men as they are', even as Rousseau himself had given it in the *Second Discourse*, must now be revised. The dominating motive of mankind is at all times 'the love of oneself', but this, in man who lives in social relations, takes the form of a constant 'desire to distinguish oneself'. Individuals want to stand out in the herd and enjoy their own importance. Hence they love the social inequalities or distinctions. And this kind of affection for themselves is a very different, and more hopeful, thing in comparison with the sheer brutality and selfishness of that fiction elaborated by Hobbes out of a semblance of truth. Rousseau discarded that older view in favor of his new conception of 'the natural gradation of human sentiments'.<sup>2</sup> In another contemporary essay, *The Laws*, he wrote: 'It is one of the singular things about the human heart that, in spite of the inclination all men have to think too highly of themselves, they do esteem themselves more meanly than they ought, on some points. Such an one is that of self-interest, which they regard as their dominant passion, although they have another passion stronger than that, a passion more general and easier to set right, a passion, indeed, which makes use of self-interest as a means of satisfying itself: this is the love of distinction. People will go to any length to become wealthy, but it is really to be *thought* of as such that they want their riches. . . . It is evident enough that the desire to distinguish themselves is the sole origin of luxury and grandeur. . . . Thus we see whole families actuated by one and the same principle, toil without end to enrich themselves, and then in turn ruin themselves. It is a case of Sisyphus who sweats blood to carry to the summit of a mountain the very rock which the moment after he is going

<sup>1</sup> This is the negative way of conceiving the 'general will'.

<sup>2</sup> *L'État de guerre*, p. 306.

to roll down again.' In this light the motive may seem absurd, but it is not a mean one. It is better, anyhow, than a determined selfish interest. Being very general in its object, it can more easily be rectified than a deep-rooted, reasoned selfishness. The desire needs only to be trained upon worthier objects than it commonly finds. Indeed, 'it is only a matter of exciting the desire and providing the means to elicit the same consideration for virtue that men now have for wealth. This truth flows from the principles I am establishing, and to the honor of humanity, experience confirms it'.<sup>1</sup>

There was thus considerable ground for an optimism. If men can be brought to compete with each other for the reputation of being the best citizens, they will come to identify their wills more with the public good and with the cause of justice. The love of possessing civic honors develops inadvertently into the love of country. With such patriotism there comes a more equal regard for their fellow-men who are, like themselves, members of the same body and dwell in the same neighbourhood. This was a corollary that was most eloquently expressed in his *Dedication* to the republic of Geneva.

But in the essay on the *State of War* Rousseau was confined to actualities, and not at liberty to explore his ideal visions. The section entitled *Concerning the Social State* is still in the tenor of his text in *The Discourse* itself, 'We now enter into a new order of things. We shall see men who are united in some concord by artifice, gather together in order to massacre each other, and all the horrors of war arise from the very means taken to prevent it. But it is important first of all to form more exact notions than heretofore of the essential nature of the body-politic. Let the reader only bear in mind that this is a matter less of history and fact than of right and justice, and that I want to examine things in terms of their own nature rather than our prejudices.

'There follows necessarily from the formation of the first society that of all the others. We must either participate in it or unite with others to resist it. It must be imitated or else we must let ourselves be engulfed in it. Thus all the face of the earth is changed. Everywhere nature has disappeared; everywhere human devices have taken its place; independence and natural liberty have made way for laws and slavery; there is no longer any free being; the philosopher looks to find a man and finds none. But it is in vain that we think we can blot out nature; she rises up anew and shows herself where one least expects. The independence which has been taken away from men has betaken itself to these societies; and these great bodies,

<sup>1</sup> *Des Lois*, Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 333-4.

left solely to their own devices, produce shocks all the more terrible, in proportion as their masses are greater than those of the individuals.<sup>1</sup>

This is a situation surprisingly contrary to expectation. The various bodies-politic represent, on the part of the men forming them, an intent for peaceful and happy association.<sup>2</sup> They thrive on 'patriotism', which means 'virtue', something higher than the usual forms of social distinction. Political states, then, ought to carry forward the spirit that has made and sustained them, and thus live 'in an eternal peace' with each other. This seems all the more possible because, unlike individuals, they are quite self-contained entities, and not dependent on each other and therefore not impelled to use others for their own ends and exercise injurious constraints upon them. Of course a commerce between states arises, but this is for their mutual advantage and it ought not simply of itself to produce any such fatal discord. Obviously the root of the international trouble lies deeper. It consists in the fact that political societies are institutions started by men and not by nature. The egoistic will which makes them so necessary to the individuals still persists, unrepressed, in their greater politics. The evil demon cast out of men only passes into these Leviathans of the world. For that love of being distinguished above all others, ennobled somewhat in those citizens who can see their own worth in a social virtue, is degraded in the states which that very virtue of theirs has made possible, for its only object is brute strength or power. And the reason is this: 'The state . . . being an artificial body, has no determinate standard; its own proper magnitude is indefinite; it can always make itself greater; and it feels itself to be weak so long as there are any others stronger than itself. Its safety, its preservation, demand that it shall make itself more powerful than all its neighbors. It can only increase, nourish, and exercise its own powers at their expense; and, if it has no need to seek its subsistence beyond itself, it is still seeking constantly for new members who will give it a more unshakeable solidarity. For the inequality of men has limits placed by the hands of Nature; but that of these societies can augment incessantly, until one alone absorbs all the others. Thus, since the greatness of a body-politic is purely relative, it is forced to compare itself in order to know its own worth; it is dependent on all that surrounds it, and it cannot but be on the watch for everything that goes on. For while it might desire to stand entirely on its own footing, without gaining or losing anything, it would actually become little or great, weak or strong, entirely according as its neighbor

<sup>1</sup> *L'État de guerre*, pp. 295-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 313-14.

expanded or contracted, strengthened itself or became weaker. Indeed, its very solidity, in making its relations more constant, gives a surer effect to all its actions and makes all its quarrels more dangerous.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the many writers who had treated the State as an embodiment of reason alone were much mistaken. A political society is itself dominated by an unbounded and very dangerous competitive passion. Nature, indeed, has her revenge to wreak. The small states are endowed with the greatest vigor for action, while the large ones, by virtue of their very size and the resulting diminution of any sentiment of community, lose their will to assert themselves effectively against all-comers.<sup>2</sup> But this tendency of nature to equalise the contest does nothing whatsoever to alter the condition of war itself, but rather makes for perpetual hostility. 'Thus, according to my views, *the state of war is natural to the Powers.*'<sup>3</sup>

It is to this state of things, if anywhere, that Hobbes's appalling story of mankind is truly applicable. There is an unceasing war among states. These bodies or public persons are in continual offensives against each other. And this means that the civil state is not an escape from misery but actually a stage of progress toward even worse things. And Rousseau followed out that melancholy logic, really a continuation of his *Second Discourse*. The 'different ways of attacking a body-politic are not all equally practicable or equally useful to the one who employs them; and those are naturally preferred whose result is at once our own advantage and the disadvantage of the enemy. Lands, silver, men, all the plunder one can get, thus become the principal objects of mutual hostilities. That contemptible greed insensibly creates a change in the ideas of things, so that war finally degenerates into brigandage, and from being enemies and warriors men become, little by little, tyrants and robbers'.<sup>4</sup> Here is an intolerable anarchy in the relations of men, both within and without their political societies. Nothing is right or sacred. There is no 'civil' life of security and happiness possible to them in such circumstances. The gleam of peace and the good life that seemed imminent with the rise of the State is dashed by the phenomena of its maturity. The political body and all its quasi-controls are hurrying to the doom of everything that defies the rule of nature. Into such dismal reflections Rousseau relapsed, after following for a while the star of hope.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 297-8.

<sup>2</sup> Another fragment making this same point (ibid., pp. 321-2) refers to the writings of Abbé de St. Pierre which came into Rousseau's hands after his return from Geneva, late in 1754.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 300. Italics mine.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 299-300.



What, then, is to be done? Abolish States? That itself would require warfare and only hasten and aggravate the brutalising tendencies in mankind. States are intended to be 'pacific institutions'. They ought, therefore, to be preserved from the universal destruction for which they seem headed, and instead made to realise those noble intentions. The point of attack must be their policy, their conduct of themselves in the state of war so natural to them. The habits of pillage and rapine, and the wanton violation of all natural rights of men and peoples must be corrected by showing truer ideas of the nature of war itself, that is, of what the end of war really is. This truth Plato had once and for all published to mankind in his last great book to them, *The Laws*: warfare must be governed by some laws, so that those who wage it will be able eventually to become reconciled with each other and unite in a peaceful intercourse and association.<sup>1</sup> And guided by the light of that wisdom Rousseau advanced in his own argument to an important insight. The condition of society is not utterly desperate, nor without the possibility of amelioration. If warfare can be made subject to law, it might cease to exist in the form known to present civilisation. Where law supervenes, the practices of life become transformed, or in other words, they approach the true ends of nature.

The first step to any discovery of the law of nature pertaining to anything is the definition of the essence of the thing in question. 'I call the war of one power on another, then, the effect of a mutual, constant, and manifest disposition to destroy the enemy state, or at least to weaken it by all the means possible. That disposition put into action is war strictly speaking; in so far as it continues without effect, it is only the state of war.'<sup>2</sup> When the state of war changes to an act of war there ought to be some public declaration of the fact. This is, obviously, a first law of war.

At this point there is an abrupt break in the argument, and a new heading: *Fundamental Distinctions*. What follows tells nothing about such distinctions. Indeed the most fundamental one involved in the reasoning seems already made when the author writes, in the sentence just before this caption: 'I have been speaking up to this time of the natural state (of war), but I am here speaking of the legitimate state.' Apparently the intention had been to expound such a distinction. But the argument is missing from this fragment, although something like it may be read in another contemporary essay.

<sup>1</sup> *The Laws*, 684, 691, 709, 714-15; *Rep.*, bk. 5, esp. 469-71.

<sup>2</sup> *L'État de guerre*, p. 300; cf. p. 310 top.

What is meant by a 'natural state of war' and the 'legitimate state of war'? Obviously the latter is the condition of affairs where law governs in the relations of political bodies with each other. The former is presumably the state of affairs prior to the rule of any law amongst the nations of the world. To make the difference between these two contrasted conditions appreciable some analysis is necessary. When nations publish to the world their intentions to combat each other they are recognising, in their act of agreeing to be hostile, that they belong together in a larger society of the nations and that they must have some regard to this social situation and to the opinion of others. Hence the same dialectic ought to be possible here, as in the case of the individual in the State of Nature, the dialectic with which Rousseau opened the essay when he showed that the unregulated, destructive selfishness of a conqueror defeats his own ends by depriving him of the fellowship necessary to the enjoyment of his possessions and power. By analogy, the self-defeating character of a policy of brutal militancy among the nations ought likewise to be discoverable. And such logic would be of tremendous value in the world. For statesmen, discerning the truth 'that the state of war is natural to the powers' are prone to think it their high duty to plan for war and seek to wage it on every occasion with all the skill and prudence in their power, and all for the sake of the exclusive advantage of their several States. The astute prince will naturally want to go the limit of Nature's course. It is important, then, to see why this is false and impolitic, and to disabuse all sovereign princes of the visions to which their ambitions as well as the 'reasons of State' of their ministers lead them. To this critical task Rousseau had addressed himself in another essay, *On Luxury, Commerce and the Arts*.

This piece seems to have been written separately because it was, in considerable part, the critique of a book by J. F. Melon, *A Political Essay on Commerce*: it is only toward the end, indeed, that this dialectic of militarism makes its appearance. Melon had made himself famous with this essay on commerce and also with a well-known *Letter on Luxury*. Montesquieu had given him drastic criticism. But he was in high standing amongst the Encyclopedists. Rousseau agreed with Montesquieu: here was another one of those who were leading his contemporaries astray and requiring a sober and philosophical criticism.<sup>1</sup> Melon as

<sup>1</sup> *Sur le luxe*, &c., p. 342, Montesquieu, op. cit., bks. 20-1. That Melon is contemplated in his criticism may be inferred from the fact that a similar attack on slavery is specifically directed against Melon's argument, op. cit., bk. 15, ch. 5, p. 309; cf. J. H. Melon, *Essai Politique* in M. E. Daire's *Economistes Français*, p. 724.

an economist had published some very acute observations upon public policy. He had talked the language of modern statecraft and argued his points with an eye to matters that would tell with governments. All States seek to preserve themselves and to gain every possible advantage over each other. This is the 'natural' motive which statesmen consider exclusively. But they tend to measure such advantage in terms of the wealth of their nations. In that case, however, every State ought to realise its ends by commercial supremacy rather than by the usual methods of military conquest. Melon illustrated his thought by reference to an imaginary island—which indicates, it seems, his admiration of the English polity—this island by its very commerce wins a dominating position over its impoverished neighbors; this superiority results in an increase of population, and consequently a still greater advantage in respect of wealth, men, and power; in the end the State is so large in men and resources that it must forever enjoy the blessings of tranquillity. Thus 'the spirit of commerce' goes hand in hand with 'the spirit of self-preservation'. But with both these policies 'the spirit of conquest' is utterly incompatible. A true political economy therefore ought to be based on the principle of commerce which contributes not only to the preservation of the state but also to the satisfaction of the wants of the people and, therefore, to 'the public happiness'. In regard to the last-named benefit, Melon piously quoted Isaiah (ch. 9, verse 3): 'Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy.'<sup>1</sup>

Much of this was highly acceptable to Rousseau, as it was to Montesquieu, especially the repudiation of conquest and restraint upon commerce. The objective of this new political economy was precisely that held up by Plato: 'the happiness of the whole state.' But the things Melon endorsed in proposing his commercial policy were not pleasing to one who had long schooled himself in the wisdom of ancient political economy and was never very far from the Christian teaching of Geneva. Melon had defended slavery and eulogised luxury for its value in furthering industry—points on which Montesquieu had taken issue with feeling and some justifiable sarcasm, observing that 'commerce corrupts pure morals; that was one of Plato's grounds

<sup>1</sup> Melon, pp. 711, 733, 818. There were at this time a considerable number of works forthcoming on political economy in the same tenor as this book by Melon. Hume's *Political Discourses* were presented in French translations in 1752 and 1753; a translation of John Nikols, by Dangeul, entitled: *Remarques sur les avantages et désavantages de la France et la Grande Bretagne par rapport au commerce et aux autres sources de la puissance des États*; Forbonnais, *Les Éléments du commerce*, which contained his articles for the *Encyclopédie*, and appeared April, 1754; a translation from the English of J. Childe, entitled *Traité sur le commerce et sur les avantages qui résultent de la réduction de l'intérêt de l'argent*, by Abbé Gournay.

of complaint. . .'.<sup>1</sup> Melon twitted the citizens of religious Geneva for their pretence of eschewing luxury and he called them 'a community of recluses rather than free-men'. His ideal was a large State developed by the processes of industrial art and trade, a State so large that it would enjoy peace by virtue of its strength in population and its wealth.<sup>2</sup> Naturally such recommendations provoked a critical attitude in one returning to be a 'citizen of Geneva', and it set him writing an essay of his own on this subject of luxury, commerce, and the arts, in order to develop those suggestions of a new economics in a somewhat different and less fallacious way. And in this connection he employed the dialectical batteries he had devised to fight down the policy of national selfishness in any form.

His argument is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the selfish policy in respect to wealth and aggrandisement. 'Suppose that after long and hard efforts a people has attained its objectives in that respect, and that it has ruined all its neighbors and accumulated all the gold and silver there is in all the rest of the world—let us see what will result, from such public prosperity, for the personal happiness of the citizens themselves.' Nothing else besides those mere metals would be appropriated by the victor because all other goods would have been ruined in the process of the war. No new commodities would subsequently come into circulation, since all commerce must disappear with the destruction of the neighbors. Hence the sole material outcome of the successful war could be nothing but an influx of currency. But this is not real wealth and it cannot bring any increment of satisfaction to individuals. Moreover, in actual events, such moneys never reach the public treasury itself but go to swell the fortunes of those who already have an abundance of wealth and power, for 'silver is the veritable seed of more silver'.

'Thus it happens that the wealth of a whole nation creates opulence in some private individuals, to the prejudice of the public, and that the treasures of the millionaires aggravate the misery of the citizens.' To this must be added 'the infallible increase in the price of all things by reason of the abundance of money and especially of the scarcity of food which necessarily follows in such a situation'. Hence, 'it is easy to demonstrate that the more rich a State is in silver, the more poor people it must have and the more the poor must suffer'.<sup>3</sup> This demonstration held both against a military policy and a commercial warfare. And Rousseau pointed out a remoter consequence which Montesquieu and Plato both taught him. Where the

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu, *op. cit.*, bk. 20, ch. 1, p. 349 f.

<sup>2</sup> Melon, pp. 724, 743-4 (on Geneva, luxury, &c.). <sup>3</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 347-8.

people as a whole have such additional grounds of discontent, because of their increased burdens and inequalities, they will lose their sense of being members one of another; and with that there will come a weakening of the bond which constitutes them a political body.<sup>1</sup> In this effect is seen the most fatal consequence of a victorious war. The State, instead of being preserved and benefited is losing its own life, since that consists in the loyalty of its citizens. All this, then, is the appalling result of war waged to the death: no real goods to the victor, no commerce to bring any benefits, and finally no civic ties holding the nation itself together as an integral body competent to subsist in the society of nations. Without regard to that wider society, therefore, no single people can enjoy its national unity and powers. And it behooves every political body, therefore, to pay some attention to the conditions necessary for the maintenance of such society among the nations, to the laws that make it possible, and to the rights of man which all laws must subserve. This is what Rousseau meant by the phrase 'the lawful state of war'.

Of course this entire dialectic against an unregulated warfare among the nations proceeds on the assumption that there is always a deliberate policy of conquest. This weakens the general argument somewhat. Rousseau needed to demonstrate that the 'natural' state of war is fatal even where the intention to make it utterly destructive of other peoples is lacking. The natural course of events, so to speak, without any malignant policy, must be seen to be toward a condition so unhappy that only by the governance of some higher law than the will of the sovereign State can any hope arise for mankind. Rousseau drew his illustrations of this from history rather than from Plato or from his own imagination. In another essay on *Rome and Sparta* he observed that 'the aggrandisement of both, although on very unequal terms, was equally the cause of their ruin', yet 'both of them, enemies of violence and conquest, were only dreaming of making the State independent and peaceful'.<sup>2</sup> That fatality is inherent in the political body when left to its own devices, and hence the rule of law must supervene and the conduct of the State be directed with respect for 'the laws of nations'.

The *Fundamental Distinctions* which are so barely alluded to in the essay on *The State of War* must have been conceived along the lines of such observations and reasonings. But there was one danger to be guarded against in making such a distinction between the 'natural' and the 'legitimate'. It might suggest that the purpose of the argument is to endorse war instead of

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 697-8; Montesquieu, op. cit., bk. 20, ch. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Vaughan, pp. 316, 319.

condemning it and seeking to control the propensities of the nations to engage in it. The treatise could be mistaken as a book of advice to princes, how to carry on warfare successfully, for the world of letters was then full of works of that stamp, *On the Art of War*, &c.<sup>1</sup> 'I beg the readers not to forget that I am not seeking what will make war profitable to him who wages it, but what will render it lawful.' For sometimes it is necessary: 'It almost always costs something to be just. Is one on that account relieved of the obligation to be just?'<sup>2</sup>

But what could possibly be a lawful state of war? And how ought a just war to be conducted? This must be answered in terms of the previous definition of the nature of war. War is a relation between 'public persons'. 'And what is a public person? I reply that it is that moral being one calls the sovereign, to which the social pact imparts existence, and all of whose acts of will bear the name of laws. Let us here apply the preceding distinctions: one can now say, in regard to the effects of war, that it is the sovereign who does the damage, and the State that suffers it. If war then is only taking place between the moral beings, one is not waging it against men at all, and one can make war without taking the life of a single person. But this calls for explanation. To envisage the situation strictly in terms of the social pact, the land, silver, men, and all that is contained within the boundaries of the State, belong to it without reserve. But the rights of society, founded on those of nature, cannot nullify those natural rights; all these objects ought to be considered in two aspects: to wit, the land as public territory and as the patrimony of individuals; the goods as belonging in a sense to the sovereign and in another sense to the proprietors: the inhabitants as citizens and as men. At bottom, the political body, being only a moral person, is only a creature of reason. Take away the public convention, and at that instant the State is destroyed, without the least alteration in all that composes it; and all the conventions of men can never possibly change anything in the physical constitution of things. What is it then to make war upon a sovereign? It is to attack the public convention and all that accrues from it, for the essence of the State consists of nothing except that. If the social pact could be severed at one stroke, at that moment there would be no war; and as a result of that one blow, the State would be killed without involving the death of a single man.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Corr. Litt.*, vol. ii, pp. 385, 444.

<sup>2</sup> Vaughan, p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> Vaughan, p. 301, cf. Montesquieu, *op. cit.*, bk. 10, ch. 3 ('Right of Conquest') 'La société est l'union des hommes, et non pas l'homme; le citoyen peut périr, et l'homme rester', p. 257.

Here was a new conception of international policy, amply justifying Rousseau's feeling that he had something to bring forward unknown even to great writers like Grotius and Pufendorff. His was an ideal dictated by an interest in humanity and not by that in the glory of princes. It represented an attempt to preserve the State as an instrument of peace without sacrificing any individuals to it. For the State was now being accepted as inevitable, and, possibly, as a moral good. Indeed he even recognised a value in the national struggle for supremacy. For this competition, like the desire for distinction in men themselves, might be transformed into a more noble contest than what usually obtains. Such an idea is suggested in his essay on *Public Happiness*. If political States cannot be denied their natural desire to seek to surpass all others, they might very properly have it directed toward 'the true superiority of the State', which consists in 'the happiness of all the people'.<sup>1</sup> In that alone lies the national strength. And all political activities ought to be governed by reference to that objective rather than to the vain achievements of military conquest which minister only to the satisfaction of princes.

These beginnings of a new statesmanship were ideals of a fervid moralist. But his essay on the *State of War* develops them no farther and hints at no other innovations in the laws of nations. For the vision of hope was once again swept rudely aside in his mind by the resurgence of the brutal actualities, and by a bitterness and indignation at the writers who had garnished the prevailing bad policy with fine magisterial words: 'I open the books on law and morals; I listen to the savants and jurisconsults; and penetrated by their beguiling words, I grieve over the miseries of nature, I admire the peace and justice established by the civil order, I bless the wisdom of public institutions and console myself for being a man by the sight of myself as a citizen. Thus, taught so well what are my duties and what is my happiness, I close my book, leave the class, and look about me: I see unhappy peoples groaning under a yoke of iron, the human race crushed by a handful of oppressors, a crowd down and out, with trouble and hunger, whose blood and tears the rich man drinks in peace, and everywhere, the strong armed with the redoubtable power of the laws against the weak. All these things take place peaceably and without resistance. It is the tranquillity of the companions of Ulysses, shut up in the cave of Cyclops, waiting to be devoured.'<sup>2</sup> One must groan and be silent. Let us draw the curtain for ever over these objects of

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, p. 327 f.

<sup>2</sup> This satirical description of the tranquillity of life in the modern State suggests that Melon's argument was here the butt of attack.

horror. I lift my eyes and look afar. I perceive fires and flames, the country-side deserted, the towns being pillaged. Savage fellows, whither are you dragging these unfortunates? I hear a frightful sound; what tumult, what cries! I draw nearer; I see a theatre of murders, ten thousand men massacred, the dead piled high, the dying trampled under the feet of horses, everywhere the image of death and agony. That is the fruit of these peaceful institutions! Pity, indignation, rise up in the bottom of my heart. Ah, barbarous philosopher, come read us your book on a field of battle! What men of any heart would not be moved by these sad objects? But it is no longer permitted one to be simply a man and to plead the cause of humanity. Justice and truth must be turned to the interest of the most powerful: that is the rule. The people give no pensions, no work, no chairs, no places in Academies; why should one therefore protect *them*? Oh great, magnanimous princes, I speak in the name of the men of letters; oppress the people in good conscience; it is from you alone that we look for everything; the people are of no use to us! How is a feeble voice to make itself heard over and above so many venal outcries? Alas, I must be silent; but the voice of my heart, would it not still know how to pierce so sad a silence?<sup>1</sup>

At that Rousseau checked himself, lest he give way wholly to satire as well as to his indignation and grief. 'I would like to confine myself, as I have always done, to examining human establishments in terms of their principles; to correcting, if possible, the false ideas which interested authors have given us of them, and at least to seeing that injustice and violence shall not impudently assume the name of right and equity. The first thing I remark, in considering the position of the human race, is a manifest contradiction in the way it is now constituted, a fact which makes it always vacillating. Man to man, we live in the civil state and submitted to laws; as people to people, each nation enjoys its natural liberty: this is what makes our situation at bottom worse than if these distinctions were unknown to us. For living at once in the social order and in the state of nature, we are subject to the disadvantages of both the one and the other, without finding security in either of them. The perfection of the social order consists, it is true, in the concurrence of force and law. But for that it is essential that law shall direct the force; whereas, according to the idea of the absolute independence of princes, force, speaking to the citizens under the name of law and to strangers under that of reason of state, deprives the latter of the power and the former of their will to resist; in such wise that the futile name of justice only serves,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 302-3.



on every hand, as a safeguard of violence.<sup>1</sup> Bound by their own lawfulness and loyalties to the State, men put themselves at the mercy of their sovereigns who continue to think for their part that they are 'absolutely independent', and subject to no law above their own wills. The will of all the citizens is thus used most unnaturally against them and their own good. All the power of sovereigns originates in the people; yet it oppresses them. The spirit of law makes it possible for them to dwell together in one community and set up political institutions, but these in turn are administered in the spirit of conquest. Thus men live in a 'mixed condition', partly under the reign of law, partly under that of sheer force; partly civilised, partly in the unruly 'state of nature'. And it is in that division of the life of man, ever the symbol of something imperfect or contrary to nature, that we must see 'the true origin of public calamities'—wars.<sup>2</sup>

According to the 'analytic method' employed by Hobbes, war arises from the native qualities of men and is put down by the institution of some absolute personal authority. This method is one of reasoning from what is to be observed in any pre-existent social order: whenever individuals fall into strife with one another, they are reduced to a state of civility and peace by the power of a government superior to them. This holds provided a social order already obtains. But it is not relevant to a condition of affairs where relations of men have not yet taken form and substance, where the social bond is still to be established. There is, then, a 'natural order' of developments to which Hobbes and other philosophers were blind: men come together into some kind of association; there they develop all their antagonisms and hostilities; these require devices of control in the form of government; and these powers, finally, make war upon each other and oppress their subjects at the same time. Through a genetic method—Rousseau calls it a 'genealogy'—the errors of Hobbes are exposed and refuted. The essay stops short at this point.

But what of Rousseau's own ideas about political institutions? There were still great problems. Indeed, the very origin of society was far from being clear to him. He had perceived that society does not arise naturally from the satisfaction of man's wants by the exercise of his intelligence but from moral needs which call for more than a domestic life and therefore require some 'general convention'. He was quite certain, however, that the social pact does not have its origin in a state of war into which men are projected by their first experience of each other's company, but that, on the contrary, warfare comes after the loose natural associations of the family are made into political bodies

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

when they become 'powers', and naturally, *as* powers, and not moral beings, struggle with each other for supremacy. What, then, is the source of the veritable 'social bond?' There is a certain truth in Hobbes's political theory, if one could detach it without any trace of its brutal meanings. The idea of a social compact conveys that of a deed in which all the men in the community participate, and from which all derive some benefit. That is the idea of a Republic. It is the idea delineated by Plato and the ancients. But most of the modern writers had given a curious twist to the thought, as if they had to turn the argument to meet some exigency in the case that was not expressed in their pages. They lent themselves to the glorifying of martial supremacy, and of sovereignty based upon such achievement. They talked of the wealth of nations and the glory of Princes. Nothing about virtue in both man and ruler alike. A sovereign in the flesh they provided for with their books on the social contract, for the so-called contract establishes the will of a sovereign who is then revered as independent of the laws and the people. Yet it is their own contract, made for their own good, and subject to their wills. What they still need in their predicament, in their lives that are half-social and half-barbarous in the moral sense, is the supremacy of Laws, not of men. The modern peoples, groaning under the exactions of warlike princes, fancy with longing the dreams of Plato in the *Laws*, the spirit of which only Fénelon and Montesquieu seemed to grasp: 'When I call the rulers servants or ministers of the law, I give them this name not for the sake of novelty, but because I certainly believe that upon such service or ministry depends the well or ill being of the State. For that State in which law is subject and has no authority, I perceive to be on the highway to ruin; but I see that the State in which the law is above the rulers, and the rulers are the inferiors of the law, has salvation, and every blessing which the Gods can bestow.'<sup>1</sup> And Socrates was one who had heard the Laws speaking to him as if they were veritable persons. Such realities are the ones to enthrone among men in their cities, and in States and in empires made up of whole nations. With Law established in the relations of man to man, and sovereign to sovereign, and State to State, the social economy would be what it ought to be, and right, not force, would be the bond of society. That was why Rousseau liked to dwell on the glory of Geneva, for there, as the words of his *Dedication* tell, every man can be free and happy, subject only to the laws which are binding equally upon all.

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 715; Jowett, p. 98; Montesquieu, *op. cit.*, bk. 10, ch. 3; bk. 26, ch. 20; Fénelon, *Dialogues des Morts*, Dion et Gélon, xxii.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ENCYCLOPEDIST

‘Si les Lettres étoient maintenant anéanties, je serois privé du seul plaisir qui me reste. C’est dans leur sein que je me console de tous mes maux ; c’est parmi ceux qui les cultivent que je goûte les douceurs de l’amitié, et que j’apprends à jouir de la vie sans craindre la mort. Je leur dois le peu que je suis.’ *To VOLTAIRE, September 10, 1755.*

THE enthusiasm with which Rousseau had set out for Geneva had been communicated to his friends in Paris, especially Grimm and Diderot. They were all three very intimate with each other. They were united in their admiration of constitutional government and in their rooted opposition to every form of despotism and intolerance. On such ground they stood solidly together in a union that was to endure for many years and far outlast, indeed, their mutual friendships. There was a deep-rooted loyalty of these men of letters to each other, as the opponents and, at times, the victims of an order of misrule and tyranny. In the earlier days of their association, therefore, when they were seeing each other constantly and working on common projects, they surely discovered to one another what they had written on politics and morality. They shared ideas, and enthusiasms. And so it came to pass that the group who were shaping the policies of the *Encyclopedia* in 1754 caught the contagion of Rousseau’s fancy for his native land. They had been disposed to look for all right things to the land across the Channel; but when they listened to their friend, and read what he composed, they were willing, for a time at least, to believe in the truer greatness of the republican polity.

While Rousseau was still sojourning at Geneva, in August 1754, there had been sent out by one of his friends in Paris a literary review which praised to the skies the Swiss political constitution.<sup>1</sup> It pointed out the excellence of their policy in contrast with those reigning amongst all the other States of Europe. Every other State was aiming to extend its power, either by force of conquest or by commerce or by more insidious political schemes devised by ministers; groups of States were parrying with each other to get the advantage of the balance of power so delicately maintained by the fears of all parties, and every single State was working constantly toward self-aggrandisement at the cost of all the others; and the governments of the States devoted to such policies of power were becoming more and more despotic, turning their strength against the people them-

<sup>1</sup> *Corr. Litt.*, vol. ii, pp. 381 ff.

selves as well as against the stranger, so that nothing could come out of this condition of war but violent revolutions in every society. It seems as if Rousseau himself must have written this—but he was far away. It was one of his associates, to whom he must have shown his critical essays on the militant politics of Hobbes and the political economy of Melon.

But more than these notes and fragments, more even than the as yet unpublished *Dedication* of the *Discourse* must have been seen by the writer of that article. He delineated 'the principles' of an ideal of a social order and government: 'Switzerland has enjoyed for many centuries a tranquil liberty, and as she has acquired it without oppression and depriving any one of anything, she knows how to preserve it without ambition and without prejudice to any other people. This government, as wise as it is unique, would have long been the object of our admiration, without doubt, if we had not always preferred to let ourselves be dazzled by the passing glory of illusion and imaginary greatness instead of being affected by the beauty and majestic simplicity of truth and wisdom. I am always astonished, not at the indifference of people and the crowd, but at that of the philosophers toward a government whose perfection ought not to have escaped, it seems to me, their meditations. I don't understand, especially, how that rare man of whom I am speaking (Montesquieu), has been able to overlook entirely the Swiss nation and to keep all his enthusiasm for the government of the English people, infinitely less admirable in itself. . . . There are certain general and incontestable principles which have not been seen, and which once they are established will necessarily destroy all the high eulogies of certain governments by men of superior genius, and respected by most people mechanically and without criticism. I venture to suggest here some of these principles, all of them very solid, and principles which are the peculiar glory of the government of the Swiss people. . . . There is in all Europe only the government of the Swiss people which, since its establishment, has not suffered any of the shocks so fatal to other States, so contrary to the happiness of peoples. This government will subsist eternally, and will only end for the same reason that all things end—as a sound and well organised body preserves itself in life for a considerable space of time and only loses it, because it is necessary in the end to obey the irrevocable summons of nature. . . . We could make it evident, in consequence of our principles, how everything has worked toward preserving, to speak thus, for the Swiss nation that precious vigor of early youth which announces a long life and lasting health. . . . Another truth which our political

philosophers seem not to have perceived at all is that it is impossible for a State of great extent to be well-governed. I would say even more than this: a government could not possibly be good unless he in whom the sovereign power resides knows the name, the station, and the condition in life of every last one of the inhabitants of the State; for to be sovereign and to be charged with the happiness of others are synonymous. But, how dare any man, or to include his council, how dare twenty men, or one hundred and twenty men, undertake to produce the happiness of twenty thousands of others, and how could they hope to render happy those whom they do not even know and of whose very existence they are ignorant? Yet it is a fact that the last inhabitant of a State, the simple and virtuous laborer, has as much right to happiness as he who is at the head. . . . To-day, it ought to be said to our kings, 'Consider no one as your subject whom you cannot greet with his own name.' The only good government is that of the cantons: whether it be monarchical, aristocratic, democratic, mixed—that is, it seems to me, a matter of indifference . . . provided that each individual of every canton is well known by him or by those who possess power. . . . These principles, I admit, are too opposite to everything existing to be ever good for anything . . . but they ought to be known and meditated by kings and sovereigns, in order that that awful scope of their duties will teach them at least to redouble their efforts continually to procure the happiness of men in so far as it is in them, or to make reparation to them by the humanity, the compassion, the clemency, by all these virtues of a sensible heart which raise a prince to the level of divinity. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

That was someone speaking from the notes of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, from his notes on government and the duty of princes, on the rights of the simplest laborer and the happiness of every individual, on the body-politic likened to an organised living body and having its own life preserved only through the safeguarding of the precious life of its members. These were notes for a treatise on political economy and government. They were of greater worth than those 'on the art of war, on commerce, on all our profound works on politics', that is, than those of Hobbes and Melon and other authorities followed as Montesquieu had been followed—without sufficient criticism. Is it any wonder that Diderot, cognisant of these critical studies, had turned over to Rousseau the task of writing the article on *Political Economy*?

In Geneva, Rousseau was meditating the whole scheme of his

<sup>1</sup> *Corr. Litt.*, vol. ii, pp. 383-6.

thought on political institutions. He had formed some conception of the order of things where law is supreme, and liberty and happiness the fruit thereof. He walked with the clergy and with the professors of the city and made many life-long friends, who stood by him through all the distress of his later years of ostracism and persecution. But he was not content with what he learned and observed. He had enacted a sort of 'contract' with the Sovereign People of Geneva and been received in scalty by them—perhaps this was too dramatic for the governing party; perhaps he did not flatter them enough, just as he addressed his *Dedication* not to them, the government, but to *The Republic*. In any case the political authorities seemed to act with a somewhat scant enthusiasm, reluctant to adopt the popular will.<sup>1</sup> He had a suspicion, then, that the government had quietly assumed upon itself the sovereignty of the people, and, in a certain way, had set itself above their will and the law. He said nothing at the time. But it made him ready, after four months had passed, to return to Paris and his old friends, determined to set forth in his own book 'great truths, of value for the happiness of the human race, and especially for that of my country'.<sup>2</sup> Though his affection for Geneva never left him, he found it easier to do his work elsewhere, in a place where the influences would stimulate him to write, and among old friends who had helped and criticised and forced him to accomplishment in the world of letters. He was prone, as he confessed himself, to lapse into indolence. Apart from the incitements of such men as Diderot, Grimm, and Duclos, he could not bring himself to sustained work. Besides, he loved Paris despite himself. He was dependent upon the city for many things of the heart and mind, and chiefly for the companionship of those who, like himself, were animated by the ideal of bettering the conditions of human life in the modern world. In October he was back in Paris, although, to his chagrin at the moment, he found they were all away—Diderot, Grimm, Duclos, and D'Alembert.<sup>3</sup>

He felt himself to be one of them and they so regarded him. Diderot had saluted him, in his *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature*, published earlier that year, as one of the glories of the age of Enlightenment, a worthy companion of such men as Duclos, D'Alembert, Voltaire, Maupertuis, and even the great Montesquieu.<sup>4</sup> Rousseau returned the compliment quite as handsomely in a note which he composed for the Appendix of

<sup>1</sup> To Perdriau, Nov. 28, 1754, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 196, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 289; To Lenieps, July 12, 1754, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 170; To Mme Dupin, July 20, No. 173, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> To Vernes, Oct. 15, No. 181.

<sup>4</sup> *Pensées*, LV; *Œuvres*, vol. ii, p. 52.

the *Discourse on Inequality* which he was seeing through the press after his return: 'Suppose that men of the stamp of a Montesquieu, a Buffon, a Diderot, a D'Alembert, a Condillac, could be sent travelling' over the globe. What a new world would be conjured up by their pens! They would present a true natural history and a history of morals and politics, and they would thereby instruct men in evaluating the present condition of their lives.<sup>1</sup> When Diderot composed his article, *Encyclopædia*, for the next volume, he again extolled Rousseau, with the eloquence of infatuation.<sup>2</sup> And Rousseau, writing back to a new-found friend in Geneva, J. F. De Luc, spoke as if it were a matter of great congratulation for him that the editors of the *Encyclopædia* were to accept an article on *Glaciers* written by his two sons: 'It would do them great honor.' 'They would have an opportunity which might never come to them again of immortalising their name and cutting a figure with honor alongside the greatest men of Europe.'<sup>3</sup> Rousseau was evidently glorying in the position he enjoyed in the world of letters.

But he had caught their enthusiasms just as they had shared his and he was as much interested in their common organ of knowledge as in his own project. The *Encyclopædia* was conceived as offering knowledge about all the arts and sciences, theoretical and practical, that are necessary to man's happiness in this world. It had to include truths of politics, society and morals, as well as of physical science, for there is, presumably, a 'law of nature' in human relationships as well as in the events of nature. Diderot seems to have been interested in his gifted friend's *Discourse on Inequality*, partly because it illustrated, in a highly colorful way, what must always come about when a law of nature is violated by man, namely, a condition of general derangement in human affairs and of helpless misery. Where Rousseau had been deeply passionate, however, Diderot retained his *sang-froid*. He was not disposed to attribute this fateful violation of natural law to any human perversity of will, or even to any combination of natural circumstance with moral factors, but simply to ignorance. Of course, if mankind have not yet attained enough philosophy to perceive a 'natural order' in their social relations, they cannot act rightly, or take the proper measures to set their affairs in order. The *Encyclopædia* was intended to dispel such lack of knowledge and, in the spirit of Bacon, to arm men to struggle against their moral and political difficulties with the full power of true knowledge. The project was one of education, and through it, a reformation of social

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres*, vol. xiv, p. 485.

<sup>3</sup> To J. F. De Luc, Dec. 28, 1754, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 199.

life. And Rousseau himself had ideas germane to the scheme. The 'principles' of his *Discourse* and his other essays collateral with it or developing its points, these principles might easily be presented in a constructive form. He had condemned the progress of inequality as 'unauthorised by the law of Nature'. Yet he realised that societies could not be abolished without worse evils than those depicted, for he had drawn the curtain over the very worst, at the end of his *Discourse*, the picture of revolution and civil warfare. The present condition of man is ineluctably social. What mankind needs, then, is something to light the way in the civilisation of whose dangers they have been so effectively warned. It was not enough, therefore, to spread broadcast prize-essays crying against the evils—a 'citizen of Geneva', especially, ought to teach the right way to the good life. The question before him was this: *What is positively authorised by the law of Nature?* Discover the order of right, the principle of conduct for the individuals, the criteria of good management of social affairs by those charged with government that affects so much the weal or woe of vast nations of peoples. Enlightenment on these points will enable men to determine what are their natural rights and what is a lawful governance in society. Rousseau's heart was in this enterprise and in the article which he was commissioned to write for the next issue of the *Encyclopaedia*. And so enthusiastic had he become that he even shared the prejudices of his friends, despite his affection for his native land—as when he sent instructions to his publisher about the distribution of the forthcoming *Discourse* and wrote: 'Don't forget England, the only country, as I see it, where the work, if really good, will be valued for what it is worth.'<sup>1</sup> From the citizen of Geneva these words meant that he had, in the course of several months, come under a spell, the spell of a great saving enterprise, and of the men of genius who were directing it.

Work for the *Encyclopaedia* involved collaboration. Mutual suggestion and criticism made it a great monument of knowledge. Diderot had apparently listened to his friend's criticism of his authorities, in particular Hobbes and Melon. The material for the fifth volume was being collected—the fourth having been published in October. Rousseau was, probably, consulted about the manuscripts, notably one by Boucher d'Argis on *Natural Right*, which simply expounded the ideas of the Genevan jurist Burlamaqui and ignored the much more significant work of Pufendorff. In the last pages of his *Discourse* Rousseau had showed a very distinct preoccupation with the ideas of Pufendorff and Grotius, and he no doubt

<sup>1</sup> To Rey, Mar. 23, 1755, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 217.



criticised to Diderot the article which paid no attention to these greater authors. Perhaps he suggested that Diderot himself should compose another article making up for the deficiencies of the one that had been accepted. Whatever their discussions might have been, the fact is that the next volume of the *Encyclopædia* contains two distinct articles on *Natural Right*, one, *Political*, the other, *Moral*, the latter attributed to Diderot, and in the same volume Rousseau's article on *Political Economy*. The two friends must have surely worked together, for their articles were companion-pieces.<sup>1</sup>

This means, however, that Rousseau would learn something from Diderot as well as Diderot from him. Genuine collaboration is always thus. And that it was so in this case, that there was a give-and-take of ideas is beyond question, for the echoes of their philosophical dialectic lingered long in their subsequent writings and latterly became exaggerated into friendly discords and differences. Each one had his own bright fancies to propose in discussion and each his difficulties for the other. Together they fashioned a conception of moral right and political law which met the needs of the moment and satisfied them in their conjoint efforts. They were accustomed to such literary adventures together. They could still differ and be one. They were in a 'philosophic group', but as individuals and equals. They were moralist and metaphysician in tandem—and the *Encyclopædia* was still a controlling power over both.

Rousseau's article could not be written in the style of his *Discourse*, nor according to the same method. The moralist had to efface himself somewhat before his duties as scientist and philosopher. He had previously used his imagination far more than his reason, and given conjectural pictures of history and society. His experiments of thought in regard to the social bond were following the fancy of Montesquieu who had suggested what a great variety of causes and circumstances determine the character of any nation and its institutions. But it would not do, in the *Encyclopædia*, to offer conjectures and a multiplicity of factors. He had, of course, repudiated the single principle of 'sociability' to which Diderot was partial, in favor of a vague complex of moral forces and accident or circumstance. Nevertheless, some principle, some clear and distinct idea of the union of man in society, ought to be formulated and exhibited in concrete illustration. Let it be a moral force if that is the truth, but above all let it be a 'natural power' and a principle that can be employed by the intellect of man as a criterion for the ordering of life by peoples and their sovereigns. These were the special

<sup>1</sup> See R. Hubert, *Rousseau et l'Encyclopédie*, pp. 26-9.

demands of the *Encyclopedia*, made of his genial friend by the responsible editor.

What Rousseau offered was a principle that had been put forward by Pufendorff and already accepted by Montesquieu. He had meditated long upon the writings of that German professor of jurisprudence who had long before inspired him with moral reflections. Through the books of Pufendorff, made available to him in the French of Jean Barbeyrac, he had oriented himself in his studies of political science. He saw in *The Law of Nature and Nations* and *The Duty of Man and Citizen* the development of modern political theory, the oppositions of schools, and the organisation of a certain liberal consensus of opinion. There was suggested, in these books, too, an ideal which connected his own theory of morals with his political ideas as a citizen of Geneva. He had come to see, in his *Discourse* just finished, that when the social feelings and interests have once come into play, when the 'spirit of society' has descended upon mankind, then the activities of every man require the control of a will higher than a selfish will. This power cannot come from a strong man or prince, from the outside. These people may dominate society, but they are not its makers. Their royal edicts are not laws unless they are 'lawful'. Rulers are only to use the power already available in the community, in each and every person who forms it—and, of course, they mostly abuse such power. But this power, whether rightly employed or not, is *somebody's will*, and some body other than the chiefs of State. Or rather, it is *everybody's will*: this it is which makes all fundamental law for a people and which authorises the acts of those who exercise the function of government. The will of the whole body is the only will that can counteract the selfish will of the many individuals who become conscious of their private interests in a life of society. This will of the whole body Pufendorff had named 'the general will', and he had made it the *real power* which *constitutes* a body-politic and determines what is right for the individual and what is the law for the entire social economy. The principle of right or law in human society is therefore the 'general will'.

Through Pufendorff's discussions of his predecessors, Bodin, Grotius, and Hobbes, Rousseau came to see the genealogy of this principle of the general will. It had had slight beginnings, and a very dubious hold on life, until Pufendorff had gathered together the tradition and dealt what seemed to be a fatal blow to the one great champion who definitely opposed it and whose dicta had weighed heavily with his contemporaries even when they were not disposed to agree with his downright position. It

was the meticulous reasoning and criticism of this philosopher-jurist which made the field clear for such a one as Montesquieu and the new political ideals and programs of the *Encyclopædia*. Rousseau had therefore commended Pufendorff to Diderot as the opener of a new way of knowledge in the social and moral sciences.<sup>1</sup>

The genealogy of the general will begins with Jean Bodin who wrote *Six Books on the Republic*. The republic is an entity quite distinct from the family, though, of course, it is in fact composed of many families. This distinctive social reality is marked from the family by its having the power of 'sovereignty'. The administration of this sovereign republic is government, and the governing body ought not, therefore, to be mistaken for the sovereign. Nor, presumably, ought the sovereign to be identified with any family actually possessing the regalia of authority. But this inference Bodin hesitated to draw, for he lauded the monarchy. The ideal conception of the sovereignty of a people was thus almost smothered at its birth, or, we should say, its rebirth, for it was the new form of an old ideal among the Greeks and in the Middle Ages. But monarchy confused things.<sup>2</sup>

Grotius had started up a similar train of thought, pointing to the 'people' as the significant unit, and studying the 'laws of nations' as laws distinct from the positive laws of rulers and the domestic laws of families. The people is an 'artificial body' composed of lesser corporations, a union of many families, but it is supreme over all its members and, therefore, sovereign. Then, after having defined sovereignty as a 'spirit or constitution in the people', Grotius tamely deferred to the practice of the times and honored the monarch in person as sovereign, piously urging such individual potentates to respect the personal integrity of the people who really do constitute their power. The republican principle but weakly survived such concessions to monarchy.<sup>3</sup>

Hobbes, however, was the *bête noire* of the political thinkers. He was least conciliatory to the liberty of the individual. Civil society is a union of men, as individuals and as members of corporate bodies, for their mutual peace and security, a union formed deliberately and with a clear appreciation of its end and its obligations. Society is thus a 'union of wills'. But the intelligent convention or compact of each with all the others gives

<sup>1</sup> The influence of Pufendorff on Diderot is apparent in his article *Cité*, in volume iii of the *Encyclopédie*; *Œuvres*, vol. xiii, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Bodin, *Six Livres de la République*, pp. 1-11, 12, and 961.

<sup>3</sup> Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace in Three Books wherein are explained the Law of Nature and Nations and the Principal Points relating to Government*, Eng. tr., pp. 64, 98, 204, 207, 263-4.

rise at once to a new being with a character and a force of its own, the Leviathan, a body with powers of action and mind above that of an individual. For the body-politic cannot be a mere composite of the individual men who make it by their uniting, else it would not serve them any better than their own several minds and powers. To be real at all, then, it must be effectual in some distinctive way, as a genuine 'sovereignty', competent to adjust itself to different situations with more than the individual's intelligence and force. It has all the characteristics, then, of a greater person. And this Hobbes claimed as the novelty of his theory: the political society is itself a 'civil person', analogous to the corporations already recognised by law as 'persons'. Society, he repeatedly affirms, is not simply a 'concord' of men but a veritable 'union', constituting therein a 'public person' which deserves a regard greater than that accorded to merely private persons. Yet this civil person would never be more than a fiction of the mind if it were not manifest in 'some one man or body of men'. For it is only the unity of some human 'representer' that makes the State a true entity. The commonwealth or republic is no effectual person until it is represented by a 'visible' sovereign with the sagacity to lay down law and the power both to enforce it against the individuals severally and to maintain the whole body against all outward aggression. Hobbes's realism forced him thus to invest all the sovereignty of society in some actual person or group of persons, a monarch or a Parliament. The ambiguity in this conclusion seemed witness to something other than logic in the argument.<sup>1</sup>

Pufendorff countered this doctrine with an outright idealism. He accepted the novelty put forward by Hobbes: the state is a public person constituted by the wills of natural persons. But this ultimate constitution in the *will* of all the members of the State requires that the State shall also be designated a 'moral person'. Here is a significant qualification. For it reveals why the supreme power of a civil society is right in the eyes of its members and therefore effective amongst them for their security and peace: it is the power of all constituted by the will of all. Moreover, since the will of man always aims at the good, though the particular choices he makes may be in error, so this moral person made by the union of the will of all must have a will directed toward the general good of all. The 'transcendental power' in any society is, then, a 'general will'.<sup>2</sup> It is general in

<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, *Works, Tripes*, vol. iv, pp. 122, 129, 140, 206; *Philosophical Rudiments*, vol. i, p. 131; *Leviathan*, ch. 17, ch. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Pufendorff, *Les Devoirs*, bk. 2, ch. 6, sect. 10, pp. 329-30; *The Law of Nature*, bk. 1, ch. 1 ('Of the Origin and Variety of Moral Entities'), sect. 12, pp. 5-6;

two senses, first, that all the individuals by their intention constitute it, secondly, that it serves all and is in accordance with general principles of action. The general will is thus the true source of law and right. It establishes equality, for which a Christian moralist like Pufendorff stood uncompromisingly: it is a law of nature 'which obliges us to hold all men equal with ourselves'. He quoted Ulpian approvingly to the effect 'that all men by a natural right are born free'.<sup>1</sup> True, Pufendorff was often thinking more of heads of families than of individuals. But, despite his many confusions and waverings, he did maintain better than anyone else the 'republican' view. A state or civil society, in exercising its will on behalf of equal rights and according to law, 'uses' its rulers and is not properly used by them. 'The will of the community' is the real 'majesty'. So the 'general will' of the people had, in the liberal thinking of this writer, already usurped the place of a temporal sovereign or council. And this idea had been disseminated throughout Europe by the remarkably fine French edition and commentary of Jean Barbeyrac.

Before the writers of the *Encyclopédie* were to appropriate it, this conception seems to have enjoyed a certain currency on its own recommendation. The notion of the general will was taken up by the Italian, J. V. Gravina, who emphasised the fact that a general will alone can make available the 'general force' exercised on behalf of any political society. And through Gravina the idea seems to have attracted the attention of Montesquieu, that great investigator who was gathering into his thought all the impulses of this growing republican movement. Nothing that had been said, no matter how obscured by qualification and retraction, was lost upon him. Grotius's phrase 'the spirit or constitution of a people' stayed fixed in his mind, and with it the Greek ideal of the 'republic' and the supremacy of 'the laws'. Montesquieu became the hierophant of an idealistic tradition, like Pufendorff the outspoken protagonist of the 'invisible' realities in human society. With some not unjustified sarcasm he remarked, alluding especially to Hobbes, that 'some writers saw disorder in England wherever they could not see the crown'. He believed, on the contrary, that only where there is 'no visible chief' to impose his imperious will upon men can there be a genuine society of free individuals.<sup>2</sup> Thus he asserted in his just-published *Reflections on the Persian Letters* (1754): it

bk. 7 ('Of the Causes and Motives Inducing Men to Establish Civil Societies') ch. 2, sect. 4; sect. 11; ch. 5, pp. 509, 515, 543.

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff, *The Law of Nature*, bk. 2, ch. 3, sect. 13, p. 109; bk. 3, ch. 1, sect. 8, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 24, ch. 5, and bk. 29, ch. 19; *Œuvres Complètes*, pp. 408, 478.

is always 'an invisible power which governs a people and remains one and the same for them'. That power, as Gravina had well said, is the general will.<sup>1</sup> Only by virtue of it is there a *general force* whereby the State can hold its own as a unit in the world of struggling powers. This general will is what dictates the laws of the society, laws issuing, therefore, from the people and in the interest of their community with each other. The general will is thus 'the true legislative', and beside it all personal authority pales. The 'spirit of a nation' has more real empire than any regulations made by governments—indeed, it alone makes such explicit positive laws possible.<sup>2</sup> In such wise did Montesquieu explain the idea as it had come to him. But he made excellent use of this way of thinking in his own special investigations. The 'spirit of the laws' was a key for the interpreting of the constitutions of all the various peoples and governments in history. It was employed tacitly as a hypothesis for a great collection of studies in social history. And Montesquieu, in so proceeding, illustrated its truth in many varied contexts. Where Hobbes and his opponents such as Locke and Algernon Sidney were dealing only with contemporary England and devising solutions with an eye either to the supremacy of the Crown or to that of Parliament, and therefore always to some 'visible' kind of sovereignty, he achieved a measure of genuine detachment from contemporary politics and propaganda. He disclosed more impartially the great variety of right constitutions, 'right' in the sense that they squared with the characters of the several peoples and their specific needs in their physical environments, the climate, geographical situation, and many other external factors. The reality of national character determining the polity of a people was thoroughly demonstrated by reference to the actual facts of history. The 'spirit of the laws', though an invisible power, was the most real power in society.

Rousseau had let his mind run over the history of this ideal of popular sovereignty, something of far greater scope and significance than a mere history of Geneva which his friends wanted to have written when they had praised Switzerland so highly. He appreciated the continual interplay and counteraction of modern idealism and realism. 'Let Laws rule', said

<sup>1</sup> *Réflexions sur les Lettres Persanes*, *Lettre civ*, op. cit., p. 70; *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 1, ch. 3, p. 192; J. V. Gravina, *Opera, seu Originum Juris Civilis Tres libri*, lib. i, cap.; 104 lib. ii, cap. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 19, ch. 4, 'Ce que c'est l'esprit général', p. 337, and *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, chs. 21-2, pp. 180 and 184.

those imbued with the Greek ideal of the Republic; but they found certain royal families ruling in fact, and their opportunities of life and action limited by having to serve them and not some ideal society or State. 'Laws cannot rule, and administer political affairs', said Hobbes, taking the war directly into the enemies' camp. Laws are otiose; only persons with intelligence and power to make adjustments can rule, and these persons are the law-givers and law-enforcers, and, in fact, the sovereigns themselves. Persons, indeed, are always the source of law and that to which the law in politics applies. But why is not a nation quite as much of a person, suggested Pufendorff, as one man or a council of men? Surely a moral person may be sovereign. The laws may be their will and the expression of a general will. And then came Montesquieu, happily uniting what Pufendorff called a moral power with a sociological factor, showing that the spirit of the laws is a *general force*, creative and controlling. And this was precisely the kind of agency and principle Diderot had required for his argument. Rousseau proposed it as at once a moral and a natural principle by which one could explain the facts of society and at the same time supply a criterion for the perfecting of the social order.

Had it not been for Montesquieu's previous adoption of this doctrine of the general will, however, it might never have gained Diderot's adherence. Without all that remarkable verification in history, it would have been hardly more than a philosophical conjecture. But it was seen to have become a definite theory, useful for the interpretation of facts, and borne out by a vast accumulation of experiences. Consequently, the general will appeared to be a reality of Nature as much as those proved by the admired empirical philosophy of a Galileo, a Pascal, or a Newton. It was veritably a 'natural power' operating amongst men.

Here Diderot's own remarkably speculative genius seems to have come into play. Though disavowing adventures in speculation, and professing always the caution of the scientist, he had such an abundance of genuine imagination that he could not avoid treading the more daring paths of philosophy. The store of information of which he became possessed as editor of the *Encyclopedia* provided him with material for most significant analogies. The universe of nature swept into his ken as he reflected upon this 'natural power'. He envisaged the general will as but an instance of a more universal phenomenon.

The illuminating analogy hailed from the realm of life. Diderot had been studying Maupertuis's *Thesis On the Formation of Organised Bodies*, and he had just put out his own *Thoughts*

on the *Interpretation of Nature*.<sup>1</sup> What impressed him was the great variety of living mechanisms to be found everywhere in Nature, as if she had tried out every possible form within any particular species and left the attempts on record. This thought led him to the further idea that even the existing species themselves are but different, successive metamorphoses of a single prototype. The same varying which produces marked individuals within the species has apparently established the distinct species themselves. Yet there is also a relatively fixed limit to all this variation and to the individual's spontaneous activities. A given creature is never an isolated existence but always part of a larger organisation within which its life and actions fall. In this gross organism its behavior is subject to a certain measure of natural control, under penalty of its own death along with a general destruction of the species. Of course individual members of a type often do depart thus from the law of their own being and rush headlong to their ruin; indeed, entire species have done so and have actually disappeared from the realm of life. But in the main the types have been preserved through the natural aptitudes or instincts residing in the particular members composing them. And with this active subordination of each to the larger whole there is an accompanying mode of 'perception'. When beings are thus organically related to each other they have a distinctive 'consciousness of the whole' of which they are the parts. Some larger capacity of 'soul' appears in them, over and above their consciousness of themselves and their interests. From this thought one might even pass on to that of the Deity as the total system of perception corresponding to the continual self-conserving action of the whole grand system of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

The 'general will' is the analogue in human affairs of this general arrangement of Nature. Men, like other creatures, have an interest in their kind impressed upon the very substance of their being. They have a consciousness of their species along with that of their own individual selves. They not only recognise their fellow men but also have some disposition to act out of regard for them as well as for themselves, so far at least as to preserve the species. Being intelligent, too, they can appreciate so important a truth without descending altogether into the hell of warfare to learn it, that if their interest in the general good ever counted too little in their behavior, the 'species itself'

<sup>1</sup> Maupertuis introduced it into France in 1753, and Diderot had taken up the thesis. The French translation of this Latin thesis by Abbé Trublet was published the middle of April 1754. See *Corr. Litt.*, vol. ii, p. 351 f.

<sup>2</sup> Diderot: *Pensées*, XII, L, LVIII: *Œuvres*, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 15-16; 45-8, 57, and later in *Le Fils Naturel*, vol. vii, p. 69.



must certainly die away and all of them with it. Thus nature dictates to mankind, through the will and the understanding, that all shall act on behalf of all. It is the law of nature confirmed in every part of the universe, and the surrogate of this law, in the society of men, is the 'general will'. Thus an idea only fashioned by philosophers to support the faith and the struggles of the people for righteous government took on a larger dimension and authority. It was Nature's demonstrated *law*, and therefore the true foundation for all human rights and social economy.

In this thought Diderot doubtless saw the fulfilment of a vision that had captivated him years before in Shaftesbury. The world is a system of parts, each in turn being an organic system, and every lesser part plays a role in the preservation and betterment of the whole to which it belongs. So the society of mankind is an entity maintained voluntarily by the conscious beings who have some sense, throughout their lives, of the vital meaning it has for them as individuals. And the memory of Shaftesbury seems to have revived a philosophical optimism associated with him. Diderot at this time found Pope and Leibniz very congenial and was ready to believe that, on the whole, this is the best of all possible worlds, and that no matter how badly things appear in detail the system is good. There is a fundamental 'natural goodness' extending even to the order of human relationships, a goodness resident in the very will of men, restraining their selfish tendencies and making them reasonable. This was Diderot's enthusiasm.

He composed in this vein his article on *Natural Right*. The general will is the only absolute criterion of a person's rights in every capacity, whether as simply man, or citizen, subject, father, or child. There is a presumption, in actual life, against an individual's private judgment on this point. This any honest man will recognise, for he knows in his own heart, that he invariably prefers his own advantage and life to those of others. Yet he sees plainly enough that the same preference for himself ought to be allowed equally to every other person. Experience shows that people in general discern both these things, both their own egoism and the necessary equality of right for all without exception. They cannot divest themselves of their human nature and their perceptions, and therefore they cannot be unremittingly selfish without considerable disquiet and unwillingness. They must endeavour to be equitable in order to be truly happy. Consequently they ought to take the counsel of the philosopher and follow reason in this important matter which declares this: the court before which all questions of justice or

right are argued and decided is ultimately 'the human race itself', because it alone has one impartial passion for 'the good of all'. The 'particular wills of men are all suspect; but the general will is always good'. 'It has never deceived man and never will do so'. Were any animals capable of mutual understanding, they too would recognise this unmistakable authority of the will of their whole species. But as it is, this phenomenon is peculiar to man who alone can be said to enjoy 'natural rights'. Granting, however, this general will to be the source and foundation of all justice, where are its determinations lodged? The answer is in the principles of written law among all civilised nations; in the social activities of people whether in the savage or the barbarous condition; in the tacit conventions of peoples at war, even though they are in other respects the enemies of mankind; and finally in the two passions of quasi-righteous indignation and resentment which even the brutes exhibit when maltreated. These diverse practices and rules of nature declare to men their rights at every level of life, according to their degree of understanding and the form of their society. In saying this, however, Diderot had not the slightest intention of recommending the acceptance by every person of the existing régime to which he finds himself actually subjected. The laws, according to this conception, *ought* always to be made for all alike and in the common interest. If facts seem otherwise, it must be because 'the legislative power' is wrongly vested in those particular 'august mortals' who are possessed of its regalia. Indeed, it is the general will alone that makes all the fundamental laws of a society, and it, too, is the sole criterion by reference to which these laws are to be applied and amended. For laws will and must change as the species itself changes. Yet this changeability is no detraction from the value of law, since the natural right in any case remains quite definite, being always 'relative to the general will and to the common desire of the entire species' at the particular time and place. In short, the supremacy of the general will is a law of nature. And thus a philosopher can refute any violent-minded questioner who might govern his conduct according to the *prima facie* selfishness and injustice of all men.

The general will, as Diderot here presented it, is verily a strange union of factors. It is a biological force making for the preservation of the species of man, as instinct does in the case of animals. It might even be attributed to animals, if they possessed enough consciousness. But the necessity of making such a proviso indicates another essential character: 'The general will is in each individual a pure act of understanding as it reasons in

the silence of the passions with regard to what it is man can require of his fellows and what his fellows have the right to expect of him.<sup>1</sup> Thus the general will is at once a force of life that operates in each individual with the blindness of instinct, and a rational power, pure and simple. How two such functions should thus be united Diderot made no attempt to explain. He was convinced that Nature and Reason are both implicated in the formation of human society and its values, and he was apparently content with the 'thought' that the general will is somehow the representative of both these deities of the Enlightenment.

It was very much of a *passing* thought with Diderot. True, he used the idea subsequently in his articles on *The Greeks* and *The Legislator*, but he wrestled with it no farther. His quick mind swept on to other things. He became fascinated with the notion that unions of bodies produce new psychic powers, like the civic 'self' developed in man. Years later, in the *Dream of D'Alembert* (1769), he was still toying with the idea, first appropriated from Maupertuis, that all things are 'living molecules' endowed with various forms of consciousness and capable of organising themselves indefinitely into new and more complicated units, each with its distinctive 'self'. Another abstract problem then beset him: how is this consciousness of the over-soul to be conceived in relation to the consciousness of the original self? But Diderot had long taken leave of the scene of history and society and entered into a land of dreams, telling a tale to be foisted upon his friend D'Alembert.<sup>2</sup>

Rousseau, too, was carried away by the metaphysical sweep of this notion of the general will. In the atmosphere of bosom friendship he caught the contagious optimism of Pope and Leibniz and Shaftesbury and adopted the biological way of speaking about the general will. Some time afterwards, in 1755, he replied to Charles Bonnet, who had attacked the principles of his *Discourse on Inequality*, by saying that in Nature herself all is, indeed, well ordered, regardless of the individual maladjustments which an observer might cite against the optimistic point of view, and he supported his claim by 'a fact quite general and incontestable, to wit, that all the species do actually subsist'.<sup>3</sup>

And in matters of morality, as well as the mere subsistence of the species, his optimistic attitude recorded itself: 'When one considers with the eye of the philosopher, the play of all the

<sup>1</sup> *Droit Naturel*, sect. 9; see Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 432-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Pensées*, &c., vol. ii, p. 47; *Le Rêve de D'Alembert*, *ibid.*, pp. 124, 161, 175, 177.

<sup>3</sup> Vaughan, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 513.

parts of this vast universe, one soon perceives that the greatest beauty of the pieces composing it consists not in each one itself but in the fact that each is not formed to stay alone and independent but rather to go along with all the others toward the perfection of the entire machine. It is the same in the moral order. The vices and the virtues of each man are not relative to himself alone. Their most significant relation is with society, and it is what they mean to the order in general that constitutes their essence and character.<sup>1</sup> The general will was thus envisaged against a background of natural forces making for an order of beauty and goodness.

But Rousseau could not bring himself to state the matter thus in his own article on *Political Economy*. The idea of the general will had to assimilate to his own mind and background. His genius was an obstinate one, holding fast to the things it had once believed. The argument centered about human will. Now the will of man is no mere composite of instinct and reason but the result of a long development through which it has taken on a determinate and individual character. There is a particularised interest, or selfish aspect, of every man's will and this must not be overlooked amidst all the enthusiasm over the demonstrated interest in the species. This love of self, highly specified and concentrated in every one, is not a thing lightly overruled by any general will, or by the will in the individual to conform to the interests of the whole species. History offers no reassuring testimony on this score. The rise of society only aggravates the hostilities of men toward each other. Their reflective powers are no solvent for the passions of opposition with which they are afflicted. Indeed, even that pure reason or understanding which is supposed to induce men to compound their differences and accept law and institutions of government, even this is not a noble appreciation of some general good but a very scheming intelligence on the part of those who are shrewd enough to perceive the advantage of such restrictive arrangements and pacts for themselves. Amidst such egoistic passions and ingenuities the various forms of political society have had their origin. And take the story farther, beyond the *Discourse* to the essay on War, where the duality of man's interests is so obvious. Unite men in nations, and behold these nations then unite in warfare instead of in a general society of mankind. And this thought leads to another arresting question: Is there

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 338, fragment on *The History of Morals*. Cf. Plato, *Laws*, bk. 10, Steph. 903, Jowett, 290: "The ruler of the universe has ordered all things with a view to the excellence and preservation of the whole, and each part, as far as may be, has an action and passion appropriate to it. . . ."

a 'human race' ever in the purview of any man? Is it real for the individual, or is it simply an abstraction of philosophy, like 'the man of nature'? Rousseau was clinging to the facts that he, as a moralist, could never overlook—the inexhaustible vitality of the selfish will, the existence of nations with definite national character and particular passions and interests, and the very mixed condition of humanity, half-selfish still and yet half-thoughtful of the general good through its commitment to some social life in diverse political bodies.

The general will which is supposed, by inference from biological phenomena, to reside in every man, is *not easy to identify in social realities*. It cannot even be found in the cosmopolitan philosopher who stands aloof from his immediate society and wants to be a citizen of the world. That betokens an independence of responsibility which has no merit and does no good. Nor can it be identified with the will of a man who passively obeys all the laws and lets his political society make of him what it will. For what then becomes of his personal liberty and will, the only things that *distinguish* him from all other living beings? Diderot's view of the power of the general will on behalf of the species tended to ignore this implied detraction from the freedom of the individual. It seems, indeed, as if the will to conform to the law of the race and the spontaneous will to act for oneself were basically opposed. Can the general will, then, be so defined, as to eliminate these apparent 'difficulties' and 'contradictions'?<sup>1</sup> Rousseau felt he had a serious obligation to restate the position, in order to meet such objections and to demonstrate more conclusively that the general will is a real and practical rule for human conduct. Thus the opening of his *Discourse on Political Economy* announces that it is a 'development' of the ideas in the article on *Natural Right*.

There are certain preliminaries before the argument. The idea of economy and its application to the body-politic must be discussed. Originally the term referred to the right management of the home. Political economy is that notion of wise and righteous government for the greater family, the State. But this analogy, which was drawn in ancient days, notably by Plato in his *Statesman*, cannot be carried out very far.<sup>2</sup> A political régime is never the rule of a father who, by his natural affections, considers impartially the interests of those under him. In rulers of the State any interest in persons, and obedience to the voice of nature, is very misleading and dangerous. Conse-

<sup>1</sup> *De l'Économie Politique*, Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 243, 258-9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la République*, vol. i, ch. 2 ('Du Ménage et la différence entre la République et la Famille'), p. 10. Locke, *Civil Government*, bk. 2, ch. 7.

quently the administration of a nation's affairs requires the acceptance of some governing criterion other than the heart, something by which the heads of the State themselves will be guided in the execution of their work, and checked, too, in that inevitable penchant to look out for their own peculiar interests at the cost of the public welfare. The prime condition of having any veritable public economy, then, is the recognition, by all without exception, that there is some power superior to the government. This is 'the public' itself. They are, as a whole, the supreme law-giving authority. They constitute the real sovereignty, whereas the power of government, as Bodin had suggested, is merely executive in character.

But a more complete idea of this sovereign public body, the State, is necessary. The body-politic is like an organised living body, and more especially like a person. It has a self. Its members have a reciprocal sensibility to each other and co-operate to maintain it in existence. It is a moral body, therefore, whose members participate in a general will which always tends to the preservation and well-being of the whole and of every part. This general will is the life-giving principle, the source of the laws, and the only rule of what is just or unjust for every citizen of the State. Here is 'that grand and luminous principle' proposed in the article on *Natural Right*.

Rousseau now points out some very significant things about this criterion of right in society. The general will is a principle reliable enough for the citizen of any one society but not for strangers. Outsiders must regard it as only a private will, that is, one directed to the ends of special value to that particular community. Theoretically, every such particular will of a single nation is subordinate to the law of nature, but this abstraction only means that the general will of such a State is subject to a conceived general will of 'the great city of the world'.

But this relativity of the general will holds even within the confines of a political body itself, as well as amongst the nations. Every civil society really consists, in turn, of lesser bodies of people each one of which has its own pressing interests and maxims. Beside these obvious associations there are many less discernible groupings of men about their particular common interests, some of them permanent, others very fleeting, and all of them together create the diversified modes and manners of a nation. The will of each of these special societies has always a dual character, being general and authoritative for its members, but quite private and without validity for other bodies and individuals in the larger society. Such complications of human relationship give rise to very genuine perplexity with

regard to what is the right. In fact, it is more than perplexity—it is something which entails a relaxing of the social bond itself, for the more closely men are knit in society the more intense become their personal interests and antagonisms and the more confused and less effective their general sense of duty to the whole order. In every such exigency, however, the philosopher holds up his principle: the will which is ‘most general’ is always the most just, or, in other words, ‘the voice of the people is the voice of God’.

This belief is no warrant, however, for the inference drawn by both Diderot and Pufendorff, that the people are to be gathered together in a ‘public assembly’ to determine the law and rights. Public deliberations are not in themselves necessarily equitable or right. It is not the reasoning of the people but only their will that can safely be trusted. When people have already come together and have a mind to take counsel with each other, what is significant is this intention so far to unite as to discuss together the matters at issue—a general will is there, functioning at the outset, and it is only to that extent directed toward the common good. There is no guarantee, however, that the ever-present interests of groups and individuals will not supersede this original intention and determine the assembled body to give decisions contrary to the real good of all. Yet in a sense a general will must be ascribed to every human association no matter how vicious may be the intentions of that union. As Diderot pointed out—and Plato long before him—there is, even in brigands, as they gather together in their caverns to plot their nefarious work, some adoration of the image of virtue.

Now any government is an administration of public affairs by men, and by men who are themselves involved in confusing and complex relations with their fellows and who always have some personal or social purposes other than the general good of society. Righteous government is that when the interests of the chiefs are completely at one with those of the whole people; otherwise, it is tyrannical. The latter is the usual case, and its maxims are writ everywhere in the archives of history, and satirically presented in Machiavelli’s *Prince*. It is a very difficult task, however, to discover and present the principles of an absolutely lawful government by good Princes.

The various difficulties are presented. Granted that the general will is always right, how is man in such a welter of relationships and different claims to know what is veritably the general will? Suppose that solved, and the knowledge attained, how can he follow his consciousness of the right, if he

is not a free individual but one subject, all the while, to government by others? He values the social union only because it means security for all his goods, for his property, his liberty, and his life, but can the actual limitations placed upon him be accepted without loss of freedom and his goods? How can he be forced to defend the goods of some member of the body to which he belongs, and what right has he, when so acting, to effect any damage to that of others? Can a contribution to meet the necessity of the public administration be levied upon an individual without at the same time denying him the right to his own, his property, which all government is supposed to secure for him? Liberty and authority, property and taxation, these seem in theory and practice to be severally incompatible things. Yet, despite the seeming obscurity of the general will, and such contradictions between the individual's rights and the social claims upon him, the thing has been done, societies have been formed and have thrived, political institutions exist and men live by them. How did they acquire the wisdom to accomplish this? What was the key to their success, partial though it may be?

The question is rhetorical, and so is the answer. Of origins Rousseau has little substantial knowledge. He can only wonder as to what must have occurred. Some men must have been possessed of a divine inspiration. For it is an art of surpassing wisdom to make men subjects in order to make them free; to gain the use of their goods and services and even their lives without their consent and yet without their feeling any constraint. Indeed, men are even willing to be forced to punish themselves for their deeds. How is it possible to seem to give obedient service and yet not to obey any particular master? Every one enjoys his liberty, excepting that to injure another's freedom. Such prodigies—they are here presented in their idealised form, for practical life shows but approximations to them—are the work of Law. 'It is to law alone that men owe justice and liberty. It is this salutary organ of the will of all which re-establishes in right the natural equality between men; it is this celestial voice that dictates to each citizen the precepts of public reason, and teaches him to act according to the maxims of his own judgment, and not to be inconsistent with himself.'<sup>1</sup> All the difficulties arising in connection with the general will as the supreme authority are obviated by this conception of law as somehow intermediating between the wills of individuals and the will of their societies. The general will is nothing more nor less than the Spirit of the Laws. It is truly acceptable and

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 245.



sovereign, because what it exacts of one person is always in the interest of the liberty and equality of all without exception.

Using the general will as a thoroughly approved criterion, Rousseau takes the measure of sovereigns as they are, and boldly suggests what their conduct of affairs ought to be, and he speaks with the voice of Plato, Aristotle, Fénelon, and Montesquieu. Rulers are simply ministers of the people and subject to the common laws of their social union. Their first business is to see that these laws are observed by all, especially by themselves who have the most opportunity to infringe upon them. No exceptions are right. This, however, does not call for harsh exactions from the mass of men. As Plato had recommended, the heads of State should preface every public law with a preamble showing its justice and utility so that all persons would adopt it as their own rule of action. The art of statesmanship consists in creating such a love of the laws for their own sakes, not in employing force. A fine wisdom is needed too in adjusting these laws to new situations—here the rulers themselves have two criteria, one the ‘spirit of the law’, the other the general will. And if these seem unfamiliar touchstones, let the statesmen simply remember that they need only to be *just* in order to follow the general will. They must hold themselves up to these high tasks and cultivate men in their régime who will follow the same ideal. This was the grand art of government in antiquity, now forgotten when rulers think only of raising money, not good men.

Rousseau has been giving a lecture to European princes, in the name of the group of which he is a member. He continues it—more, however, in his own vein. The vital principle of any moral body, that the wills of all private individuals shall be governed by reference to the general will, means simply that men must be virtuous. The multitude of the people have their obligations as well as princes. Let virtue reign amongst them, and no cares and impossible tasks of government would remain. For the hearts of men are the strongest supports of any real public authority. It takes a people fully as good as the statesmen are wise to have laws faithfully observed. No amount of legislating and surveillance over private conduct will bring about such obedience where there is already a will to defy one’s own conscience. The place of duty cannot be taken by the motive of terror, and all the craftiness of rulers is insufficient to supply what public morals alone bring. To make all men love their own duties is thus the second great maxim for a wise and law-respecting prince. Yet this lesson, too, is best taught by example. When men see in these respected authorities a genuine love of

country, they feel the same affection themselves. Patriotism is a very active sentiment for good. In it the indefinite and largely ineffectual feeling for humanity is concentrated and formed. The habits of seeing each other constantly develop this sentiment. And the ever-present element of self-love confirms it, thus producing an energy capable of making men do really heroic actions. For man so inspired can be sublime as well as virtuous. And yet, no man will ever entertain such sentiments about his country if he never feels any regard on its part toward him. Worse still, if he considers his life, liberty, and goods insecure and at the mercy of those in power. Only when he knows that the very last man of the community will be cared for, saved from some possible evil or destruction and from all needless suffering, by the united force of the whole body, only then will every man respond with affection and a good will to the needs of the State. Thus the State must become what Plato prescribed, 'the common mother of all', a mother for whom every son is equally worthy. Statesmen must provide for this patriotism. They must create safeguards in the law for the weak and helpless and, in general, for the poor. They must seek to prevent the rise of extremes of wealth and poverty and all the oppressive inequalities consequent upon it. It is for them, too, to look out for the different classes of the society, fostering those who do useful work, especially agriculture, and allowing no unfair advantages to accrue to those who ply the arts and sciences in cities for the delectation of those who can afford luxuries whilst others must starve. Above all, no man must ever have his freedom threatened by any economic practice or arrangement whereby he is forced to sell himself to others in order to keep alive. These demands are made in the language of one who has but recently been correcting the proofs for his *Discourse on Inequality*. Equality, liberty, and true citizenship must be restored to men before they will become dutiful and good, and the primary obligation for this restoration falls upon those who have been profiting most by the existing, parlous condition of humanity.

The process of restoration is to be slow and wise, not by any revolution. When men have grown up in an evil régime, they cannot readily change their hearts, even if they see an altered general policy. Patriotism will not arise because of a few edicts, nor will slaves promptly act like free men. The spirit of goodness must be cultivated in all men from their very infancy. The really first step toward public emancipation is a 'public education' in citizenship. If youths were accustomed to consider themselves and their claims only in relation to the body of the

State, and as parts of it, they would naturally identify themselves with it and at the same time feel about it something of that strong sentiment of interest which all tend to develop with regard to themselves. Their self-love can thus be directed upon an object which will restrain it in its very selfishness. Such a redirecting of human nature is entirely possible, more so, indeed, than the philosophers usually appreciate. But the phenomenon cannot occur, certainly not in a whole people, when the self of each one has already become the sole object of all voluntary activities. Thus a public education, interesting men in this moral person larger than, and including, themselves, is the fundamental condition of the authority of a general will in the lives of all. In such an education they would learn the equality of each one with every other, as fellow citizens, and they would acquire this, not as an intellectual thing, but as a sentiment. Thus they might in the end come to feel more like brothers. And so important is this education of the will and heart that the statesman must preside over it himself, for fear of any misgovernment in that quarter.

At last Rousseau turns to the most practical concern of government, and the subject of political economy in its narrower sense. The body-politic must provide for its own subsistence and for that of all its members. These matters cannot be left to take care of themselves. There must be a policy concerning them. If they are ignored, the result is an evil economy, due to a conflict of rights within the community, which diminishes the public wealth. The right of every citizen includes, as a most sacred thing, the right to what is his own, his property. Locke had called life and liberty and happiness all by the name of 'property'. The usual meaning of it, however, is 'the means' of a person measured in terms of wealth. Now the body-politic always puts some limitation upon this right of property, in the interests of the whole state. Consequently, there seems to be an opposition here between the right of the individual to his property and his obligation as a citizen. Various compromises, however, have been made in practice. Strictly speaking, property ought to cease with the death of the particular persons possessed of it; but it is 'willed' to others, and in that practice there is indicated an extension of the meaning of 'person' to include all in whom he is interested. By this same token, however, the State itself, in which he is concerned, can claim from him a willing contribution for the maintenance of itself. Another practical solution in effect is the voluntary alienation of property, often done for personal reasons and sometimes because of social necessities. In all these cases it is seen that

property is not so absolute a right that it ceases to exist if it be restricted or altered in any way. The State can, with perfect right, appropriate to itself some portion of the property of individuals whenever they fail on their own account to make a voluntary contribution. This is the right of taxation, or else that claiming personal services. It would be a happy solution of the problem, indeed, if the body-politic had a distinct property of its own, a public domain, as Bodin and Aristotle thought, whose revenues would support its activities.<sup>1</sup> But the needs of any modern State so vastly exceed any income from such sources—due, largely, however, to the ambitions of princes for conquests—that such a provision is not feasible. The fact is that some compulsion must be exercised by the government of any State in the form of a tax levy. This is compatible with the right of property, but on one condition alone, that it be made according to law, that is, as the expression of the general will. If the tax be equitable, if the surrender be equal on the part of every citizen, then no one suffers any real loss, since all are benefiting by the general increment of the public wealth. Such equality must not be simply numerical, but an equality proportionate to means, to the common value of the individual's property. To apply such a principle in the actual complexion of things would tax the genius of a Plato or a Montesquieu who would, indeed, shrink from the undertaking as an impossible duty. Nor could a government of many men, a council, succeed where such wise men would fail. What, then, is the right thing to do in this matter of compelling individuals to pay taxes to the commonwealth? The solution is suggested by the ideal of the general will, and realised, it may be, in England; no tax shall be imposed without the consent of the people themselves, or their chosen representatives.

The *Discourse* closes with this recommendation, so congenial to the writers contributing to the *Encyclopedia*. They had a preference for the parliamentary system of English government. Like Montesquieu they admired the general scheme and rejoiced over the liberal philosophy behind it, as expressed by its native spokesman, John Locke. Sovereigns in the flesh, monarchs, rulers, all must acknowledge some limitation upon their power of governing. They are only the executives of public affairs; beside them is the legislative body, representing the whole body-politic. So the princes themselves must render obedience to the common law of the land which has its ultimate source in the people. The practical corollary, drawn by Locke, is that the people must claim their legislative rights and acquire the

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 7, ch. 10, 1330a; Bodin, bk. 1, ch. 1; bk. 6, ch. 2.

ability to exercise them. Political reform and individual education were thus made the ideals of the *Encyclopedia*. But not revolution, and Rousseau had tempered his article to their creed, as it was, in truth, his own. He did not appeal to the people and stir them up, but addressed himself mainly to their sovereigns. He wanted to give them the needed instruction in their grand art of government. The *Discourse* was really a book on *The Good Prince*.

Or, better still, it was a book on *The Statesman*. For Rousseau was moving in the train of his enthusiasm over Platonic ideals. His lawful prince has the lineaments of Plato's philosopher-kings. They are to be called 'guardians' of the laws and are the presiding genii of the education of the people. Upon them first and foremost falls the obligation of loyalty to the republic, the duty to be law-abiding and virtuous, an example and inspiration to those in other stations. They are expected, moreover, to act on the sage advice of Plato and give a reasoned preamble to every law in order to win the allegiance of the citizens. In perplexity over the application of such public law, they are to have recourse to the general will or spirit of the law, or what is declared to be the very same thing, 'the idea of justice'. When they act rightly themselves, when their judgments are equitable, when they supervise with wisdom the working of the whole State, they can make the State the common mother of all, caring equally for rich and poor alike. The force that will arise by these fine acts and by civic education is loyalty or patriotism, a power in every soul of untold potency.<sup>1</sup> *The Discourse on Political Economy* is a tracery of Plato's ideal republic upon the confused scene of modern life.

The 'general will' in Rousseau's treatment is thus a new version of Plato's Idea of Justice. It is the active power creative of law in all things, on behalf of the good of the whole man and of the society in which he lives, and, indeed, of the general society of nations. Since the modern philosopher thinks of law as the outgiving of a will, he must conceive of the source of law so generally effectual as a general will. When any individual imitates this general will he attains personal integrity or virtue. The State which upholds it as an authority above its rulers gains a unity and a concerted force of action which makes it a real Power, a moral force for the good of the humanity dwelling within and without its confines. Consequently, the rule of the general will is a *moral sovereignty*. Like justice, it is at once a criterion and a true power throughout the entire range of human affairs.

<sup>1</sup> Similar ideas appear in fragments, Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 274-5, 277 (j and k), 278 (n).

But the general will must have had still other connotations lurking in it, peculiar to the experience and reflection of Rousseau. It is the will of the people; or rather, the will of the people is its nearest approximation, very like the Platonic sense of 'imitation' or 'participation'. For Rousseau certainly conceived of the source of law in society as the will of every individual living within the range of its influence and control, for otherwise the freedom of man would be illusory. This will is general in its origin as well as in its application. Like Plato's justice it is in every man, woman, and child in the State. So the popular will is the nearest practical equivalent of the general will.

But why only such approximateness? Because Rousseau could never forget what manner of man the present creature of civilisation is, that his will is naturally bent upon seeking personal advantage over others and therefore is continually assailed with the desire to make an exception in his own favor. Although Diderot had been promptly convinced, by the analogy with living organisms, of the existence in mankind of a will for the general good quite as 'natural' as selfishness, Rousseau kept alive in his thinking the sense of the perennial contradictions within mankind, contradictions between the 'nature' acquired through so much artifice and the 'nature' that might have been if developed true to its destination. This contrariety of the will itself persists in every man. Consequently the 'will of all' taken collectively cannot be deemed a general or good will without qualification, and must be distinguished therefrom as something imperfect. And perhaps, in thus preserving the general will as the supremely perfect and ideal will, he was obeying some of the most ancient impulses of his own thought. During all his association with the Encyclopedists he had been, according to his own statement, reading his Bible constantly, and absorbing himself in religious meditations. His recourse, in this very article, to the old doctrine, 'the will of the people is the voice of God', betrays that he was contemplating a higher authority than even Nature. There was in the background of his thinking the acquaintance with a discussion among several of the writers in whom he had steeped himself years before at Les Charmettes—Malebranche, Fénelon, and Bayle—on the doctrine of the first of these that the law of nature is 'the general will' of the Divine Being who loves order perfectly and ordains that everything which takes place in the world shall follow general principle.<sup>1</sup> The thought was the very same with Plato's teach-

<sup>1</sup> Malebranche, *Recherche*, bk. 5, ch. 1 end; *Méditations Chrésiennes*, Méd. 8, p. 107; *Nature et Grâce* (Eng. tr.), pp. 4, 12; Bayle signalled Malebranche's meaning of the

ing in the *Laws*: 'The ruler of the universe has ordered all things with a view to the excellence and perfection of the whole, and each part as far as may be, has an action and passion appropriate to it.'<sup>1</sup> These meanings had passed into the conception of the citizen of Geneva: the general will is really the will of God, and that is why it is always good and right, the only veritable norm for the will of men in their affairs. Where Diderot envisaged simply the grand Law of Nature, Rousseau was, like Malebranche, seeing it all in God.

It is not without significance that when the volume containing this article was published, it inspired an enthusiastic letter from a minister of the Gospel at Geneva. Rousseau gratefully replied to this appreciation: 'You are content with the article *Economy*? I believe, indeed, that my heart dictated it, and that yours has read it.'<sup>2</sup>

The ideal solution of the problems that had been troubling Rousseau in his earlier writings was now in view. The root of all evil had been there traced to the will of man and to the things it strives for and values. The outer inequalities are founded on a human nature that has not grown up equal to itself and obedient to the dictates of nature. To restore mankind to a state of virtue and happiness it would be necessary to cultivate a will making for genuine equality among men, that is, a will subject to law. This seemed at first the remotest possibility for men as they are found living in civilisation. But it was observed that men even in society have still some regard for what they seem to be in each other's eyes and that the men of ancient civilisations could rise to patriotic devotion and loyalty, all proving that the social being is not wholly selfish, but has hopeful possibilities. That glimmer of optimism Diderot had kindled to a glow of enthusiasm by the analogy of mankind with the other species who exhibited a will to preserve the whole species in all the individuals as a condition of their own survival and well-being. The general will took form both as a definite sociological factor which makes any veritable society possible and as an ideal criterion in terms of which men can and ought to be remaking their society by their own industry and intelligence. The 'spirit of society' had been denounced as bad, for it is the attitude of men when they are interested in their jealous

general will in an article in *Les Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, May 1684—*Œuvres Diverses*, vol. i, p. 149. Fénelon argued about it, with reference to a 'particular providence' as well as a general one, in his *Réfutation du système du P. Malebranche sur la Nature et la Grâce*, chs. 13, 16, and 20, *Œuvres*, vol. ii.

<sup>1</sup> *Laws*, bk. 10, Steph. 903 (Jowett's tr.).

<sup>2</sup> To Vernes, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 287, p. 273.

enjoyments and invidious comparisons of worth; but the 'spirit of the laws', exalted by Montesquieu and by his master Plato, was naught but good. Were such a spirit fully realised in human affairs, were all acts of will done in conformity to the general will, then all the contradictions and perversions of the human soul in civilised life would be overcome in favor of a good and natural life.

The indictment of the *Discourse* upon social life would certainly have to be tempered somewhat after this work on *Political Economy*. A fragment exists, showing the change of tone: 'To speak in moral terms—Is society in itself, then, a good or an evil? The reply depends upon the comparison of good and evil which comes about from it and the balance of virtue and vice engendered among those composing it: and on that count the question is only too easy to solve. It would be better never to raise the curtain on this scene of human action than to disclose to our view a spectacle so hateful and dangerous. But on looking at it closer, one soon sees that there are other elements in the solution of this problem, which philosophy ought to take account of, elements calculated to modify very much so melancholy a conclusion. The virtue of a single good man ennobles the human race more than all the crimes of the wicked can degrade it.'<sup>1</sup>

Rousseau's aims kept him associated with the *Encyclopedia*, and engaged in writing, and at Paris, where his best friends lived, although he cast longing eyes many a time to the land of his dreams during the course of the year following his return from Geneva. He was kept busy, however, publishing his *Discourse* and cogitating a multitude of thoughts and fancies of his own in pursuance of the theme just developed in his article on *Political Economy*. And he was busy, too, helping Diderot, who sang his praises in the article *Encyclopedia* where he mentioned his most inspiring associates: 'Oh Rousseau, my dear and worthy friend, I have never had the power to deny myself your eulogy; I have felt my love of truth grow thereby, and my love of virtue.'<sup>2</sup> Naturally, then, it seemed to Rousseau himself 'that in spite of my most ardent desires, I shall finish my days at Paris, where the life that I lead is so peaceable, solitary, and perfectly free, and is not without its own charms. The only bonds that would possibly constrain me here are those of friendship: isn't that having more than even liberty itself?'<sup>3</sup> He considered himself bound to his associates, and he was happy to be known to the world as

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres*, vol. xiv, p. 485.

<sup>3</sup> To Jallabert at Geneva, Nov. 20, 1755, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 262.



one of those men of letters. 'It is amongst them that I console myself for all my faults: it is . . . with them that I taste all the delights of friendship, and learn how to enjoy life without fearing to die. I owe them the little that I am.'<sup>1</sup> So the Encyclopedist wrote, and quite sincerely, to his critic, the famous Voltaire.

<sup>1</sup> To Voltaire, Sept. 10, 1755, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 244. The reference is to literature as well as to men of letters.

CHAPTER VI  
THE QUESTION OF OBLIGATION

'Il n'est pas question . . . du pouvoir auquel on est forcé d'obéir mais de celui qu'on est obligé de reconnaître.'

First Version of the *Social Contract* (Vaughan, vol. i, p. 470).

THE pen that could pay fine tributes to friends was in demand with them. Mme Dupin and de Mably were very much concerned to have the fame of their relative the Abbé de St. Pierre perpetuated through an edition of his voluminous writings. Apparently, Rousseau had expressed some admiration for that author who was so famous for his *Project for Lasting Peace* and who had other significant projects regarding monarchy, civil service, and education. His idea of a federation of States in Europe jibed very well with one of the fancies in Plato's *Laws*. It suited the republican enthusiasm of the citizen of Geneva, who had therefore 'demanded' the writings of St. Pierre, and not merely accepted them, from those who were interested in the edition. The printed works, together with a lot of manuscripts, were put into his hands in the autumn of 1754 after his return to Paris.<sup>1</sup> And so this task was added to what Diderot had required of him for the *Encyclopedia*.

He was busy, too, earning his livelihood by copying music, a natural occupation for one who had been an engraver's apprentice and secretary to an Embassy and to private persons. It was, indeed, his sole means of subsistence, because the income from his writings scarcely amounted to anything at that time. His *Discourse* was not yet published and, indeed, he was busy with the proofs of it until the spring of 1755, and adding *Notes* in an Appendix; the volume of the *Encyclopedia* containing his article was not to come out until November of that year—and in any case no returns financially were to be expected of it. He was also preparing his articles on *Music* but, in hopes of doing something for himself, he announced a *Dictionary of Music*. However, in order to live he had to do his copying. And the necessity of being where he could get such commissions was one of the reasons why he felt he could not reside at Geneva but had to stay in Paris.

The element of constraint and the amount of business pressed hard on a man who loved his independence and who could not stay long at a task. As he said, he went from one kind of work to another at this period and found that simply to vary the

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 302: 'le dépôt de ses manuscrits, que j'avois accepté et même demandé. . . ' *ibid.*, p. 291; to Bastide, C.G., vol. v, No. 936.

occupation was to find recreation. Sometimes he had the impulse to run away from this scene of so many preoccupations to the freer air and simpler existence at Geneva. He kept corresponding with the new friends he had made there, and definitely promised them another visit. Even in telling them that only bonds of friendship were holding him in Paris and that he cherished them more than liberty itself, even in expressing this option he betrays that he was weighing the two values in the balance: is it to be friends or liberty? There were bonds, then, felt as bonds, though still accepted because of old intimacies and a sense of some common end in the relationships.

In February 1755 the great and admired Montesquieu died. Rousseau happened to be away and in the country at the moment. He sent the regretted news to Perdriau, a young minister at Geneva, saying he had heard 'that of all the men of letters with which Paris swarms, Diderot alone had followed him to the grave; fortunately the very one who would make the absence of others less noticeable to the world'.<sup>1</sup> Here was the immortal one gone who had 'taught peoples their rights and their duties'. His example had sustained them in their own ambitions, for they, too, liked to teach men these things, and were even then teaching each other. Now their common objects of admiration, respect, and love were beginning to go. And as that came about they could tolerate less and less their criticisms of each other. The passing away of their 'illustrious Montesquieu' was the first mortal touch to their intimacy, imperceptible to them, and seeming almost like a new bond, as losses do; but yet the harbinger of fatality in their friendship.

To be sure they had a common ground on the principle of 'the general will', that criterion for both personal morality and political reconstruction exhibited in their articles on *Natural Right* and *Political Economy*. But Rousseau, after composing his article, was very much engrossed with his proof-reading for the *Discourse* and, quite naturally, perhaps, he reviewed its argument. Certainly he had to consider it in order to make the decision not to include in the work his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. These writings brought him to thoughts where he was no longer in agreement with Diderot. The rise of society, like that of language, is not simply 'natural' but a work of artifice or general convention. Of course Diderot had recognised that a reflective intelligence is involved in the formation of a social body but he went to another extreme when he called the deed 'a pure act of understanding'. For Rousseau had been all

<sup>1</sup> To Perdriau, Feb. 20, 1755, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 212.

along somewhat suspicious of the nobility of the intellect, and in his *Discourse* he described very vividly how scheming a thing it is in devising pacts to restrain the weak by promising them the opportunity to become strong, all on terms laid down by those actually holding power but not in the least animated by any love of the general good. And further he was now conscious of a certain duplicity or equivocation in the meaning of the term 'natural'. His studies of the nature of war were showing him that the very oppositions of men and nations are in one sense 'natural', that between the Powers war itself is 'natural', and that 'naturally' there is no such general will for the good of 'the whole race', as Diderot and many of Rousseau's own masters, Bossuet, Grotius, Pufendorff, Burlamaqui and even Locke seemed to think when they assumed a 'general society of mankind' obtaining before there were any *political* societies.<sup>1</sup> He had some doubts about this notion. He was more disposed to keep the term 'general will' for the particular societies or bodies-politic, and to think of it there, primarily, as the source of all law in the community. And even there it is not so much a 'natural power' in Diderot's biological sense as an ideal or moral one. Thus two meanings of Nature were coming to be distinguished, that which *is*, and that which *ought* to be—the distinction between the existing and the right order.

The distinction was appreciated ever since his return from Geneva where he saw with his own eyes the life in the Republic which he had been fondly imagining with all the lineaments of Plato's ideal State. 'I had not found, in the visit I had just made there, notions of law and liberty sufficiently clear or just to suit me.'<sup>2</sup> And on March 30, 1755, he wrote to Jallabert, Professor of Philosophy at Geneva—who later proved himself a man of great courage in the cause of justice—to say that he now had a great desire to make his meditations in solitude of the greatest possible use 'to the general society of mankind, and more especially to our common country'.<sup>3</sup> Something was brewing, some thoughts on the 'question of political right'.

The thoughts came out in scribbled notes and in the draft of a first chapter of the hoped-for treatise. It was entitled: *On Natural Right and General Society*. It opened thus: 'Let us begin by getting rid of an equivocation which is the source of only too many sophisms. There are two ways of envisaging Natural Right.'<sup>4</sup> The paper is torn across after that opening sentence.

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions* referring to the purpose of the *Political Institutions*, H., vol. viii, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> To Jallabert, Mar. 30, 1755, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 194, see below, ch. xxi.

<sup>4</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 322.

Obviously the double meaning of 'natural right' is, first, the idea of the rights men actually have in virtue of their ability to obtain them by force or guile, and, secondly, the idea of right as being what they are entitled to in accordance with the general will. And still another fragment of the chapter is preserved which pursued his ideas in the essays on *Language* and *War*, to the effect: Men, by the very nature of their passions, even their hostile ones, cannot do without one another, and must have some kind of association. But this, though 'natural' enough, is not worth dignifying with the name 'general society'. There seems, indeed, to be 'no natural *and* general society among men'.<sup>1</sup> What 'naturally' comes about is a relationship full of latent hostilities which keep it for ever unstable and unsatisfactory. A society really general cannot be had without something more than these natural propensities: society in the true sense demands more human art and intention, bonds deliberately accepted because the good of them, for each and all, is appreciated. It is, therefore, an impossible conjunction of terms to speak of a society that is at once 'natural' and 'general'.

Having set these reasonings down on paper Rousseau left the essay unfinished. Subsequently he made another tentative which displaced it. This was put in as the second chapter, the first being merely a short paragraph on *The Subject of this Work*. The point of departure for the whole treatise on *Political Institutions* to follow was this chapter devoted to the proposition: *That there is naturally no general society whatsoever among men.*<sup>2</sup>

'Let us begin by inquiring how political institutions come to be necessary.'

The inquiry proceeds by resuming what had been arrived at through the previous tentatives in the *Origin of Languages* and the *State of War*. 'The force of man is so neatly adapted to his natural wants and his primitive condition that if that state changes ever so little and those wants increase, the aid of his fellows becomes necessary to him; and when his desires finally embrace all nature, the concurrence of the whole human race is scarcely sufficient to gratify them. Thus it is that the same causes which make us bad also make us slaves, and put us into bondage by depraving us. The feeling of our weakness comes less from our own nature than our cupidity: our needs draw us together in proportion as our passions divide us; and the more we become enemies of our fellows the less we can do without them. Such are the primary bonds of society in general.' And

<sup>1</sup> Fragment Neuchâtel, MS. 7854, Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 322-3.

<sup>2</sup> This is Chapter 2 of what is commonly referred to as the First Version of the *Social Contract*, Vaughan, *ibid.*, p. 447.

the implicit criticism of the *Encyclopedia* doctrine is now distinctly brought out: 'As for the identity of nature (in men) its effect is null in those things; because it is as much a basis of quarrelling among men as of their union, and it causes competition and jealousy amongst them quite as often as mutual understanding and agreement.'<sup>1</sup>

'From this new order of things arise the multitudes of relationships without measure, without rule, without solidity, relationships which men alter and change continually, a hundred working to destroy them for every one who works to fix them. And since the relative existence of a man in the state of nature depends upon a thousand other relations which are in continual flux, he can never be sure of being the same person in any two instants of his life; peace and happiness are only a passing gleam for him; nothing is permanent except the misery resulting from all these vicissitudes. Even if his sentiments and his ideas could be lifted up to a love of order and to the sublime notions of virtue, it would be impossible for him ever to make a certain application of his principles in a state of affairs which would not let him discern either the good or the evil, nor the good man from the wicked.

'*Society in general, then, such as our mutual needs could engender it, offers no genuine aid to man who has thus become miserable; or at least it would only impart new forces to him who already has too much, while the weak man, lost, stifled, blotted out in the masses, would find no place to betake himself in refuge, no support for his weakness, and must perish in the end the victim of that deceitful union from which he was expecting happiness. . . .*

'*The natural order of things is now without value. Thus the sweet voice of nature is no longer our infallible guide, nor is the independence we have received from her a desirable state; peace and innocence have for ever escaped us before we could even taste their delights. Unappreciated by the stupid men of the first epochs, missed by the enlightened ones of later days, the happy age of gold was ever a state alien to the human race, which failed to apprehend it when it was to be enjoyed or else lost it when it was to be known.*

'There is still more: that *perfect independence* and that *liberty without rule*, were it even retained in conjunction with the ancient innocence of men, would always have had an essential defect, and one harmful to the progress of our most excellent faculties, namely, the *lack of that integration of the parts which constitute the true whole*. The earth would be covered with men between whom there would scarcely be any communication;

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447, cf. Pufendorff, above, pp. 36, 38.

we should touch each other at many points without being united by any one; each one would remain isolated amongst the others, and each thinking only of himself; our understanding would not be able to develop; we should live without feeling anything, and die without having lived; our whole happiness would consist simply in not knowing our misery; there would be neither goodness in our hearts nor morality in our actions, and *we should never have known the most delicious sentiment of the soul, which is the love of virtue.*<sup>1</sup>

Here an argument followed which relates to the title Rousseau had given the chapter: *That there is naturally no general society whatsoever among men.* 'It is certain that the words, *the human race* offer to the mind only an idea purely collective, one which does not mean any real union between the individuals who constitute it. Make this further supposition, if you like: conceive the human race to be a moral person, having, along with a sentiment of common existence which imparts individuality to it and makes it one body—having, besides, a universal will which makes each part act for an end that is general and relative to the whole. Let us conceive that this common sentiment is the thought of humanity, and that natural law is this active principle of the whole machine. Observe now what follows from the constitution of man in his relations with his fellow men: and, entirely contrary to what we have supposed, we shall find that the progress of such society in awakening their personal interest, stifles humanity in their hearts, and that the notions of natural law—which might better be called the law of reason—only begin to develop when the prior development of the passions has rendered all its precepts impotent. Whence we see that *this pretended social treaty, dictated by nature*, is a veritable *chimera*, since the conditions for it are always unknown or impracticable, and one must necessarily ignore them or violate them.

'If the general society of mankind existed elsewhere than in the systems of the philosophers, it would be, as I have said, a moral being which would have qualities peculiar to it and distinct from those of the particular individuals who compose it; somewhat like the chemical compounds which have properties not those of the mixtures of which they are made. There would be a universal language which nature would teach all men alike, and which would be the primary instrument of their mutual intercourse. There would be a kind of common sensitive mind serving to effect a correspondence of all the parts with each other. The public weal or woe would not be only the sum of the private goods or ills, as in a simple aggregation,

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 448-9. Italics mine.

but would reside in the bond uniting them, and it would be greater than such a sum; and so far from the public happiness being established upon that of the individuals, it would itself be the source of all their happiness.<sup>1</sup>

But these two paragraphs were cancelled by the author. And not only that but the very title of the chapter itself was changed so as to read, *The General Society of the Human Race*, this being the third title it received—and the next step, taken years afterward, was to omit the entire chapter and use elsewhere in the book such of its matter as bore the test of time.<sup>2</sup> It is obvious from this how persistently Rousseau was seeking the truth.

In these cancelled paragraphs Rousseau was puzzling over the double meanings of both 'natural' and 'general'. Whatever happens independently of human artifice or will is, in eighteenth century thought, 'natural'. In the present instance it is a question of a society that is natural, that is, one formed without any convention among its members who bind themselves together by their own action. This was also spoken of as a 'general society', which means simply the vast, indefinite fellowship of men with each other as beings of the same species. It is a state, therefore, without *social* law or intent. And both 'natural' and 'general' had no eulogistic connotation whatsoever in the case. Yet Nature had always possessed, since the time of the Greeks, a very high signification. The 'natural' is the perfect form of anything, and as applied to a human society it must mean an ideal relationship where law and order obtain perfectly. And in such a society the 'general will' is supreme, the very source of all right and justice—and there 'general' connotes something ideal. Rousseau was here finding his way about some of the confusions of modern political thought. His rewritings of this chapter were a series of experiments toward a clear statement of the questions with which he intended to deal—his work was very much in transition, like the other essays which he never published. Thus he abandoned both those passages and his negative proposition that no general society exists among men, and he simply discussed the topic, *The General Society of the Human Race*. The point was to show that associations which do arise naturally from the needs and passions of men are defective, that they are lawless and devoid of any veritable general will—and the next step was to propose the theory of the social contract, his own theory, that it is only by virtue of some convention which is the work of the will of all that a true society exists, where there is law and the rule of the general will.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 449–50. Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447, n. 1; p. 449, n. 3.



Before proceeding to that next chapter, however, Rousseau had an encounter with other ideas which had been troubling him. First, one of Diderot's, that reason comes on the scene in the midst of those human passions and dictates to men that for their own good they must observe the rule of natural right and justice.

*It is false that in the condition of independence, reason leads us to work together toward the common good by the perception of our interest. So far from private interest and the general good being allied with each other, in the natural order of things, the truth is that they mutually exclude each other; and social laws are a yoke which everyone wants to impose upon others, but not to make a charge on himself. "I am aware that I bring terror and trouble to the human race," says the independent man whom the sage would throttle, "but it is inevitable that I shall either be unhappy myself or cause unhappiness to others, and no one is dearer to me than myself. It is in vain," he might well add, "that I would try to reconcile my interest with that of others; all that you tell me of the advantages of the social law would be valid, if, while I were scrupulously observing it toward the others, I could be sure that they would all observe it toward me. But what security could you give me on that score? And my situation, could it be worse than seeing myself exposed to all the ills that stronger ones would wreak upon me without daring to compensate myself by doing the same to those still weaker? Either give me guarantees against every unjust enterprise, or do not expect me to abstain in my turn. You talk fine language in saying that when I renounce the duties which the natural law imposes upon me I deprive myself at the same time of my rights under such law and that my own violences will authorise all those that others would like to employ against myself. I accept such a situation all the more willingly because I do not see how my moderation could guarantee me against such a thing anyhow. In addition, it will be my business to enlist the strong in my own interest, in sharing with them what we plunder from the weak; that would be more worth while to me than justice, and it would give me security."* The proof that an enlightened man, and one still independent, would have reasoned thus is the fact that *every sovereign society* which is accountable to itself alone for its conduct does actually reason so.<sup>1</sup>

As Glaucon made the question of Thrasymachus, in Plato's *Republic*, more refined and searching, so here Rousseau put that of the modern sophist Hobbes. He wanted a clear and reasoned answer to that question. In stating it he changed the descrip-

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 450-1. Italics mine.

tion of the imaginary interlocutor—the ‘violent’ fellow mentioned in Diderot’s article is simply represented as ‘the independent man’, that is, anyone who likes his liberty and wants very good reasons for binding it. Rousseau was taking the part of that man, and he wanted satisfaction from the philosophers. To be sure the theologians might volunteer a solution, and, in the manner of Bossuet ‘make the will of God intervene immediately to bind men into society’. But he had read Bayle, and he agreed with him as to the autonomy of the moral will, its competence to restrain men without religious sanctions. Moreover, the ideas of God in the different nations were greatly varied and the diverse religions had resulted in the most cruel wars, evidence a-plenty that religious belief does not make for any natural and universal law of kindness. No, it was up to the philosopher such as Diderot to answer this question purely in terms of the human situation.

And ‘the philosopher will have me go to the human race itself, which is alone competent to decide such a question, because the greatest good of all is its unique passion. It is, he will tell me, to the general will that the individual ought to address himself to learn what he ought to be as man, citizen, subject, father, child—and when it is right for him to live and to die. “I see very well, I admit, that that is the rule I can consult; but I do not yet see,” our independent man will say, “the reason which should make me submit to that rule. It is not a question of teaching me what justice is; it is a matter of showing me *what interest I have in being just.*” In effect, that the general will *ought* to be in every individual an act of pure understanding which reasons in the silence of the passions about what man can require of his fellows and what his fellows have a right to require of him, nobody, indeed, will disagree about that. But where is the man who could thus *detach* himself from his own self? And if the care for his own life *is* really the first law of nature, can one *force* it thus to a regard for the species in general, in order to impose duties whose bearing upon his personal state he cannot discern? Would not the preceding objections always remain real for him? *Is he not waiting still to see how his personal interest requires that he shall submit himself to the general will?*

‘And more; since the art of generalising ideas in this way is one of the most difficult operations of the human understanding, and one of the latest acquired, would the common run of men ever be prepared to infer, by that mode of reasoning, the rules of their own conduct? And whenever it were necessary to consult the general will in regard to a particular action, how often would it not happen that a best-intentioned person would

be mistaken either as to the rule or its application, and only be following his inclination while deluded into believing that he was obeying the law? What will he do then to guarantee himself against error? Will he hearken to his inner voice? But that voice, they say, is only formed by the habit of judging and feeling in the bosom of society, and in accordance with its laws; it cannot serve, then, to establish these things. And besides it would be requisite that there should not have already arisen in his heart any of those passions which speak louder than conscience, drown it out, and make philosophers maintain that that voice does not really exist. Is he to consult the principles of written law, the social actions of all the peoples, the tacit conventions of even the enemies of the human race themselves? The original difficulty returns always upon us, for it is only from the social order already established amongst us, that we derive the ideas of that order we imagine; we conceive the general society of mankind on the lines of our particular forms of society; the establishment of lesser Republics makes us dream of the great one; and we only begin properly to become men after having first been citizens. Hence we see what we are to think of these pretended cosmopolitan spirits who, justifying their love of their country by that for the human race, boast of loving all the world, in order to have warrant for loving no one dearly.

‘What reasoning demonstrates to us in that regard is perfectly confirmed by the facts; and we need only go back to the farthest antiquity to see at once that sound ideas of natural right and the common fraternity of all men were spread abroad in the world only very late, and made such slow progress that it is only Christianity that has adequately generalised them.’ Certain facts in Roman history and in Grotius attest this truth. And Hobbes saw the situation clearly enough: ‘The error of Hobbes, then, is not to have set up the state of war between men *who were independent and yet had become social*, but of having supposed that state natural to the species, and of assigning that as the cause of the vices of which it is actually the effect.’ On the other hand the exact contrary of Hobbes’s view is equally false: there is no more of a ‘general society’, ‘natural to the species’, than there is a ‘general warfare’. The two positions fall together, that of Diderot along with that of Hobbes.<sup>1</sup>

So deeply in earnest was Rousseau in this questioning that he struck the style of philosophy at its best, the dialogue. It was, of course, a dialogue with his friend Diderot and depicted their lively discussions, and doubtless some of their passion as well, which helps to explain why he eventually omitted this

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 450-3. Italics mine.

chapter from his book. For it was much too personal. There were traces in it of refractoriness and irritation and the tendency to satire which he had resolutely pledged himself to exclude from this book. He was too indignant to be clear and reasonable. This piece of writing was one of those which every good artist will suppress because they inject into his work the confusions before the dawn of his true light. These questionings of the independent man were thoughts of one who was still dominated by the mind of his friend and critic, and uncertain of the way in which to represent his own ideas.

There was, however, an eloquent peroration to the chapter, done in a vein of enthusiasm and showing his magnificent Platonic intent.

'But though there is no natural and general society among men, though they become unhappy and wicked in becoming social, though the laws of justice and equality are of no account for those who live simultaneously in the liberty of the state of nature and in subjection to the needs of the social condition; still, so far from thinking that there is neither virtue nor happiness in store for us, and that heaven has abandoned us without resources to the depravation of our species, let us strive to draw from the evil itself the remedy which will cure it. By new modes of association, let us correct, if possible, the deficiency of the kind of association generally prevalent.<sup>1</sup> Let our violent interlocutor (this passage was written, apparently, before Rousseau changed the designation of the interlocutor and invested him with his own trait of independence)<sup>2</sup> judge for himself of its success. Let us show him, in its perfect artistry, the reparation for the ills which the beginning art of man brought upon nature; let us show him all the misery of the condition which he would think happy, and all the fallacy of the reasoning which he tends to believe solid. Let him see in a better constitution of things the value of good actions, the penalty of the evil, and the sweet harmony of justice and happiness. Let us open the light to his reason with new insights, let us kindle his heart to new sentiments, so that he will learn to multiply his own being and felicity in sharing both with his fellows. If my zeal does not blind me in that enterprise, doubt not that if he have a strong mind and a true judgment, even that enemy of the human race will yet abjure his hatred along with his errors; that the very reason which might lead him astray will bring him back to humanity; that he will learn to prefer his own interest rightly understood to his apparent interest; that he will become good,

<sup>1</sup> *Nouvelles associations* translated 'new modes of association'.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vaughan, pp. 323-4.

virtuous, wise, and, to sum it all up, that he will become, not the fierce brigand he was intending to be, but the strongest supporter of a well-ordered society.’<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of his concern with this high project he received a letter from Voltaire. It was a malicious note of thanks for a complimentary copy sent him of the newly appeared *Discourse on Inequality*—thanks for the ‘new book against the human race’. Stung by this imputation of pessimism and satire Rousseau composed a reply, to explain how those ‘melancholy reveries’, the two *Discourses* written for prizes, fitted into his scheme of philosophy. ‘The love of letters and arts arises in a people from an internal vice which it, in turn, augments; and if it is true that all human advances are pernicious to the species, those of the mind and knowledge, which aggravate our pride and multiply our errors, very soon accelerate the onset of the evils. But there comes a time when the evil is such that the causes themselves giving rise to them are necessary to put a stop to their future increase.’<sup>2</sup> That was why he himself had come to accept a literary career. It was by writing on morals and politics that he would check the pace of the decline. He wanted it clearly understood that he was no enemy of the human race.

Then came another criticism of his *Discourse* from the city of Geneva itself, showing that not all were friendly there. An antagonist signing himself ‘Philopolis’, who was actually Charles Bonnet, published an attack in the *Mercury*. He cited Leibniz and Pope, knowing that Rousseau esteemed those writers very highly, and thinking that they would be crushing authorities for one who believed Nature to be good and yet condemned civilised institutions as unalterably bad because of their binding inequalities. If this is the best possible of worlds, then political society, one of its lesser systems, must be the best possible order of things for mankind, and the rational philosopher will so accept it, and be a ‘lover of the city’, like ‘Philopolis’. True enough, replied Rousseau—society is now a necessity for man, and in that sense it is ‘natural’. ‘Do not forget, I beg you, that according to my views society is natural to the human species, just as decrepitude is to the individual man; and precisely as old men require crutches, so people must have arts, laws, governments.’ However, there is this noteworthy difference between the things compared, that old age is a natural term of human life, whereas the state of society does not issue immediately from any single principle of human nature, like ‘sociability’, but from various motives

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 453-4.

<sup>2</sup> To Voltaire, Sept. 10, 1755, *C.G.* vol. ii, No. 244.

called out by external conditions, it being possible for the whole course of the ensuing development to be quite otherwise. The will of man has a share in this, but one not controlling enough to make him really master of the situation. Consequently, the general movement of humanity toward a social condition of existence cannot be avoided. But the movement itself can certainly be either 'accelerated or slowed up'. Now the philosophers who endorse the splendors of city-life and encourage the arts and sciences to their fullest attainments are actually contributing to hasten this advance to the term of humanity's career. His own first reaction to this had been to point out, in his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, 'the danger of moving so fast'. It seemed to him as if mankind lived too precociously. They had run headlong and delightedly into the social condition and acquired new passions and aptitudes without any corresponding heightening of the power of will to control themselves and make their common life together more stable and balanced. So 'Philopolis', who boasted of loving civilisation and society, would do better to pride himself on loving virtue, for that loyalty is what the race now needs above all. Nor is it the obligation of the intelligent philosopher to accept all the existing institutions of his country without question, but only to praise good laws and governments. He pointed out to his critic that he himself had eulogised the republic of Geneva as a good society worthy of imitation elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> He wanted it clearly understood he was just as good a citizen of Geneva as 'Philopolis'.

Then some of those friendly to the *Encyclopedie* began to suspect he was not so good an Encyclopedist. Thus Damilaville wrote, interpreting the *Discourse* to mean a literal equality of persons in regard to wealth, rank, and all distinctions whatsoever, that is, a levelling in respect to all things. To this charge Rousseau retorted with some acrimony and vehemence. Neither he nor any of the other associates in the *Encyclopedie* desired to share the vain and troublesome 'goods' in which the rich and powerful rejoiced. The material and social benefits were not at all what they had in view. Their ideal was 'that all the ranks of men in society shall be equally under the protection and the severity of the laws. You know full well that *that* is the equality they are all demanding, and also that it is necessary in every well-governed state'.<sup>2</sup>

Friends closer to him were troubled, however, by the *Discourse*, and they made their fears known. Even before it came out, Rey, his publisher, had made some inquiry about possible danger, and received from the trusting author a letter of

<sup>1</sup> *Letter to Philopolis*, Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 223 ff.

<sup>2</sup> To Damilaville, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 240.

reassurance to the effect that 'they respect the law of nations too much in France to punish a stranger for having upheld in a foreign land the maxims of his own country'.<sup>1</sup> Now that the book was out, however, his devout, Catholic friend, Mme de Créqui, who was in touch with affairs, wrote expressing her fears for his safety. But surely, he replied, the blame for raising the question, if any there be, about political right, must rest with the Academy of Dijon which had proposed the subject for discussion. Besides his argument had been entirely general and without specific application to the government of France. 'I love frankness and truth too much not to abhor libels and satire.' The laws of the land had been respected and surely its sovereign would respect the rights of one who fulfilled his duties as a foreigner resident in the country. 'I am accountable to no person for my religion nor for my sentiments except to the magistrates of the State of which I have the honor of being a member.' However, no inquisition into his views needed to be feared. 'Spite of the bad opinion I have of my age, I cannot believe that things have yet come altogether to such a pass.'<sup>2</sup>

The way people were holding the author of the *Discourse* responsible for his doctrine must have worried Diderot who had been imprisoned in Vincennes himself. Besides Diderot there was another friend of long standing, Duclos, who even ventured to persuade him to desist from anything more on that line. For Rousseau was becoming an object of public attention and a good subject of attack. Even his articles on music in the *Encyclopedia* had drawn fire from the famous Rameau who accused him of serious errors, to which he immediately retorted with an essay *On the Principle of Melody or Reply to the Errors on Music*. And Diderot was not without an interest in this situation. He was publishing shortly a volume containing the article on *Political Economy*; if attacked there Rousseau might say some of the things he had been expressing to him in their free criticisings of each other, and there was no telling how far his pen would go. As editor of the *Encyclopedia* he dared not risk anything, with the monarchy showing signs of being disturbed by whatever was coming from the hand of the philosophic group and watchful of every one of its members. Rousseau perceived these fears of his friends, apparently without trepidation, although he had been deeply impressed with Diderot's imprisonment which was indelibly associated in his mind with his own first literary adventure.<sup>3</sup> He was not going to be deterred from his own pro-

<sup>1</sup> To Rey, Mar. 23, 1755, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 217.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme de Créqui, Sept. 8, 1755, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 248.

<sup>3</sup> The impression made on Rousseau is evident years later. 'To Diderot, Mar. 26, 1757, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 357.

ject by such considerations. But he also realised that Diderot would try to dissuade him from attempting his book on *Political Institutions*, and to avoid that argument he concealed, at this crucial moment, what he planned to do from that bosom friend and most trusted critic. 'I was going ahead and taking my own chances, as they say, and I did not want to tell anyone of my project, not even Diderot. I was afraid it might seem too extreme for the age and the land in which I was writing, and that the alarm of my friends might hamper me in the execution of my task.'<sup>1</sup>

There were other reasons, more profound than the letters of that time, or even the record of the autobiography, reveal. Rousseau's manner of life had come to be more and more solitary, even in Paris. He meditated in the silence of his promenades out-of-doors. The hours devoted to this, stolen from his necessary occupation and from his familiar associates, were consecrated to his 'great masterpiece'. It was natural to his temperament to seek seclusion for thought and creative work. It was a habit confirmed in him by his early affection, too, for the religious writers like Malebranche, Lamy, Fénelon, and others who taught the necessity of spending hours in tranquil recollection. It was further strengthened by his genuine love of Nature. There was nothing unnatural about it to one from Switzerland where the people were quite accustomed to being in solitude for a large part of the year. Besides he was often quite ill and in pain and, as he said to Mme d'Épinay, when he was in that state he wanted to be 'lost in a desert'—no company!<sup>2</sup> But all this was very contrary to the life and opinion of Paris. And to the bookish men with whom he was associated it seemed unnatural, because they had read in Seneca, who was in great vogue with them, that a life of extreme privacy and solitariness is really unnatural and calculated to deprive man of the love of his fellows and of his moral integrity. That prejudice of the ancients against the life of meditation was shared by Diderot and Grimm who were so busy in the city. They began to be troubled about their friend. They sought to find out what the matter was and made inquiries about him in his own household. Thus they made him feel he was under inspection and not trusted to live his own life as he chose. They mortified the pride of 'the independent man' and roused his anger. But he liked them still, and that simply made him keep quiet, and reticent—and they could not understand it.

There was another cause for this reticence, especially about

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, spring 1755, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 227.



his projects and work. Diderot was too dominating a personality. Rousseau, who could defy a public opinion with the boldness of a Socrates and face danger with composure, stood in actual fear of this man to whom he bore so great an affection. Diderot was always volunteering advice and help, and sometimes quick, ungentle criticism. There is evidence, from other sources, that he was not wont to govern his tongue in conversation, or show great consideration for the feelings of others.<sup>1</sup> And Rousseau, timid, holding fast to ideas hardly won through brooding thought, secretly pledged to authorities other than those congenial to his friend, that is, to a Plato or a Malebranche or Fénelon—Rousseau was naturally reluctant to have his deepest beliefs discussed and treated to any drastic wit. Indeed, with regard to Plato, a difference of opinion had already manifested itself in language of some feeling. He had published the poem of his youth at Les Charmettes, in which he professed to follow 'the divine' disciple of Socrates. Diderot, in his *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature* expressed his aversion to 'mere hypothesis' and 'the fury of conjecture', and especially to Plato's 'Hall of Hypotheses' which he contrasted so unfavorably with the modern temple of learning erected by Galileo, Pascal, and Newton.<sup>2</sup> In his *Miscellanea Philosophiques* he dubbed Plato 'an illustrious fool'.<sup>3</sup> It was surely a retort to Diderot, then, when Rousseau wrote in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, 'you will find that the *Cratylus* of Plato is not so ridiculous as it seems to be'.<sup>4</sup> They knew each other's opposite sentiments on that subject. They had aroused and excited each other to words which they never forgot afterwards.<sup>5</sup> And since the *Political Institutions* was taking shape under the inspiration of Plato, and was planned to include an *Examination of Plato's Republic*, this was obviously no work to submit to Diderot.<sup>6</sup> Thus Rousseau shied away from the unpleasantness of defending his ideals in a face-to-face argument where he felt overpowered and speechless. He had on more than one occasion taken leave of the company of his brilliant friends in anger when they mocked some guileless person or even a religious belief; but he could not escape if he once put all that was dearest to himself at their not untender mercies. He recoiled from this instinctively, as one who loved his own spiritual independence; and so, long before

<sup>1</sup> *Annales*, vol. ix, pp. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres*, vol. ii, xxvi, p. 22; *Les Bijoux Indiscrets*, vol. iv, pp. 257-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iv, p. 83. (The *Miscellanea* are undated.)

<sup>4</sup> *H.*, vol. i, p. 376.

<sup>5</sup> Diderot to Rousseau, Mar. 1757—a letter complaining about 'all the ills you have done me for four years'. *C.G.* vol. iii, No. 345.

<sup>6</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 339 (c).

he appreciated the fact himself, he was doing without his 'Aristarchus', and quietly going his own way, reflecting and writing in solitude.<sup>1</sup>

After the interruptions due to the publication of the *Discourse* Rousseau proceeded to work out by himself the question in which he was destined to prove his own unparalleled competence. That 'independent man' of whom Diderot was so impatient had a right to know why he ought to act justly and follow the general will for the good of all when he has reason to fear that others might take advantage of his righteousness. Certainly a guarantee must be given men that they will not suffer thus from the injustice of others who are not so scrupulous. Hobbes had seen this plainer than anyone, and it was really Hobbes's question Rousseau was repeating, though he intended to find an answer absolutely different from the 'principles of tyranny' of that sophist.

If the righteous man is bound by his own reason or conscience to observe the rule of right, what will bind the others who have intercourse with him? The answer had been *some other kind of an obligation*. As Hobbes said, the dictates of reason oblige *in foro interno*, but *in foro externo* it is only 'the power of a superior person' that obliges. Men may acknowledge natural right in their own hearts, but that is all the farther it gets; what counts in their competitive social life is the obligation enforced by a sovereign power with or without a show of reason. And it is on that kind of bond all society is based, a *political* obligation that is external to the persons and their reason and conscience. That was the solution which in some form or other dominated the thinking of writers on politics, though they often betrayed other sentiments, 'republican' sentiments imbued by their reading of the Greeks; which only brought confusion into their thought. But Rousseau wanted to be perfectly clear on this point. 'It is not a question . . . of a power one is forced to obey, but of that which one is obliged to recognise.'<sup>2</sup>

That absolute distinction between force and obligation was fundamental. It was the difference between an external compulsion and an inner necessity of the will of man. It was also the difference between a power that makes its own right and a 'political right' recognised by the individuals themselves. The world had heard many an argument about that issue since the time

<sup>1</sup> Diderot was quite prepared, too, to do without his eloquent friend's pen. He meted out the same treatment to him as to Boucher d'Argis. Diderot had Boulanger write another article *Oeconomie Politique*, which came in a later volume—Rousseau's title being *Économie Politique*. See R. Hubert, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Social Contract*, first version, bk. 1, ch. 5, conclusion; Vaughan, vol. i, p. 470.

of Plato, and it would have to hearken to another, for the matter was not yet clear, and certainly not acted upon by mankind.

To be sure the modern writers had a doctrine conceived in the interest of the rights of men in 'the contract'. They valued liberty as well as security, and desired to see not merely a society where the rules of right reason would be in force thanks to a sovereign but, further, a society where the sovereign would be the very choice of the people by their own pact. Thus the liberties of men seemed in no jeopardy. But Rousseau had a greater passion for liberty and security than even those great leaders of politics. He was not satisfied with their theories of contract. He found them as dubious as the clearly wrong theories of the establishment of society by the superior power of a patriarch or of a master enslaving others. He was now inquiring more deeply into these 'false notions of the social bond',<sup>1</sup> as had been already intimated in the last pages of his *Discourse* where he used the common notion for his argument but gave notice that further investigations needed to be made into the nature of the social compact. All the notions with which he was familiar seemed to describe only 'forced herdings' where the pact is imposed on men by the shrewd intelligence and advantage that the privileged have in virtue of superior strength or riches or some other power. All such theories missed the mark, as he expressed it, in an epigram of Platonic character: 'There are a thousand ways of gathering men together, but only one way of uniting them.'<sup>2</sup> And that way which he was now seeking had to be one where the bond of union is equal for all, so that no one gains a private superiority over others in the social order. Besides security and liberty, then, the true social bond cannot obtain without equality.

The defender of 'the independent man' detected an apology for 'principles of tyranny' everywhere through the writings of his masters. There was Jean Bodin fired by a great ideal to which he devoted his *Six Books of the Republic*. He had some idea of the invisible and silent powers within the people themselves, for he knew his Aristotle well. But his mind's eye was greatly filled, too, with the importance of sovereigns in his day, and he could not simply declare himself for the supremacy of Law by itself as he saw it proclaimed by the Greeks. He wrote, therefore, 'the law depends upon him who has the sovereignty, who can oblige all his subjects; and the law cannot oblige them simply of itself'.<sup>3</sup> Obligation meant, in this connection, simply forced

<sup>1</sup> *Social Contract*, bk. 1, ch. 5, title, *False Notions of the Social Bond*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, opening sentence of ch. 5, p. 462.

<sup>3</sup> Bodin, *Les Six Livres*, &c., bk. 1, ch. 8 ('De la Souveraineté'), p. 135.

obedience to the power of the superior. Of course there was also the democratic notion in the air that the laws affecting any people as a whole might well be made by all the people themselves, and in this case, Bodin himself observed, 'the power belongs to all together'.<sup>1</sup> But this implied that all taken together might be conceived to oblige themselves as subjects. And Bodin was very loath to follow this logic. The people would then constitute a veritable sovereign themselves, giving the law and enforcing it. No, there must be a much less vague and a more determinate obligatory power, and Bodin paid his high respects to the sovereignty of monarchs.

For the ideas of popular sovereignty Grotius had shown a more marked sympathy. He was not averse to the notion that men can, in a real sense, vouch for themselves in their dealings with each other. In such a vein of respect for mankind's power of moral responsibility, he seems to have revamped the theory of contract that had come down from medieval times, the conception of an agreement between the people as a whole and their rulers. This contract limits the ruler, nay more, it creates an obligation for the ruler, an ideal one, at any rate, for it means that he ought to respect, in all his conduct of affairs, the natural rights of the people and the fundamental laws of the nation. But Grotius found himself committed by this to an embarrassing conclusion, on account of the legal conception that 'the person constituting must be superior to the person constituted'. For the people who are supposed in the contract to confer royal power upon a prince are *in that very transaction really the superior* to their own prince. They actually lay the obligation upon him. According to all the presumptions of life and law, then, they are quite entitled to *enforce* that obligation, against his will and according to their own judgment. Such a warrant for popular action was, however, much too dangerous to be allowed. It would encourage malcontents to believe they might at will hold any king accountable for his government. The ensuing jeopardy of all authority and peace, and the unsettling of all civilisation, was too much for an earnest soul that had brooded long upon the incessant wars of modern Europe and was composing a political gospel of peace among the nations, in his book on *The Right of War and Peace*. Grotius made a quixotic attempt then to divert his readers from the obvious conclusion of his argument, and he boldly proposed an exception to the general principle concerning law. Whenever a people make a covenant with a prince to rule them, they are not in that deed really laying upon him

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 2, ch. 1 ('Democratic'), p. 255; cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* bk. 3, ch. 11, 1282a-b; ch. 15, 1286a; bk. 4, ch. 4, 1291b-1292a; bk. 5, ch. 1, 1302a.

any obligation, not in the strict or civil sense of the term. There is, of course, something of an obligation created, otherwise the democrats would never have sponsored this theory of social contract at all, for they must suppose a real *quid pro quo*, a return for what they give—and yet, the obligation laid upon Kings by this contract is obligation *merely* in the moral sense, an obligation in their own consciences. The practical remedy for any injuries which men believe themselves to have suffered from royal governance is simply an appeal to the Christian sentiments of their ruler. Let Kings confront their God on such matters: their own personal beliefs and moral feelings will be enough of a safeguard for suffering humanity. Meantime the Prince, once granted his authority and trusted with the power that comes from all the people is deemed to be fully entitled, on his side, to impose whatever he wills. Thus the Prince *alone* can lay the *political* obligation, and it is a charge upon the people; but never can the people lay an obligation upon the Prince, for they are limited to the imposing of a moral duty and making a sentimental appeal. Consequently the social contract of Grotius's devising gives the people no new rights but only more duties, and along with them a government able to see to their execution. But it was natural to ask again, why do the people ever engage themselves to anything so plainly one-sided? The opinion of Grotius seems to have been that the artifice of social contract establishing a government is scarcely a matter of choice but rather one of sheer necessity. There can be no good life for man without society; no society without law; no law without a superior. But 'no man can lay himself under an obligation to law, that is law to which he may be subject, as coming from a superior'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed it seems axiomatic, that since no individual can be superior to himself, some superior must be established to impose the laws and oblige the individuals to obey them. This, then, is the ultimate reason for the social contract. Yet with this the doctrine becomes entirely perverted. It was first presented to remind sovereign rulers that they owe a duty of service equal to that of obedience which the people render, and now it teaches the people to obey absolutely, and without regard to their own natural rights. This capitulation to authority Grotius made for the sake of peace and good order, and what he considered to be morality.

Samuel Pufendorff nobly attempted to perfect the morality

<sup>1</sup> Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace; Prelim. Discourse*, xvii, bk. 1, ch. 1, sect. 9 (cf. Barbeyrac's note 3), p. 6 and sect. 10 (note 3), pp. 9-10; ch. 3, sect. 8-9, pp. 64, 69-72; ch. 4, sect. 10 and note 3, p. 120; bk. 2, ch. 4, sect. 12, p. 182 f., ch. 6, sects. 4-6, pp. 215-17; bk. 3, ch. 25, p. 735.

of the doctrine. There was a Protestant quality in his thought, befitting one dwelling in the land where the Reformation had been fought out. Obligation he defined as 'that which morally inclines the will most, or at least, ought to incline it'. He proved that this obligation is no derogation at all from an individual's liberty, since it issues from his own free will.<sup>1</sup> But the need of such proof suggests that the other meaning of obligation was lurking in his consciousness as in the minds of those who would read him, the idea of a constraint not applied by the individual himself but by some one outside. This is the obligation to obey *law*. For law 'though it ought not to want its reasons, yet *these reasons are not the cause why obedience is paid to it, but the power of the exactor*'. This exactor is the sovereign who can 'require the retrenching of our free wills by his own pleasure'.<sup>2</sup> What induces men generally to obey the law is, then, the power commanding it and not their own conviction of its necessity or righteousness. Here Pufendorff relapsed into confusion. He thought of obligation now as an inner sway of the will itself, the distinctively moral determination, and at other times, as an external forcing of the will by the application of superior power. When writing thus about the enforcement of law he was, of course, describing the actual administration of States. But, instead of regarding this merely as a description of fact, he took it to the higher plane of being an ideal or principle and therewith he, too, invited the traditional, sovereign prince to play the old familiar part of being the real authority behind law. Yet he recognised that all the respect and ready will of men goes only with the ethical 'ought', and only fear and evasiveness greet the external 'must' of a political command, and he tried to mend the defect in his theory by giving good counsel to those who are to use his books. The sovereigns are instructed that it is well to be obeyed with a 'reverence' as well as with 'fear'. It would be 'very useful' to princes if they could obtain the good will of their subjects in regard to their laws.<sup>3</sup> Very useful, indeed, but according to his theory of law, quite unessential. And would this satisfy subjects who had become restive because they believed themselves equal as sons of God and therefore wanted freedom from any domination by man? Pufendorff moved in the religious tradition as well as that of Greece, and this Christian individualism made him try to state the theory of social contract so as to meet the demand of men for equality

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff, *Of the Law of Nature and Nations*; bk. 1 'Of the Origin and the Variety of Moral Entities', ch. 4 ('Of the Will of Man'), sect. 8, p. 33, ch. 6, sect. 12, p. 54; bk. 3, ch. 6, sect. 10, p. 224; bk. 7, ch. 5, sects. 20-1, pp. 555-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 1, ch. 6 ('Of the Rule of Moral Actions') or ('Of Law in General'), sect. 1, p. 46; sect. 9, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 1, ch. 6, sect. 13, p. 55.

and liberty, for in that respect he was the truest master of Rousseau.

The account which Grotius had given of political society ignored a fact of the greatest importance. He had represented a people making a contract with their rulers. Whenever a people makes any transfer of power by such a deed 'the people', Pufendorff observed, 'still continues so'.<sup>1</sup> They are still constituted one body and lose nothing by the transaction. But Grotius, anxious not to have the people seem superior to their princes because of their deed of sovereignty to them, talked as if the people had exhausted themselves in creating their sovereigns, as if they became an enervated, helpless multitude which could not do anything thereafter save by means of the sovereigns on whom they had conferred their social power. Grotius's position reduced therefore to that of Hobbes because it resulted in setting up an absolute sovereign for ever exempt from popular control. Pufendorff was attacking such a notion—he followed Aristotle in his regard for the control of such power. He also appealed to the wisdom embodied in the record of the Scriptures: the covenant of the Jewish people even with God Himself—and was not this the true model of all great contracts?—had not by any means involved their dissolution as a people; they continued to be the same body as before; they had gone out to meet and acknowledge their Sovereign, and as one body they returned with their integrity quite intact, and much else gained. In terms of such imagery Pufendorff proceeded to shape his theory of political society.

The people who exist as such after their contract with a ruler must have become a people before that particular transaction. As they enter negotiations they must already have 'the rudiments of a State'.<sup>2</sup> This is explained only in terms of a social compact where every man agrees with every other to observe certain principles of conduct for the sake of their common life together in security and peace and happiness for all time to come. The form of this compact is, indeed, that of Hobbes, but its meaning is very different. Hobbes made the agreement center about a prince or sovereign; Pufendorff, about a principle. For the mutual agreement of all the parties makes them a 'moral person' with a 'general will' which is in very truth the sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> By a quaint metaphor Pufendorff described the sources of this sovereignty in all the individuals who participate in the pact. 'Since sovereignty results from the non-resistance

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff, bk. 7, ch. 2, sect. 12, p. 517.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 7, ch. 5, sect. 8, p. 544.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 7, ch. 2, sects. 4, 6, 8, 13, pp. 509, 511 ff., 517; ch. 5, pp. 540-3.

of the subjects and from their concessions that the sovereign power shall dispose of their wealth and strength, 'tis easily seen that some scattered seeds, as it were, of government, lie hid in particular persons, which by means of concurrent compacts, being excited in motions, do grow and shoot forth.<sup>1</sup> So the fundamental pact really organises the moral powers of control in each and all to make of them by their union a still higher power of control. It multiplies the forces of conscience which would otherwise be only scattered and undeveloped. And the sovereign power thus made available is always the power of all the people and not alien to them or to their good.

It might be thought that this is enough to form a political society. Would not the will of all oblige each and every one and so constitute the lasting bond of a society? And this general will would it not have the power of an inner, moral obligation? It would, indeed, said Pufendorff, but *only* a moral obligation. There must, as the earlier writers had all insisted, be an obligation in another form, expressive of the *political* power as such. They could never get away from the sting of Hobbes's retort to the republicans, that the laws cannot govern but only some persons, and whatever may be pretended about a rule of law in democracy, it is always some determinate person who wields the political power. The part of wisdom, then, since man must have governments, is to make the authorities originally of one's own choosing. The sovereignty cannot stay in 'the common or general person'—the whole body—but must be vested in some 'proper and particular person'.<sup>2</sup> The general opinion and will cannot apply themselves save through some one in particular. No single individual would dare to correct another who is his equal in the community, even on behalf of the whole body, unless he had assurances of the support of the others. Such endorsement might be forthcoming occasionally when others plainly see the superior wisdom and power of management that this or that man exhibits, but it would not be regular or 'proper' without an act of the will of the others to place him in this position of lawful authority to apply the rules of their common life. To establish such a government another contract is necessary, like that which Grotius had described, between the whole body and some particular person or persons who are to exercise the right of rule. The people when properly convened in assembly, according to their accepted laws, must be supposed to designate the persons who are to rule them and exercise for them the powers which are their own in virtue of their precedent compact

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 7, ch. 3, sect. 4 ('Of the Generation of Civil Sovereignty'), p. 529.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 7, ch. 5, sect. 3, p. 540.



with each other. By this second deed they have ceased to live in a 'rudimentary' society and pass into the complete civil state.

Pufendorff thus described two contracts, one for establishing a sovereignty, the other for a government. In the first and fundamental agreement for common action, each man says to every other, and they all do it concurrently: 'I engage not to use my right unless you are willing.' This abolishes natural right in the strict sense—nothing is right for anyone thenceforward unless it is a general right which all the others recognise. It is simply the counterpart, then, of a moral obligation. The procedure at the start, and throughout a social life thus organised, is always to settle difficulties 'by argument and reason'. But the second contract is of a different form and consequence. This time all in the community reunite in assembly to declare to some important person or body of persons amongst themselves: 'I give you a power of compelling me to use my right, though against my inclination.' This means that when men have entered into society and accepted voluntarily rights under the aegis of a sovereignty, they do not have the same liberty as before and cannot even let their rights fall into abeyance, however much inclined they might be to do so, but they must guard against their own neglect and against public injustice by authorising some one to be their representative and uphold the public law and right against any and every one. This is the true political power, and its application to the individuals, compelling them to do right, is the political obligation so necessary in the affair.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the moralist and jurist Pufendorff reasoned, and he was the man from whom Rousseau was learning most. But the pupil was now criticising his masters as thoroughly as his good friend Diderot. In all those accounts he perceived a society with 'superiors', and 'principles of tyranny', in spite of all liberal concessions and modifications. Always some sacred act granting power to privileged individuals! And those men never fail to play up the sanctity of their first establishment in order to ward off the criticism and the control of the people whom they rule. This was one of the 'false notions' which the writers on the contract had not refuted or even discountenanced. By the second contract of Pufendorff the general will is identified with the will of a particular person, or at best, of a certain small body of men whose determinations are the law of the land and obliging all the others. That was not a true obligation because it was not equal for all. And the contract itself seemed a piece of sheer folly, for the independent man would still have his question as

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff, bk. 7, ch. 5, sect. 20, p. 555.

regards this new situation: what guarantee have I against injustice from the side of these particular persons who are vested with all this power of the society?

This further dialectic of the independent man with the masters of politics is not put on record like that with Diderot. It was no longer a face-to-face argument which could be transcribed almost exactly from life. Rousseau was now thinking alone. But the marks of an inner argument are everywhere throughout the first writing of the essay on the *Social Contract*, especially when the author became so exercised by the 'false notions' he was countering that he forgot his own rule of impartiality and dispassionate study and let his indignant pen write opprobrious names, such as 'sophist', nay even worse, 'paid sophist'.<sup>1</sup>

According to the theory of Pufendorff a sovereign power is established to secure every one in his rights under the general will. But this power cannot be exercised by the generality and must therefore be vested in some particular persons who are the government. Now the question of the independent man is as pertinent here as before: what guarantee have the individuals, who create this authority of their own free will, that the government in such a superior position will hold to the law, respect the rights of men, and itself obey the general will? It is not a question now of appealing to princes as was done in the article on *Political Economy* where the existing order was taken for granted. The question is about the right and sensible order of things. Would men who can choose their own way in this matter of a political society ever engage themselves as Pufendorff described? That second engagement is one where they give the sovereign a free hand, and, what is more alarming, where they allow him to bind their own hands for all the future. Now is it rational for men who have enough understanding to make a pact and express their common will, to bind themselves to have no future general will nor to change their minds about their government? Is it not absurd to imagine they grant rights of government so eminent that they must remain for ever unaltered, though the will conferring the power may change? No body of men can by a free act commit themselves to a perpetual abnegation of their will and their freedom. Indeed, the

<sup>1</sup> It is worthy of note that when Rousseau composed the final version of the *Social Contract* he put the material in this chapter on *False Notions of the Social Bond* in place of that transcription of his argument with Diderot. In the later writings Rousseau was more conscious of the stages of his own development, and we may consider his placing of this matter *prior* to his chapter on *The Fundamental Pact*, &c., to be an indication that it was actually by reasoning his way through those notions of his predecessors he attained to his own theory. In the first version he was, apparently, too anxious to thrust his view to the fore, and he left his refutation for Chapter 5.

very act of agreeing to do such a thing only implies a general will in them that is too lively to be destroyed even at their own command. Though they might profess to surrender these powers they would eventually discover their mistake and reassert, inevitably, the claim to determine their own affairs. They could not possibly allow this particular will of the titular sovereign, the offshoot of their own will, to develop itself at the expense of its original parent. They could not tolerate the governing body arrogantly taking to itself all their rights simply by virtue of the unlimited right of government conferred by the second contract. The action it is pretended people will take with reference to their rulers actually releases one of the parties from all further contractual relationship, for the government, acting for the sovereign, cannot be legally held to account for its performance, and yet it is empowered to hold all the people otherwise responsible to itself. A most unholy and irrational alliance! In truth, no contract at all, but a spurious thing, a tricky instrument to make people consent to the rule of a family or a nobility without imposing any controls upon them. Grant that the government of men is necessary and that some way of conceiving it must be found—still, however indispensable government is, there is something far more important, and that is the preservation of the full power of all the people to make their own agreements and conventions, and to express their general will which determines the law and the right at all times in their history as a nation. Leaving aside the problem of government, then, one must inquire into the constitution of a society where this sovereign power of the whole people obtains, and with it a secure justice, and liberty, and equality.

Of course the *Encyclopedia* had proposed a solution, but it was only a palliative. That which stands over the governments in their administration of the affairs of political societies are the 'fundamental laws', the settled constitutions of the nations.<sup>1</sup> These bodies of law are not superseded by the contract vesting the rulers with power. They cannot be infringed by the rulers without their destroying the very source of their own authority. The right of government is rooted in the fundamental law, as, for example, the ancient Salic Law. It would be irrational and dangerous for kings to act so as to remove the structure of right by which even they enjoy their thrones. Now Rousseau had drunk too deeply of Hobbes's realism and of the legal practicality of certain writers to accept this solution. It might be

<sup>1</sup> R. Hubert, *Rousseau et l'Encyclopédie*, pp. 25, 108, 110, and *Les Sciences sociales dans l'Encyclopédie*, pp. 145 ff.; Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 2, ch. 2, p. 195; bk. 28, ch. 45, p. 470.

absurd, and even dangerous, to ignore or violate fundamental law, but *who can hold sovereigns to account?* The laws cannot oblige of themselves—so the old argument always ran—and why are ‘fundamental laws’ to be relied upon now as the great bulwark against aggression and tyranny? Who *will* hold kings to account, what person or persons? Is it not always necessary in this argument to think of an active person? And in this case what else but the public person, the people themselves? They who have invested rulers with their power in common ought to have the right to investigate and hold to account their rulers—such was the ancient doctrine in the Greek States described by Aristotle and recalled in modern times by both Locke and Montesquieu.<sup>1</sup> The superior power must always be kept where it first exists, in the whole body of the people. They are the sovereign and they never can give up anything of their sovereignty without ceasing to be a political body. They impose the obligations to obey the law on themselves, and it is they who really enforce them, not any external authority. The ‘fundamental laws’, as they were called, are nothing but the settled expression of their general will. Their power to make new law and to order their own affairs is the fundamental thing and it is never alienated or destroyed unless they cease to exist at all as a community. Thus the doctrine of ‘fundamental laws’ must be ushered out of court along with that spurious pact which robs the people of their own sovereignty. The tendencies to satire in Rousseau were hardly far from the surface as he reflected thus upon the tricks of the writers with their false notions. He confessed elsewhere that it took some effort to keep the satire out of his book.<sup>2</sup>

But if all accounts prove thus fallacious and unreasonable, how is one to conceive the fundamental pact and the form of the society which it makes possible? Rousseau clung to his cherished visions from Plato’s *Laws*, where it was told that three kingly heroes made oath to three cities under them, and the cities in turn made one to them, that both the rulers and subjects would observe the laws common to all of them, and the rulers promised that in the course of time they would not make their rule arbitrary, while the subjects said that if such were the case they would never subvert or permit others to subvert those kingdoms, and it was understood further that when any king or people suffered injury the others were to assist them. Their confederation under a pact kept them all safe and stronger in their union

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.* bk. 3, ch. 11, 1281b–1282a–b; bk. 4, ch. 14, 1298a; Locke, *Civil Government*, bk. 2, sects. 142, 149, 156, 168, 211–12; 243 (conclusion); Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 2, ch. 2, pp. 194–5; bk. 11, ch. 15, p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 289.

than any of their aggressive neighbors. Any attack on any one of them would be checked by the united resistance of the other two abiding by their agreement for mutual succor. According to Plato such an arrangement among equals would give them all alike 'the greatest security for the maintenance of their constitutions'.<sup>1</sup>

Here was the ancient model of the political pact, perhaps the source of all the notions which the modern writers had trimmed to the exigencies of monarchy. Here were the pacts of Grotius and Pufendorff, applied to a society of city-states to unite them into a body able to preserve themselves in a world of conflict. Here, too, was the ancient prototype of 'fundamental laws', the 'law of nations' common to the several peoples and defended by them all as necessary to their intercourse. Rousseau had drunk long of that fountain of political wisdom, the *Republic* and the *Laws* of Plato, and he came with fresh imagination to the issues of politics.

But before him others had done the same, Pufendorff, Montesquieu, and Abbé de St. Pierre, and all of them had reflected on the significance of a pact like that delineated in the *Laws*. Pufendorff had written *On the State of the German Empire* under the pseudonym of Severinus Manzambano and argued for the perfecting of the federative form rather than attempting to achieve that of monarchy like the rest of Europe.<sup>2</sup> Montesquieu considered such a pact in connection with *The Laws in the Relation they have with the Defensive Force*, where he asserted 'the necessity of a federated republic, a society of societies'.<sup>3</sup> But St. Pierre had really devoted his life to the promotion of the idea of a pact for peace and security amongst the European States, a general federation, not a particular alliance of three or more. And he had put it forward as a thoroughly practicable thing—and Rousseau was at this time studying those writings both in manuscript and in print since he was preparing to publish an edition of them. He saw St. Pierre anticipating the objection that would be raised to the effect 'that one should only regard this fine project rather as the desire of a worthy citizen than as the plan of a good political system, *votum non consilium*. It is nothing (they say) but the Republic of Plato, and not a practicable project; it would never commend itself to the corrupt spirits of this age, *non sumus in republica Platonis sed in face Romuli*'. Nevertheless, it is the only policy which offers any alternative to the incessant contests for supremacy and security on the part of

<sup>1</sup> *Laws*, 684, paraphrased and quoted from Jowett, p. 64 f.

<sup>2</sup> Pufendorff, *De statu imperii Germanici*, German tr. H. Breslaw, chs. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 9, ch. 1, p. 253.

every people. It is designed 'for their conservation and for their reciprocal guarantees'. And why should the now independent sovereigns object to entering such an association, for when they accept an arbitration of their peers they are not subjecting themselves to a 'superior'? Indeed 'each one only gives up on one side as much as he acquires on the other . . . and so, in that respect, everything is equalised in the system of perpetual peace between the nations of Christendom'. Of course, 'it cannot be doubted that men lose something of their apparent liberty in entering upon engagements of every sort in society, but it is not more to be doubted that in a society so full of advantages as this one they gain a hundred-fold, nay, a thousand-fold, more commodities and advantages than they lose on the score of the diminution of their liberty'. And that 'visionary' spoke of the social order as a master-builder: 'All the peoples by a mutual protection of each other would be preserved in a solid peace, despite all injustice and natural ambition in men, just as the stones of an arch will sustain each other mutually and solidly in the air, in spite of their natural weight.'<sup>1</sup>

'Despite all injustice and natural ambition in men!' Was this the form a society must take, then, to meet the demands of the independent man who before he surrenders any of his liberty and power wants to be sure he is safeguarded against the ambition and injustice of men? Was there in this pact of equals, and without any superiors, something of the nature of a *political* obligation? Or rather would the moral obligation have all the force that the earlier writers could see only in a power of government?

These questions challenged the assumption common to all those writers, that political obligation depends upon the power of a person superior to every member of the State, and that when men obey the law of the State they obey the will of a person other than themselves. They were, of course, supposed to do this cheerfully and willingly, seeing their own good involved in it, but they were denied the intelligence and moral competence to control themselves. Why was this so? With the visions of St. Pierre and Plato in mind, and the picture of several States, nay all Europe as Fénelon had likewise dreamed, united by compact to establish law and guarantees and thereby peace and mutual happiness, and all this without any superior or potentate over them, with such fancies in mind Rousseau might well have asked: Why are not men in any situation able to do

<sup>1</sup> *Ouvrages politiques de M. L'Abbé de St. Pierre* (Ch. Irenée Castel), vol. i, *Abrégé du projet de paix perpétuelle*, pp. 12, 152, 169, 183; vol. ii, pp. 15-31. *Ibid.*, vol. vi ('Effets du nouveau plan du gouvernement des États'), p. 326.

these things? Cannot the people of a country, all taken together, constitute for any one of their number a true 'superior'? Indeed, the practical Aristotle had already spoken thus in his *Politics*, and it seemed with commendation: 'Now, though no one individual of the many may himself be fit for the supreme power, yet when these many are joined together, does it not follow but they may be better qualified than those (the few), and this *not separately, but as a collective body. For the multitude when they are collected together have all of them sufficient understanding for these purposes.*'<sup>1</sup> Are they not all as one body competent to lay down law for themselves severally, and thus 'to oblige themselves'? A strange conception this would be, indeed, to those wrapped in the phrases and notions of traditional politics. Yet the notion had cropped out again and again even in their books. It was often scouted, passed over deftly, or perhaps reasoned away by the use of the aptly conceived premisses. But Rousseau pounced upon every author's admission of the idea, or his reasons against it. He tested the reasons, and used many of them against the positions for which they were invented as a support. His own theory thus developed from most of the dreaded repressions of modern political thought. It was paradoxical and novel. But by this time he had few inhibitions himself on the score of paradox. It was precisely such a daring of tradition that made possible his own concept of political obligation.

If a people can lay down the laws, Bodin had declared, they must be considered to be a veritably supreme authority in themselves. Not seeing anything in this notion except an endorsement of the ancient idea of democracy in Greek cities, he hewed close to the line of modern actualities and fashioned a theory of monarchical government. But the question, Rousseau insisted, was not that of monarchical or democratic government, but rather 'the idea of the republic' or of 'civil society'—and it was on that subject Bodin had professed to be writing his *Six Books*. Why are not 'the people taken all together' the ultimate obligatory power, if they are, in sooth, the real constituents of any commonwealth?

To this question, it seemed, Grotius made reply, as a spokesman for the tradition: a people as a body of law-givers cannot oblige themselves, because no single one of them can ever oblige himself. Surely what the individuals are unable to do they ought never to be supposed capable of doing as a multitude. Literally speaking, no man can be superior to his own will, and therefore no collection of men can be superior to themselves. But 'to themselves' is ambiguous, for it may refer to the individuals

<sup>1</sup> *Pol.* 1281a-b, tr. Ellis (Everyman), pp. 85-6. Italics mine.

taken severally one by one, or to the entire body. Now it seems reasonable, indeed, that no body of people could bind itself in any way and deny itself a future general will. That is a conclusion Rousseau is only too happy to draw, since it excludes at once the claims of absolute monarchs who pretend that once *they* are given sovereign power they can exercise it without further regard to the general will of the people. But why is not the whole body of the people a genuine 'superior' with respect to any particular member of the body? In failing to entertain this possibility, Grotius betrayed his ignorance of the meaning of 'a people'. For a people is not merely a collection or aggregate, but an organised whole in which more power is made available to every member so long as he acts in conformity with the will of the whole. The sovereignty created by any union of men in society is more than a summation of the several isolated powers of the members. And even more significant is the *nature* of this increased power: a true commonwealth is more than a pooling of goods and physical strength and divers talents—it is a concert of wills. Now Grotius himself had believed that the natural man possesses a sense of right, and an active power of conscience. He had rested his own case, at an important juncture, upon the value of the king's conscience, as something in which people ought to trust for justice and mercy. These moral forces, however, are by no means confined to kings alone: they are the possession of the most lowly of men, and quite likely to amount to more in their very ordinary lives than in those of the personages who can too easily have their own way. Precisely these active moral sentiments, as Pufendorff happily said, are the 'seeds of governance' in every individual, which the pact makes to develop into a full-fledged sovereignty of the general will. These multifarious germinal principles of self-control are the source of all law that is actually observed amongst any people. Thus the rule of law is in fact the conscience of the individuals raised to a higher power of itself by means of their agreement with each other. So the voluntary union or compact of men spells a triumph of their moral powers when 'all taken together'.

And there is more still resulting. In his comments on Pufendorff, the translator, Barbeyrac, had spoken as if the people were not 'an intelligent being', and this was taken to be an argument in favour of their submitting their judgment to that of a sovereign who is presumed to possess such gifts. But Aristotle had given the hint of a reply to this when he commended 'the understanding of all taken together'. When men unite and join forces and seek to determine their rights and duties



in society, they are obliged to communicate their opinions to each other, else they do not eliminate their differences and attain to any agreement. For they cannot fix on the conditions of their social intercourse blindly, without hearing the declarations and claims of each party who might be affected. The inevitable discussion involved creates a better understanding of their common interests as well as of their several claims, and this means the rise of a common or public opinion, a great power, which, Rousseau had said, only the ancients knew how to appreciate. Thus the social pact brings the ideas of right out of obscurity into light and makes them precise and thereby reduces the chances of conflict. Indeed the dissemination of the knowledge of the right is the greater part of the victory for a civil and peaceful life. So the 'people' who participate in such a compact verily do constitute a superior being with respect to every individual man and citizen, not only superior in power but also in the understanding of what is just and right.

In every manner of thinking there is, it seems, some train of imagery running along with the meaning. No man, thought Grotius, can lay himself under the obligation of a law, and likewise no people. Why? Because, indeed, Grotius can only imagine a superior being like a king doing such a thing, laying on an obligation, exacting it of others. The power that gives the law, and sees to its execution, is thus envisaged, necessarily, as external to the subjects, and to the will of those whose obedience is required. How can a single will 'incline' itself any other way than it is actually inclined? How can it *force* itself? Of course that is impossible: there must, then, be such external superiors or sovereigns. And if we ask how kings themselves are obliged, or whether they are exempt from mortal necessities in order to be moral, we are answered: kings are subject to the will of the Supreme Being of the Universe, the ultimate Sovereign. But Pufendorff observed that an alien and superior will cannot be effectual if it is not in some sense connected with the will of the subjects who are constrained to render obedience to its law, otherwise the rule will be felt, and often resisted, as amounting to sheer duress. The Protestant antecedents of Pufendorff, and the imagery of the Jewish people making their covenant with Jehovah, these created a slightly different picture and argument. Any governance cut off from the will of the men affected by it has little validity because it is without the support that comes from their own moral sense of freedom and right. Consequently some prior act of general agreement must be admitted, an original pact establishing the common law and committing every party to its observance. Then a second contract seemed

to Pufendorff still necessary, an agreement which communicates the will of the newly-formed 'moral person' to some active determinate sovereign. Men *consent* to be obliged by this 'superior'. But why this additional contract, asks Rousseau? If so much value attaches to that acknowledgment on the part of all men, why is anything more than their own free will needed to constitute an obligation? Surely the power that makes laws valid, and places princes on their thrones, will suffice of itself to hold any man within the law and his proper liberties. Is there still some very special *magic* in the figure of a ruling prince? Is there nothing equal to it conjured up by the image of The People themselves? Surely the attributes and functions of a 'superior being' may be envisaged, without any incongruity, in a body of individuals who have been made *one* person by their own voluntary action and by mutual understandings. The world was, indeed, too much with philosophers when they could see no 'majesty' in the people.<sup>1</sup> They had their eyes fascinated by the visible powers and bodies, by kings ruling, imposing, exacting, lording it over all and identifying themselves, in proud sentences, with the State. It was not until the great Montesquieu and St. Pierre came that men really appreciated the significance of the 'invisible' body and the 'spirit of the laws'. Pufendorff, Grotius, Bodin, and even Hobbes, had had inklings of this reality, but they dutifully averted their eyes, as if the very speculation were *lèse majesté*, and they but shyly incorporated it in their theories of contract. But they were not true believers in the sovereignty of the people—and their minds were restless until they saw a visible, single, determinate, and, of course, a most glorious sovereign.

The ancient imagery is transformed in the imagination of Rousseau. Instead of the sovereign king there is the supreme People. Man the individual, in lieu of being subject to a rule external to himself, is now seen as a self-governing and self-controlled person. Absolutely alone, indeed, his moral competence is very limited. But when through the association afforded by compact with others, he stakes something on this moral will in himself and others, he contributes to produce a social body with which he is more really identical than any grand Monarch could pretend to be with his State. This political society exists in and through the will of every citizen in the community. And it holds everyone to account for his own pledges and sustains him in his moral intentions. It expresses itself in the general will which establishes all laws and rights. And if the independent man puts his questions now, the answer

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff, *op. cit.*, bk. 7, ch. 3, sect. 3, p. 528.

is ready: 'Why ought I to observe the rule of right and what guarantees have I against the injustice of others?' 'When others are in a position to do injury to you they are already associated with you and in such wise, too, that they understand your rights and theirs are the same and that they are as much interested as you in seeing the common law upheld. You are all bound by such an obligation to uphold the rule of the law and the general will. It is the inevitable outcome of your convention or social compact.' Rousseau did not say this in so many words, but he was now satisfied that he had attained the true idea of the social bond and he set to work tracing it on paper, in the first of his essays on political institutions.

## CHAPTER VII

### 'THE FORM OF THE REPUBLIC'

'Il vaut mieux imiter les anciens que les expliquer.' (*To* PERDRIAU, at Geneva, Jan. 18, 1756.)

**T**HE autumn has been very good.' This was the message sent to friends in Geneva on November 23, 1755.<sup>1</sup> And more than once they heard from him of the tranquillity and happiness he was enjoying at Paris. He made sojourns into the country, where he could walk and think, and where he suffered less, too, from the discomforts of his painful ailment. After his expeditions out-of-doors he would attend to his occupation, copying music, and work at his book. It was evidently a very good time for writing, and the very inconsiderable correspondence during that autumn, and the following winter, is testimony that his pen was engaged in composition. It was probably then that he made the first version of his essay on the *Social Contract*.

The persons with whom he was in touch in those days were his new friends and fellow citizens at Geneva, the proper judges of his republican sentiments. His work was to be first of all an account of the true social contract as distinct from all the other versions of that doctrine; distinct in this—that it established a society which had the form of a republic. Not another Republic of Plato, to be sure, for it had to apply to modern 'men as they are', but the ideal was the same, and so he added a distinguishing subtitle to mark the essay off from others: it was an *Essay on the Form of the Republic*. The idea of the republic is in the very formula of the *Fundamental Pact*. 'Each one of us puts his will, his goods, his powers and his person in common under the direction of the general will, and we all as one body receive every member as an inalienable part of the whole.'<sup>2</sup> This means a complete departure from the state of independence, and an entrance into a commonwealth where all that a man claims as his own and as his right is subject to the rule of the whole, the general will. It is the purport of this essay to divulge the full significance of this social pact for the life of men.

There were two questions to be solved. 'It is *necessary to oblige the individuals* to conform their private wills to their reason.' This was the real subject of Book One, stated in the concluding

<sup>1</sup> To Vernes, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Locke, *Civil Government*, bk. 2, ch. 7, sect. 87: "There only is political society where every one of the members hath quitted this natural power, resigned it up into the hands of the community."

chapter, though the title given was *Primary Notions of the Social Body*. And in the same place there was indicated the true subject of the Second Book: 'It is also necessary to *teach the public to know what its own will is.*'<sup>1</sup> For a society which exists by virtue of the will of all must provide for the determination of that will which is the law of their community and which all are obliged to obey. The question was dealt with under the heading of *The Establishment of the Laws*. A Third Book was attempted on *Political Laws or The Institution of Government*, but whatever was done seems to have been unsatisfactory to the author, who tore off the manuscript at this place, so that the surviving essay actually comprises but these two discussions.

The nature of 'the fundamental pact' needs to be discussed, first, so that the new maxims being asserted, in opposition to those of other writers, might be vindicated by argument. 'It must be noted, that, according to the formula, the act of original confederation comprises a reciprocal engagement of the public with the individuals, and that each individual, contracting, so to speak, with himself, finds himself engaged in a double capacity: that is, both as member of the Sovereign with reference to the individuals, and as a member of the State with reference to the Sovereign. But we must remark that we *cannot* apply to this case the maxim of civil law, "that no one is bound by engagements made with himself"; for *there is a considerable difference between being obliged to oneself and to a whole of which one forms a part.*' This disposes of Grotius's objection to the people laying an obligation 'upon themselves'. But the old legal notion is true enough in another aspect. 'The public deliberation . . . cannot . . . oblige the Sovereign to himself; and consequently it is *contrary to the nature of the Body-Politic that the Sovereign shall impose a law which it could not possibly break.* . . . From which we see that *there is not, and never can be, any kind of fundamental law obligatory for the body of the people.*'<sup>2</sup> The whole people are thus free to make their own laws and alter them at will, and they are as absolute as ever kings were supposed to be, no limitations whatsoever being placed upon their common action for their own good.

According to the older views, 'fundamental laws' served the purpose of guaranteeing the individuals against any injustice or invasion of the rights they enjoyed from Nature or from God. Is there no such thing needed on this scheme? 'But we have some distinctions to make in regard to this, notably that the

<sup>1</sup> Concluding paragraph of Book One, first version *Social Contract*, Vaughan, vol. i, p. 476.

<sup>2</sup> Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 456. Italics mine.

sovereign being only formed of the individuals who compose it, has never any interest contrary to theirs: and that consequently the sovereign power would never have need to give any guarantee to the individuals, because it is impossible that the whole body would ever want to harm its own members. On the other hand, it is not the same with regard to the individuals in their relation to the sovereign. . . . In effect, every individual *can*, simply as a human being, have a personal will contrary to, or different from, the general will which he also has as a citizen. His own absolute and independent existence, as it seems to him, makes him regard what he owes to the common cause as a gratuitous contribution on his part, the losing of which by the others would be less harm than the payment of it is burdensome to himself; and thinking of the moral person which constitutes the State simply as a being of reason, merely because it is not an actual man, he would like to enjoy the rights of the citizen without wishing to fulfil the duties of a subject; an injustice the development of which would soon cause the ruin of the political body. In order, therefore, that the Social Contract shall not be a vain formula, it is necessary that, independently of the consent of the individuals, the sovereign shall have some guarantees of their fulfilment of their engagements to the common cause. . . . So the fundamental pact tacitly includes this agreement, which is the only thing that gives any validity to all the others, *that whoever will refuse to obey the general will is to be constrained to do so by all the body*. But it is very important at this moment to keep well in mind that the proper and distinctive character of this pact is that the people are only contracting with themselves; that is to say, the people in a body, as sovereign, with the individuals who compose it, as subjects: a condition which makes all the artifice and play of the political machinery, and which alone renders lawful, reasonable and without danger, engagements which would otherwise be absurd, tyrannical, and subject to the most enormous abuse.<sup>1</sup>

The transition to the social state thus founded means a substituting of justice for instinct in the conduct of men and an imparting of moral character to their actions. Instead of regarding only themselves in the narrow view of self-interest, they see themselves 'forced to act on other principles, and to consult their reason before hearkening to their inclinations'. With that moral attitude comes an enlargement of all their perceptions and sentiments and interests, and a general elevation of the quality of their minds. They become, for the first time, 'intelli-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457; cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* bk. 5, ch. 1, 1302a, 'But there is no instance worth speaking of, of a sedition of the people against themselves.'

gent beings and men'. Thenceforward they live in a realm where there is civil liberty, instead of an unlimited, indefinite, natural liberty to do as they please. They enjoy secure property, and not merely possessions held at their own risk. All their rights whatsoever are defined by general will, and only limited by the condition that they must be equal for every member of the society.

The right of property in particular calls for some attention. According to such men as Bodin, who followed Aristotle, the sovereign should possess a 'domain' of his own.<sup>1</sup> He was the great proprietor, though, powerful as he might be, he was but one among lesser proprietors, a prince among peers, and he was limited in his conduct by their 'natural' right to property which was in the same category with his own right. In form, at least, there was something common to be respected. With the new concept of political society, however, the separate sovereign and proprietor disappears, and with it simultaneously the absolute and natural right of the lesser owners of property. Their making-over of their goods to the whole body is as total as that of their persons and powers. They contribute everything they possess at the moment of their convention to the commonwealth. All their lands and goods are, then, the domain of the whole body of the people, the sovereign. But there is no particular person who benefits from this at the expense of the others. Consequently all receive in return for their free gift the title or right to what they may have in entering the association. 'They have, to speak in this wise, acquired all that they have given.' And more, indeed, since the conjoint powers of all members will be employed in the defence of every one's claims, as a defense of the common country. This limitation that 'the right of every individual to his own property is always subordinate to the right which the community has over all' thus makes for social solidarity and enhances the sovereignty of all.

In all these enigmas of the social union this must be realised, that while man surrenders himself absolutely and without reserve to the whole body, yet he is of that body and, at the same moment, receiving an equal obeisance from every other soul in the community. He is obliged to act in accordance with the rule of conduct to which he has committed himself by a free covenant; yet he is as fully favored, too, by the support of all the others in case of any aggression or violation. The extreme of trust brings an extreme of safety and benefit. His property is his own, subject to the right of the community over all—but that right is his greatest safeguard, since the force of the whole

<sup>1</sup> Bk. 1, ch. 3, pp. 458-9; cf. Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 7, ch. 10, 1330a.

body, and not merely his own strength and wit, maintains his ground and his personal status. Men may have different geniuses, talents, goods, and opportunities, but they are all vouchsafed equality of a moral and lawful sort which constitutes a more veritable opportunity for life, subsistence, and happiness than those precarious natural advantages. They are all equal in the sovereign.

But the question of sovereignty merited a distinct chapter which Rousseau took pains to mark as most important: *In What Sovereignty Consists and What Renders it Inalienable*. The break with the past is here direct and unequivocal. No personal rulers can ever be sovereign. Between the people themselves who are truly sovereign in their community, between them and their acknowledged God, there is no intermediary vested with any right to control their lives according to his own will. Some had described the chiefs of a people as receiving an investiture of the splendid mantle of regency by 'divine legation', in the language of Bishop Warburton; others, and these were the nobler spirits who fought for the rights of the people, had portrayed, instead, an act of deeding, where the people give over their right of government to their representatives. But according to this new theory neither legatces nor representatives have any place. Sovereignty is the moral power of the whole body. In relation to individual persons it has 'an abstract and collective existence alone'. So 'the idea we attach to the word (Sovereign) cannot be joined to that of a simple individual', and the sovereignty of the people can never be 'alienated' in the manner described by Grotius and Pufendorff. Hence the assumption of *sovereign* power by a monarch or a council of men is always without right, though it may be made to seem so because the people accept it. But they themselves are deluded in so doing, for it is simply incompatible with the idea of the general will to conceive of it as *identified* with the will of any particular man or any part, however large, of the entire community. Most of the miseries and chaos of human society have been due to people's crediting such spurious claims and pretensions. It is impossible to have a veritably *social* order when men give their silent consent to the usurpation of their own powers as a body and allow their rulers free rein to take away their lives, their goods, and even, by many arts and blandishments, the very spirit to reassert their liberty. All this is contrary to nature, and to logic. Therefore this principle must be laid down, that the sovereignty of the people is absolutely *inalienable*.

The true sovereignty is just that of the general will. 'I believe we can lay it down as an incontestable maxim, that the general



will alone can direct the forces of the State toward the end for which it is established, namely, the common good. For if the opposition of private interests has rendered the establishment of civil societies necessary, surely it is the accord of these same interests which has made it possible. It is the existence of something common in these different interests which constitutes the social bond; and if there were nothing whatsoever in regard to which all the interests were accordant, the society would not be able to exist. But since the will always aims at the welfare of the being who has that will; and since the will of a private person always has for its object his private interest; and further, since the general will aims at the common interest, it follows that the last-named is, or ought to be, the only veritable authority of the social body.' Once and for all, then, the sovereignty is to be absolutely distinct from any particular person's will, even though that individual be hoisted up by the people themselves to the eminence where he dares to do all things.

Here Rousseau bested such writers as Grotius on their own ground. When Grotius said, that since no man can exercise a sovereignty over himself alone, therefore no people can constitute a sovereignty for themselves, he was plausible only because he thought of the sovereignty of the whole as divided into many little bits, and since the power of self-control in individuals taken separately is insufficient for their lives, the power of the multitude appears an ineffectual power for peace and law, and popular sovereignty is impossible. Rousseau took over this idea of sovereignty as something greater than the will of individuals and insisted that it certainly must not be identified with the will of any of them in particular. According to the true idea of the social contract each person becomes an inalienable part of the whole, and the whole having no existence except in their union can never be identified with any part thereof because this would at once alienate it from all the other parts and destroy its reality. If there is a real social body, then, its sovereignty must be inalienable and the rule of right for all alike. The State is as inalienable from each and every one of them as they are from it. Sovereignty is too big a thing to be vested in any one in particular, not even those most glorious kings whose virtue and wisdom the older writers celebrated, perhaps not without some interest of their own in the doctrine.

For the sake of argument, however, let it be supposed that some man like a grand monarch does arise in the history of a nation and show that he wills the good of the whole body. He may be, as a matter of fact, the person to entrust absolutely with the social force of all the people. Nevertheless, as policy,

this would be dubious. 'Every one ought to be able to see that a private will substituted for the general will is a superfluous instrument when they are in accord and harmful when they are opposed.' The fact of human nature still remains, that 'the private interest of any man always tends toward preferences, the public interest alone to equality'. However, granting such agreement of the will of a ruler and the general will, it cannot be 'presumed to last even until the moment thereafter'. 'The order of the affairs of men is subject to so many revolutions, and their ways of thinking, as well as their modes of existing, change with so much facility that it would be temerity to affirm that we shall will to have to-morrow what we have willed for to-day. So, even if the social body were to say on some one occasion, "I now will everything that this particular man wills," it would never be able to say in speaking of the same man, "What he shall ordain to-morrow, that will I, too." *But the general will which ought to direct the State is not the will of times past, but that of the present moment; and the true character of the sovereignty is that there is always an accord, in respect to time, place, and circumstance, between the general will and the employment of the public force: an accord on which we cannot count as soon as another will, whatever it might be, disposes of that force.*'<sup>1</sup> To have a true sovereignty, the exercise of the public force must be absolutely under the direction of the general will. This Rousseau had stated in his article on *Political Economy*, where he was appealing to rulers and trying to teach them reason, but now he was planning an economy without reliance on their good will or intelligence and looked into a question which seemed to him 'the abyss of politics', like that 'abyss of philosophy', how the soul can act on the body and make it do its will—how can the general will rule the conduct of those who have the employ of the forces of the public? There must be such government, and government administered by men. Apparently all the 'legislators' with their codes of politics had fallen down on this question. Some of 'the best means' they had tried to secure the necessary unison with the general will could be detailed later. But Rousseau was feeling rather desperate about this matter, as if he had not yet discovered the real solution. And he had more melancholy thoughts. Even if the question were settled in theory, the political institutions would be only the work of men, and, like other mechanisms of their devising, sadly defective in the operation. 'Rarely is the general will the will of all parties, and the public force is always less than the sum of the individual forces.'

<sup>1</sup> C.S., Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 460-1. Italics mine.

But melancholy gave way to indignation as he thought of the other theories of government where the body-politic itself was supposed to be ushered into existence by virtue of certain chiefs of State who were therefore entitled sovereigns and made much of at the cost of the people. These were certainly 'false notions of the social bond' and of the work of man in the forming of society. It would be a help toward fixing 'the idea of the civil state' to run over these spurious notions and show their fallacy. This attack interrupted, therefore, the continuous discussion of sovereignty.

The authority of a chief among men is not an extension of the paternal right of a man over the members of his family. As had been pointed out in the *Political Economy* the management of the State must be on a very different principle from that of natural affection which is the law of the home. The demand upon the Statesman, as Plato had described him, is something of heroic character, and one cannot assume a marvel in order to explain human society in natural terms. But the body-politic is not the achievement even of an ordinary chief such as may be found in history, one who has become powerful in lands and possessions by the so-called 'natural' right of property that he can give law to others within his domain and possess their persons as well, for these men would not make such a submission without a consideration and could not give up all liberty of action thereafter—it would be a futile and absurd arrangement for them to give him 'an obedience without limits'. A society never arises that way.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it the product of a conquest where the victor grants the conquered their lives on condition that they be his men, his slaves, for they have only accepted their fate, not his tyranny, and they do not give up their will to regain their liberty at the very first chance. Such a life of underlings and overlords is surely not one of society. It is, in fact, but a continued state of war between them. And besides, the condition of war is not precedent to life in society but incident to it; and the question at issue is what forms these peoples who then engage in war and conquest. It is the old story, that a prince establishes this bond and the State. But surely 'a people is a people independently of their chief; and if the prince happens to die, there still exist among the subjects some bonds which maintain them in one body as a nation'. But from this the writers averted their eyes. They tried every other possibility, for example, this, that a violent usurpation comes to be accepted by men who 'tacitly consent' to be held together by the effectual rule of others. It is the work of time, then, that 'a usurper

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pufendorff, *The Law of Nature*, bk. 1, ch. 6, sect. 12, p. 54.

changes into a supreme magistrate, and a troop of slaves into a national body'. But time does not change the fact of subservience nor the right of man to liberty. Men may lose their inclination to assert their right, but they have it still; and their lack of resolution does not bind their children, who are entitled to their freedom simply as human beings and not as the sons of men whether free or slave. Furthermore, even from the longest silence one cannot presume a 'consent', so long as the people have no power to assemble in a body to declare their will. It seems quite the contrary; their very silence implies a rejection of a chief whom they do not recognise. Of course the jurists and others paid to say it speak otherwise, yet 'all they say does not in the least prove that the people have no right to regain their usurped liberty but only that it is dangerous for them to try it'. However, 'all that dispute concerning the social pact (whether the people are committed by silence or by real consent) seems to me to reduce to a very simple question. What is it that can have engaged men to unite with each other voluntarily, if it be not the common utility (in the language of St. Pierre)? The common utility is, then, the foundation of civil society. That posed, what is there to distinguish rightful States from forced herdings which nothing authorises, unless we consider the object or end of the one and the other respectively? If the form of the society tends to the common good, it follows the spirit of its institution (as Plato and Aristotle and Montesquieu described it);<sup>1</sup> if it has nothing in view but the interest of the chiefs, it is unlawful by right of reason and humanity, for even if the public interest were sometimes in accord with that of the tyranny, such a fleeting accord would not be sufficient to authorise a government of which it would not be the principle. When Grotius denies that all power is established for the sake of those who are governed, he is only too true as far as the facts go; but the question is one of right. His sole proof is very singular: he derives it from the power of a master over his slave, as if one could authorise a fact by a fact and as if slavery itself were less iniquitous than tyranny. It is precisely the right of slavery which must be established. It is not a question of that which is, but of that which is fitting and just, nor of a power one is forced to obey, but of that which one is obliged to recognise.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. especially Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 3, ch. 7, 1279a.

<sup>2</sup> The argument against slavery and conquest follows in the train of Pufendorff and Montesquieu (*The Law of Nature*, bk. 3, ch. 1, sect. 8, p. 184 f.; *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 15, chs. 2-8, pp. 308-10) and probably also Locke, *op. cit.*, bk. 2, ch. 4. Montesquieu had attacked the reasoning of Grotius (*The Rights of War, &c.*, bk. 1, ch. 3, sect. 8, pp. 65 ff., and bk. 3, ch. 8, 'Of the Right over Prisoners', p. 602): 'but it is not repugnant to natural justice that men should become slaves by a human fact, i.e.

And the power one is obliged to recognise is solely the general will, which is thus the true sovereignty—'that is the fundamental principle which I have tried to establish'. Now the questions arise, what empire that sovereignty has and how it manifests itself to all.

The first point is to determine *The Respective Rights of the Sovereign and the Citizen*. Those writers who had set up personal rulers as sovereigns had often intended to limit their power by reserving something for the benefit of the other party, the people, either their natural rights or else the fundamental and unalterable laws of the land. They would treat the right of government itself as but one of a number of natural rights and by no means able to exclude the others or to violate the natural law so basic that they often seemed to come from God Himself. These safeguards of the individual were good enough if the princes really believed in God and His Law and Vengeance. But the critical attitude evinced by people toward the royal claims of their superiors in the modern age had been paralleled by a similar attitude on the part of the rulers themselves toward the Sovereign of the Universe over them. As the old ties weakened they did so universally, in monarchs no less than in the common people. So kings readily ignored those natural and fundamental laws and made themselves the bearers of all the rights and masters of all the laws. And there was nothing to be done about it—everything resolved itself into force. But on the present theory that the absolute right and law belong to the people 'taken all together', united by mutual pact, what is there to be said regarding the rights of the one and the other party, the sovereign and the citizen? The answer, in effect, is that the question ceases to exist. The two bodies coincide, all the people being as one body the sovereign, and in their individuality the subjects thereof. They are not two separate beings standing over against each other as a lord to his underlings. There cannot be any delimiting of rights belonging peculiarly to the sovereign and to the citizen respectively. Every duty owed by the citizen means a right for himself as member of the sovereign, and it is the same for all. 'The engagements which bind us to the social body are only obligatory because they are mutual, and their nature is such that one cannot work for others without working at the

by virtue of some agreement, or in consequence of some crime; . . .'. And besides Grotius, there were under fire, Melon (*op. cit.*, ch. 5, pp. 724 ff.), Bodin (bk. 1, ch. 5, 'De la Puissance seigneuriale', &c., p. 50), and Aristotle (*Pol.*, bk. 1, ch. 5, 1254b). Pufendorff made the general proposition that 'neither strength nor any other natural eminence is sufficient to produce an obligation, but either some good or some voluntary submission of self'. (Bk. 1, ch. 6, sect. 12, p. 54.) Rousseau is not content with 'either . . . or' but insists on both the good of the individuals *and* their own free act of will.

same time for oneself. Why is it that the general will is always right, and why do all will constantly the happiness of all, if it is not because there is no person who does not secretly apply the word "everyone" to himself and think of himself when voting on behalf of all? This proves, incidentally, that the equality of right, and the notion of justice derived from it, come from the preference which every one gives to himself, and consequently from the nature of man: and, further, that the general will, to be truly such, ought to be *general in its object* as well as in its essence; that it ought to issue from all in order to return again to all; and that it loses its natural rectitude the moment it falls upon an individual and determinate subject; because then, judging of that which is not ourselves, we no longer have any true principle of equity to guide us.' The general will 'cannot pronounce by name either upon a single man or upon a fact'. Only in this generality is it an authentic sovereignty, which 'obliges or favors equally all the citizens'. An act of sovereignty, therefore, 'is not an order from a superior to an inferior, nor a command from master to slave; but an agreement of the body of the State with every one of its members: an agreement lawful, because it has for its basis the Social Contract; equitable, because it is voluntary and general; useful, because it can have no other object than the good of all; and substantial, because it has for its guarantees the public force and supreme power'. So long as the subjects are submissive only to such agreements, they obey nobody in particular, but only their own will; and to ask how far the respective rights of the sovereign and the individuals extend is really to ask *how far the individuals can engage in mutual undertakings: each with all of them, and all with each*. And this is an absurd question to ask, for to fix any limit to their acts of agreement with each other is to restrict their liberty to seek their own good. To that end their own sovereignty must be without limitation, or absolute.

'It follows, however, that the sovereign power, all absolute, all sacred, all inviolable as it is, does not and cannot go beyond the limits of general agreements, and that every man can dispose fully of what is left to him by these agreements of his own goods and liberty, in such wise that the sovereign never has the right to charge any one individual more than another, for then the matter becomes a private affair and the sovereign power is no longer competent.' Thus wherever people do not find it useful to come to any understanding about their mutual conduct they are not obliged to any authority and still enjoy their own 'natural liberty'. But it must be recognised now that such liberties, peculiar to individuals and of no account for their

social existence, seem hardly to merit the name of 'rights'. They are too indefinite, precarious, and unsubstantial. And it is never any real loss to a man, when he finds them generally valued and socially important, to exchange them for 'civil liberties' under the sovereignty and the protection of the whole body. The rights thus held are 'invincible'. And in this aspect of the matter there is again seen to be no point in confining the jurisdiction of the general will or making any jealous distribution of rights between the sovereign and the citizen. It is unnecessary because the sovereign power has its own limits—it cannot act competently save through the general agreement of all.<sup>1</sup>

The second question remains: How does this sovereignty manifest itself? It is the power of the body-politic formed by a social pact, having 'an ideal and conventional existence', without any special faculty for knowing what is its own good or evil. That must be the affair of the individuals who are the members of that body. How do they come to know 'the community of ills' they all need to avoid, or the 'community of goods' which they are joined together to secure for themselves? How do they appreciate these things? Is it by sad or happy experience, or by direct knowledge? How can they keep from being confused by their private interest? Are the people to be thought of as always assembled to deal with such matters? And how will they all act in concert? They presumably have the will to unite in one community, but their agreement must extend to very definite matters, and the question is how this comes about and what form it takes. And the answer is, the form of law. The marvels of law Rousseau had previously celebrated in his article on *Political Economy*, copying there from his notes for the *Political Institutions* to which this present essay belonged and where the same eloquent passage is repeated, showing how law establishes liberty, equality, and justice, and gives rules of conduct for all and keeps them from contradicting their own intentions. Law thus expresses the general will, the will of all, the will of the sovereign.

But the sovereign is the people, and here more questions arise. 'The laws are properly nothing but the conditions of the civil association. The people submitted to the laws ought therefore to be their author; for it belongs only to those who associate with each other to declare the conditions under which they want to associate. But how will they declare these conditions? Will it be by common accord or by a sudden inspiration? . . . How

<sup>1</sup> In the final version of the *Social Contract* the title of this chapter was changed to correspond to the true question, 'The Limits of Sovereign Power', bk. 2, ch. 4.

would one have it that a blind multitude which often knows not what it wants, because it rarely knows what is good for itself, could form and execute of itself an enterprise so difficult as a system of legislation which is the sublimest effort of human wisdom and prevision? Of themselves the people always want the good; but of themselves they do not always see it. The general will is always right, it is never a question of setting it right; but it is necessary to know how to interrogate it properly. . . . The individuals see the good which they reject; the public wants the good that it does not see. All are equally in need of guides: it is necessary to oblige the individuals to conform their wills to their reason; it is necessary to teach the public to know what it wants. Then from public understanding there will result the virtue of the individuals, and from that union of the understanding and will in the social body the exact concurrence of all the parts and the greatest force for the whole.' And that is the condition of a true and effectual sovereignty in the people.

The title of this concluding chapter of Book One is *The Necessity of Positive Laws*, which indicates the relation of the argument to the traditional doctrine of sovereignty. Hobbes had railed at the Platonists of his day because they thought of laws as if they were fixed and unalterable principles in the heavens, and above titular 'sovereigns' as well as ordinary men. He repudiated their ideas of 'natural laws' and 'rights' and 'fundamental laws'. Such laws were a feudal strait-lacing of the body-politic; they prevented its 'representative' from meeting the exigencies of public affairs in a changing, nationalistic world with intelligence and resolution; they were a fatal restriction on the new power of sovereignty which was to save the day. It was not sufficient to set up a supreme power by a compact; that power had to be free to maintain itself and the State. This doctrine, taught so effectively by Hobbes, was not forgotten by the later Barbeyrac, the commentator of Grotius and Pufendorf, whose translations of those authors Rousseau had studied most carefully; and Barbeyrac insisted that the body-politic has the right to preserve itself.<sup>1</sup> With this Rousseau agreed. The sovereign must be always free to meet the situations which concern the existence and well-being of the community. The State must not only be founded but enabled to live and act for the future. Hence the necessity of law-making, of positive law. It is as necessary for the republican form of society as for any other.

But the difficulties were immensely greater for the new theory.

<sup>1</sup> Barbeyrac's note in Grotius's *Rights of War and Peace*, bk. 2, ch. 6, sect. 6, p. 216: n. 1.



The life of the people must continue always in the spirit of their institution. So they must go on with their making of agreements when legislating for every occasion of importance to them all. It was not easy to conceive of this. Ask any of the older writers 'Who is rightly charged with the making of the laws?': and the answer is prompt, 'Those sovereigns whom the people have entrusted with their powers for peace as well as war.' The image might vary, sometimes one man, a monarch, and at other times a council or parliament—in any case, a distinct person or a few, certainly not the whole body, of the people. Historical fact was on the side of this notion of the legislative authority. And a certain weight of ancient opinion corroborated it. Was it not said, in Plato's *Statesman*, that it is better to have the living Law in command, some person of wisdom, than merely literal rules? This seemed to be a disparagement of the Laws. But Plato had represented nobly how the Laws of Athens spoke to Socrates and admonished the natural man in him that would have fled his punishment, and made him willing, instead, to die in sacrifice for an Idea. It was not the Laws that Plato disparaged, but the mass of the people: he never seemed to think that they could act like Socrates in their way and situation, and he looked, therefore, to a few, wise law-givers. And Rousseau himself had a weakness for this heroic role. And this made it hard for him to show that it is possible for the people to have true opinions of the good of their community, and further, to declare their will, the general will, in the form of laws. How is their law-making possible? Were not Bodin and Hobbes and Barbeyrac unhappily correct in saying that the people is not an intelligent being, but a 'blind multitude', a 'beast of many heads', and all the other epithets derogatory to democracy they learned from their classics?<sup>1</sup>

But Rousseau had Montesquieu with him. He had observed that 'in a free state it would be necessary for the people as a body to have the legislative power' and he had written as if it were a possibility, though he admitted it might be necessary to have representatives if the State were large, as in England. One could count on 'the natural capacity the people have for discerning merit' and following the lead of those who showed their knowledge of the general need and good. Aristotle, too, had said some fine things on that score: that 'the multitude when they are collected together have all of them sufficient understanding for the purposes . . . of voting in the public assemblies and determining causes . . . and electing the officers of the State, and also of inquiring into their conduct when they come out of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bodin, particularly bk. 6, ch. 4, p. 940; p. 962.

office'.<sup>1</sup> And one must not ignore the effect of the establishment of a republic, that the spirit of its institutions will shape the mind and heart of every succeeding generation of citizens, rearing them to be just and wise as the community requires. That was the lesson taught by both Plato and Aristotle. And even Bodin had observed that 'Plato's Republic was the most popular state ever'.<sup>2</sup> It is true Plato attributed only 'justice' to all without exception and reserved to the few the special attribute of 'wisdom'. But this wisdom was to be employed for the public good, and, if Montesquieu were right in his judgment, the rest of the community would *recognise* this wisdom and make it their own will. It is possible, then, to see how a 'public opinion' might arise in such a community and how the laws of the State might be made, being not simply the declarations of a legal character by some person in command but all those common practices, habits, manners, and morals which really govern a people.<sup>3</sup> And all this nourished the vision in Rousseau's mind of a society founded upon the agreement of all and continuing in the same spirit of equality, liberty, and justice. It would, however, be a hard question to solve, and it required a Second Book, on *The Establishment of the Laws*.

Some one must discover or find the best rules of life for a society or nation. It is a noble office, for which there must be noble men, but not those so entitled in the modern language, those military figures, the conquerors and sovereigns so glorified by sycophant writers. The mind of Rousseau was dominated by ancient imagery, instilled by the tales of Plutarch. His counterblast to the image of the modern royal prince is 'the legislator' of Greek and Roman tradition. There had been many such, among them the heroic figures of Lycurgus and Numa. Such men, in the turmoil of contemporary passions, hostilities, ambitions, and self-interest, raised themselves above the crowd and fashioned a policy meeting the common needs at the time. They were men enough to feel the ordinary necessities without succumbing to them. They were men almost divine in their gift of self-knowledge, especially in the way they provided safeguards against their own weaknesses and partialities. Bold as Lycurgus was, for example, in daring to attempt a remaking of human nature through the instrumentality of the new laws, he would not presume upon any renovation of his own soul in the way of wisdom and virtue, and so, lest he should

<sup>1</sup> *Pol.*, bk. 3, ch. 11, 1281b-1282a; ch. 15, 1286a.

<sup>2</sup> Bodin, bk. 2, ch. 1, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois* (On free state), bk. 11, ch. 6, p. 266; (On discerning merit), bk. 2, ch. 2, p. 194; (Educative value of the general system of the republic), bk. 4; (On the contribution of the nation in general), bk. 19, chs. 4, 14.

be tempted to construe the laws in his own personal favor, he at once betook himself from his own country and from all enjoyment of the benefits of that system he had newly instituted. He recognised that his own pre-eminence in the State might have led him to overrule the laws. His ideal was to let the laws make their way into the hearts and minds of all the people by their own intrinsic recommendation, and thuswise become the settled habits of the nation and serve as a moral education for each successive generation of citizens. By such an extraordinary, self-denying ordinance, then, Lycurgus proved himself to be the true example of the *Statesman* described by Plato. And his own people recognised his moral self-mastery, and because of that, his right to leadership. He could lay down the laws to himself, and was therefore worthy to rule others as well. Yet knowing that they were only too ready to subject themselves to his will on that account, and wishing them not to follow him but rather to imitate his example, he told the fiction of the Laws as having been dictated by the Gods, so that the people might transfer their admiration from himself to The Laws, and be ruled by them alone. Such invoking of religious sanctions was a dangerous expedient, which Rousseau did not like. He preferred to believe, indeed, that the real power in that situation was, after all, 'the great soul' of the statesman himself. The people recognised *the character* of the man and accepted him, less as a magistrate or ruler than as an instructor who could 'teach them to know their own will'. In so regarding him, they considered the laws that came with his recommendation as coming from their own will, and, in a sense, when they thus accepted them they were themselves participating in the legislation.

Here was the new theory, then, of the establishment of the laws of a people. It was a blending of ancient ideas with those of the nearer Montesquieu. There is 'the wise man' of olden time who has the vision and energy to formulate the scheme of social intercourse suiting the life of a nation and to employ 'the resources of public opinion'.<sup>1</sup> There are the people themselves, without whose recognition of the man, and acceptance of the charter of law he discovers to them, the law-making would be ineffectual and incomplete—their consent and practice of the rules alone makes them the governing principles of the society. The 'legislator' and 'the people', these are the two factors of moment in making the laws.

The manner in which Rousseau wrote this account, as if it were one of origins like his *Discourse on Inequality*, disguises the general nature of his theory. It seems as if he were dealing

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fragment, Vaughan, vol. i, p. 322.

with the first establishment of laws, as if the legislator were 'the founder' described in Diderot's forthcoming article *Foundation: Political and Natural Law*, one who appears at the beginning of a people's career giving them a political system or fundamental law by means of which they live on and on without more ado. The Greek examples rather suggest that interpretation. But Montesquieu had observed, apropos, that the legislator of the ancient, heroic mould is only necessary at the founding, because the laws serve thenceforward to educate the people and enable them to produce their own leaders through whom they continue to make their own laws, time after time, and on every occasion of importance.<sup>1</sup> So the far-off event appears symbolic of what is constantly happening in any enduring society. The legislator is any political leader who 'refounds the constitution of a State' or in any way contributes to the laws which enable it to enjoy a continued, successful existence.<sup>2</sup> At every juncture in the history of a body-politic provision must be made for the emergence of this legislator who will take the initiative, but no more than that, no liberties of his own; and who will submit his proposals to the people for their acceptance, which is final, not so much a decision by formal registering of voices as by tacit and practical adopting of the proposed rules in the conduct of their own lives, in their morals. It is such perpetual co-operation of the few wiser spirits with the common people that is the real and total act of legislation. This is, therefore, a veritable *institution* of the body-politic.

This theory of law is reminiscent, however, of more than books of politics. The citizen of Geneva had not forgotten the scenes of his childhood recently revisited, the actual ground where he wanted to see realised his cherished visions of the republic. There was the right place to which he constantly wanted to return. To be sure he had been slightly disappointed in the governing body, and in the general lack of understanding of the supreme value of law. Still the picture of Genevan institutions slipped across the imagery of Sparta or Rome and reinforced its meaning. The true republic must provide for eliciting the opinion and will of the people as well as the genius of statesmen. In any community certain processes of initiative and referendum must have place, proposings and disposings that may not always be entered on legal records, but are nevertheless the life of the State.

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, ch. 1, p. 125: 'Dans la naissance des sociétés, ce sont les chefs des républiques qui font l'institution; et c'est ensuite l'institution qui forme les chefs des républiques.' *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 2, ch. 2, p. 194, and bk. 19, ch. 5; 'C'est au législateur à suivre l'esprit de la nation. . . .', p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 321.

After *The Legislator*, then, it is proper to discuss the subject of *The People for Whom the Laws are to be Instituted*. Here again Montesquieu had said a great deal that was worth repeating about the importance of the character of the nation in determining the kind of polity which is suitable. In a sense this is a digression, because Rousseau was concerned only about the form of the republic and not any other. But it is nevertheless essential to realise the conditions under which republican institutions can possibly be realised. The ancient Greeks lived in republics, and they are one good example. The Hebrew nation, too, was remarkable in continuing to live for generation after generation over many centuries under a system of laws which one of their greatest geniuses initiated for them. Here is a case where the polity seems almost independent of circumstance and largely determined by the national character. The laws of Moses illustrate, too, what laws ought to be, the product of legislators evolved from within the community and content to be only its devoted guides, not wanting the regalia of kingship. Now the question is, are all peoples, without exception, capable of similar achievements? Is there not something to investigate here, as Montesquieu suggested? For he had put on record nations which had perished as well as those surviving long enough to perpetuate a tradition of themselves in civilisation. Most nations have changed in character and temper, even at the time of their supremacy, and, besides, their circumstances often changed regardless of the concerns of the people. True and effectual laws must be responsive at all times to the exigencies of the moment, otherwise they miss their object, which is the real good of the particular people at that time and place. The finding of these appropriate laws is, of course, the practical business of the statesman. Yet the philosopher has some part to play: he can study the various instances and derive the general principles of statesmanship and make them known to those in a position to put them into practice, if they happen to be men enough to love their country more than their own powers or the glory of the princes they serve. This political science Rousseau now makes so bold to offer such statesmen.

Every established people has its own customs and deeply-rooted prejudices which no law-giver can change without the greatest danger. In rare cases, to be sure, there will be violent revolutions when they break with their own past and accept a totally new constitution. This was precisely what happened in the days of the radical reforms of Lycurgus and Numa, and in modern Switzerland and Holland.<sup>1</sup> But for the most part the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the study of *Sparta and Rome*, Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 316-20.

nations of the earth seem to drag along in a wearied-out existence, too lifeless to shake off their bondage to established rules and too stupefied to do anything more than bewail their unhappy lot, never suspecting how much better things might be made for them. Thus 'they live together without any veritable union, like people gathered together on the same land yet separated from each other by precipices'. They cannot find out what they need. They dream away at life, taking what comes. No man among them can take the initiative and call forth the spirit and will of all—the people have no way of discovering either their man or their own good. They are, then, in no shape to have a republic started amongst them. Such are destined to have 'only a master, never a liberator'.<sup>1</sup>

Even when nations are not thus far on the way to ruin, they suffer from accidental weaknesses with which the wise statesman will reckon carefully. The very size of a State may constitute one such disability. It should 'not be too great to be well-governed, nor too small to be able to maintain itself by its own strength'. In determining the mean proportion, the circumstances have to be considered, the kind of polity and the strength of neighbouring states, the nature of the terrain, the possibility of communication within the national boundaries with especial regard not only to the mobilisation of forces but also to the internal administration as a whole. With respect to the matter of government, moreover, the character of the people themselves is very important. A country ought not to be so large that the ability to govern it is not likely to be often found in 'the common run' of the members. For if it is so extensive that it requires a steady succession of extraordinary geniuses, it is surely doomed, sooner or later, to go to pieces. That is why a State under the direction of a Senate is better off than one with an hereditary monarchy, since a body of men is likely to supply a more equal capacity at all times. But Rousseau preferred something even better: 'a fundamental rule for every society well-constituted and lawfully governed would be this: that all the members could be easily assembled every time it were necessary. . . . It follows from this that the State ought to be limited to one single city at the most.'<sup>2</sup> This implies a disparagement of the French monarchy. The size of a State, however, ought not to be reckoned superficially, in extent of territory. For the really important thing is the relation of the territory to the number of people and their economic subsistence. The nation should be, as far as possible, economically independent. They ought not

<sup>1</sup> C.S., Vaughan, p. 484.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 484-7; cf. Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 7, chs. 4-5, 1326b, 1327a.

to be burdened by land which they must protect but from which they cannot derive anything for supporting the additional population necessary to that end. The statesman must strike the proper mean, and have full knowledge of the geography, the economics, and the internal tendencies of the people themselves.<sup>1</sup>

'Let us recapitulate the considerations which a legislator ought to weigh before undertaking the creating of institutions for a people. . . . First, he ought not to attempt to change those of a people already under civil governance, much less re-establish those already abolished or try to rehabilitate worn out agencies.' A large nation cannot be brought under control; a small one has not enough substance; and states in between often share both defects without any special virtues of their own. The very neighborhood of a State is of moment. The small city States of Greece survived because each one existed in the environment of all the others. Whenever they acted for a common interest they were a great power in their union. But where a small State is in the sad position of being between large nations, it can hardly escape implication in their hostilities with each other and is often in danger of complete extinction after the decisive victory of one of them. These and many other matters are a challenge to the legislator. And the true statesman is he who knows how to bide his time: 'There is never a man, or even a people, who will not sometime or other have a happy moment when his life is amenable to reason, and then is the time to propose new legislation.'<sup>2</sup>

The ideal conditions for establishing the republican form are as follows. The people must be 'one which has never yet borne the yoke of laws: people who have neither customs nor ingrained superstitions, and who find themselves already bound to each other by some union of origin or interest; a people not fearing to be wiped out by sudden invasion, or who without entering into the quarrels of their neighbors, are able to resist each one of them severally, or to avail themselves of the aid of one to repulse attacks from the other; a people all of whose members can be known to each other, and where no man is burdened with a task greater than man can bear; a people which is able to do without others and on which others, in turn, need not depend—neither rich nor poor but self-sufficient; in a word, a people uniting the solidarity of an ancient race with the ability of a new people to learn something.' An impossible set of conditions, it must be admitted, of 'finding the simplicity of nature

<sup>1</sup> C.S., Vaughan, pp. 487-8; cf. Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 6, ch. 5, 1320a.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 489-90.

conjoined with the necessities of society'! It is not surprising that there are 'few well-constituted States'.

This chapter is a lesson to those in authority, teaching them the true maxims of political science, very much like that of the article on *Political Economy*. And there follows a chapter 'On the Nature of the Laws and The Principle of Civil Justice' which sums up the meaning of law as such and defines justice or right in the political sense, therein retracing something of the discussion with Diderot about natural right, when they worked together for the *Encyclopedie*. And the chapter contains many things deriving from that argument.

What is good and right in the order of things is so by nature and not by any human convention. All justice, in truth, comes from God. But men do not have the art of receiving their justice from so high an authority. And even if they were able to find it by their own reason and loved it because it is good, still the justice they would practice would be utterly futile unless it were reciprocal amongst them all—otherwise the virtuous would find themselves in the unsecured position of the independent man. There is no 'natural sanction' for their righteousness. Hence the laws that are to be effectual, and unite rights with duties on the part of all, must be laws of human making sanctioned by the body of those to whom they apply. The significant law and justice is not natural but civil or political.

This is taking issue with the philosophers, indeed, even with the esteemed Montesquieu himself. They were laboring under a metaphysical conception of law and justice. They defined 'the law of the State' vaguely by analogy with the 'law of nature' and really ignored the essential character of the former, a charge quite true, for example, in the case of Montesquieu, who opened with a definition that 'laws are the necessary relations which are derived from the nature of things'.<sup>1</sup> This was like the thought of the metaphysician Leibniz, who derived civil justice and obligation from 'the mere perception of a relation', and Barbeyrac had observed that this simply missed the point concerning obligation which cannot exist as an intellectual love of order.<sup>2</sup> Indeed even Diderot was guilty of this fallacy, for he tended to think that merely 'envisaging the system of sensible beings' is to be 'strongly desirous of the happiness of all, and participating in it'.<sup>3</sup> Such sentiment arising from the idea of the general system of humanity is not sufficient, as

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu, *Esprit des Loix*, bk. 1, ch. 1, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> Barbeyrac's *Examen du jugement d'un Anonyme* (Leibniz) appended to Pufendorf's *Devoirs*, &c., pp. 445 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Diderot published his *Fils Naturel* in 1757, expressing such thoughts. *Œuvres*, vol. vii, p. 69.



Hobbes proved, to establish law in the lives of individuals. The truer conception, indeed, was furnished by Montesquieu himself—he ought to have revised his initial definition of law in the light of his own work—and by the doctrines of St. Pierre and the *Encyclopedia*, that all laws of human society must have a reference to the needs, wants, and will of all the people for whom they are valid. Law ought to be defined in terms of that relationship to the will of the community for its own good. It has already been said that law is 'a public and solemn act of the general will', but a further point must be made that 'the matter being ruled upon necessarily relates to the common good'. The defining character of an act of law—marking it off, for instance, from a decree of the people which can be as far from law as any monarch's dictate—is 'this double generality' of the persons in concern and the objects of their will.<sup>1</sup> Consequently 'the moment a people consider a particular object, be that object even one of their own members, there is formed between the whole body and its part a relationship which makes of them two separate entities, one the part, the other the whole body *minus* that part. But the whole less any part is no longer the whole; and as long as that relationship obtains there is no real whole, but two unequal parts. On the other hand, when all the people are laying down something that pertains to all the people, they are not considering anything other than themselves, and if any relationship is formed then, it is one between the entire object in one aspect and the entire object under another. Then the object with regard to which they are ruling is general like the will itself that is making the rule, and it is such an act I call a law'. And in further explanation, 'when I say that the object of the laws is always general, I mean that the law considers the subjects all as one body and the actions as kinds or species of conduct; but never any man in particular nor any action that is unique and individual'. Hence it is not an act of law to specify any personal rulers, a king or an hereditary succession, or any particular persons whatsoever, for all that lies outside the competence of the law-giving power.

Rousseau turned straightway to such fatal implications for the older views: 'We no longer need to ask who is entitled to make the laws, for they are verily the acts of the general will

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 2, ch. 8, 1269a; bk. 3, ch. 11, 1282b; ch. 15, 1286a; bk. 4, ch. 4, 1292a—'law must be general, and a people's decrees cannot be general in their extent'. Plato, *Statesman*, 295a; Bodin, bk. 1, ch. 10, p. 216, 'la loi est le commandement du souverain touchant tous les sujets en général ou choses générales'. Grotius, bk. 2, ch. 4, sect. 12: 'it is not supposed that legislators are willing to include themselves unless where both the matter and the reason of the law are universal. . . .'

alone; nor whether the Prince is above the laws, since he is only a member of the State; nor if the law can be unjust, inasmuch as no one can be unjust toward himself; nor how one can be free and at the same time subject to the laws, for they are only the registers of our own wills. One sees further, that Law uniting the universality of the will and the object, whatever any man, whoever he might be, orders on his own initiative is not a law at all; whatever even the sovereign ordains with respect to a particular object is no more a law either but a decree; nor is it an act of the sovereignty but only of the magistracy.' . . . But these points are for later discussion.

The results of the new idea of law, however, are not merely negative of false notions. Their greatest value is in 'showing us clearly the true foundations of justice and natural right. In fact the first law, the only veritable fundamental law that flows immediately from the social pact is that each one prefers in every matter the greatest good of all'. But what those actions are which concur to produce the greatest good remains to be determined by the people who are concerned, and they do this in particular laws which constitute the body of positive law in the strict sense of the term. However, many actions contribute to the common good without needing to be specified in laws, such as deeds of civility and well-doing, and 'the habit that disposes us to practice these actions even to our own cost, is what one calls force or virtue'. Thus manners, morals, and laws arise all together from the basic law involved in any association of men in a true political community.

There is a further development of note. Protected as we are by the particular society of which we are members or in which we reside (Rousseau recalled that he was a citizen of Geneva living in France) we no longer have the obsessing dread of harm from every other corner, or of some attainder to our liberty, and we are released from the long inhibitions which that fear of others has laid upon our 'natural repugnance' to do harm to any one, and we can be our natural, humane selves willing to live and let live.<sup>1</sup> Hence the security of civil society spells the release of common humanity, and so we are led 'by nature, by habit, and by reason to deal with other men pretty much the same as with our fellow citizens. And this disposition rendered in acts gives rise to the rules of reasoned natural right, different from natural right in the proper sense which is founded only on a sentiment, one that is true enough but very vague and often

<sup>1</sup> This contradicted Montesquieu who had said that when once in society men lose their sense of weakness and are emboldened to make war on each other. *Esprit des Lois* ('Des lois positives'), bk. 1, ch. 3, p. 192.

stified by the love of ourselves'. This reasoning takes one back to the *Discourse on Inequality* and the arguing with Diderot about natural right: in the natural course of things the love of self stifles the small voice of justice and no such thing as a general society obtains among men—if any society is to exist there must be a pact involving the will of all and laws for the good of all, and then justice has a real meaning and efficacy in the lives of men. There is no general society prior to the particular, political societies of men, and it is only from their life in the State under its law and protection that men ever conceive of the more general order and so come to extend to others generally the same treatment as they have come to realise necessary in their own society. The thought follows Hobbes and contradicts Montesquieu—the law of the State gives men their first 'distinct notions of just and unjust'.<sup>1</sup> The experience of life secure in the State produces a disposition to act fairly which is of more account than the sentiment of 'the tender soul' of Diderot's fiction who is naturally moved to identify himself with the happiness of others. The philosopher had overlooked the transaction whereby any society comes into existence and he put the general ideas about mankind and natural right first where they ought to be last in the order of development.

Rousseau owed this appreciation to the writings of Abbé de St. Pierre which he had close beside him since the return from Geneva. It was St. Pierre who pointed out the vagueness of the current ideas of Natural Right, the Law of Nations, and Civil Justice, and who further proceeded to derive them from a principle more ultimate, 'the greatest public utility' of all the parties concerned.<sup>2</sup> This principle had been taken up by Melon, Gravina, and Montesquieu, and was being adopted by the writers of the *Encyclopedia*. Rousseau himself introduced it previously in this essay when he sought to dispatch the false pretence of a contract, that the people 'consent', tacitly at least, to being ruled by their superiors, as if their will could be thus presumed without regard to the 'common utility'. And the present argument went on to follow suggestions of St. Pierre. For he had actually proposed to derive the fundamental Christian maxim itself from this social principle of utility. 'Do not to another what you would not have him do unto you if

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu in his *Défense de l'Esprit des Lois* declared he intended to demonstrate against Hobbes and Spinoza 'that the relations of justice and equity were anterior to all positive laws', op. cit., p. 528.

<sup>2</sup> *Ouvrages*, vol. ii ('De l'utilité publique'), p. 109; vol. iii ('Projet pour perfectionner le gouvernement'), p. 200; vol. iii ('Les Droits des autres'), p. 109; vol. vii, p. 323; cf. Diderot, *Œuvres*, vol. i, pp. 466–8; vol. ii, pp. 98, 396 ff., and notes. See *Appendix*, St. Pierre.

you were in his place, and he were in yours,' &c. This maxim could be expressed as well in terms of a convention among men: 'For our mutual happiness we are agreed not to cause one another any evil, or injury, or any damage without making good for it.' Or it might be expressed as a maxim of social prudence: 'It is of interest to every man that others shall not take action against him unless they would be willing to have him do the same with regard to them'.<sup>1</sup> Thus St. Pierre hinted at an explanation of 'the origin of the duties and rights of people to each other', and the hint was valuable to one who wanted to trace another and very different genealogy of morals from that he had given in his *Discourse*—it is from the experience of life in a society formed by social pact and maintained in the same spirit of common will and interest that all the supposedly fundamental maxims of morality are to be derived. 'It is a beautiful and sublime precept to do to others as you would have them do to you.' Yet this is not a self-authenticating rule. If applied merely by itself without any other reference it could admit of all sorts of sophistries, even justifying known evils. Nor is the age-old maxim of the Greeks any the better, 'to every one his due'. The decision as to what is a man's own is always open to misguided interpretation. What is to prevent one adopting the maxim of Hobbes that 'all is for me'? Nothing but this, that oneself and one's dues and rights only have definite meaning in a society in which others are joined with us and pursue their interests as we pursue ours, so that it is only by reference to the interests of all that anything is a right or a duty. 'It is, then, in the fundamental and universal law of the greatest good of all, and not in the private relations of man to man that we must seek the true principles of justice and injustice; and there is not a single, particular rule of justice which one cannot easily deduce from that first law.' The point of the Greek principle 'to each his own' is that respect for property and civil liberty is essential to the community. And likewise the Christian maxim of treating every man as a brother is of value because such an attitude tends to make every man identify himself with every other member of the society and thus to bind all of them together (as Plato had described) in ties of affection as well as mutual interest. So the ultimate rule of justice is 'the greatest public utility'.

That chapter on the 'Nature of Laws and the Principles of Civil Justice' contained early thoughts which had not attained their majority. It projects us back to the first tentative of the new

<sup>1</sup> St. Pierre, *op. cit.*, vol. ii ('Origine des devoirs et des droits des uns à l'égard des autres'), p. 107. See Appendix.

theory of political society, to the train of thought after the *Discourse* and at the time of the articles by Diderot and himself for the *Encyclopaedia*. Now he was going with Plato, Aristotle, Bodin, Grotius, and Pufendorff on the subject of Law, again with Hobbes opposing the Platonists and Montesquieu on account of their abstract idea of justice, and with St. Pierre's utilitarian notions which made justice an acquired idea like others whose origin the empiricists were tracing. Rousseau was here exploring still, and not yet master of his own thought. It is significant that the final version of the essay omits entirely this latter material on Justice and Natural Right, along with that earlier chapter on 'General Society', saving for publication only what was said about the meaning of law. In his enthusiasm for the social contract and all the benefits it confers upon men he hazarded too much, daring to contradict Montesquieu and to trace all human morality to the political institution.<sup>1</sup> He thought differently later, and remained more faithful to his vision of the form of the republic.

He was wise enough to follow Montesquieu and the Greeks in his chapter on 'Division of the Laws'. For the right order of the whole there must be laws governing all the diverse relationships possible within it, as Aristotle had said.<sup>2</sup> The first relation is that of 'the entire body acting on itself', the whole as sovereign acting on the State consisting of many members. That action takes place through certain intermediary forces which have not been considered as yet in the essay, the agency of government. The laws determining that relationship involving the government are the distinctively 'political laws', often called 'fundamental laws', and rightly so when they are wise, although it must be remembered even so that 'the people have always the power to change their laws, even the best'. A second relationship obtains either amongst the citizens themselves or between the citizens and the State, and concerning this relationship the object of the regulation ought to be such that every one is put 'in a perfect independence of all the others' and at the same time 'in an excessive dependence on the City', the very language betraying the Greek source of this idea of 'civil laws'.<sup>3</sup> A third sort of relation may be noted holding between the citizen and the law proper, when disobedience necessitates punishment,

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu, *Defense*, 'L'auteur a eu en vue d'attaquer le système de Hobbes: système terrible, qui, faisant dépendre toutes les vertus et tous les vices de l'établissement des lois que les hommes se sont faites. . .', p. 530. Thinking of his Republic, not of Hobbes's State, Rousseau saw no objection to the idea.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle on 'the ordering of the whole', *Pol.*, bk. 3, ch. 1, 1274b; ch. 6, 1278b.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, for 'political law', ch. 6, 1278b; Montesquieu defining both political and civil law, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 1, ch. 3 ('Des lois positives'), p. 192.

and the rules of this relationship are 'criminal laws', although they are less a particular kind of law than the sanction of all laws whatsoever. But above all in importance are laws mostly forgotten by modern politicians, though the ancients appreciated them well, laws written solely in the hearts of the citizens, which are the true strength of the State, for while other laws weaken and disappear these grow stronger with time and have a constant force tending to preserve the spirit of a nation's institutions. They 'substitute insensibly the force of habit for that of authority. I speak of morals and of customs. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

It was in further agreement with Montesquieu that the next chapter was entitled 'The Diverse Systems of Legislation', recognising the various relations between the people and their circumstances which determine the complexion of their systems of law. Nevertheless every system must have two principal objects in view, 'liberty and equality'; liberty, because all personal dependence is just so much force taken away from the body of the State, and equality, because without it liberty cannot subsist. And to guard against such misapprehensions as those Damilaville had expressed, Rousseau avowed that he did not mean a literal distribution of power or wealth but that all power must be above violence, and never exercised except in virtue of true rank and the laws; and differences of wealth must never be such that one can ever buy another, and the other be so poor as to be forced to sell himself.<sup>2</sup> It is the art of the legislator so to devise his system with reference to the situation of a people that no such inequality and servitude creeps into their system of life. Many nations have risen and fallen; they have aimed at other ends than these, or sometimes at the one but not the other, and in the case of all, 'invincible Nature has resumed her empire'.

That closed an argument. A new book of this essay began, *On Political Laws or The Institution of the Government*. Here it was a question first of determining the right idea of government for a society having the form of a republic. 'What the Government of a State is.' 'I warn the readers that this chapter demands some attention and that I do not know the art of being clear to one who will not be attentive.' It seems, however, that Rousseau himself was not satisfied afterwards with whatever it was he wrote in the chapter, and, indeed, in the whole remaining portion of the book, because the page of the manuscript is torn across just after the opening of the discussion and the rest of

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *op. cit.*, bk. 2, ch. 8, 1269a, 'for a law derives all its strength from custom, and this requires a long time to establish'. Montesquieu, *op. cit.*, p. 192; bk. 4; bk. 6, chs. 1-2; bk. 7, ch. 9; bk. 8, ch. 8; bk. 19, ch. 4, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Damilaville (1755), *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 240, cited above, p. 135.

the early version is gone.<sup>1</sup> The argument began with the analogy employed in the article on Political Economy: every free action has two causes that concur in its production, the one a moral cause, that is, the will which determines the act, the other a physical one, the power which carries it into execution—and so the body-politic has two distinct moving factors, one the legislative power, the other the executive. This followed a distinction Bodin had made between two powers of the public, the sovereignty, which he said is above law, and the government of the magistrates which is under the law.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the sovereign in this theory is the whole body of the people, and therefore the legislative power belongs to them and to them alone. 'It is easy to see, likewise, that the executive power cannot belong to the people. . . .' and precisely there the record stops. 'It is easy to see' may have seemed unwarranted to the author at the later time, when he reviewed his first presentation of this matter.

What is meant can be deduced from the preceding argument. The people act as sovereign only in giving law; but law is always general, whereas actions are particular in their reference; consequently the people cannot rightfully carry out their own will. They must have a quite distinct body doing this for them, the government, or to use Bodin's term, taken from Aristotle, 'the administration'.<sup>3</sup> This body, as mentioned in speaking of the political laws, is intermediary between the whole people as sovereign acting on the whole people as individual members of the sovereignty. So far, indeed, the position may be said to have been clear at the time of writing this version. Rousseau was committed by his entire argument to a sharp distinction between the sovereignty and the government, and he never wanted to let the reader forget it or make any concessions that would permit them to do so. From the very start of his thinking on politics he had turned his back on the idea that the sovereignty of the people can possibly be identified with the person of a king or council or any body whatsoever exercising governance, and he made the sovereignty inalienable so as to create an abyss between sovereign power expressing itself in law that obliges

<sup>1</sup> There is, indeed, a record in this same Geneva manuscript of a chapter on 'The Civil Religion', which became the last chapter of the *Essay* in its final version, but it is written on the back of the pages that have to do with the 'Legislator' and is not continuous with anything of the present argument. It seems likely that *after* Rousseau had already detached the part of the manuscript he was not keeping he simply used the reverse of the remaining pages for jotting down his first sketch of the chapter on religion. The full justification of this is in chapter 19, below.

<sup>2</sup> Bodin, bk. 3, ch. 5, p. 431 ('De la Puissance des Magistrats sur les particuliers').

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 2, ch. 2, p. 273; ch. 6, p. 330; Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 3, ch. 6, 1278b; ch. 7, 1279a.

all equally and the power of government which is always the application of general law to particular cases and individuals. But then he faced that abyss from another side. If there is any executive power in a society how can its exercise be made to conform to the general will? Even if the government be recognised as only a body of administrators, a view which Hobbes thoroughly detested as a slight upon the sovereign, how can one secure the supremacy of the general will in that quarter? How keep out the rule of passion and selfish interest even in those who are not set up as sovereigns but merely officers of the people, as Aristotle had represented the tenets of democracy? The independent man would naturally ask what guarantee he has against the failings and aggression of men empowered with all the forces of the State. Various means had been tried of 'controlling the controllers'—as Hobbes mockingly put it—such as dividing their powers or restricting them in some way or other, and it was intended to discuss these devices.<sup>1</sup> But the fundamental questions remained. How can the people authorise anybody amongst themselves to govern them? What is the nature of that governance? How is it kept in rapport with the general will so that the body-politic acts truly as a perfect sovereign with the will and the forces used and the members in unison? How, too, is there any possibility of lawful executive action unless there be a continual assertion of law by the whole body? It was to solve all these questions the remainder of the essay was conceived. The only way out for the author was to hold fast to his vision that the people taken all together are able to take the necessary measures for their own salvation, that they can not only oblige themselves and make their own laws, through the agency of legislators from amongst them, but also govern themselves by using officers chosen by themselves and responsible to them. But having separated the sovereign and the government so completely, how was the *institution* of the government and the *control* of its action by the people to be represented? Following the logic of his distinctions and yet following a theme of the competence of men taken as a body to do all that is needful for themselves without sacrifice of their liberty or equality, Rousseau was in a predicament, and his first attempts to solve it in this manuscript were not preserved.

In general this version of the essay represented the first clear disengagement of the thought of Rousseau from the views of his masters and his friends working for the *Encyclopedie*. His

<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, speaking against 'the erroneous doctrine' which had caused bloodshed, 'that kings are not superiors to, but administrators for the multitude'. *Philosophical Rudiments* ('Preface to Reader'), xi, *Works*, vol. 2.



argument was a running encounter with the notions of the older thinkers like Bodin, Grotius, Pufendorf, Barbeyrac, Locke, and it exhibited a highly critical tone to the contemporary figures, Montesquieu and Diderot. One after another of the stock notions was assailed and put aside as demonstrably false. Foremost, of course, the notion of a personal sovereign in whom all the power of the State is vested for good and all. But along with it into limbo went the notion of fundamental laws made by no one on earth and graciously serving to limit the power of those pretended sovereigns. Laws are, indeed, a real force, and men have their rights, but they rest upon the present consent of the society and have no validity above that of the general will. No restrictions upon that true sovereign are allowable. And, therefore, though property is private in one sense, all is subordinate to the right of the body-politic, and one must no longer think of the State as having a special public domain set alongside of the private properties of the many families among whom the sovereign enjoys the rights of being overlord, for all come under the supreme authority of the whole, and there are no such natural or feudal rights outstanding and limiting the sovereignty. It is futile, therefore, to try to distribute rights like physical possessions between the sovereign and the citizens, since the two bearers of right are identical. The intention of those who favored that doctrine was, of course, to impose some limitation upon the action of those who were allowed all the power of the community, but the purpose is realised another way, by defining the inherent nature of sovereign action when it is just and equal and competent, which is that it must always express itself in general terms or laws. The sovereign of this social contract is very different in guise from that of the compact of Hobbes or the tacit consent of Grotius—the sovereign is never identified with any particular person and everything connected with it is general in character, ultimately expressing what all the people deem is important to their life in a community. The contract is no longer an example of national suicide as unholy as self-slaughter in an individual, nor an example of men voluntarily enslaving themselves. It is a pact which binds them together whilst enabling them to enjoy liberty. It is an institution established for the sake of a liberty and equality during all their association with each other. Hence the law-making is but a continuing of the pact and the spirit of the institution. Here great deeds are called for and men pre-eminent must be expected to serve as the legislators of the people, to discover the law which they in turn will accept from them, because of their own justice and wisdom. If men want some symbol to adore, then, let them

take the Legislator of old rather than the splendid militant prince of modern adulation—on no account is that kind of 'sovereign' authority to be recognised in a true republic. It may be a difficult question to find the right way of conceiving the use of the power of the public by the government, but the forthcoming solution is not to be on the lines of the tradition of modern sovereignty.

In this work Rousseau achieved 'the idea of the civil State'. He had reached that of 'the state of nature' in his *Discourse*. He had seen clearly the criterion of right that is involved in any state of society, in the article on 'Political Economy'. There remained the question of showing how that idea of the general will actually has force in the lives of men as they are, how the obligation to obey its laws and even the capacity to know them arise from the assembling of men in a veritably social pact. These questions were solved in this *Essay on the Form of the Republic*. And the significance of the action, whereby all these good things come, so impressed the moralist that he tended to treat all the other questions involved in his study of *Political Institutions* in terms of this one solution proposed in *The Social Contract*.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE 'MAGNIFICENT PROJECTS' OF 1756

A GREAT programme was now under way and taking definite form. The problems posed in the *Discourse on Inequality* were seen to admit of solution. There Rousseau had told of the evils of man and how they come from his own deeds and the spirit behind them; yet he stood firm in the conviction that man is not naturally evil. He had portrayed man in society with a dominant interest in self which stifles the natural feelings and tendencies; yet he believed all the while that these are good. The practical remedy must be taken in the sphere of human affairs where these good possibilities are seen to be thwarted, in political society and its forms and practices. Hence the great work of Rousseau's life was conceived to be his book on *Political Institutions*.

It was to treat of every institution necessary to a reconstructed order of society. And its ruling idea was that men taken together in true community have the power to undo all the evils caused by their lack of right will and judgment or any other defects of their imperfectly social life. So far this theme had been successfully illustrated in the essay on *The Form of the Republic*. If men are conceived to come together and set up a régime of the general will, they have established a Republic where each one is obliged by the law of the whole and enjoys a perfect liberty and equality under a reign of justice. If they assemble on other occasions, and again and again, to make the laws their own wise men perceive to be necessary, they are continuing to live in agreement and freedom, establishing equal and just laws for all. The institution of the State and the legislative sovereignty are thus described as they ought to be. But another institution called for explanation in the same terms, the Government proper. Could not this also be conceived as the act of the whole people, who assemble this time to set up the offices of State and fill them with the men of their choice and then watch over the performance of these administrators and hold them accountable for their deeds? This had been the practice of ancient democracies, as reported by Aristotle, and more recently by the admired Montesquieu.<sup>1</sup> And Fénelon had recommended the institution of a 'general assembly', meeting once every three years in order to hold the executive body of

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu, *Considerations*, ch. 8, p. 146; *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 11, ch. 15, p. 268, referring to the Romans and the English.

government to its duties under the law.<sup>1</sup> The thing was possible once, why not now?

The *Political Institutions* had the great scope, however, of books such as Plato's *Republic* or *Laws*. And there divinity was not excluded from consideration. Providence has some share in the redemption of the race from its own affliction. And the modern Christian writers like Bossuet and Warburton had much to say not only about divine origins but also about the force of religion in holding men to their bonds and their duties to each other and their superiors. Rousseau in his chapter, 'The Legislator', set it down that religion 'tends to impart to the moral bond between men an internal force which penetrates to the very soul itself and would always be independent of goods, of ills, and all human eventualities'. However, he was still somewhat inclined to agree with Bayle that morality is a sufficient power in its own right, for his enthusiasm of the moment was about man's own powers of salvation, that men in association can do all needful for their good. Besides, religion meant more human institutions, and there was before him the vehement and stirring appeal of Hobbes that the Church must not be allowed a claim to equality with the State but must be made subordinate, for otherwise the body-politic loses its unity, and terrible evils result from the internal conflict and the break-down of sovereignty. Like Plato, too, Rousseau desired the republic to be as much one body as possible. However, all those diverse opinions rendered necessary some reckoning with the question of religion in this civil state. Montesquieu had dealt wisely with it in his study of institutions, and he had taught the virtue of tolerance, which is, after all, another aspect of liberty. All this was destined to send Rousseau into the question. How would he solve it? Could the idea of men coming together and establishing what is meet and right for themselves in all things be extended to this

<sup>1</sup> Fénelon, *Télémaque* (bk. 9, near end): 'Songez donc à vous rassembler de temps en temps. . . Faites de trois ans en trois ans une assemblée générale. . . pour renouveler l'alliance par un nouveau serment, pour raffermir l'amitié promise, et pour délibérer sur tous les intérêts communs. Tandis que vous serez unis, vous aurez au dedans de ce beau pays la paix, la gloire et l'abondance: au dehors vous serez toujours invincibles.' The various instances of the assembling of the people as conceived by Rousseau for the *Political Institutions* may be gleaned from later expressions. The résumé in *Émile*, for example, states: 'Here, then, you see the third relationship under which the assembled people can be considered, that is, as magistrate or executor of the law that they have made as sovereign.' The first relationship is that of the original pact; the second, that of establishing the laws; the third, that of acting as the government, by means of agents or administrators (H. 2, p. 434). In *Polysynodie*, ch. 8, it is said: 'In effect, just as the first laws of a nation were made by the nation assembled as a body, so the first decisions of the Prince were taken with the chief men of the nation assembled in a council.' (Vaughan, vol. i, p. 406.) See also the role of 'general assemblies' in *Contrat Social* (bk. 4), and *Lettres de la Montagne*. See below, chapters xix and xxii.

spiritual sphere—could men all assembled establish in some way or other a civil religion as well as a pact for society and laws and government?<sup>1</sup>

In any case it would be essential to the political system to set up a civic education such as the Greeks provided in all their schemes. This would be an institution quite foreign to the modern order, where education was still in the hands of the Church. Did the Church teach men to be free or slaves? Does it not certainly belong to the City to rear citizens for itself? Here lurked another difficult argument, in practice if not in theory.

It is not sufficient to consider the State from within. Its external relations are important. Montesquieu had a chapter on defensive institutions, harking back again to Plato who had depicted the necessity of Greeks coming together into a larger accord as a nation rather than living isolated from each other in their cities, and above all regulating their warfare so as to be eventually all-reconciled, and one body, in institution as well as in language and religion. That vision of Plato had caught the fancy of Fénelon before that of Montesquieu. Indeed it was never far from the mind of the more profound Catholic writers like Bossuet, who thought primarily of a 'general society of mankind' of which the particular political societies were but 'divisions'—the return of man to his true estate was conceived as a rising above local allegiances to a single great allegiance under God. Rousseau had repudiated the doctrine of a primordial natural society, but he held fast to the ideal of an international order of society and peace. And in this he felt strongly abetted by the visionary St. Pierre who had worked out a definite plan for lasting peace in modern Europe through a confederation and pact of all the States. The Form of the Republic ought certainly to be extended to the society of nations, so as to establish not simply one republic here or there but an 'European Republic'.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the masterpiece on *Political Institutions* was to have placed on its canvas all the fundamentals of civilisation—pacts, laws, government, religion, education, and federation. These were the subjects Rousseau was on his way to presenting, in essays animated by the ideal of the moral possibilities of men when they dwell in a community under a righteous rule.

But there was more planned. The writings of St. Pierre had proved most rewarding as well as congenial. This priest, who

<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu, on religion, bks. 24–6, referring to Bayle's views, bk. 24, ch. 6, p. 408. Cf. Rousseau's later description of the establishment of a religion by the people assembled, *Lettres de la Montagne*, pt. 1, Lettre 1, H., vol. iii, pp. 125–8.

<sup>2</sup> See Vaughan, vol. 1, p. 376; cf. Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 9, on a 'federative republic', ch. 1, p. 253.

spoke of those in his own calling merely as 'moral officers', was very full of republican ideals. He hated war and domination and he kindled a similar spirit in many who read him and joined in his denunciation of the spirit of conquest, Melon the economist, Montesquieu, and many another before Rousseau. The fatal importance of war in the existing order was singled out for attention. If it could be prevented by a compact among the States of Europe, then the titular sovereigns would have no reason for oppressing their subjects, and, without powerful armies, they would have little means of doing so. To abolish warfare is to take away one of the chief dangers in entrusting the forces of the State to the particular individuals who are the government. They, too, must become, then, merely officers of the body-politic instead of its masters or tyrants. But St. Pierre did not content himself with that indirect control of the executive power of government. He had other projects pertaining to the constitution of the governing body itself, even in a monarchy. He followed the suggestion of Aristotle: 'But as it is impossible that one person should have an eye to everything himself, it will be necessary that the supreme magistrate should employ several subordinates under him; why, then, should not this be done at first, instead of appointing one person?'<sup>1</sup> Rousseau repeated this in his satire, *The Queen Fantastic* (March 1756), telling of a king who was fool enough to try 'to do by himself all the things he possibly could take over from his ministers'.<sup>2</sup> And St. Pierre, leaving the monarch to be what he liked, proposed that the real government should consist of a body of civil servants distributed into councils each of which has its own work in public affairs and all under the direction of a general council. By this arrangement it was hoped not only to take power away from the monarch but also to prevent any small clique from controlling the government for their own selfish purposes, because the multitude of councils would operate as a restraint upon domination from any source whatsoever. Besides these projects, St. Pierre was full of others on the education of citizens and the training of a true civil service, projects animated by Greek ideas and against tyranny and injustice. It was from these writings Rousseau had already drawn a most valuable idea that a pact of equals is sufficient for the control of every member, without need of any 'superior' or sovereign in the ordinary sense—the whole body sufficing to direct and restrain all its members. It is a question whether he would have hit upon his solution of 'the social contract' if he had not seen

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 3, ch. 16, 1287b, tr. W. Ellis (Everyman).

<sup>2</sup> *La Reine fantasque*, H., 12, p. 262.

the idea first applied, in the project of St. Pierre, to the case of a society of sovereign States, although it must also be admitted that Pufendorff taught him something on that score, for he had written an illuminating treatise *On the State of the German Empire* where he exhibited a political system lacking the ordinary attributes of sovereignty or 'majesty' but yet, as a federation, managing to survive, and not only that, but to preserve the liberty and integrity of every one of its constituent parts.<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff showed him that such a federative association was an historical reality, and the idea was not at all visionary. This may have given Rousseau greater respect for St. Pierre and a willingness to look further to him for aid, especially in regard to the question of the nature of government which was puzzling him exceedingly. As the *Confessions* say, in reference to his study of 'the great and fine thoughts' of St. Pierre, he found thinking for himself on this matter too hard and fatiguing, and preferred 'to clear up and advance the ideas of another rather than to create'.<sup>2</sup> Consequently one of his own projects at this time was to develop the possibilities of these ideas of St. Pierre.

But the moralist had even more to his programme, things of his own inspiration. He had been experimenting with a thought on education in the chapter of his essay dealing with 'The Nature of the Laws and the Principle of Civil Justice'. It was there written that when men associate under the protection of the civil law their mutual relief from the incessant fear of their fellows is a liberation of natural sentiments which had been repressed by the manner of their life before. Now it had also been said in the *Discourse* that the precise trouble with man is a throttling of his natural compassion and affection—the new social order, then, offers a remedy for that evil, and a remedy entirely within man himself, the full expansion of his faculties. The manner of life under a system founded on mutual agreement instead of fear produces a habit of fair-play, civility, and well-doing, which can even be extended, as the view of man extends, to mankind generally, whence come the universal ideas of moral virtue. The idea of moral habit arising from life in civil society and then becoming the basis for definite ideals of morality was something like the thought of Aristotle, or more probably of the imaginative Plato who depicted in his *Symposium* the development of man passing from 'fair practices to fair notions, and from fair notions to fair forms' until there is eventually attained that perfect love of wisdom and righteousness which raises men

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff (under the pseudonym of Severinus Monzambano), *De statu imperii Germanici*, rendered into German by H. Breszlau, ch. 8, sect. 4, p. 114 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 291.

above all partialities and makes them equal to gods. The foundations of character are in the first sentiments and ways of life. And therefore, as it was written in the *Laws*, the place to begin correcting the spirit of domination and to release the soul for its flight to perfection is in childhood, and the process of so doing is education. This remedy attacks the situation before the evil really arises—it is preventive, and comes nearer the goal than the first solution by way of political controls. Rousseau was already thinking of a project on education. He had, indeed, a Plan of very long standing, drafted in connection with his tutorship to the sons of De Mably at Lyon. He had been asked to write out his ideas further by Mme de Chenonceau, for her use in rearing her family. He was meditating something for practical use in the home—a quite distinct matter from the civic education that is naturally part of a political system—and something of the purely domestic character of the thought may be gleaned from the satire, *The Queen Fantastic*, where the queen was represented as very weird because she 'nursed her own children, odious example of which all the women in the realm depicted very vividly the evil consequences'.<sup>1</sup> This was but the beginning of a longer story to be told more seriously, and without satire, a complete treatise on education.

There was one other project being meditated, relating likewise to the moral problem. The writers on education from the Greeks onward had stressed the importance of a sound and vigorous physique as a condition of a sound spirit in man. If the body is not in right relations with its surroundings, it dominates the soul, instead of being subject to its direction, and self-mastery becomes an illusion, and no freedom exists. Furthermore, Diderot and the Encyclopedists were dwelling very much upon the role of the physical in the affections and morals—and Rousseau did not like their emphasis, or their irreligious materialism. He proposed, therefore, to make the element of truth in materialism into a wise philosophy of life, to study exactly how the material factors enter into the making of a stable and forceful power of will in the individual and how 'an external régime' may be devised 'favorable to virtue' and how the 'animal economy' may be made to support 'the moral order it so often troubles', so that mankind may attain at last to that moral economy the need of which had been discerned at the time of the *Discourse*. Something, therefore, was to be written on *The Morality of the Sensitive Being, or the Materialism of a Sage*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H., vol. xii, p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> For this and the whole preceding account of the projects in 1756 see *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, pp. 288-93.



These were, indeed, 'projects magnificent' beyond words; but Rousseau was determined for all that to put them into words. The array of work before him made him more anxious than ever before to secure a greater freedom from distraction, and especially from the social obligations which he did not want to incur but could not avoid as long as he actually resided in Paris and among old friends. These writings would require all the time and energy he could possibly salvage after meeting the necessity of gaining his livelihood by copying music. And some of them were too dangerous to be doing at Paris where the visible usurpations of right and liberty by the Church and the Monarchy smote the spirit as a perpetual mockery of the invisible powers of law and morals. That made him satirical of the whole society, as in the *Queen Fantastic*, of the women, *savantes* and neglectful of their first duty to their children, and the men who played with them whilst their liberties were the sport of despots. It made him indignant and scornful and sarcastic, so that when he read what learned men had written teaching the meek that it was noble of them to practise their private moralities amongst themselves, leaving it to grand and noble rulers to do their part as they saw fit according to their conscience, he vented his spleen in words about 'paid sophists'. He could be neither meek nor respectable as the common man was supposed to be. And the wrath of the proud citizen of Geneva had already dictated all too many lines of his essay on politics. An episode revealed the danger, and also the sincerity, of his belief in liberty. Like Socrates of old he had been singled out for mockery on the stage by a playwright, Palissot. His colleague D'Alembert became anxious for his safety; and, having connections with the King of Poland, who had power in the matter, he exerted influence to have the unfortunate Palissot expelled from the Academy of Nancy. The intermediary in the affair, a Count de Tressan, informed Rousseau of the action that was about to be taken. He received a letter containing this observation: 'If all his crime amounts to is that of having exposed my absurdities, why that is only the privilege of the theatre, and I see nothing reprehensible for the good fellow in that—indeed, I regard it as a merit in him that he should have made so good a choice of a target. I beg you, Sir, not to listen to the zeal which friendship and generosity inspire in M. D'Alembert with regard to this matter.' And D'Alembert received a letter very promptly: 'I appreciate very much, my dear Sir, the interest you have in me, but I cannot approve the zeal which makes you hound out that poor M. Palissot. . . . Please desist from that at once, I beg you, and I shall be just as deeply obliged to you for

doing so, as if the affair were terminated as you intended it should, and I assure you that your getting the expulsion of Palissot for love of me would give me more pain than pleasure. . . . Why are we to render evil to that poor fellow for the real benefit he has done me? But I thank you with all my heart.'<sup>1</sup> And so Palissot was not crushed by the power of king and philosopher. He wrote a very grateful letter which for some reason never reached Rousseau; and it would have embarrassed him, telling him that he was in very truth the modern Socrates, a person of magnanimity whose virtues no one could question, whatever might be thought of the soundness of his ideas.<sup>2</sup> The Count was equally impressed with the absence of all little-mindedness and told him so. But Rousseau answered him simply, as one would who genuinely hated any persecution and intolerance. 'Indeed, however little esteem I have of my contemporaries, God forbid that we should demean them to this extent, to write it down as an act of virtue in me for taking a course of action that the simplest man of letters would not have failed to do if he were in my place.' Still the Count thought the deed somewhat extraordinary, and came back with a humorous observation: 'Let us hope that in the future M. Palissot will always be so lucky as to throw stones only at sages.'<sup>3</sup> For it was magnanimity, and not what the contemporary men of letters would always show.

Indeed, Rousseau himself could not have been unaware of this difference between them and himself. He detected an element of intolerance in their liberal sentiments. They were willing to employ force like those they attacked: he was oversensitive on the matter of domination, even in his own friends. He complained of this to Mme d'Épinay at whose country house he often went for relief from the city, to an atmosphere where he could think for himself—he complained of 'those importuning friends who, in order to make me live in their way, are going to make me die of vexation'.<sup>4</sup> He was coming to fear friendship at Paris as well as the hostility of those in authority. His own domestic life was the occasion of much trouble through the presence of Mme le Vasseur whom he took into his abode, although she had children who could have cared for her—to this woman some of those friends turned for information about his life, endeavoring to penetrate his own veil of reticence, and only succeeding in making him conscious that all was not well in

<sup>1</sup> *C.G.*, vol. ii, Nos. 256-7. As early as Apr. 16, 1753, D'Argenson noted the ill regard in which Rousseau was being held by political authorities. *Journal et Mémoires*, vol. vii, p. 457; cf. also Letter from Mme de Créqui, Sept. 8, 1755, *C.G.*, No. 248.

<sup>2</sup> *C.G.*, vol. ii, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 259-60.

<sup>4</sup> No. 227.

his own household. To add to these annoyances of the spirit there was his physical suffering and discomfort, especially in the winter.

The effect of all these drawbacks of life in the city was to produce a sense of constraint and thwarting of genius. He was full of his plans for various books. It so happened that Mme d'Épinay was much in his confidence, at least to the extent of knowing his views on education, for she was profiting by them. She had been writing moral letters for her son, and received good criticism of them, that she ought not to talk so much of submission, duty, and reason to a youth who could not yet be moved by such considerations and was far more likely to appreciate fables.<sup>1</sup> She valued those opinions and she interested herself in Rousseau's situation and wanted to see him where he could accomplish his ambitions. She counselled leaving Paris, 'because it is above your strength to stay there'.<sup>2</sup> And that thought had been in his mind for some time. It was, indeed, a necessity, if he were to accomplish the great work of his life.

A return to Geneva had often been bruited. But many things seemed to stand in the way. Mme le Vasseur could not be taken so far. He himself could not continue the work by means of which he secured his livelihood, copying music, which he could not obtain so remote from the great city. But he had another reason for giving up all thought of going there. Voltaire had settled nearby, and from that man he shied away, as one fascinated and horrified. He knew most of his own friends in Paris regarded Voltaire's presence in Geneva as a good omen because they thought that haven of freedom needed only the addition of the graces of life, the arts, sciences, theatre, all the urbane benefits, to make it a complete thing—they were ambitious to extend the intellectual hegemony of the Enlightenment to the city of Calvin. To this kind of ambition Rousseau was now really a stranger. He craved an escape from the intellectuals quite as much as from the rule of kings. And he wanted to go on with his study and writing, untroubled by all the social game of influencings and conquests of wit. Release and independence were sorely needed, and any step he would take must leave him perfectly free to carry out his programme. 'I shall never engage any portion of my liberty either for my subsistence or for that of anybody else,' he wrote Mme d'Épinay. 'I want to work, but at my own pleasure, and even to do nothing if I please, without having anybody find it amiss, unless it be my own stomach.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 1756, No. 273.

<sup>3</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 1756, No. 278.

<sup>2</sup> From same, No. 274.

Some time past Mme d'Épinay had offered him the use of the Hermitage, a little house on the verge of the forest of Montmorency. It was a place near enough to Paris for communication and the transmission of music-copy; but out of the turmoil of its society. It was not too far for visits from his true friends. He had promised to make a trial of living there, though he hesitated, with misgivings still about his cherished freedom if he were to accept such hospitality. But it appealed to him because of the situation and the facilities at his disposal. He would be able to work and to have his friends when he chose. So he made an agreement, to guarantee his liberty for the future, and he stated quite explicitly in it that he must have his time to himself and be accountable to no one for what he chose to do with it. And Mme d'Épinay was very happy to accept him on those terms. Their pact even went into the minute item, for instance, that Rousseau was to pay the wages of the gardener for the upkeep of the place, an obligation which he was most scrupulous in fulfilling. It was in April 1756 that he moved into the Hermitage with his household, intent upon his 'magnificent projects' and delighted as a poet with his new liberty and the beauty of his sylvan surroundings.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Corr. with Mme d'Épinay, Nos. 278, 289. *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 286 f.

CHAPTER IX  
STUDIES ON GOVERNMENT

THE first leisure in this paradise regained was spent upon the projects of Abbé de St. Pierre. Just at the time of entering his retreat Rousseau had a letter from his friend St. Lambert, who was very close to the parties interested in the edition of St. Pierre and who asked how it was coming along.<sup>1</sup> This reminded him of the obligation he had assumed. He devoted the first flush of a happy spring-time of liberty to this work. Within two months four pieces of writing were done, *The Project for Lasting Peace*, the *Plurality of Councils*, and two *Criticisms*.

These were all the product of one pulse of activity. They were excellent writings, for Rousseau did superlatively whatever engaged his heart. He did not proceed as one doing hack-work. He had solicited the task himself, and the story of the progress of the undertaking from its very inception in 1754 is told very fully in the *Confessions* as an affair of happy memory, where the order of events remained ever fresh in his mind. It was a grateful labor, significant, and something to be remembered afterwards.<sup>2</sup> The writings of St. Pierre were voluminous in the extreme, and to one who could not stay long at work when his passion was not aroused the very reading of all the manuscripts and printed works must have been a chore. Nevertheless he had patiently gone through it all. And he found things worth the toil, things inspiring and helpful and relevant to his own thinking. However, as he realised the scope of his undertaking, and his desire to get ahead with his other projects, he decided to abandon the attempt to edit the whole bewildering lot of schemes conceived by the Abbé and confined his attention to those which he felt were of greatest importance to posterity. At first he had not hesitated to introduce his own views along with those of the author, but when he focused his energies upon the two projects of special interest to himself he seemed to have felt some scruples about thus intermingling the ideas of the author and the critic. He realised, too, there was some danger in doing so, since it exposed him to being held accountable for the projects as a whole, which were in truth extremely revolutionary, amounting to a downright condemnation of the monarchy. Consequently he tried to separate what he wanted to say in his own name from what the Abbé had actually written,

<sup>1</sup> From St. Lambert, at Luneville, Mar. 26, 1756, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 284.

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, pp. 291 ff.

and he composed the *Projects* and his own *Criticisms* as entirely distinct works.

The 'great and fine thoughts' were, however, already part of his own thought; and they were, in turn, transformed by his thinking. The first of these was the vision of peace in Europe and an ending of war and the miseries of men. His own previous essay treating of war and the necessity of a more valid Law of Nations had been done partly under the inspiration of St. Pierre. Then the project itself of a League of States in Europe formed by a pact and dedicated to the security and the peace of nations had served as a model for his own concept of the social compact of any people, as an association of equal, independent persons guaranteeing to each one protection and liberty under the whole body thus created. It was a pleasing fancy of St. Pierre, too, when he compared the States associated by a pact to the structure of an arch where the stones sustain each other above the earth simply through the utilisation of their very tendency itself to fall downwards. So peoples may hold themselves up to a lawful order, by the very forces of their mutual self-interest. The project had been sketched centuries before in Plato's *Laws*, where three cities made a compact and agreed to stand by a common law, and, if any two of them were ever to fall out, the third State would force them to compose their differences and keep the peace. The importance of this third party in preventing war and lawlessness by compelling the disputants to come to terms seemed far greater as envisaged by St. Pierre, who proposed not a triple alliance but a general association of all Europe so that the third party in any dispute would be a great body of interested States other than those involved. There is greater safety in numbers, and the party interested in the maintenance of the law and public peace is then manifestly a superior authority. The interest of the public is then more likely to be justly interpreted and enforced. But the beauty of St. Pierre's scheme was this, that it established a power of restraint amongst the States without setting up any *particular* 'sovereign', or dominating power. Its whole intent seemed to be to minimise the role of the traditional 'sovereign' and subordinate him to the people. And this same intent was discerned in the other project for the governance of France, the *Plurality of Councils*. For this described an administration where the execution of the public policy is entirely in the hands of a number of councils each having its own function in the political economy, and all having an interest that no one shall become too important but that every one shall stay within lawful bounds—thus making the law really the common interest, and suppressing all arbitrary

action on the part of the titular 'sovereign'. Such division of the powers of government was not unlike that in Locke's *Civil Government*, which Montesquieu favored, but it was, perhaps, more promising, because of the greater number of parts in the government, which makes it more difficult for any one to corrupt them or to have them conspire against the people. In any case, the project was worth studying, as a practical way of making the personal 'sovereign' or ruler count for less and so have less power to dominate and tyrannise and make conquest. All the Abbé's proposals seemed to be directed, therefore, toward 'controlling the controllers' of the people, keeping the Powers set up by their will within the bounds of law and the common interest, restraining them both within the State and in their external relations for the sake of peace and the liberties of individuals.<sup>1</sup> Such projects would be of value for one who wanted to establish a government of laws not of men, even though it be true that some men must always administer it. If the administration of the State were organised on these lines and if 'the European Republic' were established, the 'form of the Republic' would be realised throughout the whole range of human associations.

Inspiring though it be simply to dream away at 'men uniting and loving one another', and 'a sweet and peaceable society of brothers, living in eternal concord, all guided by the same maxims, all happy in the common happiness', still one must leave that 'image of felicity' and proceed 'to reason in cold blood'. And the argument proceeds by following Rousseau's earlier analysis of the 'state of war'—things as they are.

Mankind have become partly socialised—only enough to be able to form particular societies and then to confront each other in a hostile attitude. 'We have put an end to private hostilities between individuals only to light up general wars which are a thousandfold more terrible.' Ironically, it is 'in uniting ourselves with certain men we really become enemies of the human race'. These are 'dangerous contradictions' and they can be obviated only by using still more intelligence and art in the conduct of social life. A union of States which subjects each one to a common law like that which obtains within the State is the only solution. To that end some 'form of Confederative government' must be established.

There was a certain novelty about this suggestion. Modern people seemed to know nothing about confederations, though the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Diderot, *Art. Magistrature*, vol. xvi, p. 37, comparing the situation with the system of stars in the world where each part holds the others in place and carries out the impulse of the celestial machine.

ancients had them—as in the case of the Achaean League. Yet something of the sort had actually obtained in Europe unobserved by most of the political writers, for example the Germanic Body, the Helvetic League, and the States-General. Rousseau might have exempted Pufendorff from the accusation of ignorance at this point because he refers to his work later, from which, in fact, he learned about the Germanic Body and the few modern tentatives toward a federal polity, in the *State of the German Empire* and an *Introduction to the History of the Principal States of Europe*.<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact the conditions in Europe would favor the establishment of such an institution more than is commonly realised. Quite distinct from associations in the form of definite leagues, there are other less obvious relationships obtaining among the nations. Tacit bonds have been formed 'by virtue of the union of interests, the congeniality of maxims, conformity of customs, and other circumstances which permit common relations to subsist between peoples who are in every outward aspect divided from each other. It is in this way that all the Powers of Europe form amongst themselves a sort of system which holds them together, by virtue of one and the same religion, by one and the same law of nations, by morals, letters, commerce, and by a kind of equilibrium which is the necessary effect of all those things and which, though no one in particular actually devotes himself to its preservation, could not, for all that, be so easily destroyed as many people think.'

'This society of the peoples of Europe has not always existed and the special causes which have made it arise still serve to maintain it.' These causes ought to be realised. The conquests of Rome begin the story. They effected a mode of political union extending over the whole of Europe, strengthened by civil institutions and by the excellence of the Roman Law which determined the rights and duties of governors and subjects throughout the Empire. There supervened, then, the pervasive bond of the Christian religion. Independently of these ties established by the Empire and the Papacy the nations of course had diverse interests, but despite that they enjoyed a 'real community' in their maxims and opinions which still exists, although bonds of interest, law, or political relationship have long since disappeared. For the geographical character of Europe keeps the nations in a constant intercourse and facilitates the interchange of arts, letters, inventions, and, in sum, all the instrumentalities of civilisation. So Europe, in contra-distinction to

<sup>1</sup> *De statu imperii Germanici*, op. cit., ch. 7, p. 105; ch. 8, sect. 4, pp. 114-15; *Introduction*, &c. (only begun by Pufendorff), in English ed. 1764. Chapter on *Germany*, p. 391 f.



Asia and Africa, which are only nominal in their unity, has developed 'a real society which has its religion, its morality, its customs, and even its own laws, which none of the peoples can depart from without immediately causing trouble'. This union in Europe seems to have been the deeper intention of Nature.

But look at Europe, where the Powers made by men work their will! It is a very opposite scene. 'Perpetual dissensions, brigandage, usurpations, revolts, wars, murders, these bring desolation day after day into this respectable haven of sages, this brilliant asylum of the sciences and arts.' What 'strange contrarieties' of European civilisation!

'Yet things are here following only their natural course. Every society *without laws and without statesmen*, every union formed or maintained *by chance*, must necessarily degenerate into quarrelling and dissension at the first change of circumstance.<sup>1</sup> The ancient union of the peoples of Europe has introduced complexity into their interests and rights in thousands of ways; they touch each other at so very many points that the least movement of some of them cannot fail to produce a shock in the others; their divisions are all the more fatal because their ties are so intimate, and their frequent quarrels have almost the cruelty of civil wars.

'Let us admit, then, that at present the condition of the Powers of Europe relative to each other is, strictly speaking, a state of war, and that all the partial treaties between certain of these Powers are but temporary truces rather than veritable peace: due in part to the fact that these treaties have, ordinarily, no other guarantors than the contracting parties, and in part to the fact that the rights of the one set of parties and those of the other have never been basically decided and that the ill-defined rights, or the pretensions to them that have place among the Powers who recognise no superior, will infallibly be the sources of new wars, just as soon as other circumstances will have brought access of new forces to the pretenders.

'Moreover, the public law of Europe, never having been established or authorised in concert, and having no general principles, but varying incessantly according to times and places, this law is full of contradictory rules which cannot be reconciled save by the right of the strongest: with the result that reason, without any sure guide, will always bend itself toward personal interest in doubtful cases, and war will then be inevitable, even if every one would really like to be just.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, p. 368. Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Barbeyrac's comment on Grotius, that a 'positive law of nations distinct from the law of nature is a mere chimera'. *Rights of War*, bk. 1, ch. 1, sect. 13, n. 3.

... 'Another seed of war, more concealed and no less real, is that things do not change when their real nature changes; that hereditary States actually remain in appearance elective; that there are Parliaments or National States in monarchies, and hereditary rulers in Republics; that a Power actually dependent upon another preserves still the semblance of liberty; that all the peoples subject to the same power are nevertheless not governed by the same laws; that the order of succession is different in the divers States of the same sovereign; and, in fine, that every government always tends to change without its being possible for any one to prevent the process. These are the causes, general and particular, which unite us only to destroy us, and make it possible for us to write so fine a social doctrine with hands always sullied with human blood.

'The causes of the evil once known, the remedy, if it exists, is sufficiently indicated. We can all see that every society forms because of common interest; that every division arises from opposed interests; that a thousand accidental events can change and modify both the common and the separate interests and that as soon as there is a society, there must necessarily be a co-active force which organises the movements of its members and brings them into concert, so as to give the common interests and reciprocal engagements the solidity which they would not have of themselves.

'It would be otherwise a great mistake to hope that that violent state could ever change simply by the force of things themselves and without the aid of human action. The system of Europe has precisely the degree of solidity to maintain it in a perpetual disturbance without entirely overturning it; and if our evils cannot increase, still less can they end, because every great revolution is henceforth impossible.'<sup>1</sup>

This curious state of equilibrium is 'in certain regards, the work of nature'. In the first place geographical factors seem to have determined the variety and size of the nations, mountain boundaries and streams and seas. A certain balancing of the States has thus come about without any person's meddling with it. Thus any attempt to establish a universal monarchy in Europe would fail, no matter how great the genius of the aspirant to such hegemony. The first tentative would arouse a concerted opposition on the part of other powers. No great, concealed source of military forces can exist, for the populations

Pufendorff admitted there was some question about the reality of such international law. *Law of Nature*, bk. 2, ch. 3, sect. 23, p. 121.

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, pp. 369-70. Cf. Melon, *op. cit.*, p. 733, and Diderot, *Art. Législateur*, vol. xv, p. 433.

of the continent are all located and known. Nor can any remarkable advantage through military discipline bring victory, for the opposing nations soon learn the same tricks and bring up their effectives to the same standards of proficiency in the art of war. Books and intercourse put all devices in a common pool. Money can do very little, and, besides, its purchasing value depends ultimately upon the continuance of an international exchange in commerce, in the course of which other nations tend to achieve some kind of parity in wealth, if measured in services as well as silver. Thus, from every point of view—money, military prowess, men—‘the resistance of those attacked is in the long run equal to the effort’ of those attacking. A monarch must fail in his ambition of conquest. Nor can a group of States win more than the most temporary success, for, at the moment of their partial triumph they would ruin each other by dissension over their new acquisitions and powers. No league *for war* is long enduring. Consequently there is, in fact, a natural check upon conquest. It is not simply the Alps, however, the Rhine, the sea, and the Pyrenees that constitute obstacles, but also the statesmen themselves, who when they are not deluded with a notion of domination, actually must aim at the balance of power. ‘What makes for the true support of the system of Europe is in part, then, the play of negotiations, which almost always balance each other mutually. But this system has another support, even more substantial, and that is the Germanic body, placed almost at the centre of Europe, a body which keeps all the other parties in wholesome respect of it, and serves perhaps even more to the maintenance of its neighbors than to that of its own members; a body, redoubtable to foreign powers because of its extent and of the number and prowess of its people; but of value to all because of its constitution which takes away every means and will to conquest and at the same time acts as a check to conquerors. Despite the defects of that constitution of the Empire, it is certain, that as long as it subsists, the equilibrium of Europe will never be upset, that no potentate will have to fear being dethroned by another, and that the Treaty of Westphalia will perhaps be forever the basis of our political system. Thus the law of nations, which the Germans study with so much pains, is even more important than they think, for it is not simply the public law of the Germanic peoples but in certain respects that of all Europe.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Here was the tribute due to Pufendorff’s labors. Allusion to more than one such scholar may have been prompted by the appearance, in the *Journal Encyclopédique* for April 1756, of a review of J. J. Schmaus’s *Sketch of the Actual Government of the German Empire, or a Short Account of International Law*. Pufendorff argued in *De statu*

'But if the present system is indestructible, it is just on that account all the more stormy; for there is an action and reaction of the European Powers which without displacing them altogether holds them in a continual agitation; and their efforts are ever vain and ever renewed, like the waves of the sea which unceasingly disturb its surface without ever changing the level; in such wise that the people are forever desolate without any real advantage to the sovereigns. . . . It would be easy for me to prove this truth with regard to the private interests of all the courts of Europe; for I could easily show that these interests are interwoven in such wise as to hold their forces mutually in respect. But the ideas about commerce and money, having produced a kind of political fanaticism, make the apparent interests of all the princes change so readily that one cannot establish a single stable principle of policy with regard to their true interests, because everything nowadays depends upon the economic systems, most of them bizarre, which enter the heads of the ministers. However that may be, commerce itself, which tends constantly to establish itself in an equilibrium, actually takes away from certain Powers the exclusive advantage they might wish to derive from it and at the same time deprives them of one of the great means they have of laying down the law to others.<sup>1</sup>

'If I have insisted so much upon the equal distribution of force which results from the actual constitution of Europe, it is only to draw an important conclusion for the establishment of a general association. For, in order to form a solid and durable confederation, it is necessary to put every one of the members in such a mutual dependence upon it that none alone would be in a position to resist all the others, and that the private alliances which might do harm to the great society would meet with sufficient obstacles to prevent the execution of such harm. Without this check the confederation would be futile, and each member would be really independent, though seemingly under control. But if the existing obstacles are such as I have just described above, even now when all the Powers are at perfect liberty to form leagues and offensive alliances, what do you think these

(ch. 8, sect. 4, pp. 114-15) against converting the Germanic body into a monarchy, and praised the federation where it was not possible for any one State to grow great at the expense of others but all were equal in freedom and security, despite an actual inequality of power. He proposed further to strengthen the system by a guarantee of present possessions, an abandonment of long-standing claims and disputes and settlement of all new ones by the members of the federation. In the *Introduction* (p. 392) it is stated: 'If any German State invades the territories of a neighboring state, or disturbs the public peace, the other states of the same circle unite in making war on this, until it submits to the decrees of the imperial chamber or council.'

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Melon, op. cit., p. 733.

obstacles would amount to if there were a great armed league, always ready to stop those who would attempt to destroy or to resist it. This is enough to show that such an association would not consist in vain deliberations, which any one might resist with impunity, but that there would arise from it an effective power, capable of forcing the ambitious to keep within the limits of the general treaty.

‘From this exposition three incontestable truths emerge: first, that excepting Turkey there obtains among all the peoples of Europe an imperfect social bond, but a bond, nevertheless, that is more intimate than the general and ineffectual ties of humanity; second, that the imperfection of that society makes the condition of those who compose it worse than not having any society at all amongst them; third, that these initial bonds which render that society harmful, make it at the same time easy to perfect so that all its members might obtain their happiness from what actually produces their misery, and change the state of war reigning amongst them to a lasting peace.

‘Let us now see in what way this great work, begun by fortune, can be consummated by reason; and how the free and voluntary society which unites all the European States, can by taking on the force and solidarity of a true political body, change into a real Confederation. It is not to be doubted that such an establishment, giving that association the perfect form it now lacks, will destroy its abuse, extend its advantages, and force all the parties to co-operate toward the common good. But for such results it is necessary that the Confederation shall be so general that no considerable Power refuses to join it; that it shall have a judiciary to establish the laws and rules that ought to be obligatory upon all the members; that it shall have a force co-active and compelling to make every State submit to the common decisions, whether to act or to abstain from action; in sum, that it shall be strong and lasting, in order to prevent members from detaching themselves from it at their will as soon as they believe they see their private interest to be contrary to the general interest. There you have the sure marks by which to determine whether or not the institution is wise, useful, and unshakeable. It is now a question of expanding upon this supposition, and of seeking, by an analysis, what effects ought to come about, what means are the right ones for establishing it, and what reasonable hope we can have of putting them into execution.’<sup>1</sup>

Suppose, then, we imagine one of the frequent conferences of the Powers of Europe to be some day possessed of good

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, pp. 370-4.

sense, and a real desire for the welfare of humanity, and a capacity for resolute action. Suppose that this is expressed in a solemn commitment to joint efforts for peace by forming a federation. The terms might be the following: 'By the first, the contracting sovereigns will establish amongst them a perpetual and irrevocable alliance, and shall name the plenipotentiaries who are to hold in a permanent place, a Diet or permanent Congress, in which all the differences of the contracting parties shall be passed upon and settled by methods of arbitration and judicial reason. By the second, they will specify the number of sovereigns whose plenipotentiaries shall have voice at the Diet; those who shall be invited to accede to the treaty; the order, time, and manner in which the presidency of the confederation shall pass from one to the other at equal intervals; and lastly, the relative contribution of each to the common expenses, and the way of raising the funds.<sup>1</sup> By the third article, the Confederation will guarantee to each one of its members the possession and the government of all the States it actually possesses, likewise the succession, elective or hereditary, according as the whole system is established by the fundamental laws of each country; and in order to suppress at one stroke the source of all the controversies which incessantly arise, they will agree to take the actual possession and the latest treaties as the basis of all the mutual rights of the contracting Powers: renouncing forever, and reciprocally, all prior claims; save the case of future successions that are in contest, and other rights to fall due, these being all alike passed upon by the judgment of the Diet, without its ever being permitted to any party to make the fact precede the right or to take arms, one against another, on any pretext whatsoever.<sup>2</sup> By the fourth article, they will specify the case when every Ally, as violator of the treaty, shall be put under the ban of Europe, and proscribed as the public enemy; the case, to wit, when it refuses to execute the decisions of the great Alliance, when it makes preparations for war, when it negotiates treaties contrary to the Confederation, when it takes arms to resist it or to attack some one of the Allies. They will further agree by the same article to arm themselves and to act offensively, in conjunction with each other and at common expense, against every State put to the ban of Europe, until that State shall have laid down its arms, executed the judgments and orders of the Diet, made reparation for its wrongs, paid the costs, and rendered reason even for the warlike preparations it has made contrary to the treaty. Finally,

<sup>1</sup> Pufendorff described this circulation of the 'presidency'—*De statu*, ch. 8, sect. 4, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> See Pufendorff, quoted above.

by the fifth, the plenipotentiaries of the European Body shall always have the power to make rules that they deem to be important to procure for the European Republic and for every one of its members all possible advantages (for making such rules, the plurality of votes suffices to pass measures in the first stage, but three-quarters necessary, five years afterwards, to make them finally valid). But they shall never change these five fundamental articles without the unanimous consent of the confederated States.<sup>1</sup>

This project deserves to be scrutinised, not pettily or with captious questions about phraseology or about the method of policing Europe, but simply with a view to its practicability in the large and to the chances of its being instituted by the present sovereign Powers. There is no doubt that all want peace, unless the exceptions be the Princes of Europe. The project must therefore be presented to them.

They must first be made to realise what the true situation is. They must see that every Power is actually limited by the presence of the others on a common terrain where all sorts of common practices, commerce, customs, morality, and religion obtain. They are not actually so independent as they seem. They are, in fact, independent, but without rule. If the controls that subsist despite their attempts to get perfect liberty of action could be made both stronger and more regular and intelligent through some common agreements, they would operate to the mutual advantage of all. 'Once established, the European Diet would never have rebellion to fear.' Nor would the Sovereigns. Nor would the peoples suffer, not from the evils of warfare.

Still this condition might not seem so desirable to the Sovereigns, who believe they have certain good reasons for taking up arms. Now these motives are either to make conquests or to defend themselves against a conqueror, or to weaken a too powerful neighbor, or to sustain rights that have been assailed, or to settle a disagreement which cannot be ended amicably, or finally to fulfil the obligations of some treaty. There is no cause or pretext of war that cannot be listed under some one of these six headings: but it is evident that none of these six can exist in the new state of things.

'First, all conquest must be renounced because of the sheer impossibility of succeeding when one is sure to be stopped in one's course by a force much greater than what one has oneself; so that in risking the loss of everything one is rendered actually incapable of gaining a thing. An ambitious prince,

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, pp. 374-7; cf. St. Pierre's own formulas in Appendix.

who wants aggrandisement in Europe, does two things: he begins by fortifying himself with good alliances, then he tries to take his enemy when he is weak. But these private alliances would be of no avail against an alliance much stronger, and always in operation; and since no prince has any pretext, under such a régime, for arming himself, he could not possibly do so without being noticed, forestalled, and punished by the Confederation which is always armed and ready.

‘The same reason which takes from every prince all hope of conquest takes at the same time all his own fear of being attacked; and not only are his States, guaranteed by all Europe, as assured to him as the possessions of citizens are to them in a well-governed country, but more so for him than he could do for them as their sole and rightful defender, and just in the proportion as all Europe is stronger than he alone.

‘There is no reason to want to weaken a neighbor whom one has no longer any ground to fear; and one is not even tempted to try it when no hope exists of succeeding.

‘With regard to the upholding of his rights, we must first of all take note of the fact that an infinity of chicanes and obscure and contested claims will all be wiped out by the third Article of the Confederation, which definitively bases all the reciprocal rights of sovereign allies upon their actual possession: thus all the possible demands and pretensions will become clear for the future and be adjudicated in the Diet, when they arise. Add that if one attacks my rights, I ought to maintain them the same way: but they cannot attack them any longer by way of arms without incurring the ban of the Diet; and so it is not by arms that I shall have need to defend them. We might say the same thing about injuries, wrongs, reparations, and all the unforeseen differences which can make two sovereigns rise up against each other; and the same power which would defend their rights would also bring redress for their complaints.

‘It is not possible, then, that the Confederation, once established, could leave existing any source of war among the confederated parties; and the end of lasting peace would be perfectly realised by the carrying out of the proposed system.’<sup>1</sup>

But the real difficulty comes in the establishment of such an association. Reason is not the strong point of sovereigns or their ministers. Their first objection is likely to be a specious one couched in the beautiful language of liberty. ‘In effect, some one will argue, you take away from sovereigns the right to render justice to themselves—that is to say, their precious right to be unjust when they please; you deprive them of the power

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 377–9.



of growing greater—at the expense of their neighbors; you make them renounce such ancient pretensions as have their only value from their obscurity because one extends them as one's chances increase . . . and to put the whole thing in a nutshell, *you force them to be equitable and peaceful*. What, indeed, are the compensations of such cruel privations?"<sup>1</sup>

The spirit of mockery took possession of Rousseau's pen as he contemplated the poor, bounden Princes who would love to have their liberty and do justice in their usual way. St. Pierre himself had answered those objections with a pitiful, feeble appeal to the true glory of Princes as residing in the public good and the happiness of their subjects. That is no way to induce them ever to accept this very real limitation upon their claims to power. They are only governed by their desires and their nearer interests, and so the appeal must be made to their sense of insecurity. Make them feel their thrones will totter!

But cool reasoning, too, must be done. Every Power in Europe has rights and claims that it is urging against others. These can never be made perfectly clear, because there is no constant criterion by which to judge of them. Every such claim rests upon a great many obscure and usually unavowed conditions. Yet all parties alike are making precisely such dubious and unrecognisable claims. 'It is, then, an error, to be thinking always of our claims over others and forgetting those of others upon us, when there is really no more justice on the one side than the other. . . . We have made it apparent that even in the actual system, each one, in projects of aggrandisement, must find a resistance superior to his effort; whence it follows that the most powerful, having no reason to stake anything, nor the weakest no hope of profit, it is really a good thing for all alike to renounce what they desire, to have made really secure what they already possess.'

Rousseau then drew from his own earlier essay on this subject to press home the sheer futility of war. It consumes men, silver, and forces of every sort. A victorious Prince loses more than he gains, and 'only has the consolations of seeing the conquered party still weaker than himself'. Meantime the neutral powers, without a stroke at any cost to themselves, gain the advantage over the conqueror. 'The cost of war is oftentimes far more than it is worth.' The losses most irreparable are not always the apparent ones, but such things as 'the men who are not born, the increase of taxes, the abandonment of farming and neglect of agriculture'. The size of the territory is less vital than the condition of the people. 'Men alone constitute the power of

<sup>1</sup> P. 380. Italics mine.

kings.' On a small terrain they will thrive, if they have 'good laws', and an intelligent public economy, and government. *There* are the true conquests of rulers.<sup>1</sup>

Now another objection arises, that the argument so far proves too much, that if all this were true, sovereigns would have discovered it long ago. 'Peace would have established itself, and lasted forever, without any confederation.' But the objection ignores the positive difficulty that has to be overcome in the minds of men. There is a 'lack of security common to every sovereign as things now are'. No one dares to venture on the way of law and peace for fear of losing all. Every one assumes that all others are going to take advantage of him. Consequently every one is forehanded about war, and not daring to venture on ways of peace. 'Many wars, even offensive wars, are unjust precautions to put their own goods in security, rather than means of usurping those of others. However salutary the maxims of the public good might be generally, it is certain that to consider the matter politically, and often indeed, morally, too, these maxims become pernicious for him who lives up to them with regard to all the world when no one practices them toward him.' That had been the predicament of 'the independent man', which Rousseau was not forgetting, when it applied to the independent State.

Nevertheless the Confederation meets that difficulty. It takes away independence and substitutes dependence upon a common tribunal. But it does not diminish the rights of sovereignty; on the contrary, it really affirms them, since it guarantees to every sovereign not only the integrity of his States against every foreign Power but also the authority of his government over the subjects within his States. They are all secured in their veritable rights, and they only have to renounce those they do not have. Moreover, on this point of dependence, 'there is a very great difference between depending upon others and depending upon a Body of which one is a member, and *in which each one is chief in his turn*'. Such a form of government actually obtains among the States of the Germanic Body, where there is a succession by law, and where no one of the States wants to assert its absolute independence of the whole Empire within which it has its secure place and sovereign power. This is a model for the government of such a Confederation: 'the Presidency ought to be alternative and without regard to the inequality of power'.<sup>2</sup> That is a guarantee of liberty.

Again the thought is recalled, how cheaply all this liberty, peace, and lawful rule can be purchased, as compared with the

<sup>1</sup> P. 381.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 382-3. Italics mine.

frightful costs of military preparation and upkeep, the chief note on which to play if modern rulers are ever to be enlisted in favor of the pact.

A few desperately conceived objections still remain. Europe disarmed will be a prey, it is said, to the powers outside of Europe, who will keep up their military machines, especially the Turk. But Europe is precisely so exposed at present, owing to its existing divisions. Were they really united in some common polity, they could very easily resist any external aggression, build fortresses on the frontier, and do whatever else seemed necessary. The way things operate in the Germanic Federation is again a lesson in this regard—they are never attacked and can readily produce a resistance if they are. Nor is it any objection that the art of war will be lost in an era of peace. The maintenance of peace in so large an association is itself a discipline valuable as training for any warlike operations that might happen to become necessary.

Any one who surveys the actual state of things, and really sees 'the state of uncivilised existence and war that is produced by the absolute and mutual independence of all the sovereigns in the imperfect society obtaining in Europe', will welcome action establishing such a government. It is simply a question of seeing one's true interests. 'For we ought to note well that we have not in the least supposed men to be what they ought to be, viz., good, generous, disinterested, and loving the public good from sheer humanity; but such as they are, unjust, greedy, and preferring their own interest to everything else. The only supposition we have made is that they have enough reason to see what is useful to them, and enough courage to act for their own happiness.' Those who are in a position to take the appropriate action might never do it. Such a failure does not by any means make the project chimerical, but simply means 'that these men are senseless brutes, and that it is a kind of folly to be wise in the midst of such fools'.<sup>1</sup>

Rousseau had actually put so much of his own thought into this exposition that little was left for his *Criticism*. Indeed, he criticises the Abbé far less than the sovereigns whom he had tried to enlighten by his project. 'The whole preoccupation of kings, or of those who are charged with their functions, relates to but two objects: extending their domination externally and making it ever more absolute within.' Other aims, no matter how real they might be to philosophers, are to them mere blinds, employed to conceal their private schemes. Nothing in this project will tempt sovereigns, who are generally so obtuse to the

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 385-7.

moral realities upon which all human relations must rest. The very prospect of being limited in their pretensions by anything whatsoever shocks their dignity. They will not entertain any proposal for their own security at the cost of such a limitation. Perhaps, too, there is the shrewdness of self-preservation in some of them who suspect that this covenant of peoples has implications for their internal sovereignty. The condition imposed by the pact is that their own governance shall be always according to the public law. It follows from this 'that one cannot guarantee the princes against revolt on the part of the subjects *without at the same time guaranteeing the subjects against the tyranny of their princes*. . . . No sovereign on earth could support without indignation *the very idea of being forced to be just*, not only with foreign powers but even with his own proper subjects'.<sup>1</sup> The double restraints are doubly offensive to princes and will never be voluntarily accepted.

It is not only with kings and ministers that the idealist must reckon, but with keen philosophers, the 'sophists of the courts'. They praise magnificence and the apparent gains of the existing order. The benefits of peace, even for commerce, they tend to belittle, for they say 'because these benefits are common to all participants, they will not be real for any one in particular'. When men are thus determined to make the value of anything depend upon the exclusion of others, they certainly will never be induced to see the good of this international effort toward establishing peace, commerce, and the equality of rights and benefits for large and small nations alike. To bring people so minded into a confederation, nothing less than force or sheer physical necessity will do—their minds cannot be reached. And that means revolution in Europe!<sup>2</sup>

This is the point on which St. Pierre was most to be criticised, as at once too naïve and too daring. Sometimes he talked as if it would be possible simply to assemble a Congress, sign Articles of Agreement, and then count upon the intelligence of men to push everything to its successful conclusion. But history affords some instruction in that regard. The nearest approach to any such European league was that of Henry IV, who proceeded, not in overt ways by public declaration of his ends but by life-long diplomacy and a shrewd grasp of the interests concerned. His idea arose from the hope of breaking the hegemony of Spain in Europe by organising a 'Christian Republic'. He quietly enlisted all the various States of Europe, appealing in each case to their need of security or their interests. Their own initial reluctance and fear of installing another monarchy in lieu of the

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 389-90. Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 391-2.

one they were leagued to destroy were dispelled by the renunciation, on the part of both England and France, of any of the apparent spoils or conquered territory, and by the agreement, instead, to divide them amongst the other weaker allies. The French King managed, however, that he would actually have the lasting 'primacy in the body he intended to establish'. He divided the powers of the others so that, without seeming to gain a thing, he actually remained the dominant power of Europe. In his great political wisdom he fortified himself with much more than arms and troops, with the power, in short, of a good internal government and finances, so that no division would arise at home. And Henry IV was ready to establish this league for peace when his assassination plunged Europe into the 'lasting wars' from which it seems never likely to escape. Now where such an astute genius failed, what can Abbé de St. Pierre do, merely with a book? And yet the Abbé himself had anticipated this criticism, and it was, even in Rousseau himself, mostly a form of words. For he really believed that books do, after all, convey ideas to the people, and influence their action. And if the people ever come to force their sovereigns to accept a common law, inspired by this project, they will in fact produce revolutions throughout Europe. This is a terrible route to the haven of peace, which no one would recommend. The final criticism of the project for the European Republic is that it cannot be established without such a disastrous uprising of all the peoples. The very prediction of this might become a cause—and Rousseau felt that he never could publish these observations.

He turned to the other project concerning the government of a monarchy. It was a remedy for the abuses of that form of government by introducing a republican type of administration in the actual business of the State. Fénelon had sketched an ideal government in the manner of Plato, but St. Pierre wrote from empirical observation of the period of Regency where he perceived how well government can be conducted by various bodies without the extraordinary powers and prerogatives of an Overlord being needed, and this set him at work upon his project, the *Polysynodie*. The fact is, monarchs can never govern by themselves, but always rely upon administrators and many lesser grades of civil servants throughout the realm.

'With all peoples who have a king, it is, then, absolutely necessary to establish a form of government which can dispense with the king himself; and once it is accepted that a sovereign can rarely govern by himself, the only question is to find out

how he can govern by means of others. It is to solve that problem that the *Discourse on the Plurality of Councils* is destined.<sup>1</sup>

The subordinate forms of government are three in number. One is when all the royal authority is conferred on a minister or vizir who acts as a monarch in fact; another is when this power is bestowed upon two or more; and finally there is the 'plurality of councils' where several bodies of men are called upon to administer the various affairs of State. Of these the last is preferable. But the tendency in it is always toward deterioration. The business falls into fewer and fewer hands, just as democracy lapses into aristocracy and this, in turn, into monarchy. Such a natural course of things holds little promise for the interests of the public. Yet it might be possible to plan a government by many councils in such a way as to correct that tendency, by utilising the very forces themselves that cause this movement.

The affairs of any State naturally divide into several categories, which happen to be eight in number—justice, public order, finance, commerce, navy, war, foreign affairs, and religion. Each administrative function might properly be entrusted to a council of men wholly charged with it. A ninth or general council could serve to bring all these other public bodies and their works into co-ordination. The membership in the various councils should be chosen in every case by examination. Then grades ought to be established, as in the army, with a view to rewarding genuine merit with advancement. However, the functionaries ought not to be permanently retained in their several departments but kept circulating from one to the other, which has the effect of preventing any one from organising a department for his own private advantage, since it deprives him of the time to manipulate things. Furthermore, it operates to expose any maladministration that might otherwise be covered up. On the other hand, the arrangement encourages others to an emulation of the virtues of their predecessors and a maintenance of the public service at the same high standard. In general, without assuming that there is any evil or selfish intent on the part of officials, such a constant circulation of the offices corrects things due to 'the errors, prejudices, and passions' of each administration. 'For, amidst so many different characters successively in charge of the same part, their divers faults will mutually correct each other, and all will proceed more consistently toward the common object.'<sup>1</sup> This circulation has the positive value of giving every member of every office a knowledge of all the other business and an appreciation of the unity of the

<sup>1</sup> *Polysynodie*, ch. 6. Vaughan, vol. i.

whole, so that there will be an influence within themselves checking the natural tendency to exalt their own department as the most important. With this equalising of functions, in the minds of the officials, there must develop some sense of an equality in the other persons, which is always a desirable attitude to have. The valuable law of circulation ought not to be limited, therefore, to the subordinate posts, but applied even to the Presidency of the General Council itself.

Two advantages deserve special attention in this scheme of a government. One is the continual interchange of position from subordination to authority, a democratic notion derived probably from Plato and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> No man is likely to feel the power exercised by others if he has his own turn in the office. Obedience is then more prompt, and the authority has less need to make itself felt. Secondly, this succession of individuals to the Presidency is a safeguard against the system degenerating into the rule of a vizir. From the royal sovereign's point of view, the equalising of knowledge and power among the many ministers who have risen from the ranks is entirely favorable to his own supremacy over all of them, and, of course, over the State.

Such government by many councils is not simply visionary, for it is 'the most natural' kind of administration. This truth only seems contrary to fact because of the prevalence of the modern type of monarchy. But a distinction must be made between what is apparent and the real. To all appearance the royal government is primary; but in actual fact the governance of any people has always been transacted by some such groups of administrators. 'Just as the first national laws were made by the nation assembled as a body, so the first decisions of the Prince were taken with the chief men of the nation assembled in a Council.'<sup>2</sup> This was the original of Parliaments. And from this primary institution there developed the various lesser councils with powers and duties delegated to them. Everywhere in history such a régime is to be found. The *Polysynodie* describes, therefore, a natural form of government made perfect on its own lines.

Nothing can be better for the French people than this. The end of their government is 'the greatest interest of the State and King', and the chief defect to which it is liable arises mostly from 'the private interests of the administrators', though some may be due to a lack of adequate intelligence. Now 'the more these private interests find themselves hampered and opposed, the less will any one of them get ahead of the public interest;

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.*, bk. 2, ch. 2, 1261a; bk. 3, ch. 4, 1277b; ch. 6, 1279a; bk. 4, ch. 14, 1298a; bk. 6, ch. 2, 1317b. Plato, *Rep.* 520; 539-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Polysynodie*, ch. 8, p. 406.

so that if they could be pitted against each other and made to nullify themselves mutually, no matter how strong they might be supposed to be, they would become nil in the decisions, and the public interest alone would be heard. What more effectual means of annulling the influence of private interests could one have than this of opposing them to each other through the multiplication of those who will have a voice in the matter? What makes their interests private is the fact that they are not in accord, for if they were in agreement it would not be a private interest but the common interest. But, in destroying all these separative interests, one by the other, the public interest remains, and it ought to gain in all decisions by whatever the private interests lose.<sup>1</sup>

Though the members of the divers councils, then, be mere men, they will neutralise each other's selfishness or bias, and finally have to resolve upon a course of action that will have a fair probability of being for the general good. In such assemblies the observers are too many for any extensive malpractice. Whether those present be moved by hypocrisy or by a sincere interest in the public good, they are, in this system, made to act for the welfare of the whole country. This is 'a form of government which forces the private interest to give way before the general interest'. And one further advantage is its creation of a true public opinion.<sup>2</sup> When groups of men deal constantly with questions, and the individuals themselves progress from one grade to another, there results a fund of public intelligence about civil affairs which has a profound influence upon good administration. For instance, taxes will not be unwisely levied, because the men of the councils can enlighten the Prince with regard to the economic situation and the capacity of the people to pay. Again, when so many persons are well informed, it is harder for any ambitious minister to blind the General Council to the actual state of affairs. Then the malign influence of royal mistresses cannot be brought to bear upon the administration: 'it is less difficult to seduce a single individual than a whole college of officials.' Finally, when the services of intelligent and honest men are well rewarded, and equity and reason reign in the State, all the people become infused with a spirit of contentment and develop that love of country which is the strongest force and support of any wise government. The 'public will' is then conjured into play; its dictates are well executed by the public servants; and the whole nation lives in happiness. That

<sup>1</sup> Ch. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. 10; cf. above, pp. 153-4; 169 ff., the two general questions of Books 1 and 2 of the *Social Contract*.



there are disadvantages in this form of government no one can gainsay, but they are outweighed far by the positive values. Such a system can endure long without radical changes. Policies of State will have some consistency and not change with the capacity of each man. The men needed for the civil service will be educated gradually to their responsibilities, and are not called upon to be geniuses—they can arise from the body of the people.<sup>1</sup> So the plan really takes the common run of men as they are and rears them to what the State needs of them. Indeed, this *Plurality of Councils* seems a likely form of government for any people and at any time, not merely for France in a state of Regency.<sup>2</sup>

Rousseau, the pupil of the empirical Locke and Montesquieu, has a severe *Criticism* to make of the Abbé de St. Pierre. In the first place, the project was not really based on the actual situation of France even in the Regency. The existing state of affairs had 'served more as a pretext than a model', for the Abbé wrote his project precisely because of his indignation at the poor kind of government which was then being given the nation. He was describing what ought to have been. On that score, as a daring reformer and idealist, he deserved great credit, and it was he, no doubt, whom Rousseau portrayed as the 'Druid priest' who prophesies very wisely in *The Queen Fantastic*.<sup>3</sup> Yet as practical, realistic politics this plan of government is to be condemned. A government by plurality of councils could not, as had been pretended, be developed 'naturally' from the existing order. Any attempt to bring that about would be fraught with danger to the nation. To impose a republican system in detail upon an actual polity that was through and through monarchical would be to create fundamental disorder in the whole life of the people. It would mean 'abolishing the old customs, changing old maxims, and giving a form to the State other than that which has been followed time after time for the period of thirteen hundred years.' It is most unwise to interfere in such a way with things insensibly developed in the course of nature and history. The certain outcome of such interference is revolution. For if a monarchy cannot even be tempered to an aristocracy without profound subversions and bloodshed and misery, how much worse would the situation be if it were forced into this 'mixed government', a republican form harnessed up with monarchical powers?

Indeed, the futility of imposing the republican ideal upon the government of France ought to have been anticipated by St.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 173; the *Social Contract* on legislation.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. 11, *Conclusion*.

<sup>3</sup> H., vol. xii, p. 270.

Pierre. The opposing prejudices would be incessantly working at cross purposes, the King's own ministers at every moment attempting to outwit and demean the councillors. But even suppose the project were established, without overt resistance on the part of the monarchy, how well would it succeed even on its own principles? The Abbé regarded the ninth or General Council as entirely preoccupied with the administrative rules of functioning for all other special councils of State. Each has its own general policy for the State, conceived with reference to its special duties, and each one is free to execute its respective policy, subject only to these general rules of co-operation laid down by the ninth body. But it does not follow that the realisation of the greatest amount of good in the several portions of the public business is necessarily the public weal. Such division of affairs into these various functions does not allow for the more intimate relations and ties which a departmentalised treatment must either ignore or actually override. In order to make all these services contribute to the commonwealth, a general *policy* must be determined by the *general council itself* and not left to the accidents of agreement among the policies of the several branches of the government. And this general policy must have at all times more efficacy than a ninth opinion among the other eight. To get concerted, efficient action the view of the General Council must have real precedence over the others. Such 'unity of general plan' is indispensable in any polity, and it must be the plan of *some responsible body* and not the haphazard concurrence of the plans of several bodies each formulated according to a separate notion of the good of the whole. Government is an affair which requires in some quarters a superior intelligence of the situation, and a superior power of action. The circulation of the officials from one type of office to another does not really give them a thorough knowledge of the whole, for they have simply engrossed themselves in the parts, one by one, probably forgetting in each department of service what they have realised in the preceding. Moreover the process is slow, and the attaining of wisdom by such experience might be so rare and come so late in life that the councillors so gifted would be unavailable for office. Perhaps Rousseau was here comparing them with Plato's 'guardians' who were a body of men charged with the business of studying and understanding the whole commonwealth and who had to get beyond 'opinion' to wisdom by means of personal discussion, or 'dialectic'. In a single assembly of trained persons, where each one is in sight and hearing of all the others, men seem better able to arrive at genuinely good political decisions and policies. When

policy is formed by such actual common council, it is steadier and more effectual over the period of years than the most genial conceptions of extraordinary men. 'Republics change their systems less than monarchies', that is, republics having the form of government where the deliberative body can be known by all the people, and especially by each other. However, in modern nations this is no longer possible. As an alternative to modern monarchy, then, the system of the *Plurality of Councils* is preferable, since it is a government by a council resting upon lesser councils and is more likely to maintain a steady policy and serve the nation better than the rule of one man. This is one good reason in favor of the *Polysynodie* which St. Pierre himself had failed to notice.

So much by way of criticism concerning the deliberative function. There remains, however, the executive phase proper. This is not nearly so satisfactory. Some provisions are actually inconsistent with each other. Grades cannot be established within a department if there is to be an incessant circulation of officers out of one department into another. The succession to the Presidency of the General Council is sound, if it can be made certain—that is, if the monarch does not insist upon retaining a man he has found to his liking. To guarantee this adherence to the law on the part of the sovereign, the Abbé relied upon a force outside the State itself, that is, he counted upon the simultaneous establishment of his 'European Republic' which forces the monarchs of the league to observe the standing laws of their realms. And if it were ever realised by the potentates of Europe that this would be one of the effects of that league they would quickly wash their hands of it, for they would no longer be masters in their own houses. However, the whole scheme of the *Polysynodie* presupposes at the same time the acceptance of such an international control, for there is no other guarantee against the retention of a Prime Minister perpetually in power once he is established, and sanctioned in his domination, by the Prince. Rather than adopt any such commitments by a European pact, a sovereign would prefer to make terms with the restlessness of his own subjects, and admit them to a share of the power with himself, as history actually shows to be the case. The best that could come of both these projects, for France, at least, would be some kind of mixed government where assemblies of men meet *for deliberation alone*, to formulate policies or enactments, as Parliaments do, but without power to enforce them, and where, on the other hand, the Prince would have the power and the ungrateful duty of *executing decisions not his own*. There is no promise of lasting

government in such division of the business of the State. The popular body and the monarch then constitute two distinct bodies, each with its own interests to serve. 'For the interests of partial societies are no less separate from those of the State, nor less pernicious to the Republic, than those of private individuals; and they have even this additional disadvantage that men make it a matter of glory, to uphold, at any price whatsoever, the rights and the pretensions of a body of which they are members; and whatever dishonesty there might be in preferring oneself to others, this disappears when it is for the good of a numerous society of which one is a part, so that the price of being a good senator is that one becomes, in the end, a bad citizen. This makes an Aristocracy the worst of sovereignties; and it is this, perhaps, which would make the *Polysynodie* the worst of all ministries.'<sup>1</sup>

The worst, that is, for France, in the conditions obtaining there, and in Europe. The project was offered as a practical solution of the problems of that monarchy, and it was to be judged by reference thereto. A monarchical system is actually installed there, with centuries of custom and sentiment behind it. A republican organisation of government superposed upon a society having that form could only function as a source of opposition. It would divide the governing body into a conciliar group, who deliberate and propose legislation, and an executive who enacts and enforces. It would merely perpetuate the old controversy of the chiefs and representatives of the people with the Prince; at best it would only create loyalties to a lesser body than the whole State and furnish cover for men of ambition to trouble the public peace by their manœuvres for power on the pretext of serving the body of which they are members. The worm of egoism eats at any institution reared by man. There would be no sure guarantees against the rise to supreme power, among the councils, of a man who ingratiated himself with the sovereign, who alone has the forces necessary to maintain the law of the constitution requiring the succession to the presidency—unless the League of European States be supposed to operate as a compelling force in the interests of the peace of nations. But this recourse to an external aid betrays the defect of this form of government in the circumstances. The government ought to be effective for its purposes by virtue of its own constitution and resources.

Even in the matter of deliberation, where councils are usually good, there seemed to be grave inefficiency. Rousseau feared that the individual official would identify himself with every

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, vol. i, pp. 412-22.

successive department and would not learn thereby to identify himself with none in particular but always with the whole State. The 'unity of general plan' is rendered quite impossible by this scheme of pluralism. And if the many councils fail to achieve this, some other body will, some unauthorised, private person in the State. *Divide and conquer* was an old trick of sovereigns, employed against their subjects as well as their enemies. The plurality of councils might play into the hands of the King, since it institutes the division for him and even sanctifies it. So long as there is any monarch, therefore, the policy, as well as the execution of it, is likely to represent his personal will. And none of St. Pierre's projects is ever possible without a revolution in France, and also in the other monarchies of Europe. This conclusion was so plain that Rousseau himself dared not publish either the *Polysynodie* or his *Criticism*, which did far less damage to the reputation of the Abbé de St. Pierre than to the glory and prestige of monarchy.

Only one of these pieces of writing was to see the light of day during the lifetime of Rousseau, the *Project for Lasting Peace*, which he ventured to offer to the public later, in 1761, when he had already hazarded a great deal on his own account. The publisher who first saw the work realised that it was more than a simple translation of St. Pierre and asked whether it might not be put out under his own, more distinguished, name. Rousseau answered him, saying: 'It is true, I have seen the object under another point of view from that of the Abbé de St. Pierre and I have sometimes given other reasons than those he gave . . . but I have self-respect enough not to want a usurped glory.' The publisher had to content himself with a public statement of his opinion as he issued the work, that the so-called editor of the *Project* was 'in very many respects the creator'.<sup>1</sup>

Rousseau's originality appears in a thought that re-echoes in all the pieces. It was connected with his question as an independent man: if men at large are to be controlled and restrained from injustice and wickedness by the powers of government, vested in certain men, what guarantee have I against their wrongful use of that social power? The two projects of St. Pierre were relevant to that question. One was to set up an international association by pact which would uphold public law in every State; the other was to form the administration—since any government must consist of many officers—in such a way that no party within the State could possibly tyrannise it. The schemes were repeating the political devices of

<sup>1</sup> To Bastide, Mar. 1761, *C.G.*, vol. vi, No. 1047.

Greek democracy, where it was the custom to have those in authority take turns ruling. They were formulated by St. Pierre in terms of the modern doctrine of self-interest—that where so many parties are interested in the maintenance of a system no part can dominate, for the interest of all the others checks them. But Rousseau rendered the thought in relation to his own conception of the issues. He represented these projects as ‘ways of guaranteeing the subjects against the tyranny of their princes’. The powers are ‘forced to be equitable and peaceful’, or ‘forced to cede their private interest to the public interest’, or again ‘forced to be just’. And that meant liberty for the citizen and the good man. Could these institutions be really established in Europe the great problem of government might at last be solved! And it was with no little pleasure he set down these ideas, fancying monarchs and princes constrained to follow Right and the general will of their peoples.

Those thoughts, however, were pointed at monarchy, and because of St. Pierre’s specific reference to France, they were a direct application to the country of his residence, of which he was nevertheless not a citizen. It was courting danger to issue them even as an editor. He remembered the warnings of his friends, apparently, and he saw that what was there written could not be published. He had to keep to general principles without specific allusion to the land in which he was living. Perhaps it was because the *Third Book* and whatever followed it in the manuscript of the *Social Contract* also fell short of that prescription of safety that made him destroy it and revise the whole treatise. But it is also very likely that the making of these studies of government in the projects of St. Pierre really advanced his own thinking about the question and gave him ideas which forced him to discard what had already been written in the previous essay.

There was a certain fascination for him in St. Pierre’s idea of so multiplying the interests concerned that no private interest could dominate. As applied to the deliberative aspect of government it seemed valuable. In coming to any public decision, if all the voices are heard, the diverse faults and prejudices and partialities may correct each other, leaving the decision to be made by those judgments in which the public interest happens to have more sway. This might be the practicable way to determine what is the general will. And in the matter of voting Rousseau later availed himself of this solution.

But, on the other hand, this would not do for the actual executive work of government. Rousseau shared the objection of Bodin, Hobbes, and Pufendorff to dispersing the powers of

administration in such wise as to prevent effective and unified action.<sup>1</sup> There was certainly no question about its being 'expedient that the officers should be in accord'. And it was doubtful in the extreme whether many officers moving about through the various grades of many councils would achieve a unity of policy and action. They should constitute a real body with an effectual will. The presence of such a corporate will in the government, distinct alike from the will of the body-politic and the individual's will, was one of the points on which he would later insist. It was not his intention to prevent such a will from forming, but to keep it always subordinate to the general will—that had been his aim since the *Political Economy*. The method of dividing the powers is bad policy: it only multiplies the corporate wills by dividing the government into several rival bodies each of which pursues its own ends, and the men who serve them are animated by corporate loyalties which make many an evil act right in their eyes because it is for the good of their order. Thus it is also a bad plan to counteract the strong executive power of a governing body with a separate deliberative power (the argument applied against Locke's 'executive' and 'legislative' which Montesquieu had so favored), since each would have a sense of its prerogatives, and the one body that makes decisions would chafe at having nothing to do with their execution and that which is charged with the executive office would feel it an ungrateful job carrying out orders not of their own giving. Such methods of control of the governing body seemed unsatisfactory. And Rousseau needed to inquire further on this score—how the government may be unified and effective, and yet at all times under the direction of the general will of the people.

In fact, a contradiction lurked in the various ideas being entertained. The best way of determining upon a policy which is really in the public interest seems to be the voice of all concerned, freely registered and counted—the balance which turns the decision passing as the general will. In a situation where no man in particular is in the counsels of Providence and can know the true good of a community, this must be the only fair way to proceed. But for efficiency of action it is the poorest way. A government proceeding to action according to such methods would have minimum power—and without its ability to apply the law with celerity and force, every individual in the State is left unprotected in his rights and liberties. The democratic

<sup>1</sup> Bodin, bk. 4, ch. 5 ('S'il est expédient que les officiers soyent d'accord'), p. 603; Pufendorf (*The Law of Nature*, bk. 7, ch. 4, sect. 13, p. 538) questioned the modern interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of 'mixture', averring it was never intended as a 'division of powers'.

method appears good for determining the general will but bad for its execution. This was precisely the problem formulated at the opening of the Third Book of the manuscript version of the *Social Contract*—it still remained a problem, more acutely felt because it had been realised in exact detail.

But even as regards the process of deliberation and making of law and general policy, a question existed. Are all the people to engage in that, or some men elected to act for them, the 'representatives' of the English system, so highly praised by Montesquieu. Now Rousseau was still thinking of a State with the unity and perfection described by Plato and Aristotle. He was insistent on trying to define a republican polity which would retain to the end the power in the people as a whole. This seemed impossible except in small States. But the world had grown into nations larger by far than anything contemplated in the Greek politics which ruled his thought. Here it was that the idea of federation seemed so significant. It was conceived primarily as a general association of States in the cause of peace. But it was applicable just as well to the 'defensive purposes', as Montesquieu put it, of small States, a scheme whereby they might be strong in their union against aggression from without whilst retaining their autonomy within. And when St. Pierre applied this idea to the governance of so established a system as the French monarchy, he suggested still more radical possibilities, that even the existing great nations might be made over into a federal form whereby the essential life of the people would be in communities small enough for all to know each other and understand their common needs and have a rule of the general will, without resorting to a virtual alienation of their civil rights and duties to 'representatives'. There was something ironical in recommending to the world at that time the system of politics embodied in the much-scorned, unwieldy, unmajestic 'Germanic Body' which seemed anything but a Sovereign Power. Of course he dared not come out with this proposal any more than Pufendorff himself, who had had to employ a pseudonym to tell that it was not wise for the German States to aspire to the spurious glories of sovereignty—that they ought to perfect the form at hand, even if the modern world had few examples of it. The idea of federation, Rousseau divined from these masters, had a future. And it seemed so important to him that it deserved a separate treatment on its own account.<sup>1</sup> When

<sup>1</sup> See the later plan to publish a work on 'The Right of Confederation', 'The Principles of the Right of War', and 'The Law of Nations', in order to supplant Grotius. Likewise the abstract of his political treatise as a whole in *Émile*, where the above plan is stated, subsequent to a résumé of the essay on the *Social Contract*. *Émile*, H., vol. ii, p. 438 f.



the essay on the *Social Contract* would be finished, other inquiries might be undertaken into the possibilities of realising 'the form of the republic' throughout Europe, within each State, large as well as small, and amongst them all, constituting an 'European Republic'. Then liberty and justice and peace would be everywhere established—that was the vision to be embodied in the comprehensive treatise, the *Political Institutions*. And thus the time and thought Rousseau had here spent writing on the projects of St. Pierre were no digression whatsoever from his own work on politics.

## CHAPTER X THE OPTIMIST

'J'espère et l'espérance embellit tout.' Letter to Voltaire, August 18, 1756.

**I**N the month of May 1756 Rousseau was done with his work on Abbé de St. Pierre, which was a continuation of his long-enduring investigations on the subject of politics and government. After the unremitting exertion of writing, a lassitude and indolence beset him. The season, too, beckoned him away from study into the out-of-doors. His mind was relaxed and there came into it that boon of nature scarcely known to the urban spirits with whom he had been consorting, 'the sweet sense of very existence itself, apart from any other sensation'. And the zealous citizen of Geneva, the republican, relapsed into the man of nature.

Yet only moments of the care-free independence of the solitary spirit were now possible to him. He had acquired new needs of the heart through living with men and women in society. He missed his associates of the *Encyclopedia*, and his other intimates at Paris, some of them bound to him by the tie of a common nativity in Geneva. None of these friends had yet found the way to see him at the Hermitage, for lack of time or opportunity, or possibly, too, in some cases, because they disapproved of his withdrawal into solitude. It is true they were writing to him and promising to come to see him. But they were saying things behind his back. Diderot suspected him, it seems, of a certain access of sheer misanthropy and contempt of others, and even of a vain and hypocritical pride in his own virtue—an opinion expressed, though in a veiled reference, in a letter to one of his fellow Encyclopedists, and one which Grimm endorsed.<sup>1</sup> Thus Rousseau was made to feel isolated, more alone than he wanted to be; and in his solitary state he came to need the company of some congenial spirit, better company than his own idle thoughts, or Thérèse Levasseur. And fancy had to supply him, a spring-time fancy. There thus came to go walking with him in his paradise of reverie, so reminiscent of Les Charmettes, certain figures shaped by his own brain, dreams of fairer women than ever he had known in person. They revisited him, day after day. Their comings and goings began to form a history in his imagination; and the dreamer himself became somewhat more active and tried to compose a story, *The Loves of Claire and Marcellin*.

<sup>1</sup> Diderot to Landois, June 29, 1756, *Œuvres*, 19, pp. 434 ff.; Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, June 30, 1756, vol. iii, pp. 249-56.

Of these days there is little personal correspondence surviving. Rousseau deplored this fact himself, because he was compelled to give a very retrospective account of the period in his *Confessions*. He could only recall, apparently, that his romantic imaginings went on and on until they culminated in the novel *Julie* over a year afterwards. In point of fact, however, his dreams suffered a break. His tale of *Claire and Marcellin* quickly stopped short, and the manuscript of it was found unfinished among his papers.

He had other things besides romance on his mind, ambitions still to prosecute his various great works. He was moodily intent upon his own business. He conceived a dread of unexpected visits from the various youthful spirits who were attracted to him, so that on more than one occasion he repulsed them in a way which he afterwards confessed to have been 'brutal'. Indeed, at the very time, he admitted his unmannerliness, as in the letter he sent to the young Coindet, a compatriot who resided in Paris, and who had arrived one day with a whole company of admirers and exasperated him beyond all endurance. Rousseau tendered him an explanation and apology the next day: 'Pardon the reserve of one who is seeking solitude where he might be able to dispose of the little time yet remaining to him. That is a boon of which I appreciate the value, both for others and for myself, and which one ought to respect in another person all the more because no human power can ever restore a moment of it when usurped.'<sup>1</sup> This betokened a very serious preoccupation, not indulgence in day-dreams. And the fact of the change was noticed by another young friend who was greatly attached to him, an Encyclopedist, author of the article, *Fanaticism*—Alexander Deleyre. For Rousseau had been communicating to him those 'delicious fictions' of love. And when the story broke off Deleyre plied him unceasingly for more of it, which irritated him and made him somewhat resentful as at an interference with matters of concern only to himself. At the time Deleyre was in Bordeaux, but he became greatly solicitous over the seriousness of his master and dared to offer him the following advice, though with an affectionate and light touch which brightens most of his pages: 'Amuse yourself, my dear Hermit, over the things that have driven you into solitude. Laugh a little—it wears one out to be always criticising.'<sup>2</sup> It was to the author of the *Discourse on Inequality* this cheerful advice was tendered.

Another letter clearly indicates how seriously he was occupied.

<sup>1</sup> To Coindet, June 27, C.G., vol. ii, No. 292.

<sup>2</sup> From Deleyre, July 3, *ibid.*, No. 293.

It was written to the Secretary of State for Lower Austria, M. de Scheyb, who was out collecting testimonials in honor of Emperor Francis and Maria Theresa as being noble sponsors of the arts and sciences in their State, and who approached Rousseau, asking him to join the literary flatterers of their Highnesses—along with Voltaire and other ‘great ones’. To be sought out thus was in itself offensive. Besides he had sincerely condemned the culture of the arts and sciences for any people not yet utterly corrupted. He did not know what was the actual condition of Austrian morals, and the talents that were supposed to have been fostered. And he would not commit himself to the glorification of monarchs anywhere. With undisguised acerbity he declined to lend his pen to the tribute, saying, ‘Genius cannot be bought.’ And he added this gratuitous observation: ‘Europe is vainly inundated by men of letters, but men of worth are ever rare; and durable works are still more so, and posterity will think that there were very few books in this age where in fact so very many are being issued.’<sup>1</sup> This is the superb retort of one who knew he had ‘genius’, and books to compose for ‘posterity’, and rights to his time and energy for his serious work. It was unendurable and maddening to be disturbed by such petty concerns as the vanity of kings and their adulating ministers. He was bearish to any one who dared to intrude upon his privacy of life and thought in that seclusion which he had entered deliberately in order to accomplish his high purposes.

Thus even Deleyre who had been favored with the ‘idols of imagination’ was snubbed when he tried to persuade him to continue with the romance. And Deleyre inferred, quite properly, that he was back at the political questions again, although he made the mistake of assuming that the thoughts of his dear master, ‘the Hermit’, were still cast in the critical vein of the *Discourse on Inequality*, whereas Rousseau had advanced very far since the writing of that work. Deleyre was too much under the spell of the *Discourse* himself to realise that its author, who had composed it two years before, was now intent upon an enthusiastic constructive programme. For no one, not even Diderot, much less these younger friends, knew of the manuscript essays for the book on *Political Institutions*. And Deleyre always made the mistake of arguing with him about his views in the *Discourse* and trying to convert him to the doctrine of the *Encyclopaedia*, the ‘principle of sociability’. He wanted some article of political faith and he wanted the man who inspired him most to have the same faith. He loved ‘cheerful prospects’—that was why

<sup>1</sup> To De Scheyb, July 15, *ibid.*, No. 295; cf. No. 294.

he could write the article on, and against, fanaticism—and he could not dwell long with any ‘sad reveries’. He constantly sought, therefore, with an ever-graceful wit, and very fine charm, to bring a lighter spirit into the heart of the hermit for whom he had so great an affection and respect.

Yet a man desperately serious about his thought is not necessarily thinking of desperate things. Rousseau had a peculiar fund of optimism little understood even by his most intimate friends, chiefly because they were unbelievers and missed the aids of religion. In his solitary walks in the woods he was recalling, at the age of forty-two, the sentiments of twenty years before at Les Charmettes—recalling what he had learned there from Father Lamy and Malebranche and Plato, and many another who repeated these thoughts, that the intent of human nature is good, and that the Providence of God is real, and that man can be saved if he follows in his life the perfect law and the general will of the Supreme Being. These convictions had underlain his own long personal search for the saving political solution. The happy solution, the Form of the Republic, he now had in prospect, but he did not have it complete in regard to government and a number of other questions such as the external relations of the State, education, and religion; and it was on these matters he wanted to work in his retreat. The principle of his solution was the optimistic one that men do have it in their power to supply their own controls and governance, so that they can establish a sovereignty which is wholly beneficent and never tyrannical or hurtful to the life of the individuals. Let the governing will be truly ‘general’ and the peoples on the earth will be governed as are all things on or above the earth, according to laws of a supremely wise jurisdiction. In a political order perfected along those lines the life, liberty, and happiness of every person will be secure, as God upholds every part of the universe in his perfect wisdom. The social order of Rousseau’s thoughts was thus conceived in the image of a religious view of the world as a whole. And so, amongst those dreams of perfect love there were these profounder dreams of a metaphysical nature, a vision of the Whole and its parts disposed each in its right place by the perfect will of God. A universe was tracing itself out in his fancy so as to give a sanction, so to speak, for his own scheme concerning man in society.

These thoughts on religion were as yet only implicit in his political studies. But they were beginning to disengage themselves and to make their appearance detached from any direct application to politics or society. In bringing that about, it may have been some help to him to read his Plato again, the

*Republic* and more particularly the *Timaeus*. And Leibniz may have contributed something with his metaphysics of the monads enjoying their individuality in the most perfect possible order, presided over by the most perfect God. But Rousseau himself was not actively thinking about any such metaphysics—he was simply being metaphysical in his thoughts. Genius advances often by such indirection and awaiting the favorable occasion. Rousseau seems to have been at this time in the passive, waiting attitude of the poet or the mystic, in that period which alternates with action, when ideas resile from the worked-out argument and move about into new configurations of their own intent. And it was such a frame of mind those worldly ministers with testimonials, and inquisitive young enthusiasts from Paris, invaded when they broke in upon the peace of the hermit.

The midsummer of 1756 was the occasion of an outburst of thought on the score of religious belief. Voltaire, the unchallenged monarch of the world of letters, who was living so happily in the environs of the Geneva where he himself would dearly have loved to dwell had published a poem on the disaster of Lisbon, and it turned out to be an argument impugning the goodness of God. It scoffed at the philosopher who would dare to be optimistic in the face of such suffering and loss of life. With a certain degree of malice, perhaps, he sent complimentary copies of this book to D'Alembert, Diderot, and Rousseau, the three hopeful writers of the *Encyclopedie*.<sup>1</sup> This was too much for the citizen of Geneva. He had not forgotten the sting of the sarcastic comment Voltaire had made to him in a letter thanking him for a copy of his *Discourse* and referring to it as his second fine 'libel on the human race'. Now was his chance for a retort. He would call Voltaire's poem a libel on Providence. And he plunged with passion and conviction into the writing of a letter in Defence of Providence.

'I showed men how they themselves were responsible for their own unhappiness, and, consequently, how they might escape it.' But Voltaire with a sheer pretence of being more humane only discouraged humanity and sapped their spirit of self-reliance by shifting all the responsibility for evil upon the Deity. It was far kinder to teach men to believe in their own powers. And it was precisely that, Rousseau insisted, which his reputed libels on humanity meant.

Voltaire had challenged the optimists Pope and Leibniz,

<sup>1</sup> Diderot's optimism: *Les Principes de la philosophie morale* (1745), bk. 1, pt. 1, sect. 2; pt. 2, sect. 1, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, pp. 20-7; *Pensées philosophiques*, No. 20, *ibid.*, pp. 134-5; *La Promenade du sceptique* (written 1747), *ibid.*, p. 231; *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle* (written 1747), *ibid.*, pp. 261 ff.

aiming his shafts, however, at his own contemporaries. And Rousseau speaks up for them and tells how they might address humanity at such a crisis: 'Man, have patience, your ills are a necessary effect of your nature and of the constitution of the Universe. The Eternal and Beneficent Being who governs it would have liked to guarantee you against them. Of all possible economies He has chosen that which combines the least evil and the greatest good, or, were the thing put even more crudely, if He has not done better, it is because He could not do better.' That is to say, if there really is some ground for thinking differently of God because of the fact of such a disaster to men, we should do better to drop the attribute of Absolute Power and hold fast to his Absolute Goodness. Rousseau was not so enamored of the ideal of sheer Power as not to be willing to surrender it in case of a forced option. However, this presupposes that no account of evil can be given save by ascribing it directly to God.<sup>1</sup>

Another account, however, is entirely possible. 'I do not see where else one could look for the source of moral evil than in man himself, free, perfected, and by just so much corrupted; and as for the physical evils . . . they are inevitable in every system of which man makes a part, and so the question is not why man is not perfectly happy, but why he exists at all. And besides . . . the greater part of our physical ills are our own work.' For while death itself is no evil, men make it so by their attitude in anticipation, and though it always comes sooner than anyone likes, yet they advance the fated hour by their own doings. Thus the inhabitants of Lisbon perished, in a great many cases, because they were bent on living huddled together in so limited a space in the city; and further, when the trouble came, they looked out first for their goods, papers, silver, or other things which they apparently regarded as the most important part of themselves. Were they scattered in the woods or in deserts they would have plenty of chances for survival, and the earthquake would pass unnoticed, an unrecorded item in the history of the world, arguing nothing whatsoever against a Providence. For no single occurrence in Nature is in itself either good or bad, and no argument one way or the other ought to be drawn from it. The question does not pertain to Nature but to man, and there it ought to be considered with reference to human suffering and its causes and meaning.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Voltaire, Aug. 18, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 303, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 306-8. Cf. Seneca, *De Providentia*, i. 'Quakings of the trembling earth' are mentioned among the seeming irregularities which come under the law of nature.

Yet in this respect the philosophers miss their reckonings, through not taking a broad enough basis of experience. They never know what it is to enjoy life without worldly preoccupations. They dwell among the wealthy sated with false pleasures and not caring to have life over again, and they are acquainted, on the other hand, with men of letters who live a most unhealthy sedentary existence, always unhappy because of their reflections. It is only the testimony of such tired and disillusioned people that Voltaire takes. But the world is full of many other people of better stuff, and generally more sincere in their speech, the honest bourgeois, the good artisans, even the peasants, particularly such as were in the neighborhood of Geneva. Those folk live an almost automatic existence, content with it, not harassed by any dread anticipations of death, or, if they dream of it at all, it is a paradise conceived merely as an incessant renewal of their own vegetating existence. To such people life is not a bad present. And their evidence is altogether overlooked by the urban-minded Voltaire.<sup>1</sup>

Now as to the *argument* against Providence. If any inference is to be drawn at all, it ought to be based, not on the accidents, but on the whole regular course of Nature. That regularity alone is the fact that tells a tale. In asserting this Rousseau was standing firm on the teachings of the Stoics, like Seneca, and of Malebranche, who saw the glory of God only in the perfect generality of His will which is the source of the order and law.<sup>2</sup> But Voltaire had forsaken such wise argument simply in order to score a point against optimists—evil is bound to happen, he said, because Nature is actually irregular and falls short of the perfection of a true system. Now whether there is accident or irregularity in Nature depends entirely upon the expectations of man. 'Is not the most bizarre curve just as regular in the eyes of nature as a perfect circle is to ours?' And are not all things really traceable to causes, although the 'filiation of events' escapes our perception? To take any other attitude is to affirm that there are 'actions without principles and effects without causes'. It is to deny incentive to science, for when men will blame nothing on their human ignorance they will not search farther for understanding of Nature. Voltaire was thus destroying the fundamental conviction of scientific thought. And this was not becoming in one who was the boasted expositor of Newton. Rousseau went on to cite Newton in Physics against him, and to twit him also with having abandoned his other master, Pierre Bayle, who would never have pretended, on the

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, pp. 308-9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 306-8.



basis of doubt about causality or the reality of system in Nature, to *demonstrate* anything either for or against Providence.<sup>1</sup>

The true concept of Nature seems to be that of a system of beings always intimately related to each other and to the whole. Just 'because there is nothing foreign to the Universe, everything that takes place in it acts necessarily upon the Universe itself'. The individual may cry out against such an order because he himself is not uniquely favored, but 'the system of that Universe which produces, preserves, and perpetuates all the thinking and sentient beings, ought to be of more value than any one of these beings, and so the whole, in spite of its own worth, or rather in virtue of it, is bound to require some sacrifice of the happiness of the individuals for the preservation of the whole'. God may be said to have a 'morality' precisely in this concern for the greatest number. And the passing of man from life, which so troubles the philosopher, may be interpreted as just an occasion for a 'circulation of substance between men, animals, and vegetation', which contributes to 'the general good'.

Yet the optimist must not be supposed so fatuous as to assert that 'all is good'. He is, in the first instance, only denying the contrary proposition, that there is a 'general evil'. Here Rousseau's reasoning was analogous to that done in his political writings where he first showed the falsity of Hobbes's 'general warfare', without meaning to claim that men live universally in a condition of peace and goodwill. No, it is a fact which cannot be ignored, that men do experience what is really evil to them.

The meaning of optimism, therefore, is better expressed in the phrase, 'the whole is good', or 'all is good for the whole'. Such principles are not amenable to proof or disproof from anything in human knowledge. They 'cannot be derived from the properties of matter, or the mechanics of the Universe, but solely by an induction from the perfections of God who presides over all: so that one does not prove the existence of God by the system of Pope, but the system of Pope by the existence of God, and further this is true, without contradiction, that the question of the origin of evil is itself only derived from that of Providence'.

Apart from the prior conviction that the whole order is good, men would simply regard every event in Nature as a fact and never feel the slightest need to justify anything: it is solely because men *postulate* a providential order that they find themselves in all their difficulties over evil. They ought first, then, to clear up their own explicit meaning of Providence.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> pp. 310-14.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 314-16.

The priests have stood in the way of this inquiry because they stupidly make Providence intervene in every single event of Nature. Taking the theological view at its face value the philosophers in turn hold God accountable for every particular occurrence without exception, even 'charging Him with the safety of their valises', as Seneca had remarked in his essay *On Providence*.<sup>1</sup> Both sets of notions are doubtless entirely in error, 'because all things abide by common law, and there is no exception of anything. It is perfectly credible that particular events are nothing in the eyes of the master of the Universe, that his Providence is solely universal, that he contents Himself with preserving the kinds and species, and presiding over all, without troubling Himself how every single individual passes his short life.'

The right way of thinking about Providence is to consider things as relative in the physical order and absolute in the moral. 'The highest conception I can form of Providence is that every material being should be disposed the best possible way in regard to the whole, and every sentient and intelligent being the best it is possible to be with regard to himself, in such a manner that for him who is conscious of his own existence, it would be more worth while to exist than not to exist. But we must apply that rule to the total duration of each sentient being, and not merely to some particular instant of his existence, such as is human life. That shows how very much the question of Providence is implicated with that of the immortality of the soul which I have the happiness to believe, without being ignorant of the fact that reason can doubt of this doctrine as well as of the eternity of punishment which neither you nor I, nor any thinking man who appreciates God will ever possibly believe.'

Everything seems to come down to the existence of God, a truth that Voltaire himself professed not to be bringing into question and that he had in all his previous writings been continually asserting. Consequently Rousseau assumed that truth as conceded. 'If God exists, He is perfect; if He is perfect, He is wise, mighty and just; if wise and mighty, all is good; if just and mighty, my soul is immortal; if my soul is immortal, thirty years of life are nothing to me and are perhaps necessary to the upholding of the Universe.'

But Rousseau candidly admitted that nothing seemed demonstrable *by reason* either for or against Providence. The theist bases his sentiment only on probabilities; likewise the atheist. The objections to one and the other are—as Bayle had shown—always insoluble because they involve matters about which men

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *De Providentia*, vi.

have no veritable ideas. Yet, while agreeing with all that, it had to be confessed that the state of doubt was too violent itself to be long tolerated, and that the mind was drawn by preference to the more consoling position, precisely as so many philosophical sceptics had done before him, Montaigne, Bayle, Cicero.<sup>1</sup>

Rousseau had no intention therefore of urging his own belief upon others, as if to say: 'You ought to believe this because I do.' And on this score he was in absolute agreement with Voltaire in demanding for every one a 'perfect liberty' in matters of faith. For to believe or not to believe in things which are thus beyond demonstration is not in our power to control. We can have no responsibility to any one on this score. 'The kings of this world, have they, then, any inspection in the other, and are they entitled to torment their subjects here-below, in order to force them to go to Paradise? No, every human government is limited, by its nature, to civil duties, and whatever the sophist Hobbes may say, when a man serves the State loyally he is accountable to no one for the manner in which he serves God.'<sup>2</sup> And, indeed, if any Divine Vengeance is to be thought of, it is in this form that some day every tyranny practiced in the name of God will be punished, whereas those who are doubtful about Him, but in good faith, will receive His mercy, since they have received none from the despots in authority on earth.<sup>3</sup>

'However, there is one sort of profession of faith which the laws can impose—although, apart from the principles of morality and natural right, this ought to be purely negative—because there can be religions which attack the foundations of the society, and it is necessary to exterminate these religions to make the peace of the State secure. Of these dogmas to be proscribed, *intolerance* is, without any question, the most odious, but it must be taken at its source.' Thus any one who claims that 'no one else can be a good man without believing all that he himself believes' is an intolerant. Such persons are everywhere, among the incredulous as well as the faithful, for there are some, even, who 'would force the people to believe nothing'. It would be well, then, 'to have in every state a moral code, or a kind of profession of civic faith, containing positively all the social maxims that each person is bound to admit, and negatively, the intolerant maxims which all are bound to reject, not because they are impious, but because they are seditious. Then every religion which could accommodate itself to the code would be allowed

<sup>1</sup> Vaughan, pp. 318-20. A manuscript addition refers to this as a 'proof of sentiment', and argues that it is rightly to be distinguished from prejudice, as being an 'invincible disposition' of the mind.

<sup>2</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>3</sup> P. 321, Hobbes, *Philosophical Rudiments*, ch. 18; *Leviathan*, pt. iii, ch. 43.

and every other not agreeing with it would be proscribed, and *every man would be free to have no other religion than that of the code itself*.<sup>1</sup> Will not Voltaire, who drafted the 'catechism of man', in his poem on Natural Religion, crown his career by composing for the sake of tolerance such a 'catechism of the citizen'?<sup>2</sup>

The task sketched for Voltaire was one which Rousseau himself was cogitating and not so long afterward put down on paper. The thoughts meditated on this occasion passed into the didactic romance *Julie* later, where the heroine and her unbelieving husband were described living happily, with a mutual tolerance of their difference in regard to religious belief, an example to the world of a society where no one forces another to believe or disbelieve. Other thoughts on this catechism were destined to make up a chapter, entitled 'Civil Religion', for the book on political institutions. And besides that there was to be the very personal and elaborate fulfilment of these ideas in the *Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar*, carrying on the faith asserted at the very conclusion of this letter to Voltaire: 'All the subtleties of metaphysics will never make me doubt for a moment the immortality of the soul and a beneficent Providence. I feel the truth of that, I believe it, I want it, I hope for it, I will defend it to my last breath, and this dispute, of all I have entered into, will be the sole one where my own personal interest will not be forgotten.'<sup>3</sup>

But in August 1756 these ideas were merely at the birth. His immediate preoccupation still was with the projects concerning man and his redeeming of himself by his own resources as a social and moral being. The letter itself was a continuation of his political reflecting. As he hated the tyranny of kings, so he hated the domination of ecclesiastics who would 'force men to go to Paradise', and he hated, too, the arrogance of men of letters, Encyclopedists, malicious poets who would 'force men to disbelieve'. At the sight of their intolerance he became intolerant himself. Hence his notion of a civil code of religion banning from the State every body of people which adopted the intolerant principle of using force to obtain their ends. Such a principle simply must be renounced by any one who honestly means to play his part in the social order, and it ought to be embodied, therefore, in the original social contract establishing the body-politic. At first sight this was a strange thought in one who was such a devotee of liberty. But it was not inconsistent, for all that, with his principles. He was thinking not about perfect men in his Republic but men as they are. And the men of history and experience were beings who professed

<sup>1</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> Vaughan, pp. 321-3.

<sup>3</sup> p. 324.

religion and adherence to Churches and who accepted a domination on the part of ecclesiastics which was inimical to their citizenship. Bayle and many others had signalled this opposition of the compulsory policy of the Church to the moral liberty of the individual to believe as his reason and sentiment dictated. This religious subjection of men could not be left unchallenged. The battle for tolerance begun by Bayle when he attacked the doctrine, 'Compel them to enter' (a doctrine apparently espoused by Hobbes), and carried on farther by Locke and Voltaire, both strong protagonists of tolerance, this fight must be continued. And Rousseau's own contribution to the common cause was this of proposing that the citizen of a true republic ought to have vouchsafed to him in the social convention the right 'to have no other religion but the code itself', that being no elaborate creed but only the formulation of the political principles of liberty under the law. This code was thus a device to give the individual his liberty in the matter of faith, provided he fulfils his duty to the State of which he is voluntarily a member. It was intended as an instrument of freedom. And in a sense it was a means of forcing the Church to be just and peaceful in the community in like manner as, on St. Pierre's schemes, the personal sovereign was forced to be just.

And the political ideals on their brighter side also had their part to play in this *Letter to Voltaire*. They were writ large on the heavens, as it were, Providence being described as a will exactly the opposite of arbitrary and tyrannical, a beneficent will, 'guaranteeing' to every independent individual security and welfare, and ruling in the interest of the whole, according to general law, favoring none, excepting none. The interest of the Supremely Good Being is in the whole of humanity. And since humanity consists of vast multitudes of men all equally desirous of all the goods that come into their fancy, and since they cannot all enjoy the benefits and good offices at one and the same time, they are conceived to take turn and turn about under the law of the whole order, in a 'circulation' like that of the functionaries of St. Pierre's government, or Plato's guardians. The same figure serves to make death reconcilable and immortality credible, for death is not the annihilation of personality but only a change of status within the eternal order of good of which the individual person is truly an inalienable member, nothing being 'foreign' to the Whole.<sup>1</sup> And then further as to God: He is to be thought

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Malebranche, *Recherche*, bk. 4, ch. 2, sect. 4, pp. 349-50. 'Il y a certaines lois établies dans la nature, selon lesquelles les corps changent successivement de formes, parce que la variété successive de ces formes fait la beauté de l'univers, et donne l'admiration pour son auteur; mais il n'y a point de loi dans la nature pour l'anéantissement d'aucun être. . . . Les corps peuvent donc changer, mais ils ne

of less as an absolute power or monarch than as a President or Guardian of the law of Good, again as it is written in the *Timæus* of Plato or on the analogy with the presiding superior in St. Pierre's schemes. Thus in giving his description of the best possible order of things Rousseau carried over metaphors from his studies of the right order of society.

But in taking the issue thus in the large Rousseau appears to have realised something new in his own thoughts. He was here thinking of the idea of Providence simply as an ideal and without concern for its practical embodiment for the time. He had found right at hand the Platonic notion which had kindled enthusiasm in so many who believed in the fundamental reality of the Good, in the ancient Fathers as well as the Stoics, the priests of the Oratoire, philosophers like Leibniz, moralists such as Pope and Shaftesbury, and even the keenly critical Diderot and his fellow Encyclopedists. It is the idea of all beings having their appointed place and good within the Whole whose beneficence devolves upon each and every one in so far as it holds to the order or law of the general good. Rousseau used that idea in his answer, when he wrote that the system of the universe ought to be deemed of more value than any of the beings contained within it and sustained in existence by it, and, further, that the Whole is bound to require some sacrifice of the happiness of the individuals. He accepted that notion in his theory of the political order where he asserted the sovereignty of the whole people. Nevertheless, he had another thought on this score. In the physical order generally everything must thus be conceived in terms of its relationship to the Whole, but man's existence is not limited to the physical, as he had asserted many times against his materialistic friends; and, indeed, he had started his work on politics pointing to the factor of 'moral' needs. So the most complete and finest conception of Providence would be this: that every *material* being is disposed in the best possible way with regard to the whole and every moral being in the best possible way *with regard to himself*. This implies an absolute worth in the individual, notwithstanding the superior value of the Whole in the other aspect. This thought was now being disengaged from the mingled Platonic and individualistic elements of his reflection. It was going to lead to the making of a clear distinction between two possible types of education, one the civic education of man for the State as sketched in

peuvent pas périr. . . . De même votre âme, sans rentrer dans le néant, aura des pensées et des sentiments bien différents de ceux qu'elle a pendant cette vie. . . . Les choses que je viens de dire font, ce me semble, assez voir que l'immortalité de l'âme n'est pas une chose si difficile à comprendre.'

Plato, the other the 'domestic' education where the individual is to be reared according to his own nature, not being formed for the State, though, of course, it may be hoped the truly good man will turn out to be the good citizen.

The making of such a distinction implied a renewed appreciation of the domestic relationship and its moral goods and happiness. The first sense of this had been intimated in the *Discourse on Inequality* when it mentioned the stage of existence where there are family affections as being the truly happiest era for the individual. The claims of the heart were now again asserting themselves in Rousseau. And in giving his attention at this moment to these personal desiderata he was diverted ever so slightly from his preoccupation with the life of man in the large political bodies and the eternal struggle for liberty and right. There is, indeed, a phase of human life where one is not engaged in striving or strife but simply accepting its boons and enjoyment. So it was at that very moment for the solitary thinker relaxing from his labors in his first fine season at the Hermitage.

The *Letter to Voltaire* was not written for publication, and it was not published at the time. Nor was anything else published of what he had been essaying, nothing of his studies on War and on Political Institutions. Various questions still clamored for solution on those matters, particularly concerning government. And even the *Letter* just composed only set him questioning further, not only about religion but also about the sufficiency of a political programme. The independent man wanted happiness as well as liberty and he had to look for it elsewhere than in politics. The other way or ways were still to be explored. Meantime his mood was hopeful, and he confessed with a strange, ready confidence in Voltaire that all seemed bright to him in the universe because of his hope. It is no wonder Voltaire knew not what to reply at the moment, but bided his time, in order to plan out his *Candide*, as a retort to such optimism.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE HERMIT

'Tout se réunit pour m'ôter tout espoir.'

(To Mme d'Houdetot, 1757, *C.G.*, vol. iii, p. 95.)

FOR some time longer Rousseau struggled to make progress with his work. He was exceedingly jealous of his time, and, as before, resentful when demands were made upon it. A painter of Avignon who had repeatedly sent him verses to criticise received the reply after the third time: 'It is not right that I should be tyrannised for your pleasure: not that my time might be precious, as you say—it actually passes in suffering or else is lost in idleness, and, I confess it could scarcely be used to less advantage—but when I can't make use of it profitably for any one, I don't want to be prevented from wasting it as I please. A single moment usurped is a good which all the kings of the universe could not restore to me, and it is to have the free disposition of my own affairs that I flee the idlers of the cities, people as bored themselves as they are boring to others and abusing the time of others because they don't know what to do with their own.'<sup>1</sup> In October he decided to stay over the winter at the Hermitage: 'I must have leisure', he wrote Mme d'Épinay, 'and tranquillity and all the necessities of life for working this winter; that is of the greatest importance to me, and indeed for five months I have been arranging it so that there will be no business to distract me. I have provided myself with wood and provisions; I have got together and sorted my papers and books so as to have them ready at hand. . . . In sum, in my present position, my time and these facilities are more precious to me than life itself.'<sup>2</sup> Like the artisan exalted in Plato's *Republic*, he had no time to be ill but had a work to perform without the accomplishing of which it would not be worth his while to live.

But there were other things necessary to life. The isolation in which he found himself was telling on him. He had fears that his old friends would never come to see him at the Hermitage, as he wrote to his fellow-countryman, Lenieps, at Paris: 'I hope that a few leagues of separation will never cool the sentiments that unite us.'<sup>3</sup> This was what he feared especially about Diderot, who continued to make promises and plans to come and always failed to put in an appearance. When others did begin to arrive from Paris, such as Condillac and Deleyre, they, of course,

<sup>1</sup> To Monier, Sept. 14, 1756, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 307.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Oct. 1756, *ibid.*, No. 315.

<sup>3</sup> To Lenieps, Sept. 5, *ibid.*, No. 305.



brought news of him but never the man himself. He was so disappointed over this, that even those friends who had faithfully sought him out were made to feel the inadequacy of their friendship, and they would write back to him letters pleading that they might be accepted in his affection.<sup>1</sup> But Rousseau was profoundly troubled as well as disappointed. A suspicion arose in his mind that his friend Grimm, whom he had introduced to the circle in Paris, was now crowding him out and taking his place of intimacy with Diderot just as he had gained a domination over the heart of Mme d'Épinay. There was thus an uncertain meaning in Diderot's absence which excited his imagination. Uncertainty, doubt, suspicion worked violently upon his spirit, bringing it to a pitch of emotion that was not to be endured without action. In the matter of his religious beliefs he had been able to escape such violence of feeling only by committing himself, as in the letter to Voltaire, to 'the consoling view'. And so now he turned to writing, to depict an ideal world of friends and lovers, where friends remain 'inseparable' and where lovers are not jealous of friendship, and where all alike are spontaneous, whole-hearted and natural, without chicane, suspicion, or other worldly blight upon the human relationships. With these 'amusements'—the story of Julie, St. Preux, and Claire—Rousseau was now 'wasting time' to his heart's content.

Alexander Deleyre became a frequent visitor at the Hermitage. He had come to Paris to take over the editorship of the *Journal Étranger*, and although he was very busy with his first issues, he turned up regularly at the retreat, bringing new books, gossip, and a spirited and witty presence. He besought advice and support for his new venture, and an article on music, to help him make it a success. Their growing intimacy, however, was not without some moments of displeasure. Deleyre had the keen wit of youth as well as its generous affection and charm. He liked to argue others over to his opinion, a trait which his older friend was inclined to attribute to the influence of the other Encyclopedists upon him, a kind of intolerance to which he had a profound aversion. On the very first occasion of Deleyre's visit they had evidently got into a discussion of politics, wherein Rousseau became too vehement, pronouncing 'the name of subject' to be simply of itself vile and unworthy of any man and that of 'citizen' the only fit one to bear. After returning to Paris, Deleyre wrote a letter, and persisted in a teasing argument. What is the natural inequality of man for (and that

<sup>1</sup> From Condillac, Sept. 7, 1756, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 306; from Deleyre, Sept. 16 and 23, Nos. 308-9.

Rousseau had admitted), if not to serve as the basis for a moral inequality? We must follow nature. But it is a necessity of nature, is it not, that 'the greatest number shall always let themselves be led by a few, and the few by one'? Thus the Encyclopedists reasoned when they accepted 'limited monarchy'. And again, it is not natural for men to live isolated from each other, for they are by nature disposed to assemble in one body and they only draw off from each other after they have had some experience of their mutual wickedness; then they betake themselves to the woods. These remarks by way of pleasantry were but an application of the principles of the *Encyclopedie*, against which Rousseau had apparently contended, but they seemed now to have a very personal reference, as if they expressed the opinions about himself held by the circle at Paris, that his life at the Hermitage had in it something unnatural and wrong. Happily, Deleyre himself changed the subject, to a delighted appreciation of such life: 'Away with all that metaphysics. Let us follow in your woods the two new idols of your imagination'—Julie and St. Preux. 'Oh, I envy you your leisure and your solitude. . . . You can be sure, my dear Citizen, that I, myself, am only aspiring to the liberty you now enjoy . . . as soon as I am free to do so, I will be your fellow citizen in the woods.' Then came a very personal note of loneliness: 'I miss you, especially in the evenings. I would like to have some good place to go to after work. There is so little society to which I am suited. M. Diderot is so aloof, so very much occupied, that I cannot but regret your being away from here, despite yourself. These moments of having nothing to do are so dangerous! What am I to do?'<sup>1</sup> Such an appeal for aid and companionship moved Rousseau to compassion and kindly thought. And that idea of 'a danger within' lodged deeply in his own consciousness, because it came so artlessly, and pathetically, from the young man. He was learning to know himself, through this friendship with Deleyre, and he never ceased to think of him, for all his teasing and witticism, with genuine affection. When he wrote Mme d'Épinay shortly afterwards, proposing his stay over the winter, he mentioned this 'danger within' as the only thing to be feared.<sup>2</sup> And years afterwards, writing the *Confessions*, he remembered the thought well, and spoke of himself throughout this sojourn at the Hermitage as suffering from what Deleyre had pointed out—'that interval of having nothing to do'.<sup>3</sup>

It so happened that he made inquiry of Mme d'Épinay to

<sup>1</sup> From Deleyre, Sept. 23, No. 309.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Oct. 1756, No. 315.

<sup>3</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 304.

learn if there were a gun or pistols at the Hermitage so that he would have some means of protecting the property during the long period when they would be cut off from the rest of the world. The news of this request spread through Paris. Deleyre felt that all was not well with his friend: 'I don't believe you are happy where you are;' but he could not resist opening his letter with a teasing quotation: 'Integer vitæ, scelerisque purus, non eget jaculis, neque arcu.' And surely a hermit has arms enough in the poverty of which he boasts, and in his hope of the future! And if there really is a Providence, surely he must be safe! 'Diderot and I are going to lay siege to you the very first day, and since we have a great desire to lead you back captive to Paris, you can well believe that we are going to spare nothing to force you.'<sup>1</sup> Mere innocent pleasantry that, and Rousseau bore with it, for he liked Deleyre, but such threats were destined to be remembered later and taken as indicative of a serious intent on the part of these friends in Paris. 'A life free from crime' was a little disconcerting to one who had chosen not to rear his own children and was even now contemplating a treatise on education in the home, as a kind of retribution and confession of guilt. To the remorseful a nemesis seems ever at hand to seize him in his flight away from men, and drag him back, and down amongst them. And so the purely fanciful threat of Deleyre, expressing only his desire to have the hermit back in Paris, took on, eventually, a meaning never intended, that his friends would literally force him to go their way and would conspire by every possible means to accomplish that end.

At that time, however, Rousseau only supposed that his friends were unable to understand how any one ever enjoyed life without Parisian sociability and wit. He had asked Deleyre to bring a copy of B at de Muralt's *Letters on the English and the French*, and he was doubtless confirmed in his resolve to stay at the Hermitage by reading what that other Swiss writer had said in his first letter on the French: 'They almost think every man an owl, or a philosopher, that discovers any inclination to solitude, not being able to comprehend how it is possible for any one not to be pleased with conversation.' And Muralt corroborated him in his love of liberty, which he praised in the English. These sentiments crept into the letters of Julie.

Rousseau loved Deleyre and even looked up to him. Whenever his heart was won he was highly suggestible and influenced by the sentiments and ideas of the other. He even tended to see himself as the friend saw him and to be guided in conduct accordingly. When Deleyre observed, on one occasion, that

<sup>1</sup> From Deleyre, Oct. 13, No. 316.

Rousseau was an obstinate and rebellious soul whose genius was always in abeyance away from the evil life of cities, he believed it and later described himself in exactly the same terms when writing to Dr. Tronchin at Geneva.<sup>1</sup> Again, Deleyre struck off a very happy description of the virginal reluctance to marriage observed in the grand-daughter of Mme le Vasseur, and suggested that Rousseau use the idea in his romance of *Julie*, which he promptly did and with scarcely any alteration in the language lest he spoil the imagery. 'It is a pure water that begins to be troubled at the first breath of the wind.'<sup>2</sup> Thus Deleyre made his little contribution to *Julie*, very much as Diderot had influenced the writings of several years before.

One day, shortly before the new year of 1757, Diderot came to the Hermitage. Rousseau forgot all his complaint and was in high spirits, bursting forth in an exultant letter to Mme d'Épinay, which he wrote even before Diderot had left the place. He explained to her, naïvely, all the excuses which he had apparently accepted for himself: 'The Diderot of the morning will always intend to go to see you in the evening, and the Diderot of the evening will never have seen you at all. You know he is sometimes confined, too, by rheumatism, and when he is not on a flight to the sun on his two great wings you will find him on a pile of herbs (Diderot had become vegetarian) with his four paws all tight-closed.' And reminded by this reference to Diderot's literary accomplishments of his own present sterility, he bewailed, but only jocularly, his own 'rheumatism of the brain'. It was, apparently, a day of high good humor and happiness for him.<sup>3</sup>

Back in Paris there was a lonesome old friend, 'Papa' Gouffier, who had become very ill and was calling for Rousseau to come and stay with him. Though reluctant at first, and even irritated that the demand should be made of him instead of some one nearer at hand, Rousseau responded to the appeal, and took a certain inward satisfaction in his personal ministrations. Twice during the winter he went on such an errand of mercy, assisted by the carriage of Mme d'Épinay. He saw no one else in Paris; but went straight from the sick room, at nights, to the house of Diderot, with whom he was staying.<sup>4</sup>

The general situation, however, was making him somewhat restive. The circle of his friends at Paris continually tended

<sup>1</sup> From Deleyre, Sept. 23, No. 309; and Dec. 13, No. 320; to Dr. Tronchin, Feb. 27, 1757, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 340.

<sup>2</sup> From Deleyre, Nov. 23, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 318. *Julie*, pt. 2, Letter 15, H. iv, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, end of 1756, No. 323.

<sup>4</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Jan. 1757, Nos. 326, 327-8, 329; to Lenieps, Feb. 14, 1757, No. 330; to Mme Vaudenet, Dec. 29, 1756, *C.G.*, vol. iv, No. 717 (or 328 bis).

to draw him away from his solitude toward the city. He had to fight off the lure of it. The evidence of this is apparent in the letters written by St. Preux to Julie which were so full of disparagement of the city and its wits. His dependence upon Mme d'Épinay for material help in keeping up the ties of friendship made him uncomfortable. Likewise, too, the sense that he owed her attentions in return, by way of gratitude, and that this committed him to a continual exchange of offices which would bind him for good. He talked rather freely to Deleyre about his fear of this dependence and his desire for a greater degree of liberty.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he was troubled by the realisation that he had failed to get any of his cherished work done. Once again Geneva came to mind, as the place to which he ought to have retired for this writing—he had previously abandoned the notion largely because Mme d'Épinay had prevailed upon him to try the Hermitage. But Geneva now seemed far preferable, away entirely from the old circle of interests and with an atmosphere favoring the prosecution of his thoughts on politics and morals. The matter was actually brought up for discussion with Dr. Tronchin, the distinguished philosopher-physician of Geneva, who happened to be attending Mme d'Épinay. Rousseau unburdened himself to Tronchin, and particularly emphasised his disappointment in regard to work: 'I have many things that are begun, and I should very much like to finish some one of them, but I do not know which, or even whether I should be able to succeed with it. . . . I have no more genius.' But he had asked Tronchin not to say anything to Mme d'Épinay about his desire to leave, until he was certain in his own mind about going. For there were difficulties in the way. Mme le Vasseur could never be transported so far away, and he had no intention of going until provision could be made for her. Another impediment had to do with the earning of his own livelihood when far away from the city, where he got so many jobs of copying music and books, for he felt obliged to decline, from want of capacity, the post of librarian in Geneva which Tronchin was offering him. Was there not some publisher, perhaps, who might take on an edition of his works to include some new publication? He was not prepared to say precisely what 'useful' new works he had to offer, but a definite list would be forthcoming in about five or six weeks.<sup>2</sup> Still he was not quite decided, even if all these conditions could be met. It appeared that Mme d'Épinay herself was contemplating a visit to Geneva. This would commit him to accompanying her and then keeping up in Geneva

<sup>1</sup> From Deleyre, Feb. 10, 1757, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 338.

<sup>2</sup> To Dr. Tronchin, Jan. 25, 1757, and Feb. 27, 1757, Nos. 336, 340.

the very connections and all the obligations which he so much wanted to escape. But all escape seemed veritably cut off. And that caused a sense of being forced to live in these associations and denied his freedom. He was very disturbed at having no prospect of getting truly by himself for his own work.

In the very moment of such a disturbance of mind Diderot gave him a shock. During the autumn, whilst Rousseau had been amusing himself with the beginnings of a novel, Diderot too had been busy with one, *The Natural Son*, and, having Rousseau on his mind at the time, he let slip into his novel the disapproving sentiment, that the recourse to solitude spells no good for a man: 'Only the wicked man dwells alone.' This idea came originally from Seneca, and it had been long a preconception of Diderot's expressed on other occasions before this one.<sup>1</sup> However, he had had plenty of opportunity to be reassured about his solitary friend, since he had him as guest at his own house during the time he came to minister to Gauffecourt, which showed the ever-ready affection and generosity of his nature. They had then made plans to meet again and talk over *Julie*, and the possibility of publication, and other and more intimate matters, no doubt concerning what he ought to do with M<sup>me</sup> le Vasseur. Meanwhile *The Natural Son* was going through the press. When it came out, in the latter part of February, Diderot, perhaps in all innocence, had a copy sent to him. When Rousseau spied that remark, betraying in print the evil opinion that had been shadowing his happiness at the Hermitage, his excitement knew no bounds—he took it as a present judgment upon himself, and one, moreover, displayed to all the world. It was, indeed, a guilty soul that would read those lines with such emotion. He had had his own dark reflections upon past 'crimes' and wickedness, and he had made his resolve to expiate them with a life of perfect virtue. Now to find that new life in solitude denounced as itself the manifestation of a wicked will was to be denied all hope of ever getting clear from the shackles of the past sin, and, worse still, to be exposed as a hypocrite. He imagined the world reading those lines with the meaning he himself imported into them. And with mingled grief and displeasure he sent Diderot a letter about that offending phrase.

Very much surprised at the feeling Rousseau showed, Diderot perceived at once the need of a personal interview, but proposed that his friend come incognito to see him, because he felt obliged to stay close to his family, his child being ill with an alarming

<sup>1</sup> *Les Principes de la philosophie morale*, bk. 2, pt. i, sect. 2, pp. 66-7, 115, 117; *Pensées philosophiques*, No. 6, p. 129; cf. also *La Religieuse*, vol. v, p. 119, and *Essai sur les Règnes de Claude et de Néron*, 1778-82, vol. iii, Letter 25, p. 216.

cold on the chest and his wife fairly distraught with concern. He would arrange, however, to meet Rousseau at St. Denis with a carriage and drive him to Paris. Then they would settle many different things that were on their minds. But Diderot was not wise enough to await the interview he was there arranging, and he yielded to the temptation to make some remarks on the topic in question: 'You are not of my opinion about hermits; well, you can say as much good of them as you like, you will be the only one in the world of whom I shall ever think any good. And besides there would be a lot to say on that subject, if one could talk to you about it without making you angry. An old woman of eighty years, etc. . . .' What was the imputation? That he was not doing the right thing by Thérèse's mother in exposing her to the rigors of life in the country during the winter! Diderot, anxious about his own family, had a lively imagination, at the moment, of the cold which Mme le Vasseur must be suffering. And he was, perhaps, a little superior, too—here was he, the dutiful father of a family, recognising his obligation to give comfort to the mother of his child, a responsibility which Jean-Jacques Rousseau had never put himself in the position of having to do, and now, probably, if left to himself, and unadvised in his solitude, he would neglect his duties to the mother of Thérèse; he must be instructed so as to avoid such moral dereliction. Whatever was behind his words, Diderot himself recognised that he had overshot the mark, and he sought to make amends, in a postscript: 'I ask your pardon for what I say about the solitude in which you are living. I ought not to have spoken to you again about it. Forget what I say thereon and be sure I will never utter another word about it.' Better than that postscript, however, would have been the destruction of the letter and the composition of a new one. To unsay such regrettable things is not to expunge them from the record of personal relations, for the written word enforces a friend's indignant opinion even after he takes it all back. But, indeed, Diderot was not making anything like a complete retraction, for he added a second postscript, undoing all the mending he attempted in the first, and he there taunted his friend over his fine 'citizenship'. 'Adieu, Citizen! a very singular citizen a hermit is!'<sup>1</sup>

Rousseau was quite prepared to admit the dangers of solitude, and he actually expressed himself thus in one of the letters in the second part of *Julie*: 'I am convinced that it is not good for man to be alone.'<sup>2</sup> But this message from Diderot was too much to take tamely. He felt himself under a moral sur-

<sup>1</sup> From Diderot, Mar. 10, 1757, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 342.

<sup>2</sup> Pt. 2, Letter 13, H. iv, p. 156.

veillance, as if his virtue were suspect. No doubt he was not quite easy in his mind about his conduct toward Mme le Vasseur. Still he had actually given up the idea of going to Geneva, which he most wanted to do, partly out of consideration for her. But surely it was no crime to be keeping her with him in his own *ménage*—old people had managed to live in the country long before Diderot discovered the impossibility of it. Still the fact that a possible dereliction on his part should be thought by the man who knew him best, his past ‘crimes’ as well as virtues, this constituted an argument in his own heart against him, and roused his whole nature to a vindication. To these forces of self-esteem there was added an anger over the tone of superiority with which Diderot judged him. He sent a letter to Diderot, in high dudgeon, refusing to go up to Paris to receive more of such condemnation.

At the same time an excited letter was dashed off to Mme d’Épinay to complain of this accusation of wickedness—‘and do you know why? Because Mme le Vasseur is here. And good Lord, what more would he say if she weren’t here?’ He explained how he had virtually taken Thérèse’s parents out of the street and given her mother home and support, and brought her to the country, where the air was better than in the city. He had renounced the idea of going to Geneva on account of her, whereas she was quite free to stay with him or to leave, as she pleased, for she had kin of her own in Paris. But he was supposed, it seems, to sacrifice his own happiness, and return to Paris simply in order that she might have more amusement! Yet she had never complained to him—it was his friends in Paris who were stirring up such needs in her. Then, furious at the very thought of such meddling in his own domestic affairs, he made the false step, with Mme d’Épinay, of venting his long-standing irritation against Grimm, her lover. ‘But I see what is going on; M. Grimm will not be satisfied until he has deprived me of all the friends I have given him. Philosophers of the cities, if such are your virtues, you console me for being *only* a wicked fellow.’<sup>1</sup> This was not calculated to win her sympathy. It seemed such an outrage that she did not reply to him for several days.

Meanwhile Diderot replied with some heat to the letter which had been sent him in response to his so-called apology. What Rousseau had actually written is not known from direct evidence, for it seems to have been destroyed. There must have been some bitter sarcasm about those domestic anxieties as if they were nothing but another excuse for Diderot’s failure to do the right thing by his friends, for Diderot opened his reply thus:

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d’Épinay, Mar. 13, 1757, No. 343.



'It is true that for fifteen years I have had a wife, child, domestic, no means, and that my life has been full of difficulties and trouble so that often I cannot even enjoy the few hours of happiness and relaxation I promise myself. My friends make of that fact a subject either of pleasantries or complaint, according to their character. After that what more could I have to complain of?' The letter went on to quote some of Rousseau's own words: ' "I don't want to go to Paris any more. I won't go. This time I am resolved." ' Is this the tone of reason in a friend? Diderot was angry, but he was also determined to vindicate himself against that charge of remissness as a friend. He had busied himself with a matter of some advantage to Rousseau and had wanted to make a proposition to him in person at Paris; he had also taken the pains to read the manuscript of his novel for him and was ready with criticisms for his benefit. 'We must confer on this together. It is essential. You do not want to come to Paris. Oh well, Saturday morning, whatever the weather, I'll be off for the Hermitage. I'll go on foot, my present embarrassments not permitting me to go more speedily. My means do not permit me to go there otherwise, and it is absolutely necessary, too, that I avenge myself for all the wrong you've done me for these last four years. Whatever hurt my letter may have caused you, I don't repent of having written it. You are much too content with your reply.' Diderot evidently considered it to be one of the proper offices of friendship to administer correction in so retaliatory a spirit. And he went on in that vein, regardless, and unable to keep away from delicate matters until the time of the personal interview. 'I am still alarmed over the danger to Mme le Vasseur, and I'll not get over it until I shall have seen her myself (and I tell you, on the side, that your reading of your letter to her might well have been a very inhumane sophism on your part). But at present she owes you her life, and I'll keep quiet'. . . . Then a startling observation: 'It is better to be dead than be a knave; but unhappy is he who lives and has no duty of which he is the slave.' Then followed an ironical mock-heroic description of Rousseau demanding all the dues of friendship whilst he escaped rendering any himself, through keeping so aloof in the country. One sees on the 'road from the Hermitage to La Chevrette nothing but pedestrian philosophers, making way with stick in hand, soaked to the skin and in mud up to their necks. However, in whatever corner of the world you would like to save yourself from them, their friendship will pursue you, and the interest that they take in Mme le Vasseur. Live, my friend, live, and don't fear that she will die of hunger.'

<sup>1</sup> From Diderot, Mar. 14, 1757, No. 345.

The letter from Diderot reveals a deep and long-enduring discontent as to their friendship. Most striking is the outburst about 'all the wrongs you have done me *for four years*'. What wrong could Rousseau have been doing him since 1753? Was it merely what he said in his reply later, that he would not put up patiently enough with the slights upon himself and the breaking of promises to meet together, but would complain openly to their mutual friends about such things? Or was it something that did not come out in the open between them? Diderot was furiously candid and unconcealed about his opinions, and always ready to offer them, as well as his advice, in or out of season: and he expected others to take both just as he gave them. Rousseau, however, was slow about such matters and inclined to keep things to himself, partly out of timidity and partly from a positive dislike of critical discussion. He could not think in public or with anyone else and did not want to be forced to views which he had not really made his own. Thus it seems to have been a fact that during the years after their collaboration in 1753, he was in secret thought fighting down the views being pressed upon him, disputing against Diderot in his imaginary role of 'independent man' and assailing the doctrines sponsored in the *Encyclopedia*. This secret argument was growing upon him, and it was virtually betrayed in the private letter to Voltaire where he railed against the 'intolerant unbelievers' who would force others to their own incredulity. Diderot was somewhat aware of this attitude but did not understand the reasons. It was a great misfortune that Rousseau kept from him all knowledge of the *Political Institutions*, for that would have revealed his thoughts as well as his antagonisms. But he seemed to be solely concerned with his romance of *Julie* and his *Dictionary of Music*. It was natural for Diderot, then, to regard that unpleasant reticence as evincing the danger of the habit of solitude and to see in it the beginnings of a misanthropy. But this secretiveness also piqued his curiosity, so that he, as well as Grimm, seems to have kept trying to find out about Rousseau's affairs in indirect ways which, when discerned or suspected, were regarded by him as totally unwarranted prying into his affairs and made him resile more and more from those associates. Thus a lack of courage to be candid in Rousseau conspired with an officiousness and intolerance in Diderot to send the friends apart and make each one charge the other with a neglect of the duties of honest friendship. So Diderot believed himself exhibiting a high degree of generosity in making the journey to the Hermitage to help the hermit with his own affairs.

This air of doing him a favor and reproaching him with not

having duties of which he was a slave was a mortal blow to Rousseau's self-esteem. He was furious and bitter. And in that vein he dashed off a letter. It began with sarcasms about making engagements which one knew one would be forced to break. It refused flatly the proffered interview at the Hermitage. As for Mme le Vasseur he would see that she returned to Paris to her own family, but it would be without him, for he was not going to sacrifice his liberty and happiness for her; and if Thérèse had to go with her, he would live alone. Above all he did have duties to which he was devoted, and it was precisely because of them that he had refused to encumber himself with other obligations, like the domestic ones, which would prevent his proper performance of them. But he would not say more on this point nor anything about the great work to which he was thus loyal. And he added that he no longer felt any tenderness toward Diderot whose dry, critical tone had at last come to infect him.<sup>1</sup>

Rousseau, however, was not satisfied with this letter, and withheld sending it. He had not heard from Mme d'Épinay and he wanted her judgment; so he sent her both Diderot's letters and this reply, and told her something about the repercussions of the affair in his own household. He had informed Mme le Vasseur that she had to go back to Paris whether she really wanted to or not, and he assured her—and he gave the same assurance, in writing, to Mme d'Épinay—that he would provide a pension for her support. This announcement had provoked a domestic crisis, for Thérèse would not leave him, whereupon her mother thought it all a game to get rid of her, and she reproached them for not waiting until the spring for making the change. Rousseau was now in torment: if anything were to happen to the old woman at all during the winter, he would in any case be blamed for it. 'You see', he cried out to Mme d'Épinay, 'that I cannot avoid being a Monster. I am one in the eyes of M. Diderot, if Mme le Vasseur remains here, I am one in her own eyes, if she does not remain. Whatever action I take, see I'm a bad man in spite of myself.'<sup>2</sup> And how vividly his imagination worked may be seen in the third part of his story of Julie, where she is made to reproach herself with being the cause of her mother's death and yet cries out against any imputation of evil in herself: 'but I am *not* a monster: I am weak, but not devoid of natural feeling'.<sup>3</sup> Rousseau pictured himself in the dreadful situation of Julie. And he announced it was impossible for him to see Diderot at this moment.

Meantime Mme d'Épinay herself sent Rousseau a reply to his

<sup>1</sup> To Diderot, Mar. 16, No. 347.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 16, No. 346.

<sup>3</sup> *Julie*, pt. 3, Letter 15, H. iv, p. 231.

very *first* letter, which had offended her by its accusation of Grimm. She had felt outraged by that, but she had got over her indignation and showed a genuine sympathy for him in his distress over Diderot's remarks.<sup>1</sup> The illness of her mother, she said, prevented her seeing him straightway and helping him in his trouble. But it seemed to her, as an outsider, nothing but a slight misunderstanding over a few words that would be readily cleared up by a personal meeting of two such good friends. 'Take care, take care, my dear friend, not to let the germ of bitterness take its course; perhaps you have begun by being right, be careful lest you end by being wrong, which might come about, for example, if you were to close your heart to the explanation which your friend is apparently coming to ask of you on Saturday.' And he was quick to suspect people; and she wanted, for her part, to forget what he had said about Grimm. Perhaps, if no good came out of the meeting on Saturday, he would let her see the letter from Diderot and his own reply. 'This word from her came only an hour after Rousseau had sent the letters from Diderot enclosed with the above letter which he had drafted to send to Diderot.'<sup>2</sup>

He felt hopeless, however, of gaining any satisfaction from a meeting with Diderot and was still obstinate in his refusal to see him on the day appointed, and he so apprised Mme d'Épinay: Diderot and Grimm were 'men of the world' now, and they were no longer suited to him. The next moment, however, he repented of having said that about Grimm and admitted he had done him injustice many times—only, he could not like people who are so 'lofty, so mannered, so dry'. Adversity might yet bring them together. Anyhow, Diderot would not come, even if he had said so: 'No, I might as well be assured of that—he has promised to come.'<sup>3</sup> The germ of bitterness was, indeed, well on in its career. This letter was from one in a pathetic state of mind,

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 17, No. 348. This seems so obviously the first letter she addressed to Rousseau in regard to this matter that we must suppose the letter given in her *Mémoires de Mme d'Épinay* (ed. P. Boiteau, vol.ii, pp. 164-5, cited C.G., vol. iii, No. 344) as an attempt to duplicate it from memory long afterwards. The tone of the letter in the *Mémoires* which purports to be her first response (dated March 14) is absolutely different from the one Rousseau preserved in his copy and from all her other letters during this episode—different in tone and style, for it does not have their note of fresh and spontaneous concern and helpfulness. Mme d'Épinay appears to better advantage in the letters which Rousseau has handed down to us than in the work which she herself left, in part, to justify herself. The *Mémoires* make her too 'knowing', from the very first; they represent Grimm and herself 'playing' Rousseau and making a fool of him quite superiorly, whilst they humored him with professions of affection and friendship. The letters actually show sincere feeling and respect for him; the *Mémoires* alone justify Rousseau's suspicions. That was the risk she ran in attempting to make them an answer to the *Confessions*, and Grimm showed good judgment when he left them in manuscript after her death.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 17, No. 349.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

craving the tenderness of friendship yet making anything of the sort impossible by the morbid refusal to see his friend in person.

Then came Mme d'Épinay's judgment upon the letters sent her. 'I cannot conceal from you that you are very much in the wrong. I make profession of loving you with all my heart, and it is in consequence of that that I do not hesitate to tell you my opinion; you are wrong, my dear friend.' She would not criticise Diderot's second letter with its retorts, because she had no means of knowing Rousseau's hasty reply that had called it forth. Anyhow he must *not* send Diderot the last reply he had drafted. She undertook for her part to see that Diderot would not come Saturday, in order to spare him, but she insisted that they ought to see each other as promptly as possible. 'For heaven's sake, be cool for a moment, and don't quarrel for nothing, exactly nothing, and with the best friend perhaps that you have.' In two days he would see that she was right in this judgment. As for Mme le Vasseur, it was easy to settle the matter entirely to her satisfaction. If she wished to stay with him during the winter she ought to be allowed to do so; if not, she could go to Mme d'Épinay herself who would see that care was taken of her. Nobody would get the idea, however, that she was being 'forced to stay at the Hermitage'—he was to rest assured on that score.<sup>1</sup>

Rousseau did as was suggested. That same evening he asked Mme le Vasseur to communicate her views to Mme d'Épinay, and in order to make her feel at perfect liberty to say whatever she thought, he gave her the assurance that he never wanted to know anything except her eventual decision. He also accepted the advice not to send his last letter to Diderot. Yet he was still unforgiving, and his pride balked at acknowledging any wrong on his part when he had first been so grievously sinned against—it seemed more than the Gospel itself called for to be required to ask pardon of one who had already smitten him twice on the cheek. Maybe Diderot would be just perverse enough to attempt the journey to the Hermitage after all, in the very worst weather, despite the request not to do so, because it would give him a chance to make a great to-do about his sacrifice in coming afoot, and then repeat to his face all the bad things he had written in his letters. What falsity there was in those heroics of his, one day talking grandly about fetching him in a cab from St. Denis, the very next pleading so dire a poverty that the visit to the Hermitage would have to be made toiling on foot and at the risk of his health. Such philosophers!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 17, evening, No. 350.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 17, No. 351.

A letter of the following day shows him more collected and rational. Having been able to distinguish and point out Diderot's falsity in logic he regained something of his own esteem. Moreover he was reassured by the obvious pains Mme d'Épinay was taking on his behalf and touched by her very genuine sympathy, so much so that he resolved not to trouble her any more with this affair. Instead he asked her for the loan of a book, *The Voyage of Admiral Anson*, intending to occupy himself with his work. A reference to Diderot slipped out, but it looked rather toward reconciliation: 'it is too bad there is no one to say to Diderot as much as you have said to me,'—as if both the parties would then be ready to forgive each other.<sup>1</sup>

At this time Deleyre wrote from Paris, wearied out and disappointed over the troubles he had encountered in editing the journal, and especially the malice and treachery of men. 'Where have you learned that they are good? In your own heart, no doubt; but their actions give me better instruction than your sentiments and my own. Always yours, dear Citizen.'<sup>2</sup> There was an implied tribute in this that meant much at the moment to Rousseau, and he preserved the note amongst his papers.

A few days later Diderot himself wrote a short letter of reproach and sincere grief. On being informed, by Mme d'Épinay's son, that he himself was not on any account to make the journey to the Hermitage, he had been led to expect that the meeting would take place at Paris instead, and had waited the whole day long in vain. Then he inferred it was a ruse on the part of Mme d'Épinay to shield Rousseau from the shame of making outrageous and unjust charges against him in person. 'My friend, believe me, don't shut yourself up with injustice in your retreat, it's troublesome company.' Then he recalled to Rousseau all the true marks of his own friendship; he had sympathy for his illnesses and support for him when attacked, and interest in his glory and success. Was he now to be maligned for all these offices and before Mme d'Épinay, whom he did not like? He felt obliged to return the manuscript of *Julie* at once by messenger, instead of in person. 'Oh, Rousseau, you *are* becoming wicked, unjust, cruel, fierce, and I weep with grief thereat.' 'If I will not alienate you by my visit, write me, and I'll come to see you, to embrace you and confer with you on your work. Make me a sign whenever you like, and I'll come running: but I wait for *you* to make the sign.'<sup>3</sup>

This letter Rousseau answered with like grief, and with a

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 18, No. 352.

<sup>2</sup> From Deleyre, Mar. 20, No. 353.

<sup>3</sup> From Diderot, about Mar. 22 or 23, No. 355.

quite regretful note even as he argued in defence of himself. Without any excitement he reviewed their quarrel, the plea he had made against the maxim about hermits which might have a hurtful application to himself; the reply he received to that plea impugning his treatment of Mme le Vasseur; then his own angry retort, submitted to the inspection of Mme d'Épinay, and suppressed by him; and now a third letter from Diderot, piling up the charges about his wickedness and fierceness, &c. Was not Diderot himself the aggressor in this affair? Had he no words of kindness for him, instead of such outrageous strong language? True, he himself had talked about Diderot's neglect of him, and refused to let him 'tyrannise' at will over him. But that was no warrant for such extreme charges in retort. As for the services and the concern for him which Diderot paraded in testimony of his friendship, were they anything inferior to what he himself had done in the time of their greatest intimacy, how he did not count the distance or the weather as he trudged his way to Vincennes when Diderot lay in prison? These were only the natural expressions of his affection, and a word in such a vein from Diderot would now change the whole complexion of things. It was wrong, in him, perhaps, to run to Mme d'Épinay with this quarrel and send her the letters, but he had to do something, or else 'suffocate with grief'. Besides, he added, with reviving sarcasm, Diderot appeared to be so proud of his case that he ought to be quite content to have some witness to admire it. And in point of fact Mme d'Épinay had favored Diderot in her judgment and not himself. He was condemned by her as being in the wrong. The sentence was given—he was doomed to be made out as a wicked fellow despite himself. Yet 'I am much less alone here than you are in the middle of Paris. Diderot, Diderot, I see it with a bitter grief: always living in the midst of wicked people you are learning to be like them; your good heart is becoming corrupted amongst them, and you force mine to detach itself insensibly from you.'<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime Mme d'Épinay had acquainted herself with the views of Grimm and Diderot. The only fault of the latter, apparently, had been his plain-speaking. This caused her some forebodings. She, too, had spoken very frankly to Rousseau about his being in the wrong; she was intimate with Grimm who had already been subjected to an unworthy imputation. She began to fear that she had given offense, and occasion for like unjust grievance against herself. This fear she actually expressed to him when she sent him a package Grimm had requested her

<sup>1</sup> To Diderot, Mar. 26, No. 357, cf. *Julie*, pt. 2, Letter 14, H. iv, p. 158; Letter 17, H. iv, p. 175.

to forward for him (it was, indeed, the manuscript of *Julie* which Diderot was returning).<sup>1</sup> This letter, curiously enough, arrived not only subsequent to the package it was supposed to accompany but also to the letter which Rousseau had dispatched to Diderot wherein he made this remark about Mme d'Épinay: 'It is true she serves you well; and, if I did not know her motive, I would believe her as unjust as you.'<sup>2</sup> So Mme d'Épinay happened to charge him with a sentiment of whose existence he himself was not unaware. He had begun to feel that she was no longer a disinterested third party but a partisan, aligned with Grimm and Diderot. And her expression of that fear to him was as serious an accusation as theirs: she thought him apparently quite capable of such injustice. Thus on the very day when, feeling more regretful than ever, he wanted to drop the whole matter, he was obliged by a woman's fears for herself to continue the discussion and to defend himself.

He wrote to Mme d'Épinay at once, to make it plain that he did not mind plain-speaking, and would never hold that against her. If anything, her offense was an opposite one of humoring him too much. There was a kind of indirection in this way of proceeding which reflected unpleasantly on the temper of the person so treated. Anyhow such a fault in her was nothing at all like that which had so deeply exercised him against Diderot whose plain speech had too great a mocking contempt in it to be endured: 'one will say very properly to a friend that he's an ass; but one will never say, he's a knave'. Nor will a true friend insinuate anything with regard to the moral integrity of another by remarking 'there might be a lot to say on that score, etc. . . .'. Then he read her a long lecture on friendship, what he *demandé* of a friend: Friends must be friends, not masters; giving counsel without pretending to govern him; they have rights to his heart but none to his liberty. Once advice is given, and he does what he thinks best himself, he will not have them eternally nagging about a *fait accompli*. The volunteering of services not wanted is only a burden, and besides, it carries with it an air of superiority. If a quarrel arises, the one to start the trouble ought to make it up, and he ought not to become bitter and angry merely because the other person, wrongly interpreting, has become so; the true friend will contain his feelings in that regard and soothe and caress the one over whom he has the advantage, and not aggravate the bad feeling. There is no friendship when the one who is in the position of aggressor seeks to score a point as always being in the right and

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Mar. 26, No. 356, opening sentences.

<sup>2</sup> No. 357, p. 51.



the other in the wrong. And Rousseau required more than others in virtue of his being so solitary, for he felt harshness from a friend much more deeply than others; he had nothing else to distract him from brooding upon it; he could not sleep nights; and spent his days walking about lost in his grief. As one ill, too, he deserved some consideration. Such friendly attentions Mme d'Épinay herself had given without a word; but the others neglected them. They seemed only too glad to put him under obligation to them, and to have him at their mercy; such a spirit was not the response suited to his heart. He added that he now hated Paris more than ever. And further in regard to a matter of business he begged her not to underwrite the edition of a chemistry book he was doing at the request of Holbach—that was to say, in effect, no obligations, please, but simply disinterested friendship.<sup>1</sup>

Yet in the hated city there was one friend quite disinterestedly working to bring about an overture from Diderot. Deleyre had been deeply affected by the situation, for his own ideals of philosophy were at stake. He had the advantage of not being personally or secretly implicated, as were Grimm and Mme d'Épinay.

'I saw M. Diderot, yesterday, dear Citizen. . . . You will soon be in agreement: your last letter has calmed him. Get him to tell you everything that is on his heart. It is only by complete frankness that your friendship will be made tranquil. The singular thing is that you are mutually the object of the greatest esteem for each other, and you mutually accuse each other of lacking it. I who can read into both your souls, merely your pupil as I am, I can see that you love and respect one another profoundly, and yet you act almost as if there were nothing at all there.' Then Deleyre told how he criticised both of them, Rousseau's extreme obstinacy in his resolves; and Diderot—and this he told to his face—too much disposed to *reform* his friend. The danger to Rousseau himself was told with affecting frankness and regret: 'You will become (pardon, I beg you) a consummate misanthrope, and your friend will no more be a philanthrope. You have both given me such noble ideas of truth and virtue!' Deleyre could not bear to be disillusioned and to suffer such a wound in his heart. . . . 'Wait until Saturday,' he added in a postscript, 'and if it is good weather you will be satisfied.' That is to say, Diderot would come. Deleyre had even suggested that the two friends adopt a practice of frequent rendezvous on neutral ground, at St. Denis, so that by keeping closely in touch they would continue their friendship and enhance each other's genius.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No. 356.

<sup>2</sup> From Deleyre, Mar. 31, No. 358.

Before that reconciliation could be brought to pass through the instrumentality of Deleyre, a letter from Mme d'Épinay intervened, replying to the letter Rousseau had written her in his fatigue and low spirits, exacting so much from his friends and deploring their insufficiency to the part. She saw him in a desperate plight, his soul sunken in dark bitterness and out of harmony with itself, hardening itself in its own wrongs and reasoningsophistically to justify them. Diderot he had loved most tenderly for three years, and now he was impossibly full of faults. The only thing Rousseau could cite was his failure to keep engagements with him, and this he had complained about to everybody excepting Diderot himself, which was enough to give offense to him and make him angry in his turn. It was, therefore, up to Rousseau himself, as a point of honor and self-respect, to make the advances toward reconciliation. Diderot had the right to expect some allowance for himself, for he was extremely sensitive, although outwardly tranquil, and suffered from a natural melancholy. He never pretended to disguise his feeling, a fact which Rousseau himself had to admit. He was always ready to help people, but his laziness often prevented his success in these well-wishings. 'I have heard him say twenty times that if he had believed for an instant how strongly he would be attached to you he would have avoided making your acquaintance, so much has your situation been affecting him. These are not the sentiments of an indifferent man: twenty times even since you have not been seeing each other, he has himself talked over with me the ways by which one might find it possible to make your condition more endurable, by the compensations friendship might offer, whether in seeking to procure for you a place which will be midway between your actual retreat where your friends cannot reach you during the winter and Paris which you flee, or by other offices which I should not now want to mention in detail, but which prove a heart occupying itself with you.' Then Mme d'Épinay replied to the part of the letter concerning herself: 'you know my mind, and my way of thinking well enough to be sure that I do not want either to offend you or to humor you'. And she insisted upon her opinion that his duty and well-being both bound him to take the step of making reparation to Diderot. And she painted the picture of them reconciled and bosom friends again, and the sweetness of returning to each other after the quarrel. The last words of this letter were almost a blessing: 'I want always to be a happy shadow about you, leading you on to happiness despite yourself.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, Apr. 1757, No. 361 *bis*. Cf. No. 360 from the *Mémoires*, vol. ii, pp. 184-6.

And Rousseau was humbled and ashamed. He could say nothing for himself in reply. The duty laid upon him he acknowledged as the real desire of his own heart; but he was too far spent to talk about it with any one. Besides the time for talking or writing was past. 'You know the philosopher has come to see me.' And they were now back on their old footing. When he replied to Mme d'Épinay he betrayed his deep chagrin over himself, in a casual remark after he had urged upon her some change in regimen for her ill health: 'I feel only too well that my medical prescriptions ought not to have any more authority than my books on morality. Adieu, Madame, have a little affection for your poor "bear"; who knows better what he feels than what he says.'<sup>1</sup>

By furnishing occasion for Mme d'Épinay and Diderot to meet 'twenty times' and discuss him and plan for his happiness 'despite himself', Rousseau started something of future trouble, if only in himself when, in some hour of depression and wild imagining, he would recall the picture of those conferences and think of them united to make him happy in their way.

The friendship of Mme d'Épinay was at the time, however, very grateful and consoling. He wrote often and went to see her at La Chevrette.<sup>2</sup> He even signalled to her the day which was the anniversary of their first dinner together, in the company of Grimm, at the newly occupied Hermitage. A second spring was in his spirit, as well as in the season. 'The Echoes of my woods are discreet. . . . The name of Julie and your own are the only things they can repeat.'<sup>3</sup> And the shadows of happiness were in those woods and in that friendship.

Then Grimm was called away to the army, at the opening of the Seven Years' War,<sup>4</sup> leaving Mme d'Épinay alone. She looked more than ever, it seems, to the companionship of Rousseau.<sup>5</sup> She had a sister-in-law frequently with her, the Countess d'Houdetot, whose lover, too, The Marquis St. Lambert, had been for some time away at the war. St. Lambert liked Rousseau very much and he had recommended to Mme d'Houdetot that she cultivate his friendship during this absence.<sup>6</sup> Lonely herself, she became deeply interested in the lone hermit. She did not hesitate to seek him out at the Hermitage instead of merely waiting to see him at the house of Mme d'Épinay. On one such visit, apparently, she found him preoccupied with his

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Apr. 10, No. 362.

<sup>2</sup> To same, Apr. 12, 17, and 21, and three undated notes, Nos. 363-4, 365, 366, 367, 368, 370.

<sup>3</sup> No. 366.

<sup>4</sup> No. 367.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. from Rousseau to Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 10, 1757, No. 430.

<sup>6</sup> From St. Lambert, Oct. 11, 1757, *C.G.*, vol. iii, p. 144, No. 407.

work and she felt obliged to tender a little apology for her intrusion upon him: 'I am very sorry to have seen so little of you. Stay in your woods, then, since you are so happy there, but permit us to be sorry for ourselves because you are so pleased to be there. I would be less sorry for myself if I were more free and always sure of never inconveniencing you.'<sup>1</sup> During the spring their acquaintance was developing and she found occasion—for she had not much liberty, having a family to care for and her disagreeable husband, Count d'Houdetot—to ask him to dine with her at her country-place at Eaubonne, and to bring along his disciple and friend Deleyre, if he happened to be at the Hermitage that day.<sup>2</sup> She tried to see him, too, when he was expected at the house of Mme d'Épinay: 'You are said to be going to dinner at Épinay on Tuesday; I will try to be there if I am free; it is an infinity since I have seen you.'<sup>3</sup> There was, of course, no concealment of such meetings. Rousseau actually told of his own visits to Eaubonne when writing to Mme d'Épinay.<sup>4</sup> But he was coming to have less and less communication with her. For the echoes of his woods now repeated mostly the name of Julie, and if anything more, perchance, it was the whispering of a new name, 'Sophie'. She walked with him in woods and gardens and gave him happy companionship. He had craved the perfect 'companion worthy to think with him'. He had idealised such an association in *Julie*, where a man and woman have the habit of thinking together and feeling the same way about things, the true destination of human love.<sup>5</sup> Imagination and reality became interfused, Julie and St. Preux with Sophie and himself. He was now a prince in his own romance. Or rather tutor, for the moral lessons taught to Julie, he now repeated to a living being in the flesh who could understand and respond. They talked together of Plato's ideas, 'for the veritable philosophy of lovers is that of Plato'.<sup>6</sup> Yet there was a dire fate in the real situation, as in the novel, for Rousseau was in love, and could not but avow it to himself, and scarcely conceal it from her. And there had to be a more real renunciation than that he had depicted in the imaginary tale of Julie,

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, letter of uncertain date; possibly January 1757, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 304 (cf. *Annales*, vol. ii, Ritter, pp. 20-1, and letter of Rousseau to Mme d'Épinay, Feb. 1757, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 329) or possibly spring or summer.

<sup>2</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, No. 369.

<sup>3</sup> From same, No. 371.

<sup>4</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, No. 373.

<sup>5</sup> *Julie*, pt. 1, Letter 23, H. iv, p. 55; pt. 2, Letter 27, p. 212.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 2, Letter 11, p. 152 n.; pt. 1, Letter 46, p. 85. Mme d'Épinay recorded in her *Mémoires* her impression of this philosophic converse: 'their solitary walks together could not surely have any other purpose on the part of the countess than to philosophise about morality, virtue, love, friendship, and all that follows therefrom'. Vol. ii, p. 307.

for Sophie was not only bound by a duty but also by a very genuine passion to another so that she could not give him full requital of affection. He recognised this; yet, despite the forbidding knowledge, their many rendezvous and intimacy coaxed out passionate hopings against the fate, and made duty hard.<sup>1</sup>

The state Rousseau was in seemed pretty obvious to all who saw him. Mme d'Épinay very soon perceived that his heart was entirely engaged elsewhere, and she felt neglected, being without that friend on whose sympathetic presence she counted during the absence of Grimm. Yet Mme d'Houdetot, while telling St. Lambert of the many meetings, had said nothing to him about Rousseau's passion for her, which she hoped to cure by kindness, without causing any hurt to either her friend or her lover. But St. Lambert had calumniating word from others. So one day Mme d'Houdetot returned to Eaubonne from Paris, broken-hearted, for she had there received a message from him, not exactly accusing her of anything, but obviously discontented with her and unwilling to open his heart fully. This attitude she could not bear, and she would not continue to have any more secrets, in order to regain his confidence, and felt obliged to give up her friend the hermit. But her tears and the suggestion of grievous imputations against them both excited him beyond endurance and wisdom, for he was by now highly susceptible to any suggestion of moral defect in himself. She had begged him to do nothing, but let her manage the affair with her lover entirely by herself. But the sense of his own helplessness in this matter made him bursting for some action which would clear up the doubts and suspicions of wrong. All this while Mme d'Épinay had been neglected, but was evidently watching them, for she had noticed that he was troubled by something and actually made him promise, as she reminded him later, 'to keep nothing on his heart but always speak out to her on the spot', and 'to do nothing but come and go between the Hermitage and La Chevette'.<sup>2</sup> But these strange precautions of hers to keep his company had only made him suspicious, so that he had stayed away from her altogether. After a week of that absence she wrote him a letter ingenuously asking him to relieve her uneasiness about him.<sup>3</sup> Thinking this sheer deception on her part he burst out in anger, at first almost speechless and merely hinting at his thought, then plainly charging her with having started talk about Mme d'Houdetot with intent to injure some one of the three persons who would be involved—and it was

<sup>1</sup> To Sophie (Mme d'Houdetot), *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 374.

<sup>2</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, June 29, No. 377; cf. Nos. 375, 376.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 375.

true, Mme d'Épinay had been writing to Grimm about the affair and Grimm had been talking to St. Lambert in the army.<sup>1</sup> That day five hurried notes passed back and forth between the Hermitage and La Chevrette. But Mme d'Épinay, though she was quite at Rousseau's mercy, if they were to argue the matter of personal morality, chose to defy him to substantiate his charges. Rousseau always respected a bold front. And having no evidence he could cite, save Thérèse's word and his own suspicions, he went at once to La Chevrette; and there, in an affecting personal meeting, they ended the affair, apparently with forgiveness, although it was hardly in human nature ever to forget such intensely angry words as had passed between them.

Rousseau returned to the Hermitage, lonesome with his thoughts of the happiness of times past. Mme d'Houdetot was rightly angry with him for his blundering impetuosity, and she was obliged, besides, by her own predicament, to keep entirely clear of him. He perceived the necessity of this, but was utterly lost in the sense of his own great deprivation and could not help brooding over the change of relations she forced him to accept. She was not guilty—why, then, repent? She had only listened to his love and given friendly response without surrender of herself—why affect this indifference? By her kindness in the past he had actually learned to hearken to the terrible voice of conscience which was the true safeguard for them—was he not to be trusted now? He would not pretend, of course, to excuse himself, either to her or to himself, for he had been at heart culpable; yet the penalty of an 'eternal privation' was too frightful to bear. Nor was that the worst. His imagination ran on to see himself regarded as some one alien and importuning, and even despised by her. Contempt from her was what he dreaded most of all. Would she not quiet all these desperate fears by at least a word of pity? Such were the first thoughts of his low-spiritedness and exhaustion, as he tried to take up his round of occupations at the Hermitage; but he was true lover enough even in the hours of dejection to spare her a letter of such selfish despair when she herself needed all her strength for the composing of the difficulties he had caused her.<sup>2</sup>

He found some contentment in working at *Julie*. It had been a pleasure to her to read the story told in those letters; it now gave him pleasure to work it out farther in Part Three. And

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, same date, No. 376; and another letter, No. 378, cf. *Mémoires*, pt. 2, ch. 7, pp. 257 ff., especially pp. 259, 282.

<sup>2</sup> To Sophie, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 380. This letter was composed but not sent, nor in all probability was that of July 13, No. 383. But see notes, *C.G.*, vol. iii, p. 101.

Deleyre encouraged him in this by asking how soon the world would be permitted to read the love story of *Julie*, and other writings from his pen.<sup>1</sup> What Rousseau transcribed, however, was a very different tale, of two souls tormented, as he had been, by the conflict of love and duty. St. Preux is separated from Julie by her command which he obeys faithfully, though in despair, feeling that now all the world is detaching itself from him. But they still communicate by letter, and reason with each other at a distance, concerning virtue. He assails the 'barbarous virtue' that extinguishes the 'natural', and he tries to break down the barrier she has set up: 'we shall be culpable, but we shall not be bad; we shall be culpable, but we will always love virtue'. No, Julie holds out, a sensual love extinguishes itself because it is only a physical possession, and a true love is content with the giving of the heart, and it is really lasting. Julie tells him that she had been mistaken in trying to encourage so impudent a lover to true virtue by 'the tender caresses of friendship', for to yield ever so little is to invite disaster, and then 'virtue torments long those who abandon her'.

St. Preux is told, therefore, that he is always too impatient and excitable and that he must accept the separation. Thus Rousseau realised, in his art, the meaning of his experience, and attained some measure of self-possession.<sup>2</sup>

But he was restless, and desirous of eliciting some friendly notice from Mme d'Houdetot. He composed music to be performed at the house of Mme d'Épinay when she was to be there, and went from La Chevrette to Eaubonne, seeking a sign and trying to commend himself to her grace. As Deleyre described him teasingly: 'they say, (the hermit) wanders from chateau to chateau to see all the fays of his neighborhood'.<sup>3</sup> He was obviously ill at ease. He was becoming more and more afraid of losing Mme d'Houdetot for ever and feared the influence of her lover, who was soon due to be back from the army, and apparently had developed a jealous suspicion of him.

St. Lambert had given some indications that he looked askance at the 'austere principles' of virtue so much talked about in the *Julie* which Mme d'Houdetot admired. Those moral lessons seemed to be designed to injure his own relationship with her and all to the profit of the moralist himself. They were, perhaps, but a means to instal the moraliser in the place of the lover.<sup>4</sup> This was not a notion peculiar to St. Lambert. Grimm

<sup>1</sup> From Deleyre, July 2, No. 381.

<sup>2</sup> *Julie*, pt. 3, Letters 6, 15, 18, H. iv, pp. 219-20, 231, 234-40.

<sup>3</sup> July 22, No. 384.

<sup>4</sup> St. Lambert virtually admitted later that these had been his thoughts; Letter to Rousseau, Oct. 11, 1757, No. 407.

seems to have had it first, for he had inquired earlier of Mme d'Épinay—it seems, not too delicately—whether Rousseau had not lost his head over her, and he continually suggested that she was giving far too much kindly attention to him in return.<sup>1</sup> The two absent lovers seem thus to have regarded Rousseau's eloquence about virtue as an insidious threat to their prestige and domination over the hearts of their beloveds. This reflection upon his honesty and sincerity Rousseau had been quick to divine, and he felt profoundly disturbed.

There was some appearance of truth in the charge. He had fascinated both Mme d'Épinay and Mme d'Houdetot with the tale of *Julie* and the principles there set forth with all the glamor of his passionate eloquence. They were under his spell. They wanted to read the letters of St. Preux and Julie just as they were composed, with the fresh bloom of spontaneous imagination still upon them; they demanded copies, afterwards, when they could not have the company of the author himself; and Mme d'Épinay was even moved to emulate them and attempt writing in the same mode herself. Rousseau depicted a Julie true to her filial duty in accepting a marriage arranged for her by her parents and remaining faithful to the conjugal relations established, giving up her lover, though to him she has manifestly given herself, heart and soul. Julie then has an ecstasy of horror at the thought of being false to her bonds; she speaks fervently of the beauty of virtue, the holiness and sanctity of marriage; she prays to the Eternal Being who watches over men and women in their life together. Disorder in personal relations is to be deplored, she discovers, for its vicious effects on the family and the education of the children, as well as for its inherent unloveliness. These were Rousseau's own opinions, and they were, perhaps, a little too pertinently addressed to the readers of his story, for both Mme d'Houdetot and Mme d'Épinay had children over whose interests and good education they watched with great maternal care. He had often discussed with them their problems of education.<sup>2</sup> And it was not far from this to giving expression of his views about the influence of illicit relations upon the upbringing of the family. He had

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, pt. 2, ch. 7, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> See correspondence: To Mme d'Épinay, about Mar. 1756, *C.G.*, vol. ii, No. 273; from same, summer 1756, No. 298; from Rousseau to Dr. Tronchin, criticising her, Feb. 27, 1757, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 340, especially pp. 15-16; To Mme d'Épinay, same month, No. 341. Cf. *Mémoires*, pt. 2, ch. 7, pp. 265-6, 276-8, 288, 295-6. Regarding Mme d'Houdetot, letters of later date referring to earlier events No. 398, and from St. Lambert, No. 407. And from Rousseau to Mme d'Houdetot, some time after their separation, where he reports: 'Yesterday I saw your little daughter who was sleeping away to her heart's content, and seemed to be marvelously well.' No. 382.



had to think about this matter himself when uniting with Thérèse le Vasseur; and he was bound by his own deep interest to bring the thought seriously to the attention of others. Yet both these women, unhappily married, were finding their own happiness in lovers, contrary to his maxims. And he invested those maxims with a dangerously appealing reality for them, dangerous, that is, from the point of view of their lovers. For the story of Julie elicited their impulse to 'heroic sacrifice' for the sake of their children, and for virtue's sake as well. This romance of love had come to be a veritable beatitude of renunciation. And it was written with all the fervor of one who has had to renounce for himself but feels still the yearning of desire, and transports it to the very love of duty itself.<sup>1</sup> This was, indeed, a threat to illicit love. Without intending to be false to his friends he was, in effect, damaging their prestige and disturbing their relations with each other. And to those who were likely to suffer from his influence it appeared nothing but a manner of seduction. To be thought guilty of that, under the mask of teaching virtue, was tantamount to being charged with the worst possible falsity, falsity to principle and treachery to friends at the same time. He could think of nothing to disprove such an opinion save to expose his views as they were given in *Julie* and have them read by the interested parties.

One day at La Chevrette he encountered St. Lambert and Mme d'Houdetot together. The shock of it was too much for him and he was pitiful in his distress. Mme d'Épinay was kindly; she wanted to bring the parties all together, and 'ordered' him to come to dinner and sent her carriage for the purpose of securing him. In particular she requested that he bring along his *Julie*, saying that St. Lambert had informed her he had been promised a reading. She wrote two notes to him at the Hermitage to be sure that he would come: 'I remind you, my dear Bear, that all your *confrères* are dining here today and expect you, but none with more impatience than I.' Yet at the last moment he suddenly sent a note of regret, saying he was ill, and had not the courage to go about in the hot sun; and he preferred to see her alone some other time.<sup>2</sup>

The dinner came off without him and the friends met and talked together, and St. Lambert did not see the letters of *Julie*. So he was not satisfied. And Mme d'Épinay who had gone to much trouble to make all things straight, and incidentally to clear herself from all possible accusation of wanting to spoil the

<sup>1</sup> The whole discussion is in *Julie*, pt. 3, Letter 18, especially pp. 244 ff., 251-2.

<sup>2</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, Nos. 386, 387; to same, Nos. 385, 388.

accord of the three friends, which Rousseau had levelled against her, was, no doubt, very angry. Her *Mémoires* perhaps magnify her crushing retort when he finally turned up, because they were intended for the eyes of Grimm who always suspected her of being weak in her attitude to the mad hermit. It is reported there when Rousseau turned up he talked desperately of suicide, whereupon she replied sharply: 'You would do well to do so, if you do not feel yourself to have the *courage to be virtuous*.'<sup>1</sup> But this was only a moment's provocation. She had a gentle solicitude for him in his illness and distress; she kept in touch with him afterwards when she went on a visit to the d'Holbachs in Paris, and she let him depend upon her for consolation.<sup>2</sup> Grimm was very discerning: Rousseau had a real hold upon the affections of Mme d'Épinay, who seems, moreover, not in the least to have suspected him of any insincerity as to principle—for she had been perusing *Julie*.

Meanwhile Mme d'Houdetot had asked for the return of her letters during the period of their intimacy, although she did not surrender those he had sent her. He complied with her request and sent along a 'Catechism' or profession of faith, perhaps the continuation of his letter to Voltaire and forerunner of the public declaration to be heard later in the words of the dying Julie and of the Savoyard Vicar. These were souvenirs of the kind of converse they had held as they walked together at Eaubonne. And with sad sweetness the recollection thereof came to mind. 'Ah, Madame, what will become of those charming promenades where we talked about everything that could interest good and sensitive souls, and where I was finding it so sweet to think with you that I have just about lost the habit of thinking alone. . . . The Hermitage itself appears to me a solitude, now that you no longer come here.'<sup>3</sup>

This letter announced, at the same time, that he was off at once for Paris, to see Diderot. He hoped still to be able to embrace St. Lambert and disabuse him of his ill opinion: would she persuade him to stop in at the house of Diderot so that they might reunite there? And he took with him *Julie*.<sup>4</sup> But

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, pt. 2, ch. 8, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, Aug. 11, No. 389; to same, Aug. 12, 16, and 23, Nos. 390, 391, 392.

<sup>3</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, No. 382. Dufour places this letter immediately after the separation. But it is more sad and regretful and self-possessed than the other letters to Sophie at that moment. Furthermore, it was indited from La Chevette, placing it in those days of reconciliation with Mme d'Épinay. And the projected visit to Diderot further dates it as subsequent to the *rencontre* with St. Lambert and Mme d'Houdetot at La Chevette.

<sup>4</sup> The date of this visit to Diderot at Paris is difficult to ascertain. Cf. *Annales*, vol. xv, p. 92, n. 4. The letter to Mme d'Houdetot cited has no date. Mme d'Épinay's *Mémoires* speak of two visits from Diderot in one week, which a letter from

St. Lambert did not appear; and Diderot went over the novel with him, far into the night. It was a kind of trial to him, to see what views his oldest friend would have of the moral purport of the story, and then to get advice from him about the way to convince St. Lambert of his honesty. And Diderot seems to have counselled a full confession of the passion which he now for the first time admitted, and he assured him that St. Lambert would be forgiving.

To make a full confession, however, Rousseau would have had to violate a second time his promise to let Mme d'Houdetot manage the affair of her honor by herself. Even as it was, his confiding of his passion to Diderot was a kind of disobedience of her wishes, although he thought to protect her by giving the impression that she knew nothing of his love and had received no declaration of it from him, an imperfect disclosure of the truth that was eventually to be accounted a gross deception by Diderot.<sup>1</sup> But he did not want to compromise Mme d'Houdetot. On the other hand he had given Diderot his word that he would write to St. Lambert. It was a problem how he could do this without injury to her. He argued with himself about this action—and that argument about an avowal and the danger of compromising one of the parties is translated in the letters of Julie and St. Preux.<sup>2</sup> But he wanted to be on good terms with St. Lambert, and, indeed, with all his friends, and he was quite ready to make a move toward reconciliation with Grimm, too, a consummation which lay so near to the heart of Mme d'Épinay.<sup>3</sup> It was important that he should take such action for another reason. Deleyre had been informing him from Paris that the attacks on the *Encyclopedia* were terrible; his own article on *Fanaticism* had caused him to miss a good post; Diderot was in great difficulties; and rumor was having it that Rousseau had broken with him precisely at such a crisis. Every effort had to be made, therefore, to stand united and not encourage the assailants. And Deleyre was entirely satisfied with the various steps toward that end which Rousseau was taking, for he wrote—'After all, I see now that if there is any wrong on one side or another, it has been abundantly made up for on your part.'<sup>4</sup>

Rousseau to Mme d'Houdetot (Oct. 1, No. 399) makes impossible, for it says 'Diderot has not come at all'. On the other hand, Mme d'Épinay mentions his taking *Julie*, and likewise do the *Confessions*. In the latter, however, Rousseau makes the date of the visit much later than there is evidence for in the correspondence.

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 330, cf. p. 326; cf. *Corr. Litt.*, vol. xvi, pp. 219-22; J. F. Marmontel, *Mémoires*, vol. ii, pp. 246-59.

<sup>2</sup> *Julie*, pt. 3, Letters 18, 19, pp. 253-4.

<sup>3</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Sept. 15, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 396; to Mme d'Houdetot, Sept. 29, No. 398.

<sup>4</sup> From Deleyre, Sept. 11, No. 395; cf. No. 393. Rousseau remembered rightly,

The letter to St. Lambert was an appeal from one who felt that he had not lost all the rights of friendship. It reminded him that he and Mme d'Houdetot had actually made the first advances. 'I was thinking of you, with scarcely a thought about her, when she came to see me and began to seek my company. . . . I could not flee her; I saw her; I acquired the delightful habit of seeing her. I was solitary and sad; my heart in its affliction was only seeking consolation; I found it with her; she, in turn, had need of it too; she was finding a friend who could feel for her in her trouble. We used to speak of you, of the good and facile Diderot, of the ungrateful Grimm, and still others. The days passed thus in such mutual unburdening. I became attached to her as a solitary one would, a person suffering; she, too, conceived a friendship for me; at least she promised me it. We were forming many projects for the time when we might form amongst us three a charming society, in which I dared expect of you, indeed, some respect for her and regards for myself.' Such was the confession. Then the plea. Since St. Lambert's departure she had changed and received him coldly; but 'after having tasted the charm of a companionship which has become necessary to me, I believe, by the friendship that one has asked of me, that I have acquired some right to that which has been offered me. . . .' 'Could you possibly have feared that I would seek to injure you with her, and that a virtue ill-interpreted would make me treacherous and a deceiver? The article of one of your letters which concerns me, has made me entertain this suspicion. No, no, St. Lambert. . . .' Then he stood up for his principles: 'I do blame your relationships: you wouldn't approve them yourself; and so long as you are dear to me, both of you, I should never leave you in security as to the innocence of your state. But an affection such as yours also merits regard, and the good it produces renders it less culpable. After having known all she feels for you, how could I want to make you unhappy, one by the other! No, I feel too much respect for a union so tender, and cannot direct it to virtue by the route of despair. One word especially which she said to me, about two months ago—and I'll tell it to you some day—so moved me that from being the confidant of her passion, I have almost become an accomplice. . . . I repeat it, I do not want to deprive you, the one of the other. So far from that, if ever, between the two of you, I am to be so happy as to make truth itself speak, without displeasing you, and to soften its voice in the mouth of a friend, I only wish to provide against the inevitable end of your

in the *Confessions*, that he took such action for Diderot's sake, but seems to have been mistaken in thinking that he *went to Paris* for that purpose.

love, by uniting you in a bond that is more durable, that will stand the test of the years, that you could both feel to be an honor to yourselves before all men, and that will be sweet even at the last moment of life. But you can be sure that I would never hold such discourse with either of you separately.' Friendship of this sort surely is no harm to love. It heightens the meaning of affection to be able to have it known to others, and especially in the absence of one, to speak of it to a sympathetic friend. 'I am persuaded that you yourself would experience this pleasure now, if you had given me the day you promised me. . . .' In closing he mentioned his rapidly failing health, and his hope to have restored to him the friendship of her who had become so necessary to his life: he would go more than half-way to bring this happy consummation to pass.<sup>1</sup>

A month was to elapse before Rousseau could receive an answer to this appeal, and then it came from one who was invalided and suffering from paralysis. Meantime, Mme d'Houdctot, alone and ill herself at Paris, missed the voice that had accompanied the lover in her heart, and she remembered, too, what a state of desolation he was in. She inquired concerning him; expressed her pleasure over his move to be reconciled with Grimm; reminded him that she had been the first to urge it upon him; and added that she wanted to be counted among those friends who occupied a place in his heart. 'Believe that your friendship is precious to me, that I desire it for myself, that I want it for the object of my attachment; I know too well its worth; it is a good which I would share also with him. No, dear Citizen, cherish two honest hearts which will reunite again to love you; respect and do not condemn a passion to which we have been able to join so much goodness, and in the sublime rank where virtue is to place you and where you can attain, excuse two hearts which the love of virtue will never abandon. That is what you ought to be, that is what I desire you to be, that is what I shall always see you to be, in order to preserve for you in my heart the sentiments which are there and which it is sweet to me to have there.' This letter, however, was written in great concern and sadness, for she had no word from St. Lambert. She hoped to be able to meet Rousseau at La Chevrette with Mme d'Épinay. And, apropos of his present pessimism, she begged him to re-read his own letter to Voltaire. And she still wanted copies for herself of the letters of Julie, and besides them something else he had promised her.<sup>2</sup>

Rousseau was deeply touched by this message, and very solicitous for her health, regretting that she had given up

<sup>1</sup> To St. Lambert, Sept. 5, No. 397.

<sup>2</sup> Sept. 29, No. 398.

taking walks, 'the taste for which I have had the misfortune to make you lose'. As for himself, despite the bright picture she had painted of his high destiny in virtue and a complete reunion with friends, he saw no such happy turn of affairs, with Diderot still distant, Grimm's attitude as yet undeclared, Mme d'Épinay herself not yet making amends for the wrongs she had done, and 'as for you', he cruelly added, 'I do not ignore the fact that you give me to so many friends only in order to rid yourself of me. Don't tell me so often that you won't be spending any time at Eaubonne. The instant I was aware I was importune, I forgot the way there. . . .' He promised to bring her when she would be at La Chevrette a personal copy of the letter to Voltaire, and to start the letters of *Julie* as soon as he got his own copy in shape.<sup>1</sup>

To all appearances, indeed, Deleyre was the only friend left who showed any concern for him, and he did it in whimsical as well as serious ways. He seems to have had strange dreams which he reported most entertainingly; how, for instance, Rousseau was imprisoned in the Bastille for his virtues, and Deleyre stood before him grieving, whilst the prisoner himself was only laughing. But he chatted away in his letters about affairs of the world, his own difficulties in getting along, and his wish to join forces with the hermit. 'I would like to know why you said to me, last time (we walked together), that, if I was to be at Geneva, you might soon join me there. Are you thinking of making a journey to your own country?'<sup>2</sup> Apparently Rousseau had doubts about the reunion of St. Lambert, Grimm, Diderot, and himself—and his thoughts were again directed toward that haven of escape from the whole affair.

Grimm returned. The attempted reconciliation was unsatisfactory. Rousseau, believing what he did about Grimm, that he was constantly taking advantage of him with his friends, could not, apparently, humble himself sufficiently to the satisfaction of 'the tyrant'.<sup>3</sup> And it seems Grimm had twitted him with the losing of all his friends, whereas he himself retained them all. And at that moment the truth of the statement struck him terribly—he had not heard from Diderot nor from St. Lambert, and the latter was due back soon. And even Mme d'Houdetot had failed to make her promised visit to La Chevrette—'I feel that I am alone, forgotten of all that is dear to me. I have ceased to live, and yet still breathe.'<sup>4</sup> The circle was closing up without him.

<sup>1</sup> Oct. 1, No. 399.

<sup>2</sup> From Deleyre, Oct. 1, No. 400; cf. No. 384.

<sup>3</sup> See *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, pp. 337-40; *Mémoires*, pt. 2, ch. 8, p. 356 f.

<sup>4</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Oct. 14, No. 401.

Mme d'Houdetot responded by trying to drive out the 'black melancholy' obsessing him. The delay in St. Lambert's replying to him was one from which she suffered herself and was due to the movements of the army. She reassured him that they respected him always for his love of virtue and superior spirit and talents and his tender sentiments. 'I count on going to La Chevrette on Friday and I very much want to see you there; I even beg you to come, if you can do it without inconvenience. . . . Suffer me, too, to exhort you to distract yourself by attending to the work which you have begun and have shown me. There is one especially which it ought to be very satisfying for you to do. In fine, take care of your health and take a little recreation. The season's getting on; let us profit by its last instants, and do come, my dear Citizen, to see, at La Chevrette, a friend who is very much attached to you.'<sup>1</sup>

Before that meeting affliction befell her, the news that St. Lambert was down with paralysis as a result of fatigues in the campaign. She was very grateful at that moment for the genuine 'proofs of friendship and confidence' that came from Rousseau; and she counted still upon coming to La Chevrette on the day appointed.<sup>2</sup>

Meantime, with Grimm back at La Chevrette and in Paris, Diderot was informed about everybody's plans. This was an extraordinary misfortune for Rousseau. For just at the moment when he was ready to go on with his various writings on morality, religion, and politics, and when he was secure again in the affections and esteem of Mme d'Houdetot, he received another preposterous and officious letter from Diderot telling him about his duties to others. 'I am made to love you and to give you trouble. I hear that Mme d'Épinay is going to Geneva, and I do not hear it said that you are to accompany her. My friend, if you are content with Mme d'Épinay, you ought to go with her: if not so, you ought to get out even much more quickly. If you are too heavily charged with obligations to her, well, here is the chance to acquit yourself in part and to relieve your mind on that score. Will you find another occasion in your life to give evidence of your gratitude to her? She is going to a country where she will be utterly lost. She is ill: she will have need of amusements and distraction. And winter, too, see, my friend! The objection with respect to your own health may be much stronger than I believe. But are you worse today than you would be in a month from now, and than you will be at the beginning of Spring? Would you make the journey more easily three

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Oct. 15, No. 402.

<sup>2</sup> From same, Oct. 19, No. 403.

months from now than today? For my part, I tell you that if I could not stand a carriage, I would take a walking-stick and I would follow her. And besides, aren't you afraid that someone will misinterpret your conduct? They will suspect you either of ingratitude or some other secret motive. I know well that whatever you do, you will always have for yourself the witness of your own conscience: but this witness, is it sufficient by itself, and is it permissible to neglect at a certain point that of other men? Besides, my friend, it is to do my duty to you and to myself that I write you this note. If you don't like it, throw it in the fire, and let there be no more question about it than if it had never been written. I greet you, love you, and embrace you.<sup>1</sup>

Diderot was too far away, and too devoid of imagination, to realise the catastrophic ineptitude of this note. Wherever Grimm was, Rousseau had come to see trouble for himself. In the army, St. Lambert had been influenced, and through him Mme d'Houdetot was made to adopt the attitude of a relative stranger to him, visible only under the roof of Mme d'Épinay, so that he would always have to go to La Chevrette in the future to see her. Now with Grimm at La Chevrette, he was to be sent away to Geneva, bound to Mme d'Épinay and separated absolutely from the only person dear to him. It is very doubtful, indeed, if Grimm cared to have him escort Mme d'Épinay; although it may have seemed advisable, as Diderot said for 'amusement and distraction'. In any case such harping on an obligation irritated him beyond endurance, because he had accepted the Hermitage on the distinct condition that he was to be free to work as he pleased and not to have any social duties to perform. A quite different régime had developed, to be sure, but he had no wish to sanction it, and commit himself to be a kind of 'valet' to her, and give up all his own projects, to say nothing of the society of Mme d'Houdetot. In any case, he was determined to have the whole issue fought out in the open, not arranged by twos and twos; and he read Diderot's note to Grimm and Mme d'Épinay and then his own reply as follows: 'My dear friend, you cannot know either the force of the obligations which I have to Mme d'Épinay, or how far they are binding on me, or whether she really has need of me on her journey, or whether she desires me to accompany her, or whether it is possible for me to make it, or the reasons I might have for declining to do so. I do not refuse to discuss all these points with you, but meantime, you must agree that to prescribe to me so affirmatively what I ought to do, without

<sup>1</sup> From Diderot, about Oct. 18, No. 404.



putting yourself in a position to judge of them, is, my dear philosopher, to opine recklessly. What I see that is still worse in this matter is that your advice does not come from you. Besides the fact that I am little in a mood to let myself be directed under your name by a third or fourth party, I find in these indirections certain subterfuges which do not comport with your frankness, and from which you would do well, both for you and for me, to abstain henceforth. You fear that one might interpret ill my conduct; but I defy a heart like yours to dare think ill of mine. God save me from trying to make myself approved of them. Let the wicked spy upon me and put me to evil interpretation: Rousseau is not made to fear them, nor Diderot to listen to them. If your note displeased me, you wanted me to throw it into the fire, and that there be no more question of it. Do you think that one can forget thus what comes from you? My dear man, you are as cheap with my tears in the troubles you give me, as of my life and my health in the tasks you exhort me to undertake. If you could correct yourself in these regards, your friendship would be sweeter to me, and I would have less to complain about.<sup>1</sup> Thus foolishly Rousseau gave affront to Grimm and Mme d'Épinay in each other's presence and virtually threw them and Diderot together in mutual self-defence.

By a strange chance the long-despaired reply from St. Lambert arrived at this critical moment. While still in a half-helpless condition he wrote very affectionately, promising him the continuance of his friendship, and that of Mme d'Houdetot. 'It is I alone who am to be blamed for her conduct; her heart has not changed toward you, she loves you, she honors you, but she has seen less of you because she has wanted to avoid giving me the pain you yourself would not have wanted to cause me, and yet would none the less have caused, though by my own fault. It is I who sought to unite you, the one with the other, and I certainly don't reproach myself for that now. . . . But here is the source of the trouble, here are my follies. I believed in my last visit that I saw in her some change; I love her too much to lose anything in her affections without perceiving it at once and feeling it cruelly. I avow to you that I believed you to be the cause of what I believed to be my loss. Don't think, my dear friend, that I believed you were perfidious or a traitor; but I knew the austerity of your principles. Someone had spoken to me of them: she herself spoke of them with a respect which did not seem compatible with her love. It did not take much more to make me alarmed over an intimacy which I had so strongly desired, and you are well aware that once I

<sup>1</sup> To Diderot, about Oct. 19, No. 405.

was uneasy, there would be going through my head all possible false sentiments and absurdities. I have made three persons unhappy; I am the only one for whom any trouble remains since I am the sole one who can have remorse.' Then he asked pardon, and he asked, too, that Rousseau keep his word never to speak against their love.<sup>1</sup>

It happened, too, that Mme d'Houdetot planned a visit to Eaubonne, by herself, 'to bid adieu to the valley' for the season.<sup>2</sup> She chose, by accident, the very day on which Mme d'Épinay had intended to start her journey to Geneva; but Rousseau evidently did not expect to accompany her, or if he thought it possible, he intended, 'no matter what happened', to have dinner at Eaubonne.<sup>3</sup> There they met, once again, on the terrain of their paradise lost, this time with a guardian angel or 'invincible aegidium', the letter from St. Lambert. They talked over the letter and their future. They dreamed of a society of three reunited in mutual respect and affection. The story of those dreams was traced out later by Rousseau in the plot of *Julie*, in Part Four—a reunion of Julie, her husband, and St. Preux, the latter reinstated in his old position of honor and wisdom, as 'tutor' this time, however, to the children of Julie who was then the good wife and mother. A picture of blessedness, a domestic scene and the occupations of life, not of jealous love, but of management of the home and the education of children. Thus was realised, in *Julie*, the ideal meaning of the thoughts of Rousseau and Mme d'Houdetot as they then talked over the prospects of their future.<sup>4</sup>

They parted under the spell of their dreams. Rousseau wrote to St. Lambert about their meeting, in answer to the letter that had given him such relief and authorised their joy in seeing one another again. It was a veritable benediction: 'Our friend came Tuesday to bid adieu to the valley; I passed there a half-day that was sad and delicious. Our hearts placed you between us, and our eyes were not dry in speaking of you. I told her that her attachment for you was henceforth a virtue; she was touched by that so much that she wanted me to write it to you, and I gladly obey her. Yes, my children, be forever united. . . .'<sup>5</sup> And Mme d'Houdetot, likewise, setting down her thoughts immediately—'How can I express to you the effect made upon me by all that I have seen in you that is touching and good, in our last talk together? The feeling I have of that

<sup>1</sup> From St. Lambert, at Wolfembüttel, Oct. 11, No. 407.

<sup>2</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Oct. 22, or 23, No. 410.

<sup>3</sup> To same, Oct. 24, No. 411.

<sup>4</sup> *Julie*, pt. 4, Letters 6, 10, H. iv, pp. 293-5; 310-26.

<sup>5</sup> To St. Lambert, Oct. 28, No. 413.

will never be effaced from my heart; no, it is not possible. I shall always see you as I have seen you this day, uniting all there is of good in a soul as virtuous as it is sympathetic; and everything assures you forever of a place in my heart—that friendship, that tender gratitude of your friendship which is no longer a trouble to him whom I love; and its innocence and candor, too, which will be eternally dear to all three of us.<sup>1</sup>

By an unlucky fatality this spontaneous tribute to his goodness was not destined to be seen by Rousseau himself until after he had embarked upon an action which would have been animated by quite another spirit if he had known of it. Though they had parted in a trance of pleasure over their meeting again on the authority of St. Lambert himself, they had one thing still to trouble them in the future. She felt that he had been in the wrong about his behavior to Grimm and Mme d'Épinay, at that episode when he read Diderot's letter and his reply; and she had made him feel uncertain of himself in the matter. Her influence was abetted in his mind by the generous testimony of St. Lambert, a fellow-soldier of Grimm's, who had concluded his letter saying: 'He has spoken to me of you as of a man whom he respected, whom he loved, but whose injustice was being his misfortune.'<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Mme d'Houdetot wanted Rousseau to make amends to Grimm, and, further, in hopes of hearing the trouble about the journey to Geneva settled, she waited before sending off her first impulsive thoughts.<sup>3</sup> Meantime the suggestion of his duty in the matter was having its effect on him. He was always anxious to correct any injustice; and especially because it seemed one to those persons for whom he would do very much. Impulsively he obeyed, and wrote Grimm. No doubt he sat down to it with an intent at reconciliation, but without the enthusiasm he would have had were those last sentiments of Mme d'Houdetot behind him. Lacking that support in the direction of friendship and reunion he wrote in a tone and style impossible to accomplish his end. It was not in his power to speak to Grimm as one really forgetting and asking to be forgiven for his own deeds. There were limits to his charity, just as in his disagreement with Diderot—he could not expose himself a third time after having already turned the other cheek. And the very reviewing of the facts of the situation rekindled his indignation so that his pen produced a letter which meant inevitably a break: 'Tell me, Grimm, why do all

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Oct. 26, No. 412 (not sent until later).

<sup>2</sup> From St. Lambert, No. 407, *C.G.*, vol. iii, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Reference to this is made in No. 412, pp. 151-2, and in a later communication, Nov. 1, No. 419, p. 166.

my friends pretend that I ought to follow Mme d'Épinay? Am I mistaken, or might they all be misled themselves? Would they all have that low partiality which is always ready to pronounce in favor of the rich, and to load down misery with a hundred futile duties which render it all the more inevitable and harsh? I want to reckon this score only with you alone. Although you are without doubt prejudiced like the others, I believe you sufficiently equitable to put yourself in my place, and to judge of my true duties. Hear my reasons, then, my friend, and decide concerning the part I ought to take; for, whatever be your advice, I declare to you it will be followed immediately.' Then came the argument about his obligation. Did friendship constitute an obligation to accompany her on this journey? 'She has friends less ill, less poor, less jealous of their liberty, less pressed for time, and friends who are at least as dear to her as I am'—a direct reference to Grimm's relationship to her. Did the fact that Rousseau had received benefits from her oblige him in particular to do this? 'As for benefactions, first of all, I don't like them, I don't want them, and I am not content with those one makes me support by force. I spoke plainly to Mme d'Épinay before receiving anything from her: it's not that I don't like to let myself drift, as any other person does, into relations so dear when friendship forms them; but as soon as one wants to draw the chain too tightly, it breaks, and I am free. What *has* Mme d'Épinay done for me? You know better than anyone, and I can speak freely about it to you: she had built on my account a little house at the Hermitage, engaged me to lodge myself there, and, I add with pleasure, she has taken care to make the dwelling therein agreeable and secure. What have I done, on my part, for Mme d'Épinay? At the time when I was ready to retire to my own country, which I desired exceedingly to do, and which I ought to have done, she moved heaven and earth to keep me here. By virtue of solicitations, and even of intrigues, she overcame my long resistance: my wishes, my preference, my inclination, the disapproval of my friends, all gave way in my heart to the voice of friendship; I let myself be led to the Hermitage. . . . However, far from giving myself up to the charms of solitude, the only consolation for an unfortunate person burdened with ills, and whom all the world seeks to torment, I saw that I was no longer my own master. Mme d'Épinay, often alone herself in the country, wished me to keep her company: it was for that she wanted to have me there.' And the thought of being thus used, as a subject, led him to bitter sarcasms about the way the wealthy impose on the poor, and require sacrifice of them, and he added some insulting and

ridiculing remarks about the character of their hospitality. But he went on to show why he felt so strongly: 'You know, too, that it is impossible for me to work except at certain hours, that I must have solitude, woods, and calm. . . . But try to reckon now how much money is worth an hour of the life and time of a man; compare the benefits received from Mme d'Épinay with my sacrifice of my own country, and two years of slavery, and tell me which of the two of us has obligations to the other.' But is it for reasons of his being a help to her that he ought to make this journey? It is easy to show that there is none. During the travelling he would be only a handicap with his own ailment; at Geneva, she would be in the hands of her friend Dr. Tronchin. And there her acquaintances would not be his, nor his friends agreeable to her, or likely to amuse her. Why on earth would she want him around? And suppose he were to go with her as a dependent, would not Diderot turn about and abuse him for taking the liberty of imposing himself upon her and following a rich woman about the country? Diderot would be bound to find some new obligation to charge him with. Meantime, the Le Vasseurs, about whom he had been so extraordinarily concerned last winter, would have to shift for themselves; and his furniture and all his papers would be left behind, as if they were of no account. No, when the advantages and disadvantages are counted up, there is no reason whatsoever why he should perform this new supposed duty. Yet all his friends are seeing such 'bizarre duties' for him. What is the cause of this difference of judgment? It is that he is living in a society of people who are beyond his own condition and who judge him by their own standards of behavior in their state and not by those of his own. He has wanted to live apart from them and their ways; but, being tied to them still, he cannot get them to take his character for what it is, to accept the maxims of his life, to consider what resources he has at his disposal and what rules of conduct are appropriate. It is a sign of this incompatibility that Diderot should write so glibly about taking up a walking stick and trudging afoot from Paris to Geneva—Diderot, in his study, by a good fire, and in a nice warm robe!

Rousseau was not leaving much for Grimm to decide. He was stating the obvious decision when he started to say in conclusion: 'As for staying at the Hermitage, I feel only too well that I ought not to dwell there any longer, even if continuing to pay the gardener, for that isn't enough rental: but', he added in indecision, 'I believe I owe it to Mme d'Épinay not to quit the Hermitage with an air of displeasure, which would suppose a quarrel between us. I avow it would also be hard for me to

move out in this season . . . which already makes me feel cruelly enough its approach. It would be better to wait until Spring, when my departure would be more natural and when I am resolved to go seek a retreat unknown to all these barbarous tyrants one calls friends.<sup>1</sup>

That was a declaration of war instead of a bid for peace. Why did not Rousseau follow the dictates of his self-respect and leave the Hermitage? It is true, as he very honestly said, that he was appalled at a removal—the moving-in had been accomplished only with the careful help of Mme d'Épinay, and this going-out would be a different matter, for one so ill and excited by domestic upset. But a reason more important was the fact that Mme d'Houdetot did not want it—for she, indeed, perceived she would suffer if there were talk of a quarrel since then the question of its original cause would be raised, and with it the question of her own repute because of her relations with both him and St. Lambert.

Rousseau knew her wishes but scarcely divined the reasons. His thoughts were still lingering over that happy meeting: 'How that whole day, Tuesday, was sweet and charming. Serenity suspended the agitations of my soul, and I drew, in the heart of a pure and tender friendship, the force needed to support the torments given me by a tyrannical friendship.' But why must men attain the liberty of others? Why don't they let one be what he is by nature and not try to make him what they think he ought to be? And he pictured himself ridiculously, as they seemed to want to have him: 'A bear on parade that one leads about on a leash, a little parasite, a contemptible fellow making up to others.' He admitted, then, that he had written Grimm in the heat of such indignation and had gone too far, and was now ready to disavow many things in his letter. Indeed, he feared this letter would embroil him with his friends and become a new affliction for him.<sup>2</sup> But he would console himself with the two perfect friendships that remained to him—little thinking that those friendships themselves could not be secure in the event of a quarrel which would involve her reputation.

<sup>1</sup> To Grimm, Oct. 26, No. 406. This letter cannot have been written Wednesday, October 19, as P. P. Plan proposes (in *C.G.*, vol. iii, p. 136, n. 2), but a week later, exactly as E. Ritter had previously suggested (*Annales*, vol. ii, p. 64). On October 25 Rousseau and Mme d'Houdetot met at Eaubonne, and there would not have been any question of his taking steps to be reconciled with Grimm if a letter had already been written. It was only at that meeting, apparently, that the writing of a letter of amends was suggested. Rousseau must have composed it the very next day. And then on October 29 he told her about it for the first time. (No. 416.)

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Oct. 29, No. 416.

At the moment of finishing this letter to Mme d'Houdetot Rousseau had word from Grimm to say that Mme d'Épinay's journey was postponed because of the illness of her son. 'I will think about your letter. Keep tranquil in your hermitage. I will give you advice in time. Since she is not leaving for several days, there is no hurry. Meanwhile, if you judge it *à propos*, you can make your offer to her yourself, although that seems to me a matter of indifference. For knowing your position as well as yourself, I don't doubt for a moment but she will respond to your offers as she ought, and all I see to be gained thereby is that you can say to those who press you that if you have not gone, it's not because of any failure to offer yourself. Besides, I don't see why you insist on thinking that the philosopher must be the spokesman of all the world, and why, because it is his view that you ought to depart, you imagine that all your friends pretend the same. If you write to Mme d'Épinay, her response can serve you as a reply to all these friends, since you have it so much at heart to reply to them. Adieu. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

Precisely what this message boded Rousseau could not discern, and he sent it on to Mme d'Houdetot, asking, 'is it that of a friend, of a man frank and well intentioned?'<sup>2</sup> It kept him on tenterhooks, and its sarcasms promised no good. He replied, with a letter of which there seems to be no record. But some idea of its frankness may be inferred from a part of a letter he sent at once to Mme d'Épinay, after expressing his regrets over the illness delaying her. 'Mme d'Houdetot spoke very much to me on Tuesday about this journey, and urged me to accompany you almost as energetically as Diderot has done. That insistence upon making me go, without consideration of my condition, made me suspect a kind of league of which you might be the moving spirit. I have neither the ability nor the patience to verify these things, and am not on the spot, but I have a sure enough tact, and I am very certain that the note from Diderot does not come from himself. I do not dispute the fact that the desire to have me with you might be obliging and an honor to me, but besides the fact that you had evinced the desire to me with so little interest that your arrangements for the carriage were already made, I cannot endure to have such a friend employ the authority of others to obtain what no one better than herself could have obtained of me; I find in all that an air of tyranny and intrigue which has put me in bad temper, and I have let out too much of it, perhaps, but only to your friend and mine. I have not forgotten my promise (to cherish

<sup>1</sup> From Grimm, about Oct. 28, No. 414.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, No. 417.

nothing against her but have it out);<sup>1</sup> but one is not the master of one's thoughts, and all I can do is to tell you mine on this occasion, in order to be disabused if I am wrong. You can be sure that in place of all these indirections, if you had insisted with friendship, that you very much desired it, and that I would be of some use to you, I should have overlooked every other consideration and have gone. I don't know how all this is going to end, but whatever happens, be sure that I shall never forget your goodness to me and that when you no longer want to have me for a slave, you will always have me for a friend.<sup>2</sup>

So much to the woman dominated by Grimm. There then followed a very intimate and revealing self-analysis, where Rousseau showed her how deeply affected he was, despite what he seemed to see in her that threatened his liberty and genius: 'All my inequalities come from the fact that I was made to love you from the bottom of my heart; that then, having had your character under suspicion, and judging that insensibly you would be seeking to reduce me to servitude, or to employ me according to your secret intentions, I have for a long time been irresolute between my liking for you and the suspicions that contradict it. The indiscretions of Diderot, his imperious and mentor-like tone with a man older than himself, all that has changed the trouble in my soul to an indignation which happily I have not let myself give out save to your own best friend before knowing what will be the effects of it and the consequences. I hasten to declare to you that the most ardent of my wishes is to be able to honor you all my life and to continue to nourish for you as much friendship as I owe you gratitude.'<sup>3</sup>

It ought to be remembered, in connection with all that is about to come to pass, that Rousseau received no response to this letter until almost a month later when things had gone much too far. For some reason—perhaps due only to the sudden postponement without changing arrangements about the forwarding of messages—this letter, although sent three days before the departure from La Chevrette which took place on November 1st, was not seen by Mme d'Épinay herself until she arrived at Geneva, whence she sent a reply that came to him about November 23rd.<sup>4</sup> Meantime he was in the dark about everything, whether Grimm's decision would be to have him make the journey, and particularly whether she would accept the amends he had made with a sincerity that was unmistakable.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. No. 377, p. 84 above, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Oct. 29, No. 415.

<sup>3</sup> Rousseau's own copy of the original letter omits this paragraph of confession—*C.G.*, vol. iii, p. 158 and n. 5.

<sup>4</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, Nov. 12, No. 439; to same Nov. 23, No. 440.



In fact, he almost went to see her in person the day after he sent the message, so anxious was he to avert all misunderstanding.<sup>1</sup> But no word from her; and meantime she had departed for Geneva, apparently willing to be silent. There were only two inferences Rousseau could draw from that silence. Either he was despised as a *complaisant* for his appeal to her affections at the conclusion of his letter; or else she herself could not answer the charges of intrigue which he had made in the first part of his communication. He was thenceforth obliged, by the evidence at hand, to act on one or the other of these interpretations—and so he did for the remainder of the affair.

While waiting for some word from Grimm or Mme d'Épinay on the eve of the departure for Geneva, the belated message came from Mme d'Houdetot, started five days earlier in the first flush of joy over their reunion at Eaubonne.<sup>2</sup> It was, of course, welcome and comforting to him with its tribute to his goodness toward her. But it now gave him added distress because of the following thoughts: 'I await with impatience news of her journey, whether it will take place or not. I very much wish that they will not find you at fault and I am quite sure that you will not be so in the decision you make; but, my friend, it is my whole wish that no one will find any fault in you, and that your friends will judge you to be as irreproachable as I believe you will indeed be.' And in the concluding paragraph, before dispatching it, she wrote: 'Since I have heard nothing said about you, my dear Citizen, I send you my letter. Tell me, now, what has been decided with regard to your journey, and what your friends have said to you about it. You know well that I have a very lively interest in everything that concerns you, and that this appears to me to be particularly important.'<sup>3</sup> Well, that important decision was to be made by others now; it was out of his hands. He confessed in his reply that not having heard from her had made him believe she was working in harmony with Diderot and the others to send him away, and that he had written a long and unfortunate letter to Grimm, and another to Mme d'Épinay, with no concealment of what had made him so bitter. He was now awaiting their decision. His perplexity had been unbearable, and it had been increased by the fact that he had had no further word either from herself or St. Lambert. Nevertheless, despite his sadness and illness and these bothers, he was working on the subject of morals, and thinking of her—doubtless in the letters

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Oct. 31, No. 418.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Oct. 31, No. 417, opening sentence and Note 2.

<sup>3</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Oct. 26, No. 412.

of *Julie* that sketched the idyllic reunion of three friends. Mme d'Houdetot answered this letter immediately with one full of gentle helpfulness and quiet explaining, but this reply too was not to come to his hands for several days which were of the greatest moment to him.<sup>1</sup>

The day after Mme d'Épinay departed for Geneva, Rousseau got his reply from Grimm, a horrifying message which he sent back, without looking at it twice or keeping any record of it.<sup>2</sup> 'Madame, all those I loved', he wrote to Mme d'Houdetot at once,<sup>3</sup> 'hate me now, and you know how I feel; that's enough to tell you. All I had learned about Mme d'Épinay is only too true, and I know still more about it now; I find on all sides nothing but subjects of despair . . . I am going to get out of the hermitage. My purpose is to seek a retreat far away and unknown; but I've got to get through the winter, and the orders you've given me prevent my passing it in Paris, where I should be tempted to go.<sup>4</sup> So I am going to establish myself in Montmorency, as I might do, awaiting the return of Spring. My most honored friend, I shall never see you again; I feel it in the sadness that pains my heart; but I will be busy with yourself in my retreat; I will dream I have two friends in the world, and I shall forget that I am alone there.'<sup>5</sup>

But he was even then feeling very much alone at the Hermitage, and very much afraid. Since his letter enclosing Grimm's provisional reply had gone out to her, he had had no word from her. Did she, too, now think ill of him and side with them? With this fear obsessing him he wrote another letter beseeching her not to be silent at this time. And the terrible words he had spied in Grimm's final retort echoed in his expression of this fear: 'You hate me! You despise me, you who know my heart! Good God! Am I a rascal? A rascal, I? I am learning it late enough. It's M. Grimm, it's my old friend, it's he who owes me all the friends he is taking away from me, he it is who has made this fine discovery, and who publishes it! Alas, he is the good man, and I the mean one; he enjoys the honors of virtue for having ruined his friend, and I am in disgrace, and why? For not having been able to flatter a treacherous woman, or subject myself to her whom I was forced to hate. But one must be silent and let oneself be despised. Providence, Providence! and the soul is not immortal! I am a bad man, I! and why! That indignation of outraged honor, these outbursts of grief,

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 1, No. 419, which came to Rousseau only on Nov. 4.

<sup>2</sup> To Grimm, Nov. 1, No. 420.      <sup>3</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 1, No. 422.

<sup>4</sup> The temptation was to be near her.

<sup>5</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 1, No. 422.

these sobs that suffocate me, these would then be the synderesis of crime. Ah, if I am a bad man, how vile is the whole human race! Show me a man better than I am, show me a soul more affectionate, more sympathetic, more won by the charms of friendship, more touched by goodness and the beautiful, show me one, and I will hold my peace.' And assuming, then, that she had held her peace because she really condemned him, he vowed he would write, at least, to St. Lambert to get satisfaction from him, the only one left to hear an appeal.<sup>1</sup>

When this dismaying outburst came to the hands of Mme d'Houdetot she realised at once that the letters she had sent by post had not yet reached him, so she dispatched a hasty note by special messenger who was to bring back a reply direct from him. She assured him that there was not the slightest change in her opinion of him, and pointed out clearly which of his letters she had already answered. He was to wait for them; and calm himself; and above all, not to write anybody whilst in such an excitement. 'Explain to me your grievances against Grimm, and against all those of whom you believe you have a right to complain, and tell me if I am mixed up in all that.'<sup>2</sup> When the messenger appeared with this note Rousseau had already gained the desired relief to his fears because the first of the posted letters had just arrived that day; and he had finished a letter in reply tremulous with his grateful feelings. She had assured him in that missive that she was entirely independent of Grimm and Diderot in what she urged upon him, and only wanted all his other friends to be as convinced of his rectitude in his conduct toward Mme d'Épinay as she herself, 'for I find it hard to have our friends suspect us of wrong'. She believed, too, he had also misjudged Diderot's motive as well as her own in pressing upon him the duty to go—that Diderot likewise could have feared he was making a mistake with regard to Mme d'Épinay, and only spoke with too great warmth as a friend might do. And as for Grimm's provisional reply, she could not judge, but it seemed as if his own letter to Grimm must have been written in too high a dudgeon. But in any case, no one wanted to exercise any tyrannical power over him. 'Be free, you are made to be so; but you are also made to excuse, and even to be thankful for the free counsels of friendship. . . .' Above all for those of Diderot. 'And, to finish with all my moral lesson, promise me

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 2, No. 423. Rousseau's letters of Oct. 29, Oct. 31, and Nov. 1 *had not been answered*, entirely owing to delay in the post. Replies were *actually* sent him *without delay on the part of Mme d'Houdetot*.

<sup>2</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 3, No. 426. Her letters, Nov. 2 (No. 423), Nov. 3 (425), were all on the way, arriving after this special message dispatched Nov. 3, while that of Nov. 1 (No. 419) turned up just beforehand.

before explaining yourself, always to moderate that vivacity which often makes you say things for which you reproach yourself; inasmuch as you are not always master of yourself, bethink you others can be that way too; it is necessary then to try to restrain oneself in a movement of passion; one derives a double advantage from that, which is, that one does not run the risk of exciting that of others, for we can scarcely fail to draw out a wrong from another when we have begun with one ourselves; these things multiply, the bonds relax and break. . . . Pardon again, my friend, I have finished. . . . Adieu, think of me as your friend in your solitude. I exhort you once again to take up the works you have projected: tell me where you are in them. Think about my copies, send me your little pathetic air, and take some distraction at times from your serious and useful occupations to recall to mind that there are two hearts that love you and are not unworthy of yours.<sup>1</sup>

These words of affection blotted out for him all the moralising. And they kindled in him the wish to have Diderot back again: 'Oh, my Diderot, if only I knew you were wholly appeased!'<sup>2</sup> So he wrote him, at the same time; indeed he even suggested for a moment that Mme d'Houdetot should make the advances on his behalf, although, on thinking better, he decided, in a postscript, that she must not do so, such indirection being contrary to his nature.

He was wearied out with all these controversies, and he knew it. He needed a breathing-spell, several days without any writing of letters, time to recover his spent energies. The wound was too fresh to be probed any more. And, above all this, he had to come and go whilst moving from the Hermitage to the place he had found for himself to spend the winter at Montmorency—although he would, of course, have time to read anything whatsoever she would write him.

So he was silent. But the next letters to come from her were those delayed by the post. They were written, of course, in the same sweet spirit of patience and true understanding, but their unintended effect was to rouse him again. For they reflected the excitement of the first moments after receiving Grimm's note and recapitulated for him the whole episode, and opened the wound he wanted to have healed by time and forgetting. There was an especial note of disturbance in the reiterated query of Mme d'Houdetot: 'Am I mixed up in all that?' And a questioning that called for answer: 'I have seen you suspect Mme

<sup>1</sup> No. 419.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 4, No. 427. The message to Diderot is mentioned on page 180.

d'Épinay of a strange piece of wickedness! Is there really any truth in that?' And another letter turned up, still prior to the dispatch by messenger, in which she suggested simply that Diderot had too great a zeal for instructing his friends in their duty and that Mme d'Épinay herself might possibly be wronged by him.<sup>1</sup> And above all she disapproved of the prospect of his moving out of the Hermitage. And there he was, all committed to doing so, and being asked not to, for the sake of justice, and, be it noted, for her own sake as well. For there was an element of self-preservation in her queries and advice, since an open break would implicate her. All this plunged him again into indecision, and more arguing with himself and with her.

He answered with a recapitulation of the case and incidentally developed new explanations. He wanted to leave the Hermitage as a matter of self-respect. He went over again the story of Mme d'Épinay's interest and kindness: and how she gradually demanded more and more of his time when alone, without thinking of his need to work and live for himself. 'Last summer you sought me out; could I do less than respond to your advances? How could one know you at all without loving you; insensibly I became attached to you, and my visits to Eaubonne have never been forgiven me. Mme d'Épinay could not bear it that when she had been accustomed to dispose of me all for herself, you should take from her a part of my attention; it is not an impulse of vanity which prompts that idea in me, it is the desire to find at least some motive for her inconceivable conduct, and not to attribute it to sheer malice alone.' And then, assuming from the silence to his frank letter written her before leaving, that she was really guilty of the charges made in it, he repeated them now to Mme d'Houdetot, with fixed conviction: Mme d'Épinay had intended to separate them and she it was certainly who had spread calumny about them. On this ground, and on some additional testimony obtained from Thérèse that betrayed an intent to make trouble in his own household, he was convinced of her positive unfriendliness. Moreover, M. d'Épinay had offered him reimbursement for the gardener's wages which, by the terms of the original agreement, it was his duty to pay as a kind of rental: was not that a signal for him to leave? He ought, therefore, as a matter of honor to move out of the Hermitage. But he was, he admitted, too fatigued to think or act for himself, and was utterly appalled at a moving. And he could not bear it to have no word from Diderot to whom he had appealed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 2, No. 423; Nov. 3, No. 425; Nov. 7, No. 428.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 10, No. 430.

Mme d'Houdetot now took positive action on her own account. She did not want the break between them signalised. The ground of it would be certain to get out, because of Rousseau's frankness, and she would be exposed to the public eye in a most damaging way. She ordered him not to quit the Hermitage at the moment. She wrote a letter to Mme d'Épinay pleading that she exercise her indulgence. Then, before saying a word to Rousseau, she rashly made a proposal to Diderot, whom she did not know personally, that she would take him in her carriage to the Hermitage, an action which he on his part misinterpreted and which made him shy off from any relationship with her; and this so troubled her, since she did not want him whom she admired to have a low opinion of her, that she had to confess to Rousseau what she had been trying to do.<sup>1</sup>

However, Diderot was spurred on by this event to make a move. He wrote a straightforward and deeply sincere letter to show the continuance of his old friendship. He wanted, especially, to vindicate himself against the charge of a conspiracy to send him to Geneva. There never had been any plotting together—the common opinion which had been expressed was simply what each one naturally thought about the matter. But it had been certainly a great indiscretion on Rousseau's part to read his very personal letter on that subject to Grimm and Mme d'Épinay, a letter asking one friend to be quite sure of his action lest 'people suspect you either of ingratitude or of another and secret motive'. Diderot had been told that secret reason, the informing upon Mme d'Houdetot to St. Lambert, but he had been pledged to silence. But Grimm had put adroit questions to him which forced him to give evasive answers, and to reticences that amounted to lies, and a general embarrassment. This kind of thing Diderot was too open-hearted to like. And it had been another piece of gross inadvertence on Rousseau's part to read his own reply to Diderot to them, for it contained things offensive to Mme d'Épinay in it, and it also represented Diderot to her as a schoolboy taking a contemptuous lecture from his tutor. Granting that he did not know all the facts about Rousseau's situation, still he had the most important ones from his own mouth and he had the duty of a friend to say what he thought. 'For God's sake, my friend, let your heart direct your head, and you will always do the best possible thing; but

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 10, No. 431; Nov. 13, No. 432; Nov. 15, No. 433. See two notes from Diderot to Mme d'Houdetot, *C.G.*, vol. iii, pp. 243-4. These notes are given by Dufour as written about Dec. 20; but Rousseau was installed in his new quarters Dec. 15, and these messages refer to the Hermitage. They seem clearly to be Diderot's reply to her proposal and his apology for his rebuff and misinterpretation.

don't allow your head to impose sophisms on your heart. . . . But let us stop, my friend; I am already wearied of all these doings. I see in this so much littleness and misery, that I cannot conceive how they have ever started, and still less, go on, amongst people who have a little sense of steadiness and elevation. Why do you move out of the Hermitage? If it is because of the impossibility of subsisting there, I have nothing to say. But every other reason for doing so is bad, excepting, too, that of the danger you might be running in the season we are about to enter. Think about what I say to you on that score. Your sojourn at Montmorency will be taken in bad part.' And Diderot closed his letter very kindly, after speaking his mind thus honestly and with restraint. And these qualities of his friendship Rousseau had always loved and honored, so that he was put to shame by this letter, and made very docile.<sup>1</sup>

But he had already taken steps to move out. The letters from his two loyal friends, Diderot and Mme d'Houdetot, only produced an uncertainty and vacillation, the state of mind which invariably led him to foolish action, if only for the sake of escaping the indecision. He wanted very much to settle down to work in new quarters, but Diderot said, 'Don't go', and Mme d'Houdetot, 'Don't go at once, but wait until I write.' What she called his 'self-devouring imagination' got to work, whilst waiting for some decision from her, and, finding six days elapse without word from her, he wrote frantically, declaring that he too would put precisely such intervals between his letters to her—lashing himself thus to deeper despair. But he realised, too, that the delay was due to her using the post, and asked her to spare him by availing herself in the future of the special Montmorency messenger. Then, perceiving that she would have others to think of besides himself he inconsistently lectured her on the neglect of her health, staying up late and writing letters. As for his own writings nothing could be done until he had tranquillity. 'Give me, then, a tranquil spirit! Now in agitation, now in utter prostration, when shall I find the calm necessary to the liberty of spirit?' Often he wanted to speak of his work, but always there was some such troublesome matter to fill his own letters to her. He would continue making copies of what she wanted from his pen, but would not take any payment for them—they were to be a free gift and pleasure. And just as he finished this erratic letter, he received her message written five days earlier, asking him to stay at the Hermitage until spring. That settled the matter.<sup>2</sup> He was sorry, however, that

<sup>1</sup> From Diderot, about Nov. 14, No. 434.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 17, No. 435.

she had put herself in a bad light with Diderot, and promised to disabuse him of any misconceptions. And she, on her side, encouraged him now to go on with the high work that would lift up his spirits, and she willingly renounced her copies so that there would be no drain on his energies.<sup>1</sup>

The long-desired moment of tranquillity of spirit had come, though not the genius. 'I would like to work, but one cannot command genius, and it does not come. I begin fifty things, but so badly that I get disgusted, and cannot go on with any one of them.' However, his publisher Rey had just come to see him and negotiated for the publication of *Julie*, and for anything else that might be secured. This stirred him, apparently, to conceive of a 'new enterprise', doubtless a book on the *Principles of the Law of War*, which is mentioned later in a letter to Rey.<sup>2</sup> In this new enterprise he no doubt meant to put many of the views that were developing in his mind since his recent work on the projects of St. Pierre.

The very day he was so full of these hopeful expectations of work, there arrived at last Mme d'Épinay's reply to the letter he had sent her before her departure. He could not believe that she was speaking the truth when she said at the outset that she had received it only upon her arrival at Geneva, for his sentiments were by this time so set against her, that he actually doubted her word. Her comment on his letter was this: 'It does not come from a man who, the day before I was to go, swore that he had not life enough to make reparation for the outrages he had done me. That manner of making reparation is entirely novel; I have no reply to make to it. You make me feel pity for you. If you are cool, your conduct makes me afraid for you, for I do not find it right. It is not natural to spend one's life suspecting one's friends and injuring them. There is in all that, things that are incomprehensible. What I can say to you now is this, that you abuse the patience which my friendship for you has given me up to the present.'<sup>3</sup>

To this dignified and grieving message Rousseau shut his heart, because his mind was made up, precisely the kind of mistake Diderot feared he would make. 'If one could die of grief, I should not be alive. But at last I have made my decision. Friendship is gone between us, Madame, but that which is no more still has rights which I know how to respect. I have not forgotten how good you have been to me, and you can count

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 19, No. 436.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 23, No. 437. Allusions to these projects and their character appear subsequently in No. 471 and No. 480; and to Rey, Mar. 9, 1758, No. 481: 'My *Principles of the Law of War* are not ready.'

<sup>3</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, Nov. 12 (from Geneva), No. 439.



upon all the gratitude from me that one can have for some one whom one ought no longer to love. Every other explanation would be futile: I have for myself my own conscience and leave you to your own. I have been wanting to quit the Hermitage, and I ought to do so. But there are some who think it is necessary for me to remain until Spring, and since my friends wish it so, I will remain there if you consent to it.<sup>1</sup>

Gone was all the calm—he was obliged to await that consent, to come all the way from Geneva. But still he tried to work. A week later an unhappy letter came from Mme d'Houdetot, which, though it enclosed an encouraging message for himself from St. Lambert, complained sadly of the harshness of her lover toward her. For she was suffering now from the solicitous tyranny of both her lover and her friend. Both feared for her ready susceptibility—Rousseau warning her about the influences of the opinions of Paris upon her, and humiliating her by cautioning her against Grimm, as if she were not capable of a mind of her own; St. Lambert suspecting a weakness in her in matters of the heart, a greater offense. With things in this state she begged Rousseau not to tell St. Lambert anything about his grievances against Mme d'Épinay in so far as it involved herself, and she added the troubling reflection that she still doubted whether Mme d'Épinay had taken the step he imputed to her, and was not she the one most likely to feel suspicious because she was the most compromised? And now more than ever it was best for him to stay at the Hermitage and avoid all publicity, since he might be wrong, and she would suffer more than any one. Mme d'Houdetot was frightened. And this aroused him to an instant sympathy and generosity. It was now his turn to be the consoler, and to give wise counsel. 'Will you torment yourself incessantly for mere chimeras, and will you never learn for once to be content with so much ground for being so? Your friend loves you, what more can you demand of him? If he is troubled sometimes, can one love without being so, and if he naturally worries when in health, judge what he must do when ill! Are you looking for a perfect man; where will you find him? And what failing ought less to displease you in your lover than this one which shows at least that he is always thinking of you? You have found by yourself the reason for consoling yourself for his injustice; that reason is solid and good, and suits you better than any one. Your heart justifies you and mine honors you. . . . Be calm, then, I beg of you, continue to merit your own esteem and I vouch you will never lose his.' Then he showed her Mme d'Épinay's last note and his reply, and stuck

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Épinay, Nov. 23, No. 440.

to his point about her ruses and intrigues, and about the incompatibility of such a character with his own. Meantime, waiting for the consent to stay until spring he would settle down to his work and her copies; the latter, especially, for they would 'let his spirit have time to collect itself, and his frightened ideas time to come back again, if indeed there is any possibility of that'.<sup>1</sup>

He did, apparently, get back into the writing of the letters of *Julie*. The very words of his consoling letter to Mme d'Houdetot passed into the text, where Mme d'Orbe writes Julie: 'Poor cousin, how many torments you give yourself with so many grounds for living at peace.'<sup>2</sup> And a startling suggestion made by St. Lambert in the letter to him, forwarded through the hand of Mme d'Houdetot, had evidently made him dwell long upon it, and work out its meaning in imagination. St. Lambert had said: 'I would like to have you see our friend. Make a little journey to Paris; her gentleness, her tenderness for you, her goodness will do good to your soul. . . .' In *Julie*, the husband, Wolmar, leaves Julie and St. Preux alone five or six days, trusting them to each other, and the story told was one of a passion unabandoned in either the one or the other.<sup>3</sup> It would be too dangerous to follow that suggestion—it was better, Rousseau knew, to stay at the Hermitage.

Mme d'Houdetot was only made more uneasy, however, by seeing the notes that had passed between him and Mme d'Épinay. And he, too, had very unhappy forebodings of the outcome. In their mutual uneasiness they were both inclined to become over-sensitive. He worried and insulted her by fearing the influence of Paris, and particularly of Grimm, whilst she was unduly irritated with him when he asked, quite naturally and unsuspecting, if she had ever communicated to any one his letter to Voltaire, because rumor had it such a letter of his was current in Paris—he was not reproaching her with anything but simply trying to safeguard himself against doing any possible injustice to Grimm or Mme d'Épinay, who were the only other ones to have seen his letter to Voltaire and therefore the only possible sources of a leak. It turned out later that the letter in circulation was not his but one from Vernet of Geneva.<sup>4</sup> But for quite some time Mme d'Houdetot was not disabused of this supposed slight on her own integrity. Meantime her presentiments were proving all too true. Mme d'Épinay retorted with

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Nov. 27, No. 441; to same, Nov. 30, No. 442.

<sup>2</sup> *Julie*, pt. 4, Letter 13, H. iv, p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> From St. Lambert at Aix-la-Chapelle, Nov. 21, No. 438, p. 209; *Julie*, pt. 4, Letter 12, p. 347.

<sup>4</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Dec. 2, No. 443; to same, Dec. 5, No. 444; and another exchange, Dec. 6, No. 445 and Dec. 8, No. 446.

pity to the unfortunately self-righteous last word Rousseau had sent her and yet with a taunt at his lack of independence in the matters of his duty: she was at ease in her own conscience, let him follow his own conscience then, and not what his friends wanted him to do.<sup>1</sup> This put him on his mettle and prompted him to act at once, in utter disregard of friendly counsels. He moved out of the property of Mme d'Épinay on the fifteenth of December and lodged himself in new quarters.

In April 1756 Rousseau had gone out to the Hermitage in a springtime mood of hope and achievement. Work of far scope and importance was to be done on books of human nature, politics, and education. He departed in chill winter at the close of 1757, grievously ill, surviving only in his unbeaten, and unmanageable, pride. He had succeeded in finishing but one serious task, that dealing with the projects of St. Pierre, which was done in the first flush of energy, and by way of fulfilling an obligation. But of his own various projects none was even near completion.

This disappointment of genius was due, very complexly, to his own temperament, interest, and character, and to those of his associates, and to sheer circumstance itself which, operating here exactly as he had described it in his *Second Discourse*, made all the inequalities, the differences, the egotisms of the various personalities, count against their general happiness—and so it was that all things concurred toward depriving him of all hope of accomplishing the great purposes of his life.

He was, like Montaigne, a *prime sautier*, always essaying new things, and being diverted by them from his carefully planned program of work. He could not resist taking a fall out of Voltaire for his pessimistic moralising about the earthquake of Lisbon, and then embarking on a defense of religious belief in God and immortality. Yet his genius could not be fruitful in mere refutation, and it had to bide a while for some happier occasion to express itself on the religious theme. A few years later it would obtain formulation, in the dying confession of faith of *Julie*, in the last great portion of *Émile*, and in a final chapter appended to the *Social Contract*. At this moment his thought on these matters was just in its inception.

Midsummer indolence had beset him, too, and conjured forth his romantic dreams of love, supplying a deficiency of his life at the Hermitage. *Julie* became another diversion, an

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Épinay, Dec. 1, from Geneva, No. 449: to same, Dec. 17, No. 450.

'amusement' taking him from the 'serious things'. The fashioning of dreams into a life-like picture raised in him fresh needs of the heart and produced a craving for a companionship like the ideal of his own depicting. It made him more susceptible to an affection. When Mme d'Houdetot sought him out on the estate of Mme d'Épinay, she found him, be it noted, 'at work'; and she took him from it. It was a tragic irony for her that she was eventually forced to beg him, time and again, to go back to the work and writing that had once so engrossed him, for he was incurably in love with her. But his genius was not at her disposal and could not heed her requests. He could only work on something that would be congenial to him in that situation, which was *Julie*. And so that story developed into a moral tale whose incidents and lesson were supplied out of his own experience, his difficult relations with her and with St. Lambert, and all the outlying connections of friends. Parallel with his vivid personal letters, dealing with their various afflictions and trials, were the letters of *Julie*. Such a vast amount of letter-writing consumed the time and energy which might have remained for the master-works of his plan.

The solitude that had made him lonesome made him also reflective. All had not been going well within his household. Thérèse le Vasseur had not proved satisfactory company for him. Her affections were not fastened on anything in common between them; she clung very much to her mother, to some one *familial*. But she might have followed him, instead, had she been bound to him by the tie of their children. That taking away from them of their children had been a wicked thing, as he realised more and more from his life with her. And with that there must have been an increasing remorse for his 'crime'. When he looked back on this scene of his difficulties with Diderot, Grimm, and Mme d'Épinay, he remembered in the *Confessions*, that this secret was on his mind at that time, because he pointed out that precisely those three friends had been made the confidants of it.<sup>1</sup> And Mme d'Épinay told of an occurrence, in her *Memoirs*, that was unaccountable to her, of his pronouncing with extraordinary vehemence that parents are the last persons in the world to rear their own children, which seems now as if he were rationalising his wrongful deed to himself.<sup>2</sup> But he really wanted to undertake some work of reparation for what he had done, something on the duty of parents. Hence he took a special interest in the company of Mme d'Épinay and Mme d'Houdetot, mothers devoted to their own children and earnestly seeking to provide a good upbringing in homes where there were difficult

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, H., vol. viii, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, pt. 2, ch. 7, p. 276.

marital conditions; he talked with them about their problems, and attempted to formulate principles of education that would be of use to them. The effect of this practical interest was to give a new cast to his ideas for the book on education. Instead of a treatise on education as a public institution, along the lines of the *Republic* and *Laws* of Plato, it was to be a book on the rearing in the home under the direction of the mother. And it would take the form of a personal story, like *Julie*, an account of the development of a youth, educated by a tutor—Rousseau imagining himself, as it were, in the household of Mme d'Épinay or Mme d'Houdetot, precisely as St. Preux was depicted in that house of Mme Wolmar. This work was on his mind, and his preoccupation with it, even only in fancy, meant another diversion of his interest from his first great project concerning political institutions.

Still Rousseau never forgot that grand comprehensive scheme of his masterpiece, and was all the time impatient to get on with it. Desperate as he was to avail himself of every mood and opportunity for this work he was resentful of interruption from any quarter. He became exceedingly touchy in regard to anything that seemed to limit his freedom to work when it suited him, ready to see every new tie as another bond of servitude, and therefore not appearing grateful for friendship's gifts, because he took them so grudgingly, always anticipating some sequel of obligations, and being at others' beck and call and never his own master. His apparent lack of loyalty to persons was thus due, in part, to his loyalty to the objectives of his genius.

The man of such independent spirit was nevertheless profoundly dependent on those with whom he had lived. He was extremely sensitive to what they felt about him. He had an incredible docility to one or the other, which complicated his relationships with friends and made him seem to vary and veer with the winds of opinion as one with no mind of his own or any practical judgment. Moreover the accession to his heart, and then the thwarting, of a passionate love, in a nature so much in precedent emotion, moved by the conflicting sympathies with various friends, by the frustration of genius and even by a remorse, this surcease of feeling brought him to too high a pitch of excitement, and made him too prompt to act without taking the counsel that might have steadied him. And his isolation at the Hermitage made matters worse than they needed to have been. When people meet daily they can quite naturally impart their opinions of each other without causing a sense of superiority or hurt. In the continued intimacy of persons who see each

other frequently a moment's corrective thought may be uttered without offense. If the occasions are too rare, the correction looms too large in the experience of friendship, and makes it displeasing, so that more meetings are not wanted, and perhaps even refused. And if the knowledge of each other is mediated by third parties, the hearing of any fault through the voice of others, this makes the imagination see the ill opinion current, passing from the third party to another and so on until it is common rumor, and then the 'victim' has a positive grievance against his friend. Nor can letters mend such breaches in the communication. They may even aggravate them. For the very mention in writing of any charge against another gives it the eternal finality of the word, a record from which there is no appeal. The more one argues the point, then, the more its deep damnation enters into the soul, and even though the other person gives it up it cannot be forgiven. And letters can come too late, and kindle anew old fires of anger and suspicion after one like Rousseau had attained some composure from his own resources of sanity and character. The shocks in the career of this hermit were repeated too often. His life became one of little real contact with persons, a life of letter-writing. And so it became novelesque itself, a proper source for his story of *Julie*.

For all that, Rousseau's genius was not wholly frustrated. He had the capacity to realise the meaning of his own experience in rendering it in *Julie*. And even more than that, he worked into the story the principles he knew ought to obtain in his own life: 'I want to be what I ought to be.'<sup>1</sup> And that was the moralist. It was the moralist that guided the pen of the romancer and filled the letters of *Julie* with thoughts on religion, that there are two distinct substances in man, body and spirit, that the spirit is immortal, that God is the spirit of Goodness, and that Nature, His Creation, is good likewise, and that this shows itself in man as his conscience which obliges him to act for the sake of the order of the whole and to give law to his desires and to his actions toward others.<sup>2</sup> The moralist, too, delineated the characteristics of the drama and of the social recreations that have an influence on the development and expression of human personality, these things being some of those external influences on the power of the moral will which he had planned to discuss in his book *La Morale Sensitive*.<sup>3</sup> There was much said, too, on the right education of children, things foreshadowing his treatise on

<sup>1</sup> *Julie*, pt. 4, Letter 3, H. iv, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 3, Letter 18, pp. 245 ff.; Letter 22, pp. 269 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 4, Letter 10, pp. 310 ff.

education. As moralist he described the home of Julie, partly as an ideal of what he had missed in his own life, partly as an exemplification of the principles of human governance in the realm of domestic economy. And his mind was still grappling with the political conceptions, especially those but recently dealt with in the writings about St. Pierre. The fact that he had proposed to Rey a treatise on the *Law of War* indicates that he must have been going on with his *Political Institutions*. The ruling ideas of his 'political economy' were even translated into the sphere of the domestic world and familial relationships. Thus Julie was made to speak, for instance, of marriage: 'It is not only the interests of the wedded couple itself but the common cause of all men that the purity of marriage shall not be tampered with. Every time two people unite by a solemn tie, there intervenes a tacit engagement with the whole human race to respect that sacred bond between them and honor in them the conjugal union. . . . The public is in some fashion guarantor of an agreement made in its presence.'<sup>1</sup> It was an analogy with the citizen making his contract with the whole body, and, in turn, being guaranteed as to his life and rights and happiness by the whole. By the same token, too, public amusements, such as dancing and singing, were declared innocent precisely because they are public and not hidden.<sup>2</sup> The home, indeed, is private, and must be so from the eyes of men, yet here there is another witness to the life of a couple, their children, who are entitled to an education in lawfulness and to being spared the sight of the discord of their parents and, above all, any moral irregularities. Nor does the inspection of the home end there. The mistress of the house must establish a régime of order in some way other than the poor policy of balancing opposites and jealousies in the manner of St. Pierre's statecraft—one must *not* try 'to combat one vice with another or to form amongst them a kind of equilibrium'.<sup>3</sup> A more lasting peace and unison ought to be produced by following truer principles of governance, whether in States, families, and even, it is the lesson of *Julie*, in the personal friendships of men and women.

So it was that the thoughts on religion, education, politics, and morality, which were waiting to be formulated in some systematic manner, entered into the story of *Julie*. That novel was no such sheer amusement or waste of time as the impatient, disappointed,

<sup>1</sup> *Julie*, pt. 3, Letter 18, H. iv, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 4, Letter 10, pp. 317 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 4, Letters 1 and 10, p. 278 and p. 321 f. Cf. Pascal, *Pensées* (Boutroux, after Brunschvigg), sect. 6, No. 359: 'Nous ne nous soutenons pas dans la vertu par notre propre force, mais par le contre-poids de deux vices opposés . . . ôtez un de ces vices, nous tombons dans l'autre.'

unhappy moralist himself was inclined to think. Genius works often by such digression. Others, even those who were impatient with him, knew that he was possessed of the supreme gift, and could reveal it—had not Diderot given him the article *Genius* to write for his *Encyclopedia*?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Annales*, vol. xv, *Chronologie*, &c., Oct. 10, 1757, p. 95.



## CHAPTER XII

### MORAL LETTERS

'AT last I am free; I can resume the character of frankness and independence nature has given me.'<sup>1</sup> With these words of relief Rousseau announced to Mme d'Houdetot his establishment in new quarters at Mont-Louis. There had been many things to arrange for in that move, as the inquiries of Deleyre show in his letter of congratulation on the new-found liberty: 'Your niche or your grotto, is it warm? Your pigeons, your cats, your dogs, where does all that world lodge?'<sup>2</sup> But Rousseau and Thérèse made provision somehow despite illness and the wintry conditions. They had Mme d'Épinay's man of affairs escort Mme le Vasseur back to the house of her granddaughter in Paris. They took several days for the moving itself and more than a week thereafter to the settling of the new abode: 'Up to now I have spent my time sorting my stuff in my little hermitage; it is less beautiful than the other, but in paying for it, it is my own.'<sup>3</sup> The thought of being master in one's own house at last, and independent, seemed boon enough to console him for poverty, ill health, the fatigue of domestic upset for weeks, and the disappointments of friendship.

The thought was not adequate, however, to sustaining his mind against the reproofs that followed him into his new quarters. Mme d'Houdetot had written him again before knowing anything of the last note he had received from Mme d'Épinay and of his consequent decisive action. She had wanted anything but the publicity of a move so dramatic and likely to raise such dangerous questions, and so she had asked him why he would not locate with Diderot in Paris rather than in the neighborhood of the Hermitage—without considering, as Rousseau indignantly reminded her, the attitude of Diderot's wife toward such a visitation, nor even his own interests. Was he himself never to be allowed any freedom—always to be in the house of somebody else, never in his own? He pictured himself destined for ever by such counsel to be a charge on some one, and perpetually incurring more obligations. The very fact that she did not share his feeling of the indignity of such a dependence damped his first impulses of pleasure. And a positive chagrin followed, when she announced that their views were fundamentally different, and that she did not approve of his

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Dec. 17, 1757, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 451.

<sup>2</sup> From Deleyre, Jan. 3, 1758, No. 457.

<sup>3</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Dec. 26, 1757, No. 454.

'principles' in this case. 'I believe you are a good man, because you are one of my friends.'<sup>1</sup> That was not the way he wanted to be esteemed—she must believe in him because of the goodness of his principles. On a previous occasion he had exposed his views on this matter of his obligations toward Mme d'Épinay, but that was to Grimm who had expressed a horror of the 'monstrous system'. And St. Lambert, too, remonstrated with him for his vehement declaration that he would rather be considered 'ungrateful' than 'weak'.<sup>2</sup> Was she now brought over to their disapproval and believing him guilty of real ingratitude? He remembered that Grimm was in the city, and was seeing her, and the fear came over him again that she was being converted to his views. Thus, on the third day of his establishment, in the midst of his still-unsorted chattels, fatigued, ill, and desperate over such a thought, Rousseau indited a long letter to explain his principles. Mme d'Houdetot had touched to the quick the moralist as well as the independent man, for his principles were his pride, and his basic claim to her esteem as well as to his own.

'Self-esteem, as well as friendship which is only a portion of it, has no other law than the sentiment that inspires it; one does all for one's friend as for oneself, not from duty but from delight; all the services one renders him are goods rendered to oneself, all the gratefulness which the goods received from him inspire is a sweet acknowledgement of the fact that his heart responds to one's own. That, Madame, is what befits every friendship. For myself, I confess, I impose some further distinctions that are less common. Devoured with the good of love and of being loved, and little sensible of all other goods, I do not want my friends to torment themselves more than I do myself about my poverty, but simply to love me as I am; I do not want them to turn their attachment to officious services but into sentiments; I want them to make their friendship count by tokens that are so proper to it that they could not possibly have any other motive. That is why, of all the evidences of friendship, services rendered are the least precious to me, for every good man does them for people quite indifferently, and the only merit is in the right of expecting them from humanity. That is why, too, of all the services, those coming from the purse are the ones I set the least store by, especially when they are public. For of all the sorts of sacrifices, money is that which costs the least to give and the most to receive; thus, between two friends, he who gives is, without gainsay, very much obliged to him who receives; [the case of Mme d'Épinay is now in view] without friendship,

<sup>1</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Dec. 14, No. 448.

<sup>2</sup> No. 438, p. 207.

a thousand suspect views can poison the purity of the benefaction; vanity, ostentation, the interest of acquiring one more slave at little cost, and of exciting with small benefactions a great store of gratitude, all that can play its part in such a pretended generosity. It is not simply a matter, then, of pursuing with money in hand a man who doesn't care at all about it and who sets more store by an hour of his own time and liberty than all the treasures of the world. . . . Oh, my friend, whoever thou mightest be . . . leave all that rigmarole of benefactions, and love me; build me not a house on thy lands, only to come to see me no more, saying to thyself, "I have him and do not need to cultivate him more." Build me a house in the bottom of thy heart, there is where I shall take up my abode, there is where I want to dwell the length of my days, without being any more tempted to leave it than thou to chase me out. Seek me out all the time; [the scene is shifting, it is now Mme d'Houdetot who figures in the apostrophe] and let thyself be sought out; let me read in thy eyes, upon my encountering thee, the joy my presence causes thee; let us take a thousand delectable walks together where the sun will always set too soon upon a day passed in innocence and simplicity. Console me in my troubles, and in thy turn pour all thine into my heart, so that our sufferings themselves might be a source of pleasure for us, and our common life together a tissue of reciprocal good deeds and true tokens of friendship. What difference to all that does fortune and rank make, save only to render more estimable two such friends who can make each other forget their wealth and their poverty. Then friendship counts not services, but sentiments, and the one who has loved the other most is the true Benefactor in the case.' This was the psalm of an egalitarian.

But its application to the immediate case of Mme d'Épinay was the point in question. If he felt so about his relationships with others, why had he ever accepted any gifts of another sort? His answer was 'weakness of will', that he was not able to refuse what his rich friends pressed him to take. Yet, even so, he recognised he had a duty in such a case, and he gave an example of his principle. When the wealthy Baron d'Holbach made him take the proceeds of a book on chemistry with which he had only partly helped, because otherwise the publisher would have got all the advantage, he regarded this money simply as a gift from one honest man well-off to another who happened to be indigent, and not, therefore, as a deed of friendship but of sheer humanity, and he felt it was his part in turn to imitate such conduct and give of his necessities to others less fortunate, thus keeping up 'that circulation of benefits which constitutes the bond of

society'. This was a dignified, but silent and secret, expression of gratitude. But, not being seen of the public, it left him open to the charge of not acknowledging the kindness. And now this was to be the case with Mme d'Épinay—he would suffer calumny because he owed her two years' rental for the Hermitage. And he accepted that hospitality, purely in the spirit of friendship; their friendship being ended, he could certainly not be bound to stay on longer, simply to keep up the appearance for her sake, all the while piling up more and more obligations for himself in the public eye. There were, indeed, rights of the past, and things never to be forgotten. But when Rousseau got to this point in the application of his principle he found it slipping away from him. 'I don't know, Madame, whether you comprehend anything in all this verbiage; for myself, I've just read it over, and I don't comprehend a thing in it. But my head is going around so, my soul and my reason are at their limit, I feel that I am entirely beyond commencing over again.'

However, instead of stopping, in this condition, he went on to discuss the meaning of her letter to him. It was obvious she was now finding his friendship 'burdensome'. Grimm was behind that, he cried out—that false friend who would take from him every last friend he had! He remembered that once before when he had railed thus she had been strangely silent—that augured ill; she evidently sided with Grimm. If so, she must surely break with him. Let her do it then, at once, and not wait, trying to make the thing easier for him—'do it without indirection, and in a manner worthy of your frankness'. But in a moment the very thought of her openness and goodness of character conjured up another argument for the break, one, moreover, utterly contradicting, and driving out from his tortured spirit, the imagined influence of Grimm upon her. He fancied that she would now be the only one standing by him, whilst the others all fell away; she would be going about Paris hearing him defamed, but she was not the kind of person to let a friend be thus outraged without speaking up for him—in doing this, nevertheless, she could not help him but would only be exposing herself anew to the calumny that had troubled her before, of having too great an intimacy with him. Being the true lover still, for all his injustice to her, he preferred to relieve her of the trouble and danger of such a situation. Besides, he knew very well that he was becoming more difficult than ever to get along with, and above all, more proud. He could not bear to have her his friend by halves, and without a full and complete esteem on her part. Better, therefore, to make a break. Knowing it would be hard for her to declare such an intention

to him he provided a way—Let silence be her response to this letter, its meaning would be understood.<sup>1</sup>

Alas, Rousseau had forgotten the first meaning that silence had had in his mind. It meant, by this new convention, a break; but was it for the reasons he had last given, or because she held the opinion of Grimm and the others and really despised him as a thoroughly bad man? No, there must be no doubt about that—he must have an honorable discharge from her, or none at all. So but two days had elapsed when he wrote again, crying out against the cruelty of that silence and the fancied charge of wickedness. He frankly abandoned all pretense of being able to do without her, or without being in touch with her, and pleaded to be allowed to write her letters, if not to get them from her, promising they would be honest enough to stand inspection at the hands of any one, excepting, however, that man Grimm who was so complacent over making his old friend seem a rascal. But he was getting used to such treatment, and, indeed, to loving others without a return.<sup>2</sup>

Now Mme d'Houdetot had intended no break. Her silence was not for any time at all. She had not changed in her feelings toward him. But she was very much occupied with the care of her family and with writing to her own beloved St. Lambert, and she pointed out that she could not devote herself to her solitary friend who now demanded so much of her. As for Grimm, she saw little of him, and he had said nothing to her; but it was an insult to her that Rousseau should doubt her power of resisting the prejudice of others. Still she would not punish him, though he deserved it.<sup>3</sup>

That letter was grateful to him, although he felt still their difference over principle, and a diminution in her friendship, and was somewhat querulous over the fact. He lectured her, too, on the care of her health and the habit of spending herself in writing.<sup>4</sup> But he now wanted to be sure that St. Lambert was not against him, and he insisted that she ask him for a positive declaration, a request she declined to make, however, as being simply puerile. The matter of principle, too, was hardly more than one of application, but she showed him her meaning in this wise: 'I would not even take it amiss to sacrifice for him (a friend) something of my liberty. What would appear to you a mean thing and a harsh slavery would only be for me, in a like case, an agreeable act of my gratitude; and although

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Dec. 17, 1757, No. 451.

<sup>2</sup> To same, Dec. 19, 1757, No. 452.

<sup>3</sup> From Mme d'Houdetot, Dec. 20, No. 453.

<sup>4</sup> To same, Dec. 26, No. 454.

I do think as you, that he who gives is obliged to him who receives, I also think that he who has received some benefit is somehow bound to gratitude and that it ought to appear sweet to him. He who gives never has the right to demand, but he who receives never ought to dispense himself of the duty.' After reading him that lesson she affectionately wished him a new year of tranquillity.<sup>1</sup>

During all this moral argument the settling of the house at Mont-Louis was painfully proceeding—and then Rousseau became very ill. Mme d'Houdetot wrote anxiously for news, and begged him to be moderate in all he did, especially in his copying, and she offered him the means to alleviate his distress, if he would consent to accept them.<sup>2</sup>

But their difference of opinion still tormented him, and now more than ever, because of the low ebb of his spirits as he contemplated the approach of death. In this state he was thrown back upon the most elemental *motif* of his nature, his pride. Could he be wrong in being unwilling to postpone liberty to friendship? The independent man in him rebelled at the thought, nor could he seriously believe any one else ever willed to make such a sacrifice. It was contrary to his conception of man's moral nature: the love of others falls in with the principle of self-esteem, and no matter what happens, the lover no more abandons liberty to his love than he does virtue, for he cannot be human without it. So if Mme d'Houdetot differed from him, it must really be because she had her attention on something else that seemed more important to her. Had she not just then offered him material aid, as if that were the real currency of friendship? It was money, then, that seemed so important! Thereupon he went off into a tirade on the love of wealth and distinctions, saying that he would teach himself always, from then on, to think of her as Countess d'Houdetot, and of St. Lambert as the Marquis. But, being proud himself, he was determined to accept no more money for the copies he made for her, because they would not be worth what she paid, and he did not want the matter on such a basis—they would be his free gift to her, the labor of friendship.<sup>3</sup>

It was becoming almost impossible for Mme d'Houdetot to satisfy his questioning soul and reassure him of her loyalty to him and his principles. Their relationship was becoming too 'stormy'. To avoid worse things still she decided to break it off, as he himself had suggested earlier. Two days later she wrote

<sup>1</sup> From same, Dec. 30, No. 455.

<sup>2</sup> From same, Jan. 3, 1758, No. 458.

<sup>3</sup> To same, Jan. 5, No. 459.

again to make it clear that she was doing this only because it was impossible for her, in her situation, to give him all he demanded, and that she had not taken offense at his letter; that she was actually taking his part in Paris against the charges of his old friends, and esteemed him as much as ever, and even loved him. In bidding adieu, thus, she commended Diderot as one for him to go to—would he always be writing to Diderot and quarrelling with him, instead of dwelling beside him in amity?

But that farewell of hers was destined to be short-lived. She could not bear to leave him so, when all others had abandoned him, and consequently, the very next day, despite her fear of 'some new storm each day', she wrote a letter of repentance and apology, tremulous at once over the hurt she must have caused him and the abnormally proud tendencies in him which made that hurt necessary. She sincerely asked his pardon for her previous letters, and added: 'Reply to me, then, my dear, to assure me that you have forgotten my vivacity, as I have forgotten yours; I have not the heart that can draw away thus from my friends and not forget their faults; but please don't show me any more of that solitary temper which makes you regard all society with defiance and a source of evil or a burdensome slavery; nor that lack of trust in your friends which only too often gives you either unjust suspicions about them or too unfavorable an opinion which expresses itself either in insults or in terms that decry or despise them. You see I employ with you that rustic sincerity you've spoken about to me, but I tell you, too, with the same frankness, that I am sorry for having replied too harshly, even to the insults of an unhappy friend, and that I beg him to forget the fault, as I shall forget his.'<sup>1</sup>

She sent this letter by special messenger. It crossed a letter from Rousseau to herself making an abject confession of the unrighteousness of his letter about money. 'In the name of Heaven, let me forget the indignities I have written you in regard to the copies.' Then, on receiving her message of retraction: 'Your letter has given me the purest, the truest pleasure I have ever had in my life. . . . Now I am brought to my senses, and to my maxims. . . .'<sup>2</sup>

And this recovery seemed a fact. For a few days, indeed, he wavered in his balance, thinking it all too good to be true that she would ask his forgiveness when he was the aggressor, and he actually did start a letter with worrying questions—Had she really meant that, or was she saying it because of his situation

<sup>1</sup> Three letters from Mme d'Houdetot, Jan. 7, No. 460, Jan. 9, No. 461, Jan. 10, No. 463.

<sup>2</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Jan. 10, No. 462, Jan. 11, No. 464.

and out of pity? Still it was too obvious that she was absolutely his friend, and he put aside the paper. He began, instead, his copying of *Julie*, and another work for her alone, dealing with his maxims, the *Moral Letters*. So, one month after the moving into Mont-Louis, he was applying himself to something worth while, where he felt an 'invincible impulsion of genius'.<sup>1</sup>

Once again, the opening *Letter* runs, 'Sophie' was to hear the voice of one who loved her, speaking not as a vile seducer, which she certainly must know by this time, nor yet, as she also would know, as any superior wise man in whose heart there had never been wishes to make him ashamed. She had asked him, in those early days when they walked together, to write a work for her on 'the rules of morality'. It would have been rascally, indeed, of him to expound her duties whilst trampling his own under foot, or twisting his principles to serve his passions; but she had trusted him then, and knew that he was not bad, though, indeed, he was weak. Since that time and their separation, however, even his love itself had become purer; it was now a desire to cultivate her soul toward its own perfection. He envisaged in her the mother of a growing family and the wife of a man generally esteemed and a woman of society gracing it with her virtue of restraint and moderation. She now seemed destined to a sure happiness because of her own excellences; 'a mind just and penetrating, a heart true and affectionate, a soul smitten with the love of the beautiful and an exquisite sentiment for knowing it'. Yet he dared to count himself of some value to her, even though she were thus greatly favored for happiness. For he felt, at this instant, perhaps the term of his career, a genius for this work on morality. He hoped, too, it would make himself better, because he would have to give the example of his teachings. And in such fruits would be proved the reality of that 'inclination for all that is good and honest' which had been the true bond of intimacy between them on their 'solitary promenades' in 'those beautiful days of that Summer so charming, so short, and so fit to leave long memories'. Away with these more recent days—he seems to say, when they were doing nothing but lecture one another on obligations; no, 'in expounding to you my sentiments on how to live, I pretend less to be giving lessons than to be making to you my profession of faith. . . .'<sup>2</sup>

These *Letters* were in fact being composed as a moral testa-

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Jan. 15 and resumed Jan. 28, No. 465, upon having word from her on that day. It mentions the fact that the *Moral Letters* were under way (p. 269).

<sup>2</sup> *Moral Letters*, in *C.G.*, vol. iii, Appendix I, pp. 345 ff.



ment from one who believed himself approaching death. At such moments the soul asserts itself in despite of the body's decline: the mind, startled to a realisation, but having no surmise as to the future, can only turn back and review the past which it does know, with deep regrets and clinging to the fond memories; and the man reverts to his most fundamental beliefs about life. Thus for Rousseau some most ancient and quite forgotten things stood out and were remembered, not only the lovely promenades with Mme d'Houdetot but those years earlier at Les Charmettes, and not merely the scenes, too, but the thoughts in his mind at such times. The sketches of a moral philosophy in these *Letters* drew upon that primitive stock or 'magazine of ideas' formed in his youth. In that profession of faith to Mme d'Houdetot, there were other voices heard, besides that of her contrite lover, those of the thinkers with whom he paced the garden of Charmettes—above all Montaigne, Socrates, and Plato, then Malebranche, Leibniz, Newton, Pascal, Descartes, Locke, and Bayle.<sup>1</sup>

'The end of human life is the felicity of man, but who of us knows how one is to attain it?' We run from desires to desires without any satisfaction. We need some principle of order. Reason, indeed, knows rules, but reason has no hold or force; and whereas the passions have force enough, they have no rule.<sup>2</sup> We are driven back again—as in his *Discourse on Inequality*—to the Socratic adventure which is to examine ourselves and find out once and for all what is within our human competence in this matter. What are the principles of the moral life? Of course, books are full of reasonings about the principle of the supreme good. Yet this bookish habit of thinking has only made the world a theatre of errors and miseries.<sup>3</sup> All the work of the genius of centuries in the way of education has been directed toward the perfection of our understanding, yet men are none the wiser for they know not what is the true way of life nor its end, nor even the most elementary duties and goods of the race.<sup>4</sup> Instead of attaining to anything, they have fallen

<sup>1</sup> These *Letters* were not being written for publication (see p. 349) and consequently Rousseau mentions but few of the characters who really figure in them, excepting, however, Montaigne, Socrates, and Plato. When the same views were expressed later in *Émile* the references were more complete.

<sup>2</sup> Pascal, *Pensées* (Boutroux after Brunschvigg), ed. Dent (London), Crès (Paris); sect. 4, No. 274: 'Il faudrait avoir une règle. La raison s'offre, mais elle est ployable à tous sens; et ainsi il n'y a en a point.'

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Montaigne, *Essais*, bk. 3, ch. 13, 'De l'expérience' (ed. Le Clerc), vol. iii, p. 418: 'Il y a plus affaire à interpréter les interprétations, qu'à interpréter les choses; et plus de livres sur les livres, que sur aultre subject: nous ne faisons que nous entregloser.' And Malebranche, bk. 2, pt. 2, ch. 6 ('On the Preoccupations of Commentators').

<sup>4</sup> Malebranche, *Recherche*, bk. 4, ch. 2, sect. 3. 'Il n'y a point de science qui

to quarrelling, discussing, doubting, and, if they are positive at all it is only in being arrogant and sectarian, each one exalting his own particular good, such as the perfection of the arts, the discoveries of the mind, the luxury of civilisation or what not; and all fail to see the situation as a whole, or philosophically (as Plato would put it), and the cost of their boasted exclusive goods to the happiness of the greater number of people (as the generous humanitarians like Abbé de St. Pierre and Locke would have contended). Such a state of affairs only reveals the fact that 'the art of reasoning', the pride of philosophers, is not the same thing as reason itself. 'Reason is the faculty of ordering all the faculties of our soul rightly (Plato), according to the nature of things and to their relationship with ourselves (Malebranche).' 'Reasoning is the art of comparing known truths in order to compose out of them other truths which one does not know and which this art itself enables us to discover. But it does not teach us to know those primitive truths which serve as the element of all the others.' 'Those primitive truths' are verily the first notions of Plato, the Ideas; or else they are the basic principles, whether of argument or conduct, which are known, as Pascal had said, by the 'esprit de finesse' which is something quite distinct from reason in the 'esprit géométrique'.<sup>1</sup> This art of reasoning cannot yield true or perfect principles. It gives only 'general truths'. The mind is 'always generalising' and under the influence of the 'spirit of system'. Discovering something true of a little province, it extends the idea to the whole universe. It ignores many insensible differences because the interest in appreciating the variety of the world is overborne by that of making it out according to one principle, a disregard of Nature of which 'the modern Pliny' (Buffon) had complained.<sup>2</sup> However, despite these faults this method of philosophy 'gives an air of genius and mastery to those who practice it, and just because nature always acts according to general laws, they think, in turn, that in establishing some general principles they have penetrated her secret'. No sooner have they set up their grand principles of the world, however,

ait tant de rapport à nous que la morale; c'est elle qui nous apprend tous nos devoirs à l'égard de Dieu, de notre prince, de nos parents, de nos amis, et généralement de tout ce qui nous environne. Elle nous enseigne même le chemin qu'il faut suivre pour devenir éternellement heureux; et tous les hommes sont dans une obligation essentielle, ou plutôt dans une nécessité indispensable de s'y appliquer uniquement. Cependant il y a six mille ans qu'il y a des hommes, et cette science est encore fort imparfaite.'

<sup>1</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, sect. 1, No. 1; sect. 4, No. 282; sect. 7, No. 425.

<sup>2</sup> Buffon, *Théorie de la Terre, Premier Discours*, 'De la manière d'étudier et de traiter l'histoire naturelle', *Œuvres complètes*, vol. i, pp. 48 ff.; Malebranche, *Recherche*, bk. 3, ch. 10; bk. 4, ch. 2, sect. 4, p. 349.

than the cold, less brilliant observers, the empiricists such as Locke, come on the scene to destroy the systems, but these in turn cannot prevent the rise of new reasoners to dogmatise with new systems of nature—referring, evidently, to the author of the *System of Nature*, d'Holbach, and possibly even to Diderot with his *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature*. In the end, this second *Letter* concludes, philosophy has attained to no principles with all its pretense of 'reasoning'.

'We know nothing . . . we see nothing: we are a throng of blind men, cast peradventure in this vast universe.'<sup>1</sup> We have fantastic images of things. But we know them not as they are. Nor do we know the self of man, though this self-knowledge is the most important of all. We cannot see the soul of another, because it is hidden from us; our own we cannot see, because we have no 'intellectual mirror'. We must especially appreciate the fact, however, that our knowledge of the extended world of matter is itself so appallingly defective.<sup>2</sup> All our ideas of it are either from the senses or else they are 'occasioned', in Malebranche's language, by sensations. Now by the same authority it had been pointed out many times that 'our senses are intended to preserve us, not to instruct us; to put us wise to what is useful, or the contrary, not to what is true or false: they are not intended to be employed in the investigation of nature; when we make such use of them, they are inadequate, and we can never be sure of finding the truth by means of them'.<sup>3</sup> Of course, it had been said, one sense may correct another, and therefore serve as a rule for it, but the result may need correction from a third sense or experience, and so on, a regress of seeking for certainty of which many had told the sceptical tale.<sup>4</sup> The whole way of proceeding, by reference to other evidence, which itself needs corroboration, suffers from an inherent defect of certainty. And the more we rely upon one particular sense, the more errors we admit along with the information: 'It is certain that sight is, of all our senses, that whence we receive at once the greatest amount of instruction, and of errors: it is by sight we judge of nearly all nature and it is sight that suggests to us nearly all our false judgments.' Touch may set us right, but it has its own numberless falsities. As a result we discover that we do not

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pascal, sect. 11, No. 693: 'En voyant l'aveuglement et la misère de l'homme, en regardant tout l'univers muet, et l'homme sans lumière, abandonné à lui-même, et comme égaré dans ce recoin de l'univers, sans savoir qui l'y a mis, ce qu'il y est venu faire, ce qu'il deviendra en mourant, incapable de toute connaissance . . .'

<sup>2</sup> Malebranche, *Recherche*, bk. 3, ch. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chs. 5, 6, 12, 13, and 20 (summary).

<sup>4</sup> Montaigne, *Essais*, 'Apologie', vol. ii, pp. 275-6.

even know what is greatness or smallness. That is something entirely relative to the stature and interests of the being who measures it. 'A grain that a worm finds in its path presents to it the mass of the Alps.' It is the same with us, for our senses must be proportioned to our needs, otherwise we could not subsist. Now with all geometry based on touch and sight, we cannot be sure but that even Euclid might not be a tissue of errors.<sup>1</sup> For no reasoning in science or philosophy can be true, if one has nothing sound to take hold of at the start. So Descartes, who had distinguished so sharply between the thinking substance and the extended substance, actually had his definitions destroyed in the very next generation, first by Newton, in regard to matter, and then by Locke in the case of spirit. Thus reason, limited to what the senses give, must fall into contradiction with itself just as they do; and philosophy is full of words for things men have never really conceived clearly, such as substance, soul, body, eternity, movement, liberty, necessity, contingency, &c. Our ignorance of these things is abundantly proved by the philosophers themselves.

Nay, even simple physics is in the same pass. 'The great Newton' was in perplexity over 'the wonders of electricity which would appear to be the most active principle of Nature. The most common of the operations of Nature and easiest to observe, namely, the multiplication of vegetation by its germs, is yet to be understood, and one discovers every day new facts on that score that overturn all the reasonings. The Pliny of our century, wishing to develop the mystery of generation, has seen himself forced to have recourse to a principle that is unintelligible and irreconcilable with the laws of mechanics and movement, and as we are having a fine time to explain everything, we find inexplicable difficulties on every hand, which convinces us we have no certain notion of anything.'<sup>2</sup>

In this conviction of ignorance one is permitted to hazard some new suggestions. When one realises, from Condillac's analysis of the senses of his imaginary statue, what contribution to knowledge each sense might be said to make, if considered separately from all the others, one is prepared to see the possibility that some senses, now quite ignored by us, might still exist to throw light on the dark places and add to our knowledge in quite distinctive ways. The marvellous prevision and devices of the animal world suggest that there might be such specific organs of sense unfamiliar to man rather than that faculty of

<sup>1</sup> Diderot suggested this in *Lettre sur les aveugles*, vol. i, p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Diderot, *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la Nature*, Nos. L and LVIII, vol. ii, pp. 48-9, 58-9.

action which we call by the 'unintelligible word, *instinct*'.<sup>1</sup> This reminds one, too, that man the reasoning animal may not be so well-favored a creature as he thinks—the 'incomprehensibility' which makes him pause unconvinced before a thousand truths which he himself pretends to have demonstrated is perhaps a hint of the genuine insufficiency of his powers to know the truth about his world. And being so apparently ill-equipped to know matter, how can he judge truly concerning the soul and spiritual beings? Possibly we must await here 'the development of a further organisation' of the body (as Diderot surmised), or better perhaps (with Plato and Malebranche), 'the return of our soul to its original freedom from the body'. And what if the Platonic view of perception were true, as described by Malebranche and Leibniz in contradiction to the materialists, that 'the house is lighted from within' instead of the light coming to it 'from the windows' of sense? Then it would, indeed, seem puerile to ask 'how a soul can see, hear, and touch without hands, eyes and ears'—a dig at Diderot who had composed *Letters on the Blind* and *Letters on the Deaf and Mutes*—for the real point would be to understand 'how a soul *even with hands, eyes and ears, is actually able to see, hear, and touch*, inasmuch as the manner in which body and soul act, the one on the other, is ever the despair of metaphysics, and simply to endow pure matter with sensations (as Diderot was inclined to do) is only to fall into still more embarrassment'. 'Who knows'—and here Rousseau is proposing a Platonic and Leibnizian counterpart to Diderot's materialistic evolution of bodily organisation—'if there are not minds of different degrees of perfection, to each of which Nature has given organised bodies according to the faculties of which they are capable, from the oyster to us on the earth, and beyond us, perhaps, to the most sublime species in the diverse worlds? Who knows if that which distinguishes man from the brute be not just the fact that the soul of the latter has no more faculties than its body of sensations, whereas the human soul, compressed in a body that hampers the greater part of its faculties, wants every moment to force its prison-house and unites an audacity that is almost divine with the weakness of humanity. . . .?'<sup>2</sup>

That these might be only 'conjectures without probability'—as Diderot would have said in scorn—Rousseau well understood. Still, if the opposite materialistic point of view cannot itself be proved, as the sceptics had asserted, and notably Bayle, and if we are still forced, with Descartes and Pascal, to ask what we

<sup>1</sup> See Diderot: *Suite de l'apologie de M. l'Abbé de Prades*, sect. 8, vol. i, pp. 459–60.

<sup>2</sup> Italics mine. Cf. Malebranche, *op. cit.*, bk. 4, ch. 2, sect. 4, p. 350. Rousseau specifically notes that this is a thought going back to Plato.

are, where we are, and what we truly know, we surely have a right to look hopefully even to such conjectures. Having learned, in this third *Letter*, that our knowledge of the material world very much needs to be perfected, and that such perfecting of it might well come about through attention to the principles within the mind itself, we are now ready to believe that there may be in the mind a principle of morality, too, which reveals its power to us in *conscience*. To the setting forth of this faith in a moral principle the remaining letters are devoted.

'The more man observes himself, the more he sees how little he is. But the glass that diminishes is only made for those who have good eyes.'<sup>1</sup> It is very fitting, of course, that in such a period of false and arrogant wisdom men should feel humble in their species. Nevertheless, man's 'internal sentiment' as an *individual* gives him a right to be proud. Here is 'the true title of nobility graven by Nature in his heart'. It is found sometimes in a secret uneasiness over one's own misery and weakness, at other times in an involuntary delight 'in the contemplation of moral beauty and the intelligible order of things'. Would that the 'noble delirium' of such moments could animate the whole of a life and make heroic action a daily practice! The principle of that force is within us, and it reveals itself on occasions in order to make us seek it out more consistently. The appearance of such a 'holy enthusiasm' is but the energy of powers cutting loose for once in a while from the terrestrial bonds, and it is our duty to maintain them in that state of liberty. So, however humble we are as creatures of nature, we feel in ourselves, as *individuals*, something which forbids us to despise ourselves; and though from the side of knowledge we are insignificant, we are great, none the less, in our sentiments, in our love of justice and the virtues. Such was the profession of this letter. But the author went on a little longer, in an autobiographical vein, giving testimony to his principles from his own life. Despite great vicissitudes of good and evil and much self-contradiction, certain 'internal dispositions' had remained intact in him, which enabled him to estimate the apparent goods and evils at their true values and also to sustain himself against undeserved ills. His 'contemplative and solitary life' had developed these dispositions. In seeking to understand the principle of the force which managed somehow to counterbalance the rule of his passions, he found it to come from a 'secret judgment', made without explicit reasoning upon the actions of life and the objects of his desire. He realised in himself, then, a 'germ of goodness' and a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Malebranche, bk. 3 (Conclusion), p. 336: 'L'homme intérieur qui est en moi se moquera de l'homme animal et terrestre que je porte.'

'germ of greatness' that made him superior to the slings of fortune. Here was a principle that not only directed his present action, according to a rule prescribed by itself, but also evaluated his whole past life, blaming or approving of it exactly as if it were his present self, the events themselves being treated merely as being the particular occasion on which he was really so and so at heart. More and more of his past was now coming under such review; the objects that had most affected him were estimated more according to their real nature; the pleasures of a moment had become long repentances; and also, happily, the sacrifices made for goodness and justice appeared now to make up for what they had cost him. But not all this force, he confessed, had come from himself—he owed it to 'Sophie', for of their relationship he had memories all to her glory. He had been ready to go astray, and was culpable at heart, but she had held him to virtue and to his duties to friend and principle, so that they could look each other in the face honestly thereafter and not turn away in mutual shame and discontent or feel estranged from each other: 'It is you who have forced me to conquer myself.' If his life were to become an example of principle it would be, then, nothing but the fruit of her very own cultivating. And from this the moral to be drawn was this, that she, too, must look for the fundamental goods of life, not to any external goods but to her own inner resources. And thus concluded the fourth *Letter*.

'All the morality of human life is in the intention of the individual.' The good of action cannot be good if it is not so in motive and at the bottom of our hearts. The primary value of justice is intrinsic, in the feeling that one is practicing it. Thus there is something grateful to our nature in moral goodness, and it follows that no man is sound or well-constituted who lacks it. This had been questioned, indeed, by those who regarded man as 'naturally bad' and insensitive to good. But that challenge is easily met by reference to human experience. Personal interests aside, the natural tendencies of humanity are to enjoy others' happiness and deplore the misery, and to feel appropriate affections toward third parties who may happen to be the cause of such misery or happiness. Ideas of justice and goodness are thus universal among men, although on ever so many particulars they think differently and contradict each other. There is certainly, then, 'an innate principle of justice' on the basis of which, despite any particular views we may have about things, we judge the actions of ourselves and of others, and this principle is to be called *conscience*.<sup>1</sup> Let the philosophers talk

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Diderot: *Les Principes de la philosophie morale*, *Œuvres*, vol. i, pp. 30, 43 f.; *De la suffisance de la religion naturelle*, p. 269.

as they will about conscience being only the result of custom and circumstances—and here Rousseau deplored that the candid Montaigne had slipped up so badly—they have only shown that the outer things give us ideas of *what* is to be judged, but ‘the sentiments which appreciate them are within ourselves, and it is by means of them that we know the compatibility or incompatibility which exists between ourselves and the things that we ought to pursue or shun’. As to the origin of this conscience, it can be accounted for in this wise—following out the idea of the early *Discourse on Inequality*: It is a development of our sensibility which is generally prior to reason and intended for the preservation of human life. The individual has certain sentiments which pertain specifically to himself, such as ‘love of oneself, fear of pain and death, and the desire of well-being’.<sup>1</sup> But it cannot be doubted, also, that man is made sociable, or at any rate to become so, by virtue of certain other natural sentiments, which make him have a care for those of his kind. Out of the ‘moral system’ formed by these different natural sentiments relating to oneself and to one’s fellows there arises ‘the natural impulse of conscience’.

‘Conscience, conscience, divine instinct, immortal and heavenly voice, sure guide of a being ignorant and limited, though intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and of evil, sublime emanation of the Eternal Substance, which makes man like unto the Gods, it is thou alone that makest the excellence of man’s nature. . . .!’

Conscience cannot possibly be explained, therefore, without reference to principles of our human nature—it is not to be understood merely as a resultant of external conditions. How those reasoners are to be pitied who, enamored of reason, try to efface the sentiments of their own nature and destroy the source of all their true pleasures. Virtue, friendship, the faith of lovers, chastity, all such moral goods are thus suppressed from human experience. The illustration may be taken from the virtue of feminine modesty. This virtue is intended as a defense of weakness, and yet is charming, for even in its denials it only enhances the delight of what may be rightfully yielded in friendship—another reflection partly autobiographical. But this virtue is everywhere recognised among the nations, and it is an instance of the primary sentiments which we first find in ourselves and afterwards get further light upon by reason.<sup>2</sup>

The sixth and last *Letter* is almost wholly personal, moralising

<sup>1</sup> Rousseau previously denied man has a natural fear of death (*Discours*). The experience of the moment no doubt dictated this confession.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, bk. 16, ch. 12, p. 320.



on some practical aspects from his own experience. It advises the use of solitude and meditation. To seek out the inner sentiments of Nature one must first of all escape all preoccupation with society and public opinion and one's interests in that world of artifice, 'The vanity of man is the spider's web which he himself draws over all that surrounds him.' One must tear away from that tangle and concentrate upon one's own self. This separation from the throng is only to make possible a reassembling of oneself for a true self-knowledge. It requires more an act of will than of reason.<sup>1</sup> Such an act does not mean quitting all society, or even the pleasures of the world. 'But I say to you: learn to be alone without being bored. . . . Don't fear lest this practice of brief retreats will make you taciturn and savage and detach you from the habits of life which you would not like to renounce.' No, it only makes one love men more and have livelier appreciations. So it is well to spend two or three days a month away from Paris and in the country where 'the objects are smiling and agreeable, and exciting to recollection and reverie; where one feels oneself at large, beyond the melancholy walls of the town and the confines of prejudice; the woods, the brooks, the verdure draw our heart away from consideration of men; the birds, flying here and there according to their caprice, offer us the example of liberty in solitude; one listens to their choirings; one smells the odor of the fields and woods; the eyes, smitten solely with the lovely images of Nature bring her to nearer intimacy with our heart'. . . . Converse with Nature, and consult her laws. Let the soul gain a state of languor and calm so that it resiles upon itself and is disturbed by nothing alien. From this sleep of inaction the spirit will arise refreshed and feel 'the temptation to do good', though not those benefactions so much affected in polished society. . . . Retire early, rise early, follow the course of the sun in this life as it is in Nature. Descend occasionally (the image reminds one of Plato's guardians who have seen the sun of the Good and must descend, by turns, into the State to play their part in practical affairs), descend into the little towns, inform yourself as to the condition of the poor and the oppressed, and minister to them according to their several needs, less by gifts from the purse than by personal attentions. The world thus visited will be full of evil-doers and vicious, corrupt men, but 'Sophie' must remember that she is sister to them all and that she ought to pardon them for any trouble they cause her, and not turn away in contempt. The sole reward, in the end, is simply the pleasure of doing good. This last of the letters trailed off, then, in hasty,

<sup>1</sup> Malebranche, *Méditations chrétiennes*, ed. J. Simon, Méd. 1, p. 7.

short sentences on the beatitude of well-doing in accordance with these maxims, of whose value he was confident, on the strength of his own experience.

These *Moral Letters* had far too much of the confessional in them to be good for the purpose intended. They could hardly have fixed Mme d'Houdetot in their faith, for they were anything but reassuring as to the soundness of the way of life recommended. They betrayed a man still morbidly worrying about the past and making these reasonings an armament to fight down the shadows of guilty passion, and imputations of disloyalty, ingratitude, and misanthropy. These evils had been charged to his solitary life, an aspersion he still resented so deeply that, in defiance, he made claim of precisely the contrary—that such life produces a true philanthropy and honesty of sentiment and good conscience. Throughout the argument he was fending the ill opinion of himself held by the 'entourage of Diderot', and aiming especially to discredit anything Grimm might say against him.<sup>1</sup> This was not the attitude of one sure of himself, or even sure of Mme d'Houdetot. In spite of the tributes to her force of character, his very care to fortify her mind against the philosophers of Paris was insulting to her intelligence. She would have been further displeased by his dwelling so fondly on the memories of their intimacy, and his almost boastful description of the struggle he went through for virtue's sake. These *Letters* were too unrestrained an exposure. 'They absolutely cannot be delivered', he wrote separately, 'except by my own hand.'<sup>2</sup> And in fact, they never were delivered, even so.

They were, nevertheless, of personal value to himself. Confronted by death, as he thought, he was genuinely concerned for his own soul. The scene recorded in the *Phaedo* came to mind, Socrates about to die and professing his faith. He, too, believed in the immortality of the soul and in an Eternal Being. But it would not do for him simply to reaffirm the faith as it had been expressed by Plato. For he lived in an age of reason where all the language and opinion was cast in a materialistic vein and he had to devise an argument against such prejudices. To do this he had to examine the modern philosophies and find one for himself. He proceeded in the curious manner of Pierre Bayle, Pascal, and, to a lesser extent, Father Malebranche, by pleading for a faith through exhibiting all the doubts of philosophy in regard to knowledge. Rationalists had disparaged the truth of the senses; empiricists that of reasoning beyond things of

<sup>1</sup> To Mme d'Houdetot, Jan. 15, 1758, *C.G.*, vol. iii, No. 465, p. 268; from same, Jan. 28, No. 466.

<sup>2</sup> To same, No. 465, p. 269.

sensibility. The imperfection of the human capacity for knowing absolute truth, by reliance both upon external sensation and reasoning, seemed amply demonstrated. However, there was a difference in this discredit of these faculties. Reason, in the usage of men, actually contradicted itself, whereas the sensibility of man was only defective in being limited to practical knowledge, its deliverance being, as regards the purposes of life, relatively true. Locke had spoken well of this 'sensitive knowledge' and introduced 'internal senses' as well as external; Malebranche, Shaftesbury, and others had pointed to the indubitable sentiments of beauty and virtue. Here, then, was an opening for one to assert the possibility of a phase of inner sense or 'appreciation' that had been unexplored and unhonored, a part of man's sensitive nature, not identifiable with any of the special senses or condemned to the vicissitudes of their externality. He had earlier planned a book on morality with the title *La Morale Sensitive*, showing that he had preferred the concept of 'sentiment' to any intellectual principle like that of Leibniz which performed the same role in perception and judgment. It was the *moral* sentiment, however, that was of greatest interest to him. Conscience is, indeed, a development of both the egoistic and the social sentiments, yet once it appears it becomes a decisive principle in its own right and judges life according to rules self-prescribed. This capacity of conscience proves that the soul of man has reached far beyond anything we are commonly acquainted with in the ordinary course of life, powers which may yet be elicited by meditation in solitude and Nature. Even Diderot had been speculating about such possibilities; although materialistic as he had become, he always thought of them as only higher organisations of the physical body, of which the psychic powers were but the effect.<sup>1</sup> Rousseau was now trying to counter this materialism with a very different sort, a *Materialism of a Sage*, which represented the souls of men in Platonic imagery, as having different degrees of perfection, becoming incarnate in bodies where they prove themselves to have greater or less virtue according to their lot. The *Moral Letters* were the preface to such a profession of spiritual faith.

<sup>1</sup> Diderot, *La Promenade du sceptique*, vol. i, p. 223.



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