

THE CRITIQUE OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY
IN ROUSSEAU'S EARLY WRITINGS

Throughout this study I have attempted to interpret the early writings of Rousseau from an historical point of view and have in fact tried to elaborate four main theses about the place of history in our understanding of his social thought. Firstly, I have argued that Rousseau's major works in the period from 1750 to 1756 were conceived largely as historical correctives to a number of abstract and universal claims - especially about the essence of law, property, music, and language - so that his essays on the genesis and multiplicity of these adopted practices and conventions comprise a challenge to several metaphysical doctrines in which such institutions were depicted as having much the same nature and foundations for all men at all times. It has also been my contention, secondly, that Rousseau saw the course of our historical development as identical with the path of our moral degradation, and my accounts particularly of the Discours sur l'inégalité, on the one hand, and the musical sections of the Essai sur l'origine des langues, on the other, have been put forward to portray the dual sense in which he believed that the evolution of society and the perfection of culture, respectively, have made men miserable and corrupt. My third thesis has been that Rousseau formulated these ideas as refutations of the views of some notable seventeenth-century theorists, including, above all, Hobbes and Locke, as well as in a series of polemical controversies with leading figures of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, among whom

Rameau, Buffon, Condillac, and Diderot were the most important. Fourthly, I have sought to show that we can only have a proper grasp of the meaning of Rousseau's arguments if we locate them in just these historical settings.

Now it should be apparent that the first two of my points refer directly to the substance of Rousseau's social theory - and specifically to his idea of history within that theory - while the third and fourth pertain rather to our own historical understanding of his works. I have here stressed that we can only grasp the sense of his speculations if we locate them in the precise contexts in which they were formulated and in connection with the arguments of various thinkers which they were designed to amend, elaborate, or rebut, and insofar as that is the case my last two claims seem to me quite indispensable for any adequate explanation of the others. But I think I have said enough already about historical method and about the philosophical errors made by scholars who accept mistaken assumptions with regard to the actual relations between views propounded by different writers. Neither do I wish to pursue here what might well appear to be an inconsistency in Rousseau's philosophy with regard to the first two of my claims, even though there are some difficult and important conceptual problems which arise from his having held to a belief both in the diversity of cultures, on the one hand, and in the invariable moral debasement of all civilisations, on the other. I should like instead to conclude my study with some remarks about what I take to be the philosophical coherence of his early social thought, and I propose to show how these points, focused both within and about Rousseau's conception of history, help to clarify the manner in which his reflections on the decadence of culture and society were formed

in the period leading to his composition of the Discours sur l'inégalité and the Essai sur l'origine des langues. I mean therefore to end this work with a brief account of the earliest of Rousseau's major writings, that is, the Discours sur les sciences et les arts, and I hope to show that in the course of the controversy which centred upon that composition Rousseau came to form the systematic social theory of which the two main components soon proved to be a treatise on the origins of inequality and an exposition of the genesis of music and language.

In his Confessions Rousseau remarked that he had been thunderstruck on reading the notice of the Académie de Dijon in the Mercure de France of October 1749, proposing a prize for the best essay on the question 'Si le rétablissement des Sciences & des Arts a contribué à épurer les moeurs'.¹ "A l'instant de cette lecture je vis un autre univers et je devins un autre homme",² he wrote. He had stopped by a tree to catch his breath, moved practically to delirium by a fiery vision - about the natural goodness of humanity and the evil contradictions of our social order - which had kindled in his mind most of the leading ideas of his principal works, even though he was never to recapture more than its faint shadow or penumbra.

Si jamais quelque chose a ressemblé à une inspiration Subite, c'est Le mouvem[en]t qui Se fit en moi à cette Lecture: Tout a coup je me Sens l'esprit ébloüi de mille Lumieres...je Sens ma tête prise par un etourdissement Semblable à L'ivresse....Si j'avois jamais pû écrire Le quart de ce que j'ai vû et Senti Sous cet arbre, avec quelle clarté j'aurois fait voir toutes Les contradictions du systeme Social, avec quelle force

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1. See the Correspondance complète, II, appendice 67, pp. 293-294.
 2. Confessions, O.C.I., p. 351.

j'aurois exposé tous les abus de Nos institutions, avec quelle Simplicité j'aurois démontré que L'homme est bon naturellem[en]t et que c'est par ces institutions Seules que les hommes deviennent méchants.³

Yet whereas the Discours sur les sciences et les arts undoubtedly constitutes the most immediate expression of that vision, it is a notable fact about this work that Rousseau came to regard it as perhaps the worst of all his major writings. The text which truly launched his literary career when it appeared in 1751⁴ might have been "mal fait"⁵ he admitted in the following year to one of its critics. It had neither order, nor logic, nor structure, he lamented later, and though it was full of warmth and vigour he maintained that

de tous [les ouvrages] qui sont sortis de ma plume c'est le plus foible de raisonnement et le plus pauvre de nombre et d'harmonie.⁶

3. Rousseau to Malesherbes, 12 January 1762, Correspondance complète, X, p. 26. See also p. 399 below. There have been many, not always illuminating, accounts of Rousseau's psychological state at this crucial moment of his life. Among the best known are those of Gerhard Gran (see 'La crise de Vincennes', Annales, VII (1911), pp. 1-17) and Guéhenno (see Jean-Jacques, I, pp. 271-283).

4. In the light of some new evidence, together with a reinterpretation of familiar sources, Leigh concludes (see the Correspondance complète, II, pp. 135-136 and 140) that Rousseau's first Discours must have been published in 1751, probably around 8 January. Most scholars have previously supposed that the text appeared at the end of November 1750. As to its dates of composition we know very little apart from that it must have been drafted between October 1749 and March 1750 (since the closing date for the competition was 1 April 1750), though Rousseau did make a number of minor changes and additions later. In his Confessions (see O.C.I, p. 352) Rousseau reflected that he had worked on the essay at a feverish pace and had confided the fact that he was engaged in writing it only to his two best friends at the time, that is, Diderot and Grimm. For an account of the reception of the Discours by the members of the Académie de Dijon see especially the documents reproduced in the Correspondance complète, II, appendices 68-75, pp. 294-303.

5. 'Lettre à Lecat', O.C.III, p. 98.

6. Confessions, O.C.I, p. 352.

In 1763 he added a foreword which made much the same point,⁷ and there is even some evidence to suggest that in his original preface he may already have intended to warn his readers that the work was conspicuously lacking in literary talent, commenting that

on reconnoitra facilement dans [cet écrit] une plume fort peu exercée dans le genre oratoire.⁸

For my part I find it difficult to disagree with Rousseau's own assessment of this work. Its rhetorical flourishes may well have merited the prize for which it was composed, but in my view it is much the least elegant, least consistent, least profound, and - despite the fuss which it stirred - least original of all his celebrated writings.

7. This foreword appears in Genève (Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau) Ms R 89, a manuscript which comprises a collection of Rousseau's early published works with corrections and additions that he meant to incorporate in the Duchesne edition of his writings. The passage which refers to the mediocrity of the Discours sur les sciences et les arts reads as follows (O.C.III, p. 1237): "Qu'est-ce que la célébrité? Voici le malheureux ouvrage à qui je dois la mienne. Il est certain que cette pièce qui m'a valu un prix et qui m'a fait un nom, est tout au plus médiocre, et j'ose ajoûter qu'elle est une des moindres de tout ce recueil." Cf. Havens, p. 92. In the light of the evidence noted by Havens (see pp. 168-169) it seems clear that the foreword was drafted in 1763, though Havens was mistaken to suppose that it was actually incorporated in the Duchesne edition of the Discours printed in 1764. In fact it was first published in Moulitou-Du Peyrou.

8. Pichois-Pintard, p. 30. My reason for stating that the evidence only suggests this conclusion is attributable simply to the fact that I am not yet entirely convinced - even though it seems to me most likely - that the fragment which incorporates this passage constitutes an original draft of the preface of the Premier Discours. Though there is no reason to doubt that it is in Rousseau's own hand, I believe that it might just conceivably be a rough version of another of his early writings, possibly of the foreword to his Discours sur la vertu du héros, composed in 1751. An intermediate draft of the preface to the Discours sur les sciences et les arts has certainly survived, however, and this fragment (BN Ms n.a. fr. 5215, p. 531), also in Rousseau's hand, was first transcribed by Leigh in his 'Manuscripts disparus' (see pp. 58-62). Apart from that solitary remnant all the original manuscripts of the work, including the final copy sent to the Académie de Dijon, have been lost. Rousseau's revisions to the published text, nevertheless, are still available. Most of these changes figure in Genève (Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau) Ms R 89, and they now appear, too, in the notes of O.C.III. A few further, and minor, alterations have recently been transcribed by Leigh in 'D'Alembert's copy of Rousseau's first Discours', The Library, XXII (1967), pp. 243-244.

The central theme of the Premier Discours seems plain enough. Civilisation has been the bane of humanity, and the corruption of our morals, Rousseau reflected, has followed the same course as the perfection of our arts and sciences.

Nos ames se sont corrompues a mesure que nos Sciences
et nos Arts se sont avancés à la perfection.⁹

Before we acquired the skills and attributes of cultured men, and before our behaviour came to be moulded by art and artifice, "nos moeurs étoient rustiques, mais naturelles".¹⁰ With the birth and dissemination of enlightenment, however, our original purity has been progressively debased by the exigencies of sophisticated taste and custom, by "ce voile uniforme et perfide de politesse", by "la bienséance", by "nôtre fausse délicatesse", and by "tous ces vils ornemens"¹¹ of fashion, until our pristine virtue has been displaced from our lives with the same unremitting force that governs the ebb and flow of tides.

L'élévation et l'abaissement journalier des eaux de l'Océan n'ont pas été plus régulièrement assujettis au cours de l'Astre qui nous éclaire durant la nuit, que le sort des moeurs et de la probité au progrès des Sciences et des Arts. On a vu la vertu s'enfuir à mesure que leur lumière s'élevait sur notre horizon.¹²

We can only regret our loss of the simplicity and happy innocence of those earliest times, Rousseau continued, when the members of our

9. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 9.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 21. James Hamilton, in 'A Theory of art in Rousseau's first discourse', SVEC, XCIV (1972), pp. 77-80, makes the interesting suggestion that the principles of 'politesse', 'bienséance', and 'goût' constitute the three main principles of art which Rousseau saw as having undermined our moral virtues.

12. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 10.

race lived together in huts and wished for little more than that their deeds and actions should be under the gaze of their gods. In the beginning the sole adornments of the world would have been - like the contours of a shoreline - sculpted exclusively by Nature herself. But when men later became vicious they banished their gods to magnificent temples in order that the deities should be less able to spy on them.

On ne peut réfléchir sur les mœurs, qu'on ne se plaise à se rappeler l'image de la simplicité des premiers tems. C'est un beau rivage, paré des seules mains de la nature....Quand les hommes innocens et vertueux aimoient à avoir les Dieux pour témoins de leurs actions, ils habitoient ensemble sous les mêmes cabanes; mais bien-tôt devenus méchans, ils se lassèrent de ces incommodes spectateurs et les releguèrent dans des Temples magnifiques.¹³

So, too, those civilisations which have been the least tainted by artistic and scientific progress, which have been the least burdened by the trappings of culture and learning, have proved to be the most vigorous and robust. For the arts and sciences do not inspire individuals with courage or with the spirit of patriotism; on the contrary they sap men of both their devotion to the state and their strength to preserve it from invasion. The marvellous inventions of the Chinese, for instance, failed to ward off their subjection to the coarse and ignorant Tartars. Of what use to the Chinese people, then, was the knowledge possessed by their erudite and expert sages? For their part, the Persians - who were taught virtue as we are taught science - were easily able to conquer Asia, while the greatness of the German and Scythian nations was founded solidly upon "la simplicité, l'innocence et les vertus"¹⁴ of their inhabitants.

13. Ibid., p. 22.

14. Ibid., p. 11.

Above all, the history of Sparta, when contrasted with that of Athens, demonstrates how much more durable, how much more resistant to the vices of tyranny, are those communities of men whose minds have not been contaminated by the vain monuments of culture.¹⁵ Socrates, the wisest person in Athens, cautioned his fellow-citizens of the dangerous consequences of their arrogance and presumption and even sang the praises of ignorance to them.

Voilà...le plus Sage des hommes...et le plus savant
des Atheniens au sentiment de la Grèce entière,
Socrate faisant l'Eloge de l'ignorance.¹⁶

At Rome Cato followed his example and inveighed against the venomously seductive delights of art and ostentation which were undermining the vitality and resolution of his compatriots. Yet his warnings went unheeded as well, and an entirely specious form of learning came to prevail once again - to the detriment of military discipline, agricultural production, and political vigilance.

Socrate avoit commencé dans Athènes, le vieux Caton continua dans Rome de se déchaîner contre ces Grecs artificieux et subtils qui séduisoient la vertu et amolissoient le courage de ses concitoyens. Mais les Sciences, les Arts et la dialectique prévalurent encore: Rome se remplit de Philosophes et d'Orateurs; on négligea la discipline militaire, on méprisa l'agriculture, on embrassa des Sectes et l'on oublia la Patrie.¹⁷

The Roman Republic, formerly the temple of virtue, soon became the decadent theatre of crime, and the capital of the world slowly but ineluctably succumbed under the yoke with which it had earlier harnessed

15. See *ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 13. This passage follows a rather free translation of several paragraphs, probably from a Latin text, of Plato's Apology.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 14. In the early 1750s Rousseau was to expound upon this distinction between Socrates and Cato on several occasions, and he may even have intended to devote a whole work to the subject (see Pichois-Pintard, pp. 78-112). Of the fragments assembled in Pichois-Pintard (see pp. 48-64) one was to figure in his Discours sur la vertu du héros and another was incorporated in his 'Economie politique'.

the barbarians.¹⁸ Much the same pattern of decline also marked the collapse of the ancient empires of Egypt, Greece, and Constantinople,¹⁹ and, indeed, it is a general rule that all great civilisations decay under the weight of their own scientific and artistic progress.

Le même phénomène s'est observé dans tous les tems
et dans tous les lieux.²⁰

In the Premier Discours Rousseau did not really explain how these developments might actually have occurred, nor did he offer any clear account of why the arts and sciences should have been generally responsible for the moral decadence of man. All that his readers could legitimately infer from the text was the fact that he supposed the advancement of culture to be universally conjoined with the deterioration of virtue. The sciences, Rousseau suggested, have always been engendered "dans l'oisiveté",²¹ and each of the particular sciences stems from the vices to which sloth and indolence give rise - astronomy from superstition, for example, geometry from avarice, and physics from idle curiosity.²² The arts, moreover, are everywhere nourished by luxury,²³ which is itself "né...de l'oisiveté et de la vanité des hommes".²⁴ Luxury, in fact, seems to be a crucial term in the argument, since Rousseau maintained that it can hardly ever be found without the arts and sciences, while they never exist at all without it.

18. See *ibid.*, p. 10.

19. See *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

22. See *ibid.*, p. 17.

23. See *ibid.* On the subject of "la grande question du luxe" in the Discours sur les sciences et les arts see especially Havens, p. 191, note 110.

24. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 19.

Le luxe va rarement sans les sciences et les arts,
et jamais ils ne vont sans lui.²⁵

The dissolution of morals, then, is apparently a necessary consequence of luxury ("la dissolution des moeurs, suite necessaire du luxe"²⁶), which, in turn, is essentially a product of idleness. And the corruption and enslavement of men that have been such characteristic features of the history of all civilisations are thus proofs of the punishment we have received for our haughty endeavours to advance beyond that state of happy ignorance in which it was our proper destiny - and would have been our blessing - to remain for ever.

Voilà comment le luxe, la dissolution et l'esclavage ont été de tout tems le châtiment des efforts orgueilleux que nous avons faits pour sortir de l'heureuse ignorance où la sagesse éternelle nous avoit placés.²⁷

Now there are undoubtedly some important elements of the Discours sur les sciences et les arts which anticipate ideas that Rousseau was later to advance in both the second Discours and the Essai sur l'origine des langues. For one thing, there are a few quite striking continuities between specific passages. Hence, for instance, Rousseau's remark in the Premier Discours that our politicians "ne parlent que de commerce et d'argent"²⁸ - whereas those of the ancient world spoke of morals and

25. Ibid. For a discussion of the significance of these lines in Rousseau's argument, and for a general outline of the distinction in the work between the sciences and sloth, on the one hand, and the arts and luxury, on the other, see Goldschmidt, Anthropologie et politique, pp. 38 and 76-77.

26. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 21.

27. Ibid., p. 15.

28. Ibid., p. 19.

virtue - seems to be recapitulated in his charge in ch. xx of the Essai that our orators now only shout "donnez de l'argent" to their weary listeners.²⁹ Similarly, his general statement in the Discours that today "un goût...fin [a] réduit l'Art de plaire en principes"³⁰ appears to apply specifically to the art of music in the Essai, especially in the passage there in which he contends that music has become "une langue dont il faut avoir le Dictionnaire".³¹ With regard to the connection between the first and second Discours, moreover, we find that the "chaînes de fer"³² which shackle the civilised men portrayed in the earlier work are depicted in the later text as the "fers" into which "tous coururent...croyant assûrer leur liberté".³³ We find, too, that the Discours sur les sciences et les arts contains the first statement anywhere in Rousseau's writings of his contention - which was to be elaborated in the Discours sur l'inégalité - that men in society have become slaves and have forsaken "cette liberté originelle pour laquelle ils sembloient être nés".³⁴ Most importantly, in the Premier Discours we can already find a sketch of the central postulate of the work to which he was only to turn a few years later - the idea, that is, that all the abuses of civilisation may be attributed ultimately to the social inequality ordained not by Nature but by man. For "d'où naissent tous ces abus",

29. See ch. IV, pp. 376-377.

30. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 8. See also Havens, p. 185, note 79.

31. See ch. IV, pp. 341-342.

32. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 7.

33. Discours sur l'inégalité, O.C.III, p. 177 (see ch. III, p. 192). An even more familiar reprise, of course, is Rousseau's statement in the Contrat social, I.i (O.C.III, p. 351) that man is now everywhere "dans les fers".

34. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 7. It should also be borne in mind that note i of the Discours sur l'inégalité, especially in its focus upon the idea of luxury, is in large measure a refrain of the Premier Discours.

Rousseau exclaimed in his prize essay,

si ce n'est de l'inégalité funeste introduite entre
les hommes par la distinction des talents et par
l'avilissement des vertus?³⁵

Most significantly, it is in the Discours sur les sciences et les arts that Rousseau first advanced the general historical thesis - to the effect that our apparent cultural and social progress has led only to our real moral degradation - which was to be developed, in sharper focus and with much greater skill, in the Discours sur l'inégalité and the Essai sur l'origine des langues. To be sure, Rousseau had shown an interest in problems about the general history of mankind long before he had begun to work on his Premier Discours,³⁶ and as early as 1737 he had in fact drafted a 'Chronologie universelle' in which he reflected that

l'histoire doit faire une des principales parties
de l'étude d'un honnête homme....L'univers est

35. Ibid., p. 25. It is possible, however, that these last two passages did not figure in the manuscript which Rousseau submitted to the Académie de Dijon. For in the preface to the published text Rousseau observed (ibid., p. 3) that he had made "deux additions faciles à reconnaître", and while we have no evidence to show exactly which elements of the work were added later, and while several distinct possibilities have been suggested by scholars, we might be inclined to agree with François Bouchardy (see ibid., p. 1240) that these remarks - ostensibly a shade more radical in tone than the rest - were introduced by Rousseau after he had won the prize. In the first Discours there are, moreover, some faint anticipations of a few ideas developed in his other writings in social theory, most notably, perhaps, the remarks about the "Precepteurs du Genre-humain" (see ibid., p. 29) which foreshadow the chapter on the legislator (II.vii) in the Contrat social.

36. From his earliest childhood he had been especially fascinated by Greek and Roman history, he reflected in his Confessions (O.C.I, p. 9):
* "Sans cesse occupé de Rome et d'Athènes; vivant, pour ainsi dire, avec leurs grands hommes, né moi-même Citoyen d'une République...je me croyois Grec ou Romain; je devenois le personnage dont je lisois la vie."

une grande famille dont nous sommes tous membres;
nous sommes donc obligés d'en connoître aussi la
situation et les intérêts.³⁷

In his 'Epître à M. Bordes' of 1741 he had also offered a glimpse of a moral world that was more attractive than our own because its inhabitants lived more simply and naturally - a spectacle that he was later to portray on broader canvases in both the second Discours and the Essai sur l'origine des langues.

O vous qui dans le sein d'une humble obscurité
Nourrissez les vertus avec la pauvreté,
Dont les désirs bornés dans la sage indigence
Méprisent sans orgueil une vaine abondance,
Restes trop précieux de ces antiques tems
Où des moindres apprêts nos ancêtres contens,
Recherchés dans leurs moeurs, simples dans leur parure,
Ne sentoient de besoin que ceux de la nature.³⁸

These cursory anticipations of some ideas which Rousseau came to expound in his mature works, however, can hardly be taken to constitute a coherent sketch of his later speculations about history and morals, not only because they are so rudimentary and isolated, but also because in the period before his composition of the Premier Discours they are accompanied by equally short statements in which he put forward claims that were almost diametrically opposed to the propositions he enunciated and defended later. Hence, for instance, in his 'Epître à Monsieur Parisot' of 1742 we find two lines on the subject of inequality which do not accord at all with the ideas of both the first and second Discours.

37. 'Chronologie universelle, ou Histoire générale des temps, depuis la création du monde jusques à présent', in 'Pages inédites de Jean-Jacques Rousseau', ed. Dufour, Annales, I (1905), pp. 214-215. At the time of its transcription by Dufour this manuscript belonged to Ferdinand de Saussure. With regard to its probable date of composition see *ibid.*, p. 213, note 1.

38. 'Epître à M. Bordes', O.C.II, p. 1131.

Il ne seroit pas bon dans la société
Qu'il fût entre les rangs moins d'inégalité.³⁹

But it would be as foolish to lay any stress upon this remark as it would be to emphasise the importance of those snippets which appear rather to foreshadow Rousseau's later views. His writings before 1750 merit our attention only because their author subsequently produced literary and philosophical masterpieces. The Discours sur les sciences et les arts, on the other hand, is clearly a work of some importance, partly because it attracted widespread attention and made Rousseau a celebrity, but even more because - despite its many faults and obscurities - it constitutes his first treatment of the thesis about the link between our historical progress and moral decay which was to form the principal theme of his major works in the period from 1750 to 1756.

This is not to say, of course, that all the leading ideas he advanced during those years figure in an incipient form in the Discours sur les sciences et les arts, still less that all the main points which he raised in that text were elaborated more fully in his subsequent writings. On the contrary, many of the most crucial features of the social theory he propounded later have no place at all in the first Discours, while a number of the judgments he made there were soon to be modified sharply or even abandoned. I shall return to this matter presently, but for the moment I should like instead to offer a few of my own reasons for concurring with Rousseau's rather severe appraisal of the quality of the essay.

For one thing, the central thesis of the work is certainly vague and obscure. In fact, as I have suggested already, the

39. 'Epître à Monsieur Parisot', O.C.II, p. 1140.

argument seems to be comprised of at least three distinct theses about the course and circumstances of our moral degradation: first, the suggestion that mankind has declined progressively from the innocence of his earliest primitive state; second, the claim that nations which are artistically and scientifically undeveloped are morally superior to their sophisticated counterparts; and third, the contention that great civilisations have become decadent under the weight of their own cultural progress. But these claims do not easily accord with one another. There is, in particular, a clear discrepancy, on the one hand, between Rousseau's tribute to the mode of life of primitive man in the second part of his work and, on the other, his praise of untainted civilisations in the first part - a problem made all the more intractable by the fact that, like a great many Enlightenment thinkers, he also maintained that the general course of our history has been interrupted by a reversion - under several centuries of medieval barbarism and superstition - to a state which was even worse than that of our original ignorance and from which

il falloit une revolution pour ramener les hommes
au sens commun.⁴⁰

It is difficult to see how this description of "la Barbarie des premiers âges" - this account of an "état pire que l'ignorance"⁴¹ - can be reconciled with the portrait of "la simplicité des premiers tems"⁴² which Rousseau also drew in the Discours. He did not explain anywhere in the text, moreover, how these discontinuities in the path of our moral history might have occurred, nor how men - apparently

40. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 6.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 22 (see pp. 384-385 above).

already in a state of decay - might nonetheless have formed great civilisations.

At the end of his argument Rousseau even launched upon an entirely new thesis to the effect that it is not really the arts and sciences as such but rather their abuse by ordinary men which has been the true source of our misfortunes, and, indeed, he concluded his work with the observation that it was the task of great scientists and artists to build the glorious monuments of the human spirit.

S'il faut permettre à quelques hommes de se livrer à l'étude des Sciences et des Arts, ce n'est qu'à ceux qui se sentiront la force de marcher seuls sur leurs traces, et de les devancer: C'est à ce petit nombre qu'il appartient d'élever des monumens à la gloire de l'esprit humain.⁴³

The rest of us lesser mortals, he exclaimed, should aspire to no more than the obscurity and mediocrity to which we have been destined.

Pour nous, hommes vulgaires, à qui le Ciel n'a point départi de si grands talens et qu'il ne destine pas à tant de gloire, restons dans nôtre obscurité.⁴⁴

For my part, I find it difficult to see why Rousseau should have thought these lines appropriate in a critique of the arts and sciences and a defence of the virtues of ignorance, innocence, and common humanity.

He is not at all clear, either, about precisely what contribution he believed the growth of culture had actually made to our decline. His thesis appears to be that the progress of the arts and

43. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 29. I am fully in agreement with Havens when he notes (p. 248, note 298) that the conclusion of the argument is "inattendue", though "parfaitement agréable à ses amis, les Encyclopédistes".

44. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 30.

sciences has been responsible for the debasement of morals, but I have already shown that he also supposed that the arts and sciences were engendered by 'l'oisiveté', 'la vanité', and 'le luxe' of man. Has the advancement of culture been the cause of our corruption, then, or only its effect? Rousseau, whose main concern in the work was to portray the evils which invariably "suivent les Lettres et les Arts",⁴⁵ but who equally proclaimed that "les Sciences et les Arts doivent...leur naissance à nos vices",⁴⁶ seemed quite unable to make up his mind.

Perhaps the principal reason for the indecisiveness of Rousseau's argument is the fact that most of its components were borrowed from the work of earlier thinkers. By this I do not mean only that its central theme was inspired by ideas which were first propounded by other figures, though that is unquestionably true. The Premier Discours incorporates the views of a host of modern and ancient authors - such as Montesquieu, for instance, and Fénelon, Montaigne, Seneca, Plato, and, above all, Plutarch⁴⁷ - whose writings Rousseau read at length, and whose commentaries upon the superiority of nature

45. Ibid., p. 19.

46. Ibid., p. 17.

47. From his earliest childhood, Rousseau reflected in his Confessions (O.C.I, p. 9), "Plutarque...devint ma lecture favorite". The references to Plutarch's Lives throughout his writings are legion - far more numerous than the sixty-eight counted by Marguerite Richebourg [Reichenburg] (see her Essai sur les lectures de Rousseau [Philadelphia 1932], p. 175) who only tabulates the bulk of the passages in which Plutarch is mentioned by name. I suspect, indeed, that there is no other single text which Rousseau consulted more often in the preparation of his own works, and no other author he more frequently cited or invoked by allusion - notwithstanding the fact that he discussed the ideas of Rameau at greater length. According to Havens (p. 63) almost the whole of the argument of the Premier Discours - with one exception - can be found in Plutarch: "Amour de la patrie, courage, vertu, austérité, simplicité, haine du luxe et de l'inégalité, goût des rudes travaux des champs, admiration pour les 'qualités guerrières' des héros de Sparte et des premiers siècles du vieux Rome, l'exemple même de ce Fabricius qui éblouissait tant l'esprit de Jean-Jacques dès l'instant de son inspiration sur la route de Vincennes,

over artifice, or upon the merits of simplicity, or the oppressiveness of inequality, or the decadence of civilisation, were endorsed or recapitulated in his text.⁴⁸ Diderot later remarked that "on avoit fait cent fois avant [Rousseau] l'apologie de l'ignorance contre les progrès des sciences et des arts",⁴⁹ and on this point he was certainly correct. But the first Discours is conspicuously lacking in originality not just because it is marked by the influence of many other works in a similar vein to which Rousseau turned for guidance. Neither are its derivative qualities due mainly to the fact that Rousseau's scholarship in the essay is so clearly second-hand - his account of the Scythians, for example, drawn essentially from Horace, his description of the Germans taken from Tacitus, his sketch of the Persians from Montaigne, and his contrast between Sparta and Athens from several writers, among whom Bossuet and Rollin are probably the most important.⁵⁰ By pointing to the derivative character of

voilà ce qui sortait de ce vieux livre, camarade chéri de son enfance. Presque tout le Discours de Dijon est là." The exception, however - also indicated by Havens (see pp. 63-64) - is significant, for Plutarch praised the arts and sciences and the world of learning generally. For an account of Plutarch's influence upon the Premier Discours, see Abraham Keller, 'Plutarch and Rousseau's First Discours', PMLA, LIV (1939), pp. 212-222. For an interpretation of his wider influence upon Rousseau's thought, see especially Georges Pire, 'Du bon Plutarque au Citoyen de Genève', Revue de littérature comparée, XXXII (1958), pp. 510-547, and Denise Leduc-Fayette, Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le mythe de l'antiquité (Paris 1974), passim.

48. The best general accounts of the sources of Rousseau's Discours sur les sciences et les arts are still those of Louis Delaruelle (see 'Les sources principales de J.-J. Rousseau dans le premier discours à l'Académie de Dijon', RHLF, XIX (1912), pp. 245-271) and especially Havens (see pp. 61-82).

49. Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, Assézat-Tourneux, III, p. 95.

50. With regard to the portrait of the Scythians by Horace, from whom Rousseau also drew his epigraph 'Decipimur specie recti', see Havens, p. 197, note 128 (though Bouchardy [see O.C.III, p. 1245] views this particular connection as only problematic); with regard to Tacitus on the Germans, see Havens, p. 197, note 129; with regard to Montaigne on the Persians, see Havens, p. 195, note 126, and O.C.III, p. 1244; with regard to Bossuet and Rollin on Sparta and Athens, see Havens, pp. 200-201, and O.C.III, pp. 1245-1246.

Rousseau's text I mean rather to draw attention to the fact that not only his principal ideas but often the very words in which he expressed them were borrowed from his authorities. Apart from the quotations and references of which the sources would have been patently clear, there is at least one passage in the Premier Discours which is drawn, without acknowledgment, from Montesquieu's Esprit des loix⁵¹ and one unattributed transcription from Bossuet's Discours sur l'histoire universelle;⁵² there are several snatches from Plutarch's Lives⁵³ and upwards of fifteen extracts from the Essais of Montaigne,⁵⁴ only a very few of which are accompanied by any mention of their parentage; the very last line of Rousseau's text, moreover, is adapted from both Plutarch and Montaigne together.⁵⁵ Dom Joseph Cajot's Les plagiats de J.-J. Rousseau of 1766⁵⁶ may have been excessively

51. Cf. the passages from the Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, pp. 19-20, and the Esprit des loix, XXIII.xvii, Oeuvres complètes, I.ii, p. 57, compared by Launay in his 'Discours sur les sciences et les arts: Jean-Jacques entre Mme Dupin et Montesquieu', in Jean-Jacques Rousseau et son temps, pp. 99-100. Launay's observations (see *ibid.*, pp. 100-101) as to why Rousseau should have refrained from mentioning his source are partly based upon some intriguing but unconvincing speculations about Rousseau's connections with Claude and Louise-Marie-Madeleine Dupin, to whom (that is, Mme Dupin) Rousseau was engaged as a secretary at the same time that he composed the Premier Discours and after both husband and wife had undertaken to refute the Esprit des loix.

52. This passage pertains to Rousseau's remarks about Egypt (see O.C.III, pp. 10 and 1243). See also Havens, pp. 189-190.

53. See especially Havens, pp. 199, note 135; 201, note 140; 207, note 160; and 209, note 167; and O.C.III, pp. 12, 14, 15, 17, and 1246-1247. The prosopopoeia of Fabricius (see O.C.III, pp. 14-15), which Rousseau later claimed to have drafted first, was also largely inspired by Plutarch - in this case his 'Life of Pyrrhus'.

54. See especially Havens, pp. 65; 187, note 88; 195, note 126; 199, note 133; 200, note 136; 202, note 145; 211, note 175; 216, note 189; 229, note 232; 230, note 235; 235, note 250; and 236, note 255; and O.C.III, pp. 9, 11, 12-14, 18-19, 22, 24, 1243-1246, 1248, and 1251-1253.

55. See Havens, pp. 66 and 251, note 309; and O.C.III, pp. 30 and 1256.

56. This work incorporates Cajot's 'Observations touchant le [premier] Discours de Rousseau', first published in 1765. With regard to that text see especially Havens, pp. 72-73; 185, note 80; 200, note 137; 202, note 145; 210, note 170; 229, note 232; 231, note 241; 245, note 290; and 249, note 303.

severe - and in most instances incorrect - in its imputations that the Discours sur les sciences et les arts had been plagiarized from other books. Nevertheless, it is a disconcerting fact that this text is the only one of Rousseau's major writings to warrant such suspicions. Despite the polemical tone and character of the argument it is directed against no other work in particular, and Rousseau appears to have turned to his sources not so much to give more weight to his own ideas as to find ways of repeating the claims which he found in them. The dissimilarity between his first and second Discours with regard to this point could hardly be more striking. For while it is a measure of the brilliance of the Discours sur l'inégalité that Rousseau set out to refute the ideas of nearly all the figures whom he mentioned in that text, it is equally a measure of the mediocrity of the Discours sur les sciences et les arts that it does little more than reflect the sometimes disparate views already advanced by its many precursors.

It may seem a little strange, perhaps, that a work of such poor quality should have stirred so great a fuss, particularly since both Rousseau's friends among the men of the Enlightenment that it attacked, on the one hand, and his critics among the enemies of the Enlightenment who might have been expected to endorse his views, on the other, regarded the essay as 'un discours de parade' which did not really express his authentic and sincere beliefs.⁵⁷ Yet with the publication of the Premier Discours - the first text that he

57. This point is made admirably by Havens in his 'Diderot and the Composition of Rousseau's First Discourse', Romantic Review, XXX (1939), pp. 379-380.

signed 'citoyen de Genève'⁵⁸ - Rousseau almost immediately became one of the major celebrities of his day. More than a decade later he reflected that his second Discours and Emile were also inspired by the same flash of illumination which had ignited the main theme of that work in his mind.

Tout ce que j'ai pu retenir de ces foules de grandes Verités qui dans un quart d'heure m'illuminerent Sous cet arbre, a été bien foiblement epars dans Les trois principaux de mes ecrits, Savoir ce premier discours, celui Sur L'inegalité, et Le traité de L'education, Lesquels trois ouvrages sont inseparables et forment ensemble un meme tout.⁵⁹

And while I think this passage is somewhat misleading - because it makes rather too much of an essay which Rousseau elsewhere decried⁶⁰ and at the same time ties it too closely to his boldest and most original masterpiece, Emile - it does offer an important insight into the way he and his public together envisaged the plan of composition of his major works. For there is no doubt but that, by repute as well as by design, Rousseau's principal writings after the Discours sur les sciences et les arts comprise an elaboration of the central thesis that he had propounded in 1750 - the thesis, that is, that the advancement of both culture and society has produced the moral

58. This was no doubt partly to preserve his anonymity during the competition and even afterwards - since the first published edition appeared with the same signature but not his name. On the other hand, and perhaps paradoxically, Rousseau also employed the terms 'citoyen de Genève', in my view, to establish his republican identity. Already in his 'Epître à M. Bordes' (O.C.II, p. 1130) he had exclaimed, "Moi, fier républicain que blesse l'arrogance, Du riche impertinent je dédaigne l'appui", and in his letter to Voltaire of 30 January 1750 - also signed 'Citoyen de Genève' - he had referred to himself again (Correspondance complète, II, p. 124) as "un Républicain [qui] adore la liberté". Leigh makes the interesting point, however (see *ibid.*, p. 126), that Rousseau, who was a convert to Catholicism in 1750, knew that he had thereby lost his Genevan citizenship.

59. Rousseau to Malesherbes, 12 January 1762, Correspondance complète, X, p. 26.

60. See pp. 382-383 above.

degradation of mankind. I do not mean to suggest for a moment that this elaboration of a thesis is the same as the construction of a single doctrine whose interconnected parts are spread over the corpus of his writings, and I fear that I may have to stress that point, which I have already made here in several places, just one more time before I end this study. But the proposition which I should like to advance next is that it was in the course of the controversy surrounding the Premier Discours that Rousseau came to develop and refine the views he had propounded in that text, and to put them forward with greater precision and more sharpness of detail, until they came to constitute a coherent theory of the genesis and influence of culture and society which encapsulated what he termed his "grand système"⁶¹ of ideas in the period from 1750 to 1756. No fully armed Athena sprang from Rousseau's head when he was struck by the thunderbolt on reading the notice of the Académie de Dijon, and his true genius was sparked rather by the accumulation of smaller jolts fired by the critics of the Discours sur les sciences et les arts.

One of the major controversies about the Premier Discours has been focused upon the question of whether its main theme was actually devised by Diderot. This dispute need not detain us long. It is true that there are two favourable - albeit brief and, in one case, indirect - references to Diderot in the text, and it has even been established that the passage which Rousseau freely adapted from Plato's Apology took as its source Diderot's own translation of that dialogue.⁶² But these devices scarcely

61. See p. 431 below.

62. See O.C.III, p. 24 for a citation of a passage from Diderot's Pensées philosophiques (Assézat-Tourneux, I, p. 129). The implicit reference appears in connection with a quotation from Montaigne (see O.C.III, pp. 9, note, and 1243). For a commentary upon the passage most likely drawn from Diderot's translation of the Apology (now in the Fonds Vandeul in Paris) see Raymond Trousson, Socrate devant Voltaire, Diderot et Rousseau (Paris 1967), appendix. See also Havens, 'Rousseau's First Discourse and the Pensées philosophiques

betoken an actual rôle played by Diderot in the conception or composition of the Premier Discours, any more than does the work's express tribute to Voltaire,⁶³ who knew nothing at all about it until it was finished. The only reason that there has been so much discussion about the extent of Diderot's influence is that his friends - Marmontel, Morellet, and Meister, in particular - and his daughter - Mme de Vandeul - have all suggested that it was Diderot who proposed to Rousseau that he should answer the question 'Si le rétablissement des Sciences & des Arts a contribué à épurer les moeurs' in the negative. According to these commentators Rousseau had originally intended to reply in the affirmative.⁶⁴ Now even if this had been the case it does not constitute evidence that Diderot was in some way responsible for the work that Rousseau actually produced, but in any event there is no reason to suppose that the testimony of Diderot's supporters is in fact correct. For one thing, all their accounts of the conversation between the two men in which the subject was first broached - at that dramatic meeting at the prison of Vincennes in October 1749 - figure in the context of generally derogatory portraits of Rousseau which were produced several decades after Rousseau's notorious break with Diderot. They are, in short, highly partisan and unreliable, second- and third-hand, restatements of Diderot's recollections of a discussion with a man who had long since come to infuriate him. For another, Diderot himself never claimed to have given Rousseau the idea of responding in the negative to the question posed by the Académie de Dijon, and all the evidence we have from both his writings and those of Rousseau amounts to absolutely nothing more than the possibility that when Rousseau

of Diderot', Romanic Review, XXXIII (1942), pp. 356-359; Havens, pp. 187-188 and 235-236; and O.C.III, p. 1253.

63. See Havens, pp. 225-226, and O.C.III, pp. 21 and 1250-1251.

64. The relevant documents have been considered at length by several scholars on many occasions. See especially F. Vézinet, 'Rousseau ou Diderot?', RHLF, XXXI (1924), pp. 306-314; Krakeur [Crocker], 'Diderot's Influence on Rousseau's First Discours', PMLA, LII (1937), pp. 398-404; Havens, 'Diderot and the Composition of Rousseau's First Discourse'; Trousson, Socrate devant Voltaire, Diderot et Rousseau, appendix; and O.C.III, pp. xxvii-xxx.

had expressed his enthusiasm about the subject he had said "Vous prendrez le parti que personne ne prendra", with Rousseau having replied, "Vous avez raison".⁶⁵ Why these remarks should have been taken to mean that Rousseau had not thought of the idea himself is very difficult to understand. Thirdly, Diderot held a low opinion of the work itself, claiming that it was full of "sophismes" and that if he had written it instead, "J'aurais fait tout autre chose".⁶⁶ Fourthly, Diderot admitted - in terms which are remarkably similar to those employed by Rousseau at roughly the same time - that it was "l'étincelle qui partit de Dijon...qui l'enflamma",⁶⁷ and it is hard to imagine how Rousseau could have been enflamed by an idea which only a few minutes later he was persuaded to abandon for the sake of its opposite.⁶⁸ Finally, the substance of Rousseau's argument is actually incompatible with Diderot's own views for much the same reasons, which

65. Réfutation de 'L'Homme', Assézat-Tourneux, II, p. 285. This text, which first appeared in Assézat-Tourneux (though some pages had already been printed in a suppressed volume of the Correspondance littéraire in 1783), was drafted by Diderot several times between 1773 and 1778. Almost exactly the same lines figure, too, in his Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron (see Assézat-Tourneux, III, p. 98) of 1782, a work which forms the second edition of his Essai sur la vie de Sénèque of 1778. In the first edition Diderot had drawn a savage portrait of Rousseau, though without mentioning him by name; in the second edition, which appeared after Diderot had had an opportunity to read the first part of Rousseau's Confessions - whose impending publication he had dreaded for some years - the reference is explicit. Rousseau himself recounted the circumstances of their meeting at Vincennes just very briefly in his Confessions (see O.C.I., p. 351). Both in his letter to Malesherbes of 12 January 1762 (see the Correspondance complète, X, p. 26) and in Rousseau juge de Jean Jaques (see O.C.I., pp. 828-829) he reflected only upon the vision of a new world which he had had on reading the notice of the Académie de Dijon.

66. Réfutation de 'L'Homme', Assézat-Tourneux, II, p. 285. On the unlikely testimony of Grimm, however (see his letter to Gottsched of 25 November 1752, in the Correspondance complète, II, pp. 202-203), Diderot had earlier been converted to Rousseau's thesis.

67. Réfutation de 'L'Homme', p. 286. Cf. the following passage in Rousseau juge de Jean Jaques, O.C.I., p. 829: "De la vive effervescence quise fit alors dans son ame sortirent ces étincelles de génie qu'on a vu briller dans ses écrits durant dix ans de délire et de fièvre...Enflammé par la contemplation de ces grands objets, il les avoit toujours présents à sa pensée."

68. On this point see also Krakeur, 'Diderot's Influence on Rousseau's First Discours', pp. 402-403.

I have considered already,⁶⁹ that undermine any attempt to establish a major influence on his part in the composition of the Discours sur l'inégalité.

While this protracted controversy about the genesis of the Premier Discours is of small consequence the dispute which raged for a few short years immediately following its publication, and which was concentrated upon the validity of its central thesis, requires more attention. For a number of the points that Rousseau raised against the critics of his work were more perceptive and more clearly argued than the collection of borrowed propositions they were meant to defend, and it was only in the course of his confrontations with his detractors that both his ideas and his literary powers began to come to full fruition. "Je n'ai pas toujours eu le bonheur de penser comme je fais",⁷⁰ he proclaimed in the best of the vindications of the Discours sur les sciences et les arts, and the elements of his early social theory came to be expressed in a coherent fashion in the writings which he conceived in order to elaborate and refine his views rather than in their first formulation.⁷¹

Rousseau made no effort to reply to all the rejoinders to his essay, and there were some critiques - even among those published very shortly after the text had appeared - which probably escaped his notice altogether.⁷² Others he acknowledged more or less without

69. See ch. III, pp. 110-113.

70. 'Préface de Narcisse', O.C.II, p. 962.

71. This fact has not been stressed often enough by Rousseau scholars, though it has been noticed before by some commentators, for instance by Ira Wade in his review of the Havens edition of the Discours sur les sciences et les arts (see French Review, XXI (1948), p. 510). According to Wade, however, it is not Rousseau's replies to his critics so much as their remarks against him which "bore fruit in [his] later works". That seems to me a misconceived construction of an essentially correct idea.

72. Rousseau probably overlooked a number of the great many reviews which appeared in 1751 and 1752, not only in France but throughout enlightened Europe generally. Lessing's review of April 1751 in Das Neueste aus dem

comment, and he greeted d'Alembert's Discours préliminaire to the Encyclopédie - the most celebrated among the writings in which his ideas were challenged, and a kind of manifesto of the whole Enlightenment movement which Rousseau's text had seemingly condemned - with the words,

Je ne puis m'empêcher de penser avec plaisir que la postérité verra dans un tel monument que vous avez bien pensé de moi.⁷³

Six of the attacks levelled against the Premier Discours stand apart from all the rest, however, insofar as they were met by direct rebuttals from him.

In the first of these attacks - an anonymous work (possibly by Raynal⁷⁴) entitled the 'Observations sur le Discours qui a été

Reiche des Witzes of April 1751, for instance, seems not to have caught his attention at all - this despite the fact that he was aware of the hostile interest which his work had aroused in Germany (see the 'Préface de Narcisse', O.C.II, pp. 960, note, and 1865-1866, and Havens, p. 34).

73. Rousseau to d'Alembert, 26 June 1751, Correspondance complète, II, p. 160. To be fair, d'Alembert had described Rousseau (Encyclopédie, I, p. xxxiii) as "un Ecrivain éloquent & philosophe", but while his remarks were certainly polite and respectful in tone they were much more critical than commendatory in substance. Rousseau was rather selective when contending with his critics, and he hardly deigned to reply at all to some of the attacks against the Premier Discours - for instance those of the abbé Le Roy and René de Bonneval - which he had undoubtedly read. He did, however, continue to defend most of the views he had propounded in his work even after the main controversy about it was concluded, and his letters to Voltaire of 7 September 1755 (see the Correspondance complète, III, pp. 164-168) and to Franz Christof Scheyb of 15 July 1756 (see ibid., IV, pp. 26-29) comprise only the most important among the subsequent justifications he produced. To my knowledge just two (both incomplete) collections of the writings addressed to the Discours sur les sciences et les arts have ever been published, the first (the Recueil de toutes les pièces qui ont été publiées à l'occasion du Discours de M. J.J. Rousseau sur [les sciences et les arts] Gotha, 2 vols.) in 1753, the second (in vol. II of the Launay edition of Rousseau's Oeuvres complètes) in 1971. There is also a very useful discussion of the main contributions in Havens (see pp. 34-61).

74. Raynal had sent Rousseau an advance copy of this short essay in his capacity as editor of the Mercure de France, and Rousseau's reply, addressed to Raynal, was in fact printed in the same issue of the journal.

couronné à Dijon' and printed in the Mercure de France in June 1751 - there appeared three main points of criticism which Rousseau was to take into account. Firstly, the author complained, Rousseau had not been sufficiently explicit about the precise point which marked our moral decline, for he appeared to "préférer la situation où était l'Europe avant le renouvellement des sciences"⁷⁵ - a state which was truly worse than that of ignorance because it had been dominated by the jargon and false learning of scholasticism. Secondly, he noted that with regard to the question of luxury Rousseau "[qui] n'ignore pas tout ce qu'il y aurait à dire là-dessus"⁷⁶ had been too vague and cursory in his discussion. Thirdly - and perhaps most importantly - he regretted that Rousseau had failed to offer any practical conclusions which followed from his thesis and had neglected to propose a remedy for the condition he described.

Quelle conclusion pratique peut-on tirer de la thèse que l'auteur soutient? Quand on lui accorderait tout ce qu'il avance sur le préjudice du trop grand nombre de savants...comme au contraire sur le trop petit nombre de laboureurs; c'est, dis-je, ce qu'on lui accordera sans peine: mais quel usage en retirera-t-on? Comment remédier à ce désordre, tant du côté des princes que de celui des particuliers?⁷⁷

The second attack was the 'Réponse' drafted by King Stanislas of Poland - no doubt with the assistance of his confessor Father Joseph de Menoux - published in the Mercure de France in September 1751. This work contained three further charges of some substance to which Rousseau offered a reply. The first was that ignorance of vice is

75. Launay, II, p. 69.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

not the same as virtue⁷⁸ and that the men who inhabited the world before the advent of our arts and sciences were not at all innocent but rather ferocious, cruel, and "transportés par des passions violentes".⁷⁹ The second, which followed directly from the first, was that Rousseau had drawn an entirely imaginary portrait of "des hommes sans défauts, sans désirs, sans passions" which was nothing more than an "idée pour se faire illusion".⁸⁰ The third was that the arts and sciences have not been responsible for such moral corruption as has in fact occurred in human history, for that development has been brought about by an excess of wealth rather than learning.

Non, ce n'est pas des sciences, c'est du sein des richesses que sont nés de tout temps la mollesse et le luxe; et dans aucun temps les richesses n'ont été l'apanage ordinaire des savants.⁸¹

Some of these ideas were to feature again in the later attacks, for instance in the third, by the mathematician Joseph Gautier, whose own 'Réfutation' appeared in the Mercure de France in October 1751, and in the fourth, the first Discours sur les avantages des sciences et des arts of Charles Borde - with whom Rousseau had become friendly in Lyon in the early 1740s and to whom he had addressed his 'Epître à M. Bordes' - which was printed in the same journal in December 1751.⁸² Gautier, moreover, who was a historian as well, introduced a number of critical observations which challenged Rousseau's scholarship - contending,

78. See *ibid.*, p. 73.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

82. The essay had already been read at a meeting of the Académie de Lyon in June 1751.

among other things, that he really ought not to have praised the Scythians who were in fact a fierce and savage people which displayed traits that "font horreur à la nature",⁸³ adding, too, that some of the ancient figures, particularly Seneca, to whom he paid his tribute had maintained that "les belles-lettres préparent à la vertu"⁸⁴ - a thesis quite the opposite from that which Rousseau had ascribed to them. Gautier also made at least one remark which greatly rankled with Rousseau, for he charged that the author of the Premier Discours was the apologist of ignorance who appeared to favour the destruction of culture, the burning of libraries, and a general return to a rustic form of barbarism built upon the ruins of civilisation.

L'auteur que je combats est l'apologiste de l'ignorance: il paraît souhaiter qu'on brûle les bibliothèques; il avoue qu'il heurte de front tout ce qui fait aujourd'hui l'admiration des hommes, et qu'il ne peut s'attendre qu'à un blâme universel; mais il compte sur les suffrages des siècles à venir. Il pourra les remporter, n'en doutons point, quand l'Europe retombera dans la barbarie; quand sur les ruines des beaux arts éplorés, triompheront insolemment l'ignorance et la rusticité.⁸⁵

Borde, for his part, reiterated the point first made by Stanislas that Rousseau's portrait of an uncorrupted state was simply an illusion, remarking that

on est désabusé depuis longtemps de la chimère de l'âge d'or; partout la barbarie a précédé l'établissement des sociétés; c'est une vérité prouvée par les annales de tous les peuples.⁸⁶

83. Launay, II, p. 95.

84. Ibid., p. 99. In the Discours sur les sciences et les arts (see O.C.III, pp. 14 and 1246) Rousseau had quoted a passage from Seneca which he actually transcribed from Montaigne. See also Havens, p. 203, note 151.

85. Launay, II, p. 94.

86. Ibid., p. 134.

He also repeated the charge that luxury "naît immédiatement des richesses, et non des sciences et des arts",⁸⁷ and he contended, too, that the advancement of culture and the growth of empires follow much the same path and that the arts and sciences, so far from contributing to the decline of our political institutions,

périssent infailliblement, [frappés] des mêmes coups; en sorte que l'on peut observer que les progrès des lettres et leur déclin sont ordinairement dans une juste proportion avec la fortune et l'abaissement des empires.⁸⁸

In addition to these claims, moreover, Borde also put forward a number of further objections which seemed to follow from them. Firstly, he observed that since the fall of nations was not attributable to the progress of culture it must be explained as the effect of some other agency, and in his view that ultimate cause could only be political in character.

Ces sanglantes révolutions ont-elles donc quelque chose de commun avec les progrès des lettres? partout je vois des causes purement politiques.⁸⁹

Secondly, he maintained that Rousseau had been unwise to praise the military prowess of uncivilised peoples, since whatever conquests the barbarian nations might have made were due not to their innocence but to their moral injustice.⁹⁰ The "qualités guerrières"⁹¹ which Rousseau

87. Ibid., p. 137.

88. Ibid., p. 136.

89. Ibid.

90. See *ibid.*, p. 140.

91. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 24.

had cherished were nothing more than "les moeurs grossières" in the judgment of Borde, "des vertus animales peu conformes à la dignité de notre être".⁹² It was only "une barbarie passée de mode", he concluded,

de supposer que les hommes ne sont nés que pour se détruire.⁹³

In his Second Discours sur les avantages des sciences et des arts, finally - a text published in 1753⁹⁴ that was to comprise the sixth of the attacks to which Rousseau replied - Borde made this last point about the savagery of primitive men more general by suggesting that the vices which now mark the behaviour of individuals in civilised society were remnants of our earlier barbarism rather than attributes that had arisen from a surfeit of culture. Imperfect knowledge, he declared, can only yield defective virtue.

Que des connoissances imparfaites produisent des Vertus qui le sont aussi; il n'y a rien là que de conforme à mes principes: nos Sciences sont au berceau, nous tenons à la barbarie par mille côtés: n'avons-nous pas encore des haines de Nations, des Guerres, des Combats singuliers? tant d'ignorance qui nous reste ne peut être sans beaucoup de vices.⁹⁵

The fifth attack was the 'Réfutation' of Claude-Nicolas Le Cat - a professor of anatomy and surgery and permanent secretary of the

92. Launay, II, p. 134.

93. Ibid., p. 140.

94. Borde's Second Discours actually dates from 1752, for in August of that year it was read at two meetings of the Académie de Lyon. It was printed in Avignon in the spring of the following year, by which time Borde had had an opportunity to read the 'Préface de Narcisse' and to incorporate a note about it in the published version of his text.

95. Havens, p. 55.

Académie de Rouen - which appeared in the spring of 1752.⁹⁶ In this work, one of the longest of the refutations of the Premier Discours and certainly the most deceitful - since Le Cat pretended to be a member of the Académie de Dijon who had voted against Rousseau's prize essay⁹⁷ - nearly every point raised earlier by the other critics was recapitulated. Indeed, Le Cat's focus upon what he termed "un joli conte de fée...ce siècle d'or",⁹⁸ and upon the failure of Rousseau to distinguish properly between 'courage' and 'férocité',⁹⁹ and upon the idea that "le luxe est un abus des richesses que corrige les sciences et la raison",¹⁰⁰ all indicate that he owed a rather special debt to Borde's first Discours sur les avantages des sciences et des arts. Though Rousseau produced a rejoinder to Le Cat's work there were no new points of substance in it which either troubled or inspired him. Nevertheless, in another 'Réfutation' prepared by Le Cat at roughly the same time - in this case a rebuttal of Rousseau's reply to the 'Réponse' of Stanislas - he provided the philosopher with a whole new front for the development of his ideas. For just as the unknown author of the first 'Observations' had challenged Rousseau to be specific about the temporal point of our moral decline, Le Cat, in his endorsement of the essay by King Stanislas, challenged him to designate precisely which areas of culture were subject to his imputations. Surely Rousseau did not propose to include music among the arts and sciences which had brought about

96. See the Correspondance complète, II, p. 194, and Havens, p. 48.

97. For the Academy's repudiation of this fraud, see the Correspondance complète, II, appendice 73, pp. 298-300.

98. Launay, II, p. 168. See also *ibid.*, p. 163.

99. See *ibid.*, p. 162.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

the debasement of morals, he exclaimed, and the main contributor of the articles on music for the Encyclopédie must know better than anyone else how useful and advantageous this subject has been for humanity and how, at the very least, it must constitute an exception to his general thesis.

Nous lui demanderons le dénombrement précis de ces sciences, de ces arts, objet de ces imputations. Nous espérons qu'il ne mettra point dans la liste la musique, que les censeurs des arts regardent comme une science des plus futiles....M. Rousseau connaît mieux qu'un autre ses utilités, ses avantages, puisqu'il en fait son étude, puisqu'il s'est chargé de remplir cette brillante partie des travaux encyclopédiques.¹⁰¹

Rousseau produced his replies to these attacks in various ways between 1751 and 1753. His 'Lettre à Raynal' was printed in the Mercure de France in June 1751,¹⁰² his 'Réponse au roi de Pologne' appeared as a brochure in October 1751,¹⁰³ his 'Lettre à Grimm' ['Réponse à M. Gautier'] was published in the same format in the same month,¹⁰⁴ his 'Dernière réponse' came out together with the first

101. Ibid., p. 93.

102. See note 74 above.

103. See the Correspondance complète, II, p. 173. The 'Réponse' of King Stanislas had been published anonymously, though there can be no doubt but that Rousseau knew the identity of its author (see O.C.III, pp. 1257-1258). In his reply (ibid., p. 56) Rousseau even managed to incorporate the following oblique reference to his adversary: "Il y a en Europe un grand Prince, et ce qui est bien plus, un vertueux Citoyen, qui dans la patrie qu'il a adoptée et qu'il rend heureuse, vient de former plusieurs institutions en faveur des Lettres. Il a fait en cela une chose très-digne de sa sagesse et de sa vertu."

104. See the Correspondance complète, II, p. 175. Rousseau's work was addressed to Grimm on the pretence that Gautier did not really merit a reply. Thus, Rousseau remarked in his text (O.C.III, p. 68), "Je ne répliquerai...pas à M. Gautier, c'est un point résolu". A decade later, after Rousseau had become estranged from Grimm, he instructed Duchesne to remove Grimm's name from the title-page of the text which would appear in the collected edition of his writings. An early draft of Rousseau's 'Réponse à M. Gautier' survives in Neuchâtel Ms R 50 (ancienne cote 7872b).

Discours of Borde in April 1752,¹⁰⁵ his 'Lettre à Lecat' was printed separately in or about May 1752, and his 'Préface d'une seconde lettre à Bordes' was probably drafted in the late autumn of 1753, though it remained unpublished until the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Around the end of 1752, moreover, Rousseau also composed a general defence of his ideas in the Premier Discours - which he prefixed to his theatrical comedy, Narcisse¹⁰⁷ - so that we can in fact count seven principal rejoinders to his critics during this period, which altogether comprise a collection of writings that is nearly three times the length of the text whose arguments they were designed to reinforce. In these vindications of his work, moreover, Rousseau adopted a number of different styles and tones of discourse and expression, in order, for instance, to display both his respect for Stanislas and his contempt for Gautier to their best advantage. But just as Rousseau's critics borrowed some of their ideas from one another he replied by treating these ideas as roughly interchangeable, and he even managed to address a few of his rebuttals to works in which the relevant charges had not been made.

With regard to the historical points that had been raised by Gautier, Rousseau seemed rather uncomfortable and perhaps even out of his depth. He took no notice at all of Gautier's objections to his

105. A rough draft of part of the 'Dernière réponse' survives in Neuchâtel Ms R 45 (ancienne cote 7869 - see the Correspondance complète, II, appendice 84, pp. 321-322).

106. The 'Préface d'une seconde lettre à Bordes' constitutes part of Genève Ms fr. 228. It was printed for the first time in Streckeisen-Moultou.

107. For an account of the composition and substance of this play, to which the preface was only added at the last moment, see O.C.II, pp. 1858-1865. Rousseau may have had some conception of writing it even before 1730 and undoubtedly drafted it several times during the 1730s and afterwards. It was first staged at the Comédie Française in December 1752.

views about Seneca and the Scythians, and though he did confront him briefly on a few issues dealing with the interpretation of ancient history¹⁰⁸ he proclaimed that he would not pursue such matters of scholarship and erudition on the grounds that the problems which they were meant to solve, and the questions they were meant to clarify, would thus become only more complex and obscure.

Les Brochures se transforment en Volumes, les Livres se multiplient, et la question s'oublie: c'est le sort des disputes de Littérature, qu'après des in-Folio d'éclaircissemens, on finit toujours par ne sçavoir plus où l'on en est: ce n'est pas la peine de commencer.¹⁰⁹

When Gautier, in turn, produced his own reply to Rousseau's 'Réponse' he concluded that the whole of Rousseau's case was nothing more than

une déclamation vague, appuyée sur une métaphysique fausse, et sur des applications de faits historiques, qui se détruisent par mille faits contraires.¹¹⁰

Rousseau, however, took no notice of this further charge, and Gautier's second attack remained unanswered. The main reason for Rousseau's neglect of detailed historical narrative had in any case already been announced in his 'Lettre à Raynal'. For when the author of the 'Observations' had challenged him to specify precisely which historical circumstances marked the beginning of our moral decline Rousseau retorted that his real aim had been to put forward a general thesis about the connection between the progress of the arts and sciences and

108. See, for instance (in Launay, II, p. 96, and O.C.III, p. 65), the dispute between Gautier and Rousseau with regard to the rôle played by Carneades in fomenting Cato's suspicions about the merits of Greek philosophy.

109. 'Réponse à M. Gautier', O.C.III, p. 61.

110. 'Observations du même M. Gautier sur la lettre de M. Rousseau à M. Grimm', Launay, II, p. 110.

the decadence of morals. He had not been essentially concerned to trace the course of any particular set of events.

Il auroit du, disent-ils¹¹¹... marquer le point d'où il part, pour désigner l'époque de la décadence. J'ai fait plus; j'ai rendu ma proposition générale: j'ai assigné ce premier degré de la décadence des mœurs au premier moment de la culture des Lettres dans tous les pays du monde, et j'ai trouvé le progrès de ces deux choses toujours en proportion.¹¹²

Rousseau was to pursue this theme of generality much further in his Discours sur l'inégalité where he later focused his attention not upon the untainted civilisations of ancient times but rather upon the nature of primeval man and upon a condition of humanity which was so remote that no historical research could possibly uncover its true features.¹¹³ After the publication of the Premier Discours Rousseau became progressively more concerned with the ultimate sources of our decadence and less with its particular manifestations in different cultures, and it was a paradoxical quality of the approach which he adopted that while he gradually set his sights upon our most distant past his evidence came to be drawn from an increasingly contemporary world - a world that was populated by savages who had thus far escaped the miseries of human history rather than by the heroes and sages of antiquity. In these years, that is, his fidelity to the venerable Lives of Plutarch came to be counterbalanced, we might say, by his enthusiasm for the Histoire générale des voyages of Prévost.¹¹⁴ As

111. Since the anonymous author of the 'Observations' incorporated a few reflections of "des personnes bien intentionnées" (probably Raynal himself again) who were equally unidentified, Rousseau also included some remarks addressed to these persons in his 'Lettre à Raynal'.

112. 'Lettre à Raynal', O.C.III, pp. 31-32. Cf. the passage in the fourth paragraph of the 'Observations' which appears in Launay, II, p. 69.

113. See ch. III, pp. 225-226.

114. On Rousseau's admiration for Plutarch, see especially note 47 above. With regard to his debt to Prévost, see ch. III, notes 29, 94, 104, and 110.

the divisions between man's nature and his culture which Rousseau perceived grew sharper and bolder the arguments that he put forward to characterize these differences also came to be more general, and in the course of the development of his early social theory the shortcomings of his historical scholarship were soon to be supplanted by the profundity of his speculative insights.

This point about the generality of Rousseau's thesis seems to me important for our understanding of the ideas about the natural state of man which he formed in the period between the compositions of his first and second Discours. Borde and Le Cat, for instance, had joined Stanislas in charging that his conception of a golden age was a chimera, but they had thereby confused a philosophical abstraction for an historical illusion. Indeed, the view of our primitive condition which Rousseau had advanced was, he protested in his 'Dernière réponse', no more chimerical in substance than the concept of virtue itself.

On m'assûre qu'on est depuis long-tems désabusé de la chimère de l'Age d'or. Que n'ajoûtoit-on encore qu'il y a long-tems qu'on est désabusé de la chimère de la vertu?¹¹⁵

In his 'Lettre à Lecat' Rousseau replied to a question which had first been put to him by the author of the 'Observations' by reiterating that he did not in fact regard the centuries of medieval barbarism as superior to the renaissance of arts and sciences which had come afterwards; on the contrary, he maintained yet again, such a state was "pire que l'ignorance".¹¹⁶ But his critics had misconceived his aim

115. 'Dernière réponse', O.C.III, p. 80.

116. 'Lettre à Lecat', *ibid.*, p. 101. Cf. the passage from the Discours sur les sciences et les arts, *ibid.*, p. 6 cited on p. 393 above.

when they imagined that he had juxtaposed past and present epochs in order to identify the features of a better world which might be copied or resuscitated. His arguments had been designed to establish the causes of our corruption but not to plead for the rescue of our lost innocence. Both in his 'Réponse au roi de Pologne' and in his 'Préface de Narcisse' Rousseau observed that a people which had once been degraded could never return to a virtuous state. "Un peuple vicieux ne revient jamais à la vertu",¹¹⁷ he exclaimed, and this was a thesis to which he continued to adhere throughout his life.¹¹⁸ Above all, Rousseau took great offence at Gautier's accusation that he was the apologist of ignorance who appeared to believe that our culture should be crushed and our libraries burnt.¹¹⁹ "Quand un peuple est une fois corrompu à un certain point", he asked in the 'Préface de Narcisse',

soit que les sciences y aient contribué ou non, faut-il les bannir ou l'en préserver pour le rendre meilleur ou pour l'empêcher de devenir pire? C'est une...question dans laquelle je me suis positivement déclaré pour la négative.¹²⁰

We must not plunge Europe back into a state of barbarism, he contended in his 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', and in each of these two works, as well as in the 'Dernière réponse', he insisted that he was not advocating the obliteration of our libraries, academies, or universities, or, indeed, the destruction of society itself.

117. 'Préface de Narcisse', O.C.II, pp. 971-972. The passage from the 'Réponse au roi de Pologne' is cited in ch. III, p. 229.

118. See ch. III, pp. 229-231.

119. See p. 407 above.

120. 'Préface de Narcisse', O.C.II, p. 971.

Je ne proposois point de bouleverser la société actuelle, de brûler les Bibliothèques et tous les livres, de détruire les Colléges et les Académies: et je dois ajouter ici que je ne propose point non plus de réduire les hommes à se contenter du simple nécessaire.¹²¹

Rousseau was impressed by the force of some of the objections which his critics had raised, and in at least two cases he was sufficiently persuaded of their cogency to modify and even abandon certain features of his theory. Stanislas had challenged his account of the connection between virtue and ignorance and had maintained that the uncultured men of antiquity whom he had praised were really more brutal and fierce in their behaviour than innocent and benign. Rousseau agreed that there was a good deal of truth in this contention, and he proposed to accommodate it by drawing a distinction between two forms of ignorance, of which only one was odious and terrible - for the reasons Stanislas had outlined - whereas the other was reasonable, modest, and pure.

L'Auteur attaque...les loüanges que j'ai données à l'ignorance....Je ne nie point qu'il ait raison, mais je ne crois pas avoir tort. Il ne faut qu'une distinction très-juste et très-vraie pour nous concilier. Il y a une ignorance féroce et brutale, qui nait d'un mauvais coeur et d'un esprit faux; une ignorance criminelle...qui multiplie les vices ...cette ignorance est celle que l'Auteur attaqueIl y a une autre sorte d'ignorance raisonnable... une ignorance modeste, qui nait d'un vif amour pour la vertu...une douce et précieuse ignorance, trésor d'une ame pure....Voilà l'ignorance que j'ai louée.¹²²

Yet since Rousseau did not attempt to explain how the difference between

121. 'Dernière réponse', O.C.III, p. 95. The comparable passage in the 'Réponse au roi de Pologne' appears in *ibid.*, pp. 55-56 (see ch. III, p. 229). In the 'Préface de Narcisse' it appears in O.C.II, p. 972.

122. 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', O.C.III, pp. 53-54.

these two kinds of ignorance might have arisen his reply was not at all convincing, and in his later writings he was more hesitant about ascribing the moral innocence of primitive men to their mere lack of learning.¹²³

He regarded Borde's comments about his emphasis upon the military prowess of barbarians as even more significant,¹²⁴ and though he attempted to meet this point by drawing another rather lame distinction - this time between a commitment to war for the sake of conquest, on the one hand, and a willingness to fight for the defence of liberty, on the other - he allowed that soldiers were not generally so worthy of our admiration as hunters, labourers, and shepherds, and he proposed that they should be stricken from the list of persons whose contributions to humanity were essentially more commendable than the achievements of artists and men of letters.

Quel spectacle nous présenteroit le Genre humain composé uniquement de laboureurs, de soldats, de chasseurs, et de bergers?¹²⁵ Un spectacle infiniment plus beau que celui du Genre humain composé de Cuisiniers, de Poètes, d'Imprimeurs, d'Orphèvres, de Peintres et de Musiciens. Il n'y a que le mot soldat qu'il faut rayer du premier Tableau. La Guerre est quelquefois un devoir, et n'est point faite pour être un métier.

123. That had not even been his intention in the Premier Discours, he protested in a note of the 'Réponse au roi de Pologne' (ibid., p. 54): "Si j'avois dit qu'il suffit d'être ignorant pour être vertueux; ce ne seroit pas la peine de me répondre; et par la même raison, je me croirai très-dispensé de répondre moi-même à ceux qui perdront leur tems à me soutenir le contraire."

124. In his 'Fragment biographique' (O.C.I, p. 1114) Rousseau later reflected that Borde alone among all the critics of his Premier Discours "savait penser et écrivoit bien...il publia non contre moi comme les autres, mais contre mon sentiment deux discours pleins d'esprit et de vues et très agréables à lire".

125. Cf. Borde's first Discours sur les avantages des sciences et des arts, Launay, II, p. 134.

Tout homme doit être soldat pour la défense de sa liberté; nul ne doit l'être pour envahir celle d'autrui.¹²⁶

Following Borde's criticism, however, Rousseau never again portrayed the ideal of military valour in the shining colours he had employed in the Premier Discours. There he had remarked upon the glorious "réputation guerrière" and "vertu militaire"¹²⁷ of the ancient Romans, but in the Discours sur l'inégalité and afterwards he was to portray all wars as criminal, murderous, execrable, and - for the combatants themselves - pointless.

Les Guerres Nationales, les Batailles, les meurtres, les représailles...font fremir la Nature et choquent la raison....Les plus honnêtes gens apprirent à compter parmi leurs devoirs celui d'égorger leurs semblables; on vit enfin les hommes se massacrer par milliers sans savoir pourquoi.¹²⁸

While Rousseau thus made a few concessions in the face of these attacks he turned other major charges to more productive use in the development of his theory. This is particularly true of his replies to the claims of Stanislas and Borde that the moral degradation of man was attributable to an excess of wealth rather than learning, and it also applies to his response to the statement - again made by Borde - that the decline of nations was due ultimately to political causes. In his 'Réponse au roi de Pologne' Rousseau acknowledged the significance of an "objection considérable" which he ascribed to d'Alembert, to the effect that several factors apart from the sciences - factors such as the customs of different peoples, their climate,

126. 'Dernière réponse', O.C.III, p. 82.

127. Discours sur les sciences et les arts, O.C.III, p. 23.

128. Discours sur l'inégalité, *ibid.*, pp. 178-179. See also the passages from the second Discours discussed in ch. III, pp. 189-191, and Havens, pp. 44 and 205-206.

laws, economies, and governments - must all have figured in the formation of their particular moral traits, and he remarked that the problems which d'Alembert had raised in this manner required much consideration.

Je ne dois point passer ici sous silence une objection considérable qui m'a déjà été faite par un Philosophe: N'est-ce point, me dit-on..., au climat, au tempérament... à l'oeconomie du gouvernement, aux Coûtumes, aux Loix, à toute autre cause qu'aux Sciences qu'on doit attribuer cette différence qu'on remarque quelquefois dans les moeurs en différens pays et en différens tems? Cette question renferme de grandes vuës et demanderoit des éclaircissemens trop étendus pour convenir à cet écrit.¹²⁹

It is true that he also observed in his 'Réponse au roi de Pologne' that a full discussion of such matters could lead him "trop loin",¹³⁰ but there can be no doubt of the fact that in his replies to his critics he began to address himself to the "éclaircissemens...étendus" which these points, and those of Stanislas and Borde as well, brought to his notice. For far more than ever before he came to set his sights upon the economic, political, and social agents which must have had a substantial effect upon the nature and history of our corruption.

In his 'Dernière réponse', for instance, he noted that luxury - which he had earlier condemned as the principal cause of our decadence¹³¹ - was itself due largely to the decline of agriculture in the modern world.

129. 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', O.C.III, pp. 42-43. It is interesting to note that in this passage Rousseau credits d'Alembert with a rather more ample and detailed objection than he had actually made. For in his Discours préliminaire to the Encyclopédie (I, p. xxxiii) d'Alembert had only asked Rousseau to consider whether "la plûpart des maux qu'il attribue aux Sciences & aux Arts ne sont point dûs à des causes toutes différentes, dont l'énumération seroit aussi longue que délicate".

130. 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', O.C.III, p. 43. See also p. 428 below.

131. See pp. 387-388 above. See also the following passage from the 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', O.C.III, p. 51: "Le luxe corrompt tout; et le riche qui en jouit, et le misérable qui le convoite."

Le luxe peut être nécessaire pour donner du pain aux pauvres: mais, s'il n'y avoit point de luxe, il n'y auroit point de pauvres. Il occupe les Citoyens oisifs. Et pourquoi y a-t'il des Citoyens oisifs? Quand l'agriculture étoit en honneur, il n'y avoit ni misère ni oisiveté, et il y avoit beaucoup moins de vices.¹³²

Again in the 'Dernière réponse' and soon afterwards in the 'Préface de Narcisse', moreover, he drew attention to the significance of private property as a principal source of the miseries which have marked the history of mankind. In the first of these two works he dealt mainly with the concept of ownership and with the brutal division of the earth between masters and slaves which the practical application of that concept entailed, largely in order to challenge Borde's thesis that men in their most primitive state must already have been fierce and aggressive.

Avant que ces mots affreux de tien et de mien fussent inventés; avant qu'il y eût de cette espèce d'hommes cruels et brutaux qu'on appelle maîtres, et de cette autre espèce d'hommes fripons et menteurs qu'on appelle esclaves; avant qu'il y eût des hommes assez abominables pour oser avoir du superflu pendant que d'autres hommes meurent de faim; avant qu'une dépendance mutuelle les eût tous forcés à devenir fourbes, jaloux et traîtres; je voudrois bien qu'on m'expliquât en quoi pouvoient consister ces vices, ces crimes qu'on leur reproche avec tant d'emphase.¹³³

In the 'Préface de Narcisse', on the other hand, he concentrated rather upon the fact that the moral attributes of the savage were markedly superior to those of the European because savages were unscathed by the

132. 'Dernière réponse', O.C.III, p. 79. Rousseau had been rather less forthright in his views about agriculture in the Discours sur les sciences et les arts (see *ibid.*, pp. 26-27). In the Discours sur l'inégalité, on the other hand (see the passages discussed in ch. III, pp. 215-216), he later maintained that the rise of agriculture had contributed to our corruption.

133. 'Dernière réponse', O.C.III, p. 80.

habitual vices of greed, envy, and deception which in the civilised world caused men of property to scorn and to make enemies of one another.

Un Sauvage est un homme, et un Européen est un homme. Le demi philosophe conclut aussitôt que l'un ne vaut pas mieux que l'autre; mais.... Parmi les Sauvages...l'amour de la société et le soin de leur commune défense sont les seuls liens qui les unissent: ce mot de propriété, qui coûte tant de crimes à nos honnêtes gens, n'a presque aucun sens parmi eux: ils n'ont entre eux nulle discussion d'intérêt qui les divise; rien ne les porte à se tromper l'un l'autre....Je le dis à regret; l'homme de bien est celui qui n'a besoin de tromper personne, et le Sauvage est cet homme-là.¹³⁴

In these two passages directed against the critics of his Discours sur les sciences et les arts, then, we find the first major statements anywhere in Rousseau's writings of the thesis which he was later to expound in the form of a challenge - on that occasion to Locke's theory of property - in the Discours sur l'inégalité.

Rousseau now began to look more closely at the rôle played by political factors as well. The evils of contemporary society had been described before by many figures, he reflected in the 'Préface de Narcisse', but while others had perceived the problem he had in fact uncovered its causes, and the essential truth he had learnt by 1753 was that all our vices stem ultimately not from our nature but rather from the ways in which we have been badly governed.

Je sais que les déclamateurs ont dit cent fois tout cela; mais ils le disoient en déclamant, et moi je le dis sur des raisons; ils ont aperçu le mal, et moi j'en découvre les causes, et je fais voir surtout une chose très-consolante et très-utile en montrant que tous ces vices n'appartiennent pas tant à l'homme, qu'à l'homme mal gouverné.¹³⁵

134. 'Préface de Narcisse', O.C.II, pp. 969-970, note.

135. Ibid., p. 969.

He was to make the same point again about two years later in the 'Economie politique' where he remarked that "les peuples sont à la longue ce que le gouvernement les fait être".¹³⁶ He was to stress it once more in the following decade in the Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont where he proclaimed that the counterfeit behaviour of civilised men was caused by

notre ordre social, qui, de tout point contraire à la nature que rien ne détruit, la tyrannise sans cesse, et lui fait sans cesse réclamer ses droits.¹³⁷

And around 1770 he was to reflect in his Confessions that the truth of this principle had already been apparent to him at the time that he had been stationed in Venice nearly thirty years earlier, when he had witnessed the dire consequences for its people which followed from the defects of that city's government and when he had also conceived the plan to treat the subject at length in a work which for awhile he was to call the Institutions politiques.¹³⁸

A Venise j'avois eu quelqu'occasion de remarquer les défauts de ce Gouvernement si vanté. Depuis lors, mes vues s'étoient beaucoup étendues par l'étude historique de la morale. J'avois vu que tout tenoit radicalement à la politique, et que, de quelque façon qu'on s'y prit, aucun peuple ne seroit jamais que ce que la nature de son Gouvernement le feroit être.¹³⁹

136. O.C.III, p. 251.

137. O.C.IV, p. 966.

138. See ch. II, p. 81.

139. O.C.I, p. 404. In Emile, Livre IV (O.C.IV, p. 646, note) Rousseau portrayed the government of Venice as "tyrannique", and in the Contrat social, where he commented upon the nature and character of its political institutions in some detail, he described the republic as "depuis longtemps un Etat dissout" (III.v, O.C.III, p. 407, note) whose ruling council was "un Tribunal de sang, horrible également aux Patriciens et au Peuple...qui, loin de protéger hautement les loix, ne sert plus, après leur avilissement,

In the 'Préface de Narcisse', then, we find the first statement of an idea whose elaboration in several contexts and in different forms was to occupy a major part of Rousseau's life and works. In the years between the compositions of the first and second Discours, moreover, he addressed himself to problems pertaining to the moral effects of our political relations on several other occasions, too, as for example in this fragment about liberty which clearly anticipates one of the central themes of the Discours sur l'inégalité.

Ce n'est que dans la vie solitaire qu'on peut trouver la liberté et l'innocence. et l'on doit tenir pour certain que l'époque du premier établissement des sociétés a été celle de la naissance du crime et de l'esclavage. Depuis que le monde a des maîtres la corruption est devenue générale ainsi que la servitude. et c'est celle-ci qui a amené à l'autre.¹⁴⁰

With regard to the contribution made by wealth and riches in the history of our moral decline Rousseau soon showed himself to be at least partly in accord with the ideas of Stanislas and Borde. At some unknown date in the mid-1750s he was later to address himself directly to this problem in a short 'Discours sur les richesses' in which he denounced those

prétendus sages, vils adulateurs de l'opulence, plus vils détracteurs de la pauvreté...qui savent prudemment accommoder la philosophie au goût de ceux qui la paient.¹⁴¹

qu'à porter dans les ténèbres des coups qu'on n'ose appercevoir" (IV.v, *ibid.*, pp. 454-455). See also Rousseau's illustrations from Venetian history in the chapter (III.x, *ibid.*, p. 421, note) of the Contrat social entitled 'De l'abus du gouvernement, et de sa pente à dégénérer'. For the contrast which he drew between the republics of Venice, on the one hand, and Geneva, on the other, see the Contrat social, IV.iii, *ibid.*, pp. 442-443. The most notable of the dispatches pertaining to this subject which he drafted when he was secretary to the French ambassador in Venice appears in O.C.III, pp. 1075-1077 (see also *ibid.*, p. ccliii).

140. Pichois-Pintard, p. 42.

141. Launay, II, p. 331. The 'Discours sur les richesses' comprises the bulk of Neuchâtel Ms R 31 (ancienne cote 7855). It was first published in an edition by Félix Bovet in the Revue suisse in 1853.

But already in a fragment on 'Le luxe, le commerce et les arts' which dates from around 1753 he asserted that the cupidity of man was largely a manifestation of his desire to set himself above his neighbours, so that the introduction of gold in human affairs had been unavoidably accompanied by the inequality of its distribution from which there then issued the vice of poverty and the predatory humiliation of the poor by the rich.

Dés l'instant que l'usage de l'or a été connu des h[ommes] ils se sont tous efforcés d'en amasser beaucoup et les succès ont du naturellement répondre aux divers degrés d'industrie et d'avidité des concurrents, c'est à dire être fort inégaux. Cette première inégalité jointe à l'avarice et aux talens qui l'avoient produite a du encore augmenter par sa propre force; car un des vices des sociétés établies c'est que la difficulté d'acquérir croit toujours en raison des besoins et que c'est le superflu même des riches qui les met en état de dépouiller le pauvre de son nécessaire.¹⁴²

Yet if we are to recognise the part that has been played by the accumulation of riches in the moral corruption of mankind we must not suppose that this has been the principal cause of our decline. On the contrary, Rousseau declared in his 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', wealth and poverty are relative terms which depend upon the nature and extent of inequality in society, so that the crucial factor in all cases is actually the degree of the inequality which prevails rather than the amount of wealth that is available. It was in this fashion that Rousseau set about the task of rearranging the genealogy of vices which he had portrayed in the Premier Discours, and he now proposed that pride of place in the dismal order of our corruption should be granted to inequality, which was then followed by wealth, which in turn made possible the rise of luxury and indolence, which then gave rise to the

142. O.C.III, p. 522. This fragment, which forms a part of Neuchâtel Ms R 30 (ancienne cote 7854) was first published in Streckeisen-Moultou.

arts, on the one hand, and sciences, on the other. "Je n'avois pas dit...que le luxe fut né des Sciences", he protested,

mais qu'ils étoient nés ensemble et que l'un n'alloit guères sans l'autre. Voici comment j'arrangerois cette généalogie. La première source du mal est l'inégalité; de l'inégalité sont venuës les richesses; car ces mots de pauvre et de riche sont relatifs, et par tout où les hommes seront égaux, il n'y aura ni riches ni pauvres. Des richesses sont nés le luxe et l'oisiveté; du luxe sont venus les beaux Arts, et de l'oisiveté les Sciences.¹⁴³

Here, then, was a new version of the argument of the Premier Discours which placed the arts and sciences last - and not first, as his critics supposed.

At least part of the reason for this modification of Rousseau's views is apparent from the 'Préface de Narcisse' where he suggested that while the progress of the arts and sciences has been responsible for a whole train of vices and evils in human history it is fundamentally our desire for learning rather than the achievements of learned men which undermine our morals in civilised society. For our pursuit of culture has been above all else an expression of our will to distinguish ourselves from our neighbours and compatriots. It is not so much our devotion to excellence as our wish to command the respect of others that has prompted us to manufacture the artifacts and instruments of advanced societies, so that in this sense civilisation is only a fulfilment of our attempts to establish an unequal distribution of public esteem. Moral virtue cannot truly exist, Rousseau contended, unless individual shares of talent are roughly equal.

143. 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', O.C.III, pp. 49-50.

Le goût des lettres annonce toujours chez un peuple un commencement de corruption qu'il accélère très-promptement. Car ce goût ne peut naître ainsi dans toute une nation que de deux mauvaises sources que l'étude entretient et grossit à son tour, savoir l'oisiveté et le désir de se distinguer.... Dans un Etat bien constitué tous les citoyens sont si bien égaux, que nul ne peut être préféré aux autres comme le plus savant ni même comme le plus habile.¹⁴⁴

The only safeguard which we had ever had against corruption, he remarked in the 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', was "cette première égalité" - now irredeemably lost - "conservatrice de l'innocence et source de toute vertu".¹⁴⁵ Hence our craving for distinction in the arts and sciences was a manifestation of much the same factitious feeling as the desire to dominate in politics upon which Rousseau was to focus his attention in the Discours sur l'inégalité.

In all these respects, therefore, Rousseau's replies to the critics of his Discours sur les sciences et les arts led him toward the more political, social, and economic lines of argument that he was to pursue in the second Discours and beyond. The author of the 'Observations' had criticised the first Discours partly because Rousseau had there neglected to draw a proper comparison between the morals of men in their most primitive state and the morality which was prevalent today.

Il aurait dû...en remonant à cette première époque faire comparaison des moeurs de ce temps-là avec les nôtres.¹⁴⁶

144. 'Préface de Narcisse', O.C.II, p. 965.

145. 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', O.C.III, p. 56. In the Discours sur l'inégalité, of course, Rousseau was later to argue that the physical inequality of men in the natural state was counterbalanced not by their moral equality but by the absence of morals.

146. 'Observations sur le Discours qui a été couronné à Dijon', Launay, II, p. 69.

To this objection Rousseau replied in his 'Lettre à Raynal',

C'est ce que j'aurois fait encore plus au long dans un volume in-quarto.¹⁴⁷

In his 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', moreover, in connection with his comments about the importance of the obscure but profound relations which join together the nature of government and the customs and manners of citizens, Rousseau intimated that he was already undertaking research on that subject and would consider it further on another occasion.

Il s'agiroit d'examiner les relations très-cachées, mais très-réelles qui se trouvent entre la nature du gouvernement, et le génie, les moeurs et les connoissances des citoyens; et ceci me jetteroit dans des discussions délicates....De plus...ce sont des recherches bonnes à faire à Genève, et dans d'autres circonstances.¹⁴⁸

The first major occasion was to arise just over two years after the publication of the 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', when the seeds of Rousseau's "recherches bonnes à faire", sown largely during the controversy about the Premier Discours, were to become the harvest of the Discours sur l'inégalité.

Yet though Rousseau was to embark upon a treatment of man's moral degradation along a wider social path, in his replies to the critics of the Premier Discours he did not abandon his earlier views about the importance of the arts and sciences as causal agents. On the contrary he continued to uphold his initial thesis throughout the dispute, and he consistently reaffirmed the claims which he had made in his prize essay about the interconnections between vanity, sloth, luxury, and culture, even while extending his argument to accommodate

147. O.C.III, p. 32.

148. 'Réponse au roi de Pologne', *ibid.*, p. 43. See also *ibid.*, p. 1261.

other factors. Thus, for instance, in his 'Dernière réponse', he put forward his ideas in much the same terms that he had employed in his original text, focusing particularly upon the set of links in the chain of human corruption which encompasses science and letters.

La vanité et l'oisiveté qui ont engendré nos sciences, ont aussi engendré le luxe. Le goût du luxe accompagne toujours celui des Lettres, et le goût des Lettres accompagne souvent celui du luxe: toutes ces choses se tiennent assez fidelle compagnie, parce qu'elles sont l'ouvrage des mêmes vices.¹⁴⁹

In the course of the next several years he was to develop this aspect of his philosophy much further, above all in his Lettre sur les spectacles of 1758, in which he condemned the rôle of the theatre, in particular, and of art conceived as spectacle, in general. But if Le Cat could imagine in his 'Réfutation' of 1752 that the field of music was to be exempted from Rousseau's charges, he was to be sadly disillusioned after the publication of the Lettre sur la musique françoise of the following year. No doubt he would have been even more dismayed to read the chapters in the Essai sur l'origine des langues about the relation between our musical advancement and our moral decline which Rousseau initially drafted as a section of the Discours sur l'inégalité. For in Rousseau's early social theory the senseless harmonic music by which men have come to be enthralled in the modern world has its own "relations morales", just as the debased political institutions by which they have come to be captivated contain a like "calcul des intervalles".

By the beginning of 1753, with the completion of his 'Préface de Narcisse', Rousseau had produced a work in which the principles of

149. 'Dernière réponse', *ibid.*, p. 74. Cf. especially the passages from the Discours sur les sciences et les arts cited on pp. 387-388 above.

his early social theory were drawn together better than ever before - certainly with greater clarity and coherence than in the Discours sur les sciences et les arts. Rousseau himself was to make this claim in his Confessions, and he appeared to have a much higher opinion of the 'Préface' than of the text which it was meant to buttress and defend.

Dans la Préface qui est un de mes bons écrits, je commençai de mettre à découvert mes principes un peu plus que je n'avois fait jusqu'alors.¹⁵⁰

By the autumn of 1753, when he drafted the 'Préface d'une second lettre à Bordes' - itself probably very soon supplanted by the Discours sur l'inégalité¹⁵¹ - Rousseau reflected that all his writings around the central theme of the Premier Discours comprised a distinct system of ideas to which he would thereafter adhere so long as he remained convinced that this system was founded upon truth and virtue.

Ce triste et grand Système, fruit d'un examen sincère de la nature de l'homme, de ses facultés et de sa destination, m'est cher, quoiqu'il m'humilie; car je sens combien il nous importe qu'il ne nous fasse pas prendre le change sur ce qui doit faire notre véritable grandeur, et combien il est à craindre qu'à force de vouloir nous élever au dessus de notre nature nous ne retombions au-dessous d'elle....Mais quant au Système que j'ai soutenu, je le défendrai de toute ma force aussi longtemps que je demeurerai convaincu qu'il est celui de la vérité et de la vertu.¹⁵²

150. Confessions, O.C.I, p. 388. Grimm, however (Correspondance littéraire, I(2), pp. 321-322), thought the 'Préface' "outrée" and "pas trop bonne...si vous en exceptez quelques pages dignes de...Montesquieu".

151. See ch. III, note 1, and the Correspondance complète, II, pp. 232-233. In connection with some remarks of Borde in his Second Discours sur les avantages des sciences et des arts to the effect that natural inequality provides a foundation for political and civil inequality, Leigh makes the interesting suggestion that "Rousseau devait prendre le contre-pied dans son second Discours, qui sera la vraie réponse à celui de Borde".

152. 'Préface d'une second lettre à Bordes', O.C.III, p. 105. On the following page Rousseau refers twice again to his "Système" and even his "Système vrai mais affligeant". I disagree sharply, however, with Roger Masters (see his Political Philosophy of Rousseau, pp. 206-207 and 248), who interprets these passages as support for the claim, which I take to be misleading anyway, that "there is no reason to assume that Rousseau's fundamental philosophic position changed radically between the publication of the First Discourse...and the appearance of the Emile and Social Contract". In the light of Jean-Jacques's replies to his critics, I have tried to show here that after 1750 his position did change in a number of important

In his 'Fragment biographique' which dates from the mid-1750s, moreover,¹⁵³ he even suggested that the system which he had uncovered was not in fact his own but rather that of human nature itself.

J'étudiois l'homme en lui même et je vis ou je crus voir enfin dans sa constitution le vrai Système de la nature qu'on n'a pas manqué d'appeller le mien quoique pour l'établir je ne fisse qu'ôter de l'homme ce que je montrois qu'il s'étoit donné.¹⁵⁴

It was "mon grand système", he noted in a passage of his Confessions pertaining to the period of the dispute about his Premier Discours - "[un] grand système" whose elements he was then engaged in assembling bit by bit.

J'en jettois quelque chose sur le papier à l'aide d'un livret blanc et d'un crayon que j'avois toujours dans ma poche.¹⁵⁵

Near the end of his life Rousseau came to regard the whole of his philosophy as based upon just one great principle - in effect, that Nature has made man happy and good while society has made him miserable and depraved. All of his works culminating in Emile were an illustration of "cette doctrine",¹⁵⁶ he observed in Rousseau juge de Jean Jaques. In his early writings he had attempted to show that mankind in its primitive condition must have been in a far better state than that of contemporary society, in which we now pay our homage to the very institutions that bind us to a life of permanent despair; in his later writings he had tried to explain how the evils of our world might be made less oppressive if our understanding of them was improved; and

ways and develop in some unheralded directions, so that, as Borde himself put it in his Second Discours (p. 3), Rousseau's original "paradoxe ingénieux" came to be superseded by the unveiling of "un système décidé".

153. See ch. IV, note 28, and O.C.I, p. 1836.

154. O.C.I, p. 1115.

155. Confessions, *ibid.*, p. 368.

156. Rousseau juge de Jean Jaques, *ibid.*, p. 935.

throughout his works he had been dedicated to the task of overcoming that deception and illusion which made us look upon our plight as if it were also the only goal worthy of our respect and admiration.

Suivant de mon mieux le fil de ses méditations, j'y vis par tout le développement de son grand principe que la nature a fait l'homme heureux et bon mais que la société le déprave et le rend miserable. L'Emile en particulier...n'est qu'un traité de la bonté originelle de l'homme, destiné a montrer comment le vice et l'erreur, étrangers à sa constitution, s'y introduisent du dehors et l'altèrent insensiblement. Dans ses premiers écrits il s'attache davantage à détruire ce prestige d'illusion qui nous donne une admiration stupide pour les instrumens de nos misères et à corriger cette estimation trompeuse qui nous fait honorer des talens pernecieux et mépriser des vertus utiles. Par tout il nous fait voir l'espèce humaine meilleure, plus sage et plus heureuse dans sa constitution primitive, aveugle, miserable et mechante à mesure qu'elle s'en éloigne. Son but est de redresser l'erreur de nos jugemens pour retarder le progrès de nos vices, et de nous montrer que là où nous cherchons la gloire et l'éclat, nous ne trouvons en effet qu'erreurs et misères.¹⁵⁷

There is much in this passage - and in others like it elsewhere in Rousseau's writings - that illuminates the way in which he conceived his major works to be elaborations of a central theme, and yet the passage nevertheless points equally to a significant difference between his early and later contributions to social thought. For the various parts of his "doctrine" were not all assembled at the same time, nor were they all designed - at their moments of conception - to follow "le développement de son grand principe", whose substance was extended and transformed in the very texts he later regarded as illustrations of a single principle. In particular, Rousseau did not really contend - either in the dispute about the Premier Discours or in his writings of the early 1750s generally - with the question posed by the anonymous

157. Ibid., pp. 934-935. In his first Discours and Emile, inseparable works which form "ensemble un meme tout...j'aurois exposé tous les abus de Nos institutions", Rousseau had already remarked in his letter to Malesherbes of 12 January 1762 (Correspondance complète, X, p. 26).

author of the 'Observations'. What practical conclusion could one draw from the thesis about the corruption of morals which Rousseau had advanced? In his 'Dernière réponse' Rousseau replied only that he had seen the evil and had tried to locate its sources. The task of searching for a remedy he left to others.

J'ai vû le mal et tâché d'en trouver les causes:
D'autres plus hardis ou plus insensés pourront
chercher le remède.¹⁵⁸

In fact, however, that very task was to be undertaken by Rousseau himself in his later works. In the Lettre sur les spectacles he was to sing the praises of a form of art - conceived as festival rather than spectacle - in which the moral sentiments of the participants might be uplifted instead of debased; in the Contrat social he was to devise a set of principles of political right according to which men might be brought together for their mutual advantage rather than their common despair; and in Emile he was to show how a plan of moral education might still be made compatible with freedom. In the major theoretical writings of his later years, then, Rousseau was to turn to the question he had elected to leave unanswered in the controversy about the Premier Discours, for the problems which that question raised did not occupy a crucially important place in the 'grand système' of his early writings. In the period from 1750 to 1756 Rousseau was concerned above all with the particular configurations of our moral corruption, with its genesis and patterns of development, with its nature and implications - but not with its remedy. In these years the principles of 'inégalité' and 'oisiveté' loom larger, perhaps, than any of the rest - the one as the mainspring of the evolution of society, the other as the central factor in the formation of culture. What I have tried to establish here is that it was

158. 'Dernière réponse', O.C.III, p. 95. Cf. Rousseau's 'Mon Portrait', O.C.I. p. 1120: "Je suis observateur et non moraliste: Je suis le Botaniste qui décrit la Plante. C'est au médecin qu'il appartient d'en régler l'usage." See also the passage from the 'Réponse au roi de Pologne' cited in ch. III, p. 229.

in the course of the controversy about the Discours sur les sciences et les arts that Rousseau came to formulate these principles in a much more coherent and sophisticated fashion than he had done in his original text, so that by the end of 1753 he was ready to turn to the study of culture and society again in an entirely new way. With that background, therefore, the products of his most mature deliberations during the following years came to be the Discours sur l'inégalité, on the one hand, and the Essai sur l'origine des langues, on the other - each text providing an intricate philosophy of history in which an account of the degeneration of morals through the institutions of society and culture forms the central plot.

My principal objective in this study has been to unravel that plot by focusing upon the variety of specific problems which the elements of Rousseau's early social theory were designed to solve. I have tried to show that an account of his meaning must always be established in the light of the particular contexts in which his arguments were formulated, with reference, above all, to the host of Enlightenment controversies in which they figured. If these arguments comprise the elements of a systematic theory they do so only insofar as his critique of the ideas of one writer and his endorsement of the views of another join together as particular formulations of a coherent set of problems. To establish the nature of these problems and the sense of Rousseau's statements about them we must always bear in mind the often painstaking truth that 'pour savoir les choses, il faut savoir le détail'. For that proposition is just as indispensable to our philosophical interpretation of ideas as it is to our historical understanding of them, and in either case it is not merely our best guide but the only reliable guide that we have.