An Age of Crisis

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An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought.

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THE DETRACTORS of human nature, those who “lowered” it to non-moral or to immoral impulses, strong though they were, did not have the field to themselves. The champions of man rose in firm, often angry rejoinder—though all did not reply in the same way, with equal confidence, or from the same motives. To a certain extent, defense of man was a form and a factor of the revulsion toward the anti-humanistic dogma of original sin and toward Pascal’s analysis. To a certain extent, it was a reaction to the cynicism of La Rochefoucauld, Hobbes, Mandeville and their eighteenth century followers.

To many of the defenders of human nature, it seemed that the first issue at hand was to refute the reduction of motivation to self-interest (in any of its forms). This concerned the English, who were faced with Hobbes and Mandeville, as well as the French, who had the challenge of Bayle. Some of the denials, it is true, were rather half-hearted,1 but others were firm.

1 Cumberland's influence on Shaftesbury was important, and via the latter, it undoubtedly reached Voltaire and Diderot. He argues, first, that in voluntary actions in which animals promote the good of others, but receive some benefit themselves, it cannot be claimed that they do not “alike intend and will both”; second, that to please others is pleasant to ourselves. (A Treatise of the Laws of Nature, 1727, p. 69 ff., 129-130, 174.)

Chubb argues that happiness being the proper end of action, it is reasonable for
The more vigorous refuters of the self-interest school attempted to advance alternative motivations. The abbé Desfourneaux, despite the concessions on happiness which we have noted, proposed the paradox that self-love is really lacking in most men. Do they not surrender themselves to a dominating passion or to enterprises in which they suffer real disadvantage? (Other writers called this mistaken self-love.) Vauvenargues was similarly to suggest that “Love is more violent than self-love, since one can love a woman despite her scorn.” But again, love may be considered a form of self-love. A finer distinction was made by Père Gerdil. Attacking the very basis of the opposing ideology—the philosophy of sensation—he argues that “well-being” has an entirely different scope in an intelligent creature than in a purely sensitive one.

He is not confined like the latter to the simple impression of felt pleasure. Men have been seen to be unhappy in a flood of delights. Contentment of the spirit contributes even more than pleasurable sensation to man’s happiness. . . . A man needs to be in harmony with himself, that is, with his own reason. Such is the excellence of intelligent nature, that his happiness depends more on his ideas, than on his sensations.

Gerdil, in these lines, has attempted a sweeping outflanking movement, which rests on the assumption that man is essentially and distinctively a reasonable, spiritual being. The quest for happiness may therefore be self-denying. Self-love and love of others become indistinguishable and unselfish. The assumption of his opponents was implicitly the contrary.

Equally sweeping, in its ultimate reach, was the well-known argument, proposed by Vauvenargues, the abbé Yvon and others, that it is absurd to call the sacrifice of one’s life for another person an act of self-interest. “For,” writes the former, “if the object of our love is dearer to us without our existing than our existing is an intelligent being “to forego some low degree of pleasure to himself, when he can greatly heighten the pleasure of another, and more especially of a multitude thereby.” Thus the happiness motive and the principle of greater good lead to self-denial. (The Ground and Foundation of Morality, 1745, p. 6–9.)

One of the most brilliant defenses of man’s moral nature is sketched by Sade (Histoire de Juliette, iii, 202–205). However he proceeds immediately to demolish it. For other weak refutations, see Frederick II, L’Anti-Machiavel, Oeuvres, viii, 205, 276; Volney, La loi naturelle, Oeuvres, 1, 262 f. 2 Op. cit., p. 81–82.
3 Oeuvres, iii, 251.
without the object of our love, it seems that it is love that is our
dominant passion and not our own person.” With life we lose all.
If we are still considering ourselves, then we are considering our­selves as the least part of the whole.⁵ Vauvenargues goes on from
there to broaden his argument. As we have already seen, he makes
the distinction between *amour-propre* and *amour de nous-mêmes*.
The latter allows us to seek happiness outside of ourselves, to
love ourselves outside of ourselves more than in ourselves; “one is
not his own unique object.” There is obviously a difference be­tween
the satisfaction of *amour-propre* and its sacrifice.⁶

One of the stoutest refutations of the self-interest reduction was
offered by Père André, who is better known as an aestheteian. He
begins his “Premier Discours sur l’amour désintéressé” (1744)⁷
by quoting several of the ancients. He recalls Zeno’s statement:
love of virtue is independent of love of ourselves; we can love
others without interest, out of esteem, justice or duty. He next
assails Abbadie for reducing all love to self-love, and for the
stratagem he had used to make it acceptable, that is, the separation
of *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*. Following other criticisms,
André advances his own arguments. The “love of good,” which is
admittedly our motivating force, is not merely love of happiness,
but also “love of what is termed honest, of order, virtue or the
beautiful in manners.” We are, in fact, divided between these
two loves. Each is natural, each has its sphere. However it is also
natural to our moral judgment to value the second kind of love
above the first. This is the basis of personal esteem, which would
obviously be impossible if our love of the moral good could not
function independently of interested love of self. While we
cannot help loving both *le bien honnête* and *le bien délectable,*
in cases of conflict it is clear to all that we must sacrifice the
latter.⁸ But is it not obvious that this would be impossible if *le
bien délectable* were our only motive, and that such a sacrifice
implies the independent existence of the two motives? While we
may sometimes make this sacrifice for the sake of a greater satisfac-

⁵ Other writers used a similar argument. Chamfort, for instance, brings forth the
example of people who help others at their own risk or disadvantage and refuse all
recompense. (*Maximes, Œuvres complètes*, 1, 28.)
⁶ See Ch. 4, note 76 and Œuvres, 1, 46–49, also p. 70.
⁷ Œuvres philosophiques, p. 360 ff.
⁸ This assumption was of course denied by many naturalists.
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tion, we may also prefer the virtuous act solely because it is reason-
able to do so, or because we have a love of order. While duty may
give us greater pleasure, it may also be unpleasurable, repugnant
or dangerous. We may follow a purely intellectual perception; we
may choose to lose the reputation of being a good man in order
really to be one.

André next proceeds to make some important distinctions con-
cerning pleasure, which indirectly answer the possible objection
that in doing an unpleasurable duty, the idea of doing it is still
pleasurable. We love only objects that please us. But “to please”
and “to give pleasure” are not precisely the same thing. An object
may evoke our approval without producing in us “a delectable
modification.” And when such a pleasurable sensation is produced,
it may either precede our experience of the object, accompany it,
or follow it. In the first case, it pleases us because it gives us
pleasure. In the last case, the object pleased us before it gave us
pleasure, and only as a consequence of rational approval. In other
words, “spiritual objects”—truth, justice, order—please us by their
intrinsic merit “before pleasing us by the feeling of pleasure they
give us.”

A not unrelated distinction concerning pleasure was made by
the deistic poet, Saint-Lambert. He expounded a theory that may
possibly be an echo of the English writer, Chubb. “There is a
pleasure attached to bonté, to generosity; a simple pleasure, in-
dependent of reflection and of reference to oneself.” In fact, this
instinct of bienveillence can be exaggerated beyond justice.

I have seen some take on the feelings, espouse the interests of
others, and enter into their situation to the point of losing their
own feelings, of forgetting their own interests and situation. I
have seen some repent of having yielded to their kindliness and
generosity, and admit to me that they had been swept away by
an irresistible force. This benevolence, this humanity, is con-
nected with a feeling of love more than it is the effect of
pity. . . .

The importance of this statement, like that of Père André, lies in
its distinction of pleasure as the accompaniment or result of an

8 Bishop Butler, writing in 1726, had also contended that we have some dis-
interested motives, which we pursue in patent violation of our welfare (Five
Sermons . . . p. 12–17). Butler, however, was never translated, and it is hard to
find evidence of an influence in France.

action, from pleasure as motivation; or between the pleasantness of a motivating idea and that of the act itself. It affirms our ability to break out of the circle of self and self-interest. Saint-Lambert also realizes that altruism is not in itself intrinsically moral, but may, like egoism, be right or wrong.

Quite germane at this point is Hume's essay, "The Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature." In refutation of the Hobbesian contention that all human motivation is basically selfish, Hume asserts that unselfish acts produce pleasure, rather than arise from it. Again, while it is true that virtuous men like praise, it is a fallacy to claim that love of praise is their motive. Here we see that Hume's reasoning lies athwart the common trend, which proposed the esteem motive as a fulcrum to sway men towards virtue.

The vindication of human nature in still wider and more general terms by no means suffered from lack of proponents. It scarcely sufficed to assert that man was not ruled entirely by selfishness. The apologists were bound to offer a more positive defense, and to point out precisely where man's goodness lay. There were three principal approaches in response to this challenge. It was proposed that men naturally love the good, that pity and sympathy for others are a part of their nature, and that they are moved by moral considerations. These three qualities appear sometimes as distinct concepts, and sometimes shade off into each other.

There were a number of writers who maintained either that man is essentially good, or that he is a moral creature. There is a difference between these two descriptions, at least in some writings. With the first, we may have a general exaltation of man's inclination to do good to his fellows. Thus Leroy, moderate as always, describes man as endowed with a disposition "that inclines him to bonté when contrary passions do not overcome this natural tendency." True, he admits, there are "degenerates" in whom this disposition is warped. But man is not the less good because there are atrocities, as he is not the less reasonable because many people lack good sense. As proof, Leroy (perhaps in imitation of Hume) cites the effect of tragedies on the stage, and our sympathy with good heroes in novels. "It is enough to make men forget their

11 Essays, literary, moral and political, p. 45-49.
private interests which isolate them, in order to bring them back to nature, consequently to compassion." 12 Perhaps Leroy belongs with the group of writers who judged men to be half-good, half-evil; but he does give the impression of a solid, though tempered optimism.

Leroy's evaluation had already been proposed, in somewhat varying measure, by others who wrote before him. As early as 1717, N. Dupuy—one of the defenders of hedonism and a partisan of secular morality—proposed that while men may like evil things, they do not like evil. One of the interlocutors in his dialogue inquires, "If we do not love evil more than good, why is the practice of virtue more difficult than that of vice?" The answer is that "We all have an inclination toward the good," but we imagine good where it is not, especially because of the forces of our senses. And, after all, wherein would lie the virtue of virtue, if it were the easier path? 13

The pattern is clear. Man would fain be good—only there is something—an error of some kind—that turns him astray. So Leroy and Dupuy. So also Toussaint and Samuel Formey. "Man is naturally virtuous and great," is Toussaint's reassuring appraisal; "remove the base affections he contracts when he lets himself be swept away by his senses, and he will recover his original nobility by himself." 14 Formey generalizes, seizing upon an argument that reaches back through the Middle Ages to Aristotle. The will cannot possibly choose evil (cannot "love evil as evil," is the formulation of Ilharat de la Chambre15); a man does evil only when it presents itself to his mind as a good—therefore out of error.16 Formey's argument is unfortunately not very strong. To begin with, it contains a confusion we shall find characteristic of eighteenth century ethical speculation, between good and right. There is a fundamental ambiguity in a phrase such as, "what presents itself to the mind as a good." In the second place, Formey's own definition of good, as that which leads to happiness, makes mock of his own argument. But let us continue with

13 Dialogues sur les plaisirs, sur les passions, sur le mérite des femmes (1717), p. 70–78, 96.
Formey's reasoning. What causes our confusion, he explains, is the "voluntary enslavement to the senses" (apparently the will is sadly deceived here).\(^17\) No, he urges us, let us not confuse corruption with nature. "Nature is that inner voice of reason, which calls us to search for truth and the love of happiness." Thus Formey has reconciled nature and reason—to his own satisfaction, at least.

Arguments in this pattern of natural love of good blinded by error were advanced by Robinet, Vauvenargues, Alès de Corbet and others.\(^18\) Vauvenargues, who often enough satirizes man, feels that the prevalence of order is proof "that reason and virtue are the stronger forces" in him—an attribution that many others, in the eighteenth century, would have made to fear and to pride.\(^19\) Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, like Voltaire, Rousseau and many other writers, held that man's natural goodness is deviated only by the conditions of social life and by improper up-bringing (éducation).

It is our European education that corrupts our nature. . . . Wherever I have seen unhappy children, I have seen them ugly and wicked; wherever I have seen them happy, I have seen them beautiful and good. . . . Insane teachers! Human nature is corrupt, you say; but it is you who are corrupting it by contradictions, vain studies, dangerous ambitions, shameful punishments.\(^20\)

Bernardin again raises to the fore a central problem of eighteenth century ethics, the relation between happiness and virtue. Make men happy, he tells us, and they will be good. Little does he realize all the hidden implications and problems contained in that statement!

Among our defenders of human nature is a group of particularly enthusiastic believers in human potentialities and goodness. We might well place Shaftesbury first among them, and then Hutche-
son. Both acknowledge self-love, but see no necessary contradic-

tion with virtue, inasmuch as we may identify our own good with

that of others. Shaftesbury adopts the “rigoristic” concept of virtue

from which Mandeville was to profit so adroitly in order to prove

men evil. To refrain from vice because of punishment, or to do

good for reward, is not, according to Shaftesbury, virtue. But men,
in addition to “self-affections” and “unnatural affections,” also

possess a general love of the good of all, which he pleasantly terms

“natural affections.” “’Tis no more natural for the stomach to
digest, the lungs to breathe, the glands to separate juices,” than

for men to have an affection toward the good of the species. With­

out it, the young would not survive. The heart, “in all dis­
interested cases, must approve in some measure of what is natural

and honest, and disapprove what is dishonest and corrupt.” Con­
sequently, it is clear that man, God’s highest creation is naturally

good, even noble; though corrupted by unnatural affections, he

may again regain his purity. That is why moral sense, rather than

authoritarian repression and fear, is the best guide for conduct.21

Human nature, confirms Hutcheson, seems incapable of “malici­
ous, disinterested hatred, or a sedate ultimate desire of the

misery of others, when we imagine them in no way pernicious to

us. . . .”22 These lines present a dramatic clash with the view that

our happiness thrives on the misery of others, through the com­
parative process and the need for superiority.

There were French writers who had even fewer reservations. The

anonymous deistic manuscript, Examen de la religion, dont

on cherche l’éclaircissement, de bonne foi, declares that since we

were created by God, it is impossible for us to have evil

proclivities.23 A statement such as this has its roots in the principal

fount of belief in man’s natural goodness—the whole current of

primitivism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which

was, in turn, nourished by the voyages of discovery and travelers’

accounts of primitive peoples. We cannot here trace the history

of this current of thought; nor is it necessary to recapitulate the ex-

21 Inquiry . . . Bk. 1, Part 3, and passim. For Butler’s defense of human nature,
as benevolent and adapted to virtue, see especially, his first Sermon.

22 An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue, p. 151, 174–5.

23 P. 102–104. First published in 1745. See Wade, op. cit., p. 152–158, for rejection
of attribution to La Serre and Dumarsais. The B.N. copy bears after the title,
“Attribué à M. de St. Evremond,” which is also unlikely, as Wade points out. For
the same argument used by Delisle de Sales, see op. cit., II, 154–155.
cellent work which has already been done in that field by Gilbert Chinard and Geoffroy Atkinson. We may, however, glance briefly at the characterization of man traced by Lahontan, who is typical in many respects of this outlook. In his Mémoires de l'Amérique (1703), Lahontan recounted his personal experiences with the Huron and other Indians. He paints a persuasive picture of a society that is free and self-disciplined, uncorrupted by knowledge, property, luxury and the arts, and by the train of artificial needs and vices, which are their inevitable product. In addition to the economic aspects, Lahontan emphasizes the prevalence of “free love” and divorce, with the result that sexual jealousy and crime do not exist. Rivalry, deception and hypocrisy, consequently, are also absent. In the subsequent Dialogues, the apparently untendentious picture of the Mémoires was made pointedly polemical. The wise savage, Adario—who was to become a prototype for many who followed him—replies to Lahontan, who is weakly defending European culture. “When you speak of man, say ‘Frenchman’; for you know well that these passions, this selfishness, and this corruption, of which you speak, are unknown amongst us . . . I term a man, he who has a natural inclination to do good and who never thinks of doing evil.”

In Lahontan and other primitivists, we see some of the formative influences which were later to work deeply in the mind of Rousseau, and also to affect certain phases of the thought of Voltaire and Diderot. Both Rousseau and Voltaire realized that the goodness of the primitives (as described in travelers’ accounts), was the goodness of innocence. It was the absence of vices, rather than resistance to them. We cannot help thinking, too, of Rousseau’s second Discours, and even of his concept of “negative education.” Some of Adario’s speeches remind us as well of Diderot’s Orou (in his Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville), who, however, has the gift of eloquence which was that of his author. This is how Orou urges the white man to leave his people undisturbed in their state of bliss:

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24 See Chinard, L'Amérique et le rêve exotique, especially Part II, ch. 3, 4. Part III, ch. 3. Part IV, ch. 2; Atkinson, Les relations de voyages du XVIIe siècle et l'évolution des idées . . .


26 See, for instance, the good savage in the seventh chapter of Voltaire's Histoire de Jenni.
And you, chief of the brigands who obey you, remove your vessel promptly from our shore. We are innocent, we are happy; and you can only hurt our happiness. We follow the pure instinct of nature; you have tried to efface its imprint from our souls. Here everything belongs to everyone; and you have preached to us I know not what distinction between thine and mine. Our daughters and our wives belong to all; you have shared this privilege with us; and you have kindled an unknown fury in them. . . . They have begun to hate each other; you have slaughtered each other for them; and they have come to plant in our soil the title of our future slavery.27

The essential point of separation between Rousseau and the primitivist writers is that he places the time of man’s goodness and innocence in a pre-social state of isolation. For him, society and the loss of innocence are synonymous. For the primitivists, however, man’s goodness finds its natural expression and development, as brotherly love and cooperation, only in the community of men. The writers who are influenced by the primitivists tend, in consequence, to communism and anarchism—as we see in the works of Morelly, Dom Deschamps, Meslier, Robinet and Rétif de la Bretonne. This is the result of their belief in man’s natural goodness. Rousseau, on the other hand, was to go in a different direction, and outline an ideal state that is authoritarian in its emphasis on the discipline and suppression of individual instincts.28

The primitivist influence is also evident in Raynal’s widely read Histoire des Deux Indes, and especially in the third revision (1780), in which Diderot had a large hand. Here again man is proclaimed to be good in his nature:

For too long a time they have sought to degrade man. His detractors have made a monster of him. In their ill-temper they have overwhelmed him with insults. The guilty satisfaction of lowering him has alone guided their black pencils. Who are you then, who dare to insult your fellow-man thus? What womb gave you birth? Is it from the bottom of your heart that you drew so many blasphemies? If your pride had been less blind, or your character less ferocious, barbarian! you would have seen

27 Ed. Chinard, p. 119–122. For the goodness of the Tahitians, see p. 126 f.
28 We have seen that Morelly also goes in this direction, allying communism with absolute control.
only a being always weak, often seduced by error, sometimes led astray by imagination, who sprang from the hands of nature with honest inclinations. . . .

In society, however, admits Raynal, self-interest rules all, and authority is necessary. Neither the demands of peoples nor the decisions of governments are determined by moral considerations.

We may give rapid mention to several lesser writers. Maupertuis is firm. "If we reflect on man’s nature, we shall believe him capable of anything, provided we propose him great enough motives: capable of braving pain, capable of braving death." He finds his proofs among primitive peoples who calmly bear torture and die rather than be enslaved.

The marquis de Mirabeau, though perhaps less influenced by the primitivist current, was no less eulogistic.

Man is not a perverse race. We are a race with honor and feeling. An internal law impels us to the good without even the help of reflection. . . . No, man has a different kind of entrails: he is a being urged in substance and by nature towards justice and charity. . . . Man, I say, loves light and virtue . . . he realizes that error and vice are only misery and contagion . . . injustice only disorder, unenlightened self-interest only seduction, only straying (égarement), only delirium. That is what our heart tells us all, if we deign to listen to it in the silence of our inner being.

As the century draws towards its close, this romantic sentimentality increases. The eccentric Rouillé d’Orfeuil, blasts all who have spoken ill of humanity.

Man is, according to me, the most noble and most perfect of all beings, in his form and in his good qualities; alone capable of judging beauty, of loving it with awareness, he is naturally borne to the good. His passions make ceaseless and violent efforts to turn him aside from it; but he has received from the Supreme Being arms to fight them and the strength to conquer them. His countenance is pleasant, his air noble, imposing and gentle; his mind takes a thousand forms and procures him a thousand resources of all kinds. Woman is the masterpiece of

29 Wolpe, Raynal et sa machine de guerre, p. 159. The picture of the "good savage" did not exclude ferocity, but this was not considered moral vice. In all these accounts, freedom and equality were emphasized. See ibid., p. 81–82.
30 Essai de philosophie morale, Œuvres (1752), p. 392.
31 Philosophie rurale (1761), i, 241, iii, 253–254.
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nature; her gentleness, finesse and delicacy, conjoined to the strength of man, form of these two moieties a perfect whole.\(^{32}\)

This is essentially the faith of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and it seems that his master, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, often believed it to be his.

In this circle of romantic eulogists, we could possibly include one Christian apologist—the abbé Denesle—but him alone. He is the only Christian we find denying that it is at all in man's essence to do evil—for if it were, the abbé asserts, he could not wish not to do it any longer; and this is the secret wish even of evil men.\(^{33}\) But even Denesle, despite his horror for the materialists' assessment of man, notes that we have perverted our nature.

This natural goodness of man—still taking the word “goodness” in the sense of unselfish motivation—was often brought to a focus in the impulses of compassion that all men experience towards each other. This was the positive counterpart to the denial that self-love is our sole motivation. Some of man's defenders, especially Shaftesbury, Rousseau and their respective disciples, denied the claim of the cynics and materialists that our feeling for others is no more than a disguised egoism, a projection of the self. They insisted on the reality of other-directed impulses. But even if the cynical analysis were correct, the possibility of altruistic acts, at least, and their value, remained unshaken.\(^{34}\) Pity was frequently given a quasiscientific basis in the universality of human nature and human reactions. It is a physical reaction, asserted Buffon, and does not belong to the soul.\(^{35}\) For Hume it is based on sympathy, a phenomenon that plays a vital role in his ethical thought.\(^{36}\)

\(^{32}\) *L'alambic moral* . . . (1773), p. 320–321. Another eulogistic defense of human nature was the *Essai de morale*, published anonymously, under the initials *Ca*. . . . Mi, in 1791. The author proves vices are not natural, since it would then be natural to hurt ourselves, for others would have the same rights towards us. Implicitly separating man from nature, he declares that iron is in nature, but not swords, or the use we make of them; so with all corruption. (P. 4–35.)

\(^{33}\) *Examen du matérialisme* (1754), ii, 112.

\(^{34}\) This defense was particularly strong in England. Adam Ferguson, for instance, in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* [1767] p. 20–25, inveighs against the confusion between the words “benevolence” and “self-gratification” that identifies a parent's taking care of a child with a parent's neglecting him. If we do not have completely disinterested behavior, we often act in such a fashion that our own interest is lost, swallowed up in that of the *other*. The common sense of the words, for Ferguson, is a sufficient distinction. His argument recalls that of Vauvenargues.

\(^{35}\) *Oeuvres philosophiques*, p. 367.

\(^{36}\) “Now it is obvious that nature has preserved a great resemblance among all human creatures, and that we can never remark any passion or principle in others
Rousseau presents the “original man” as possessed of two native impulses: the one leads to the preservation of his own well-being, the other “inspires in us a natural repugnance to seeing any sensitive being, and especially our fellows, perish or suffer.” 37 In the Encyclopédie, as René Hubert has pointed out, both attitudes run side by side. 38 Some articles reflect the Hobbesian, materialistic current, and maintain that men’s egoism leads them to ruthless opposition. But other writers, such as the abbé Yvon, insist on the natural sympathy which leads to pity and generous deeds. To be sure, we love the “other” only because we consider him as another self, but the explanation does not destroy the reality of altruism.

The themes of the state of nature and the origin of society are obviously connected with those of pity and compassion. Both of these subjects presently stand in need of full-length studies, and we cannot hope to do them justice in a general synthesis such as the present one, especially since their ramifications would carry us far afield. We shall only note that the feeling of mutual sympathy was commonly held to be an important factor in the origination of society; or else (by those who considered society to be natural and co-existent with man), to be an essential spring of its maintenance. “At all times and in all climates,” declared Delisle de Sales, “the sight of a suffering person moves us despite ourselves, and our soul automatically puts itself in harmony with this pain; pity is the cry of nature which summons to the conservation of beings all those who are near them.” 39

Rousseau, on the other hand, held the feeling of compassion to be both prior to society and unrelated to it, a mere animal reflex. Yet, also in the Discours sur l’inégalité, he contends that pity is the unique source of all social virtues, including generosity and friendship. He then proceeds to dispose of the commonplace objection.

Even if it were true that commiseration is only a sentiment that puts us in the place of him who suffers, an obscure and keen sentiment in savage man, developed but weak in civil man, how would this idea affect the truth of what I say, except to

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39 De la philosophie de la nature (1770), iii, 376.
give it greater force? . . . It is then quite certain that pity is a natural feeling which, moderating in each individual the activity of self-love, tends to the mutual conservation of the whole species.\textsuperscript{49}

Rousseau goes on to claim that pity, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws and virtue (an idea doubtless derived from travel books such as that of Lahontan), takes the place, too, of Voltaire's Natural Law, by inspiring in all hearts not the Golden Rule, but the more useful moral maxim (sic!), "Seek your own welfare with the least possible harm to others."

To redress the balance and present a fair picture, it must be emphasized that the more cynical and radical writers—d'Holbach and Sabatier de Castres, for instance—continued to disparage pity, or sympathy, not only as disguised forms of egoism, but also as ineffective motives. "Several philosophies," remarks d'Holbach, in open opposition to Shaftesbury and Rousseau,

have founded morals on an innate benevolence, which they have thought to be inherent to human nature; but this benevolence can only be the result of experience and reflection, which shows us that other men are useful to us, and in a position to contribute to our own happiness. A disinterested benevolence, that is, one from which there would result for us, from those who inspire it in us, neither tenderness nor a return, would be a feeling deprived of motives, or an effect without cause. It is relative to himself that man shows benevolence to others. . . . We shall perhaps be told that virtuous people push disinterestedness to the point of showing benevolence to ingrates, and that others show it to men they have never known and whom they will never see. But this benevolence itself is not disinterested; if it comes from pity, we shall soon see that the compassionate man relieves himself by doing good to others.\textsuperscript{41}

As for the marquis de Sade, we need scarcely say that pity of any kind is rigorously excluded from his naturalism, as a form of weakness and degeneracy.\textsuperscript{42}

I have suggested that there is a difference in implication be-

\textsuperscript{49} Op. cit., p. 162. However, this passage was apparently written for Rousseau by his friend, Diderot. Cf. Diderot, \textit{Oeuvres}, iv, 101. Since the same thought is repeated in the 1774 revision of Raynal, in words that in one place are identical (cf. Wolpe, p. 80), we may again see Diderot's hand here. The Raynal passage adds: "This sweet compassion has its source in the [physical] organization of man, for whom it is sufficient to love himself in order to hate the suffering of his fellows."

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{La morale universelle}, i, 26. For the chapter on pity, see p. 100 ff.

\textsuperscript{42} E.g., \textit{Histoire de Juliette}, iii, 41-42.
tween the argument that men are naturally inclined towards good (love of order and justice, sympathy with others), and the assertion that man is ruled by a moral realm within him. The second statement necessarily implies the existence in his constitution of a non-physical, "spiritual" component, which may supply the determining motivation of his acts. Love and sympathy (in themselves) are on a pre-moral level, and are found among animals. Moral experience, however, is the intuition of an "ought," or an obligation. And the two may be in conflict. But in this regard, a further distinction is necessary. We must not confuse the belief, held by almost all eighteenth century writers, that man is a moral being, that is, one who necessarily makes moral judgments, with the belief that man is virtuous, that is, capable of and willing to do the good he perceives and to execute the judgments he makes. This the first does not necessarily imply, although it would be so maintained by men like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. An even deeper ethical implication of the assertion that man is ruled by a moral experience concerns the reality and determinacy of supra-personal values of a purely moral nature; whereas the first statement confines man and his moral life to the plane of inter-personal relationships.

It was Helvétius' reduction of all motivation to the physical that united much of the opposition on this point. Most of the refutations were made by Christian apologists.\textsuperscript{43} Several of the humanistic\textit{ philosophes}, including Diderot and Marat, also rose in protest. Both the latter insisted that there were passions that relate only to the mind. "Let us leave it to the sophist author of \textit{De l'Esprit}," thunders Marat, "to try to deduce, by intricate reasoning, all passions from physical sensitivity; he will never deduce from it the love of glory, of that vain incense which ignorance and weakness offer to power, to courage, to knowledge, and for which fine souls are avid." Where is physical sensitivity in the life of Zeno, Cato and Socrates, in willing sacrifice and suffering? Beyond all doubt, there is "a love of the beautiful and the good which becomes for the heart of the wise man an unquenchable spring of delightful feelings, and lets him experience in the midst of alarms that sweet peace which misfortune cannot disturb." \textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{43} E.g. \textit{La religion vengée} (1757–1760), x, i, 149, viii, 10–12.

\textsuperscript{44} Marat, \textit{De l'Homme} (1775), 1, 201–214. Diderot will be taken up later in this chapter.
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It is on this basis that a considerable group of Christian apologists were able to support the existence of an invincible sphere of goodness in human nature. They were impelled to this advocacy by their overriding preoccupation with combatting the advance of materialism, with its reduction of motivation to pleasure-pain sensations, that is, to the physical, the organic, the animal. This doctrine menaced the Christian view of the soul, of man’s place, and of his relation to God. Consequently, while some apologists, as we saw in the last chapter, continued to emphasize original sin, the larger number chose to lay stress (without excluding the former doctrine, of course), on the existence of a moral component in man, or in other words, on non-physical motivation. This question connects itself with the existence of a spiritual soul; we shall avoid this subject and hue to the line of ethical thought.45

To the interlocutor who suggests that physical needs require physical goods, and that happiness is therefore physical, the abbé Pey’s mouthpiece replies that conscience rebels against pleasure: “I do not know how it is I experience within me a natural feeling that forces me to esteem virtue as a real good . . . the instinct of pleasure is that of the brute and the instinct of reason is that of humanity.” 46 The abbé Pichon, declaiming against Helvétius, points out that if the latter is right, if humaneness comes from the senses, then virtue is only “a special disposition of the muscles, fibres, etc.” —an idea which he of course ridicules. “You calumniate man, M. Helvétius, when you say that men conceive of force before they conceive of justice, and follow the latter only out of fear of greater force. If there existed a man with absolute power, would he then be a ferocious beast? Do you not see that your philosophy makes real moral virtue impossible?” 47

These, then, were the defenders of man; and it is clear that they

45 For the distinction between feeling or thought and the physical see, for instance, Camuset: Principes contre l’incréduilité, à l’occasion du Système de la nature (1771), p. 23–26; Paulian, Le véritable système de la nature, p. 64–65.
46 Le philosophe catéchiste (1773), p. 79–80.
47 Les arguments de la raison . . . (1776), p. 99–106. We have seen how Diderot and Sade answered the question about the man with absolute power. Gauchat, together with his insistence on original sin, also argues for man’s moral nature. Op. cit., xvi, 13, 66. For similar opinions of the abbé Barruel and Pierre Fabre, see Hester Hastings, op. cit., p. 166–167, 119 n.l. Other defenders of man in the man-beast controversy, who claimed the moral sphere as a distinctive human attribute, have been noted in the first chapter. Of course, not all were men of the cloth (e.g. Delisle de Sales, op. cit., ii, 7, iii, 37).
were outnumbered and outweighed by his detractors. There remained, however, still another approach to the evaluation of human nature. This was to turn away from the affirmation that man is inherently either good or evil, and to assert instead, that he is both, or that he is neither. As this attitude was developed in the eighteenth century, the two formulations sometimes appear not to be far apart, but they are essentially quite different; and at the hands of certain *philosophes*, the latter formulation received a special implication, that of social rather than individual responsibility.

That man bears within him, at birth, both good and evil inclinations was, of course, the fundamental belief of all orthodox Christians, although polemical excitation often prevented a clear enunciation of this doctrine. The real distance that separates the statement, "Man is both good and evil" from "Man is neither good nor evil," is revealed in Hayer's denunciation of Helvétius for proclaiming the latter formula. Hayer first declares that as man is made in God's image, he has "traits of justice and virtue engraved on his soul," although these are disfigured by "the stain of our origin." Hayer thus realizes that it is the very heart of the Christian doctrine that Helvétius has denied. He then continues, denouncing the second important implication of Helvétius' ethics, the social criterion of moral value, which denies the inherence of right and wrong in acts. For Hayer, values are determined by imperatives that are outside of man, and superior to him. "It is certain, sir, that men are *good* and that they are *evil*, independently of a *common interest*. They are evil in surrendering to passions which have no connection with the common interest. They are good in repressing these same passions. The relations of man to God are absolutely independent of the common interest of society." 48 A further consequence of the Christian view, however, as developed by Hayer, approaches somewhat that of the *philosophe's* negative formulation. Man having dual possibilities, the determination of his character lies in what happens *after* his birth. It is not true, as Voltaire says, that men are "determined by their instinct" and "never change character." They have the power to conquer themselves, by force of will.49

The concept of the simultaneity, or balance of good and evil in human nature, runs through the century, in more or less Christian terms. Two popular English writers, Pope and Wollaston, had set the tone.

Virtuous and vicious ev'ry Man must be,
Few in th' extreme, but all in the degree;
The rogue and fool by fits is fair and wise;
And ev'n the best by fits, what they despise.
'Tis but by part we follow good or ill
For, Vice or Virtue, Self directs it still . . .

At this point (though not at others), Pope—like the orthodox Christian—also separates sharply the two aspects of human nature: passion ("nature" in the sense of physical needs or what is common to all animal life), and reason, which is man's peculiar domain. Wollaston's outlook is similar: we may follow either passion (or pleasure, or profit), or else act reasonably, out of a sense of duty. The moral realm is attached to reason, the other motives are called "inferior springs."

In France, as the seventeenth century drew to its close, the widely read Abbadie reaffirmed the Pascalian view of man, as both great and abased. Rémond de Saint-Mard, an early proponent of morale laïque, was one of the first to set forth a type of analysis which was to become rather widespread. Man's nature, it proposes, destines him to conflict between the two main springs of his action: self-love, necessary to life, and love of others, necessary to society. The second makes us work for the social good, despite ourselves, but ultimately turns to our own profit.

This doctrine of man's dual nature, as it traversed the century, became the basis of much of the speculation concerning ways of conditioning behavior so as to encourage tendencies which favor the general good and to minimize the self-centered impulses. The independent subsistence of both motives was the moderates' answer to the despair of the pessimists. Even though to some of these moderates, like Buffon and Voltaire, it seemed that the selfish motives were too powerful to be dominated, many, from Morelly to Condorcet, had faith in the possibilities of social con-

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50 Essay on Man, II, 231 ff; cf. 41, 59-60.
53 Still a third spring is pleasure, at least in Saint-Mard's formulation, which in the act of reproduction unites the first two. (Nouveaux dialogues des Dieux, 1714.)
ditioning, while still others, like Hume, and some of the more optimistic writers we have encountered, believed the altruistic impulses were not so weak as was often supposed. Among this second group, Mably was one of the strongest believers in the possibility of shifting the balance.

What! because the passions have done much ill, we must allow them to do still more! Most men’s reason is astray, blind and corrupt. . . . The feeling of virtue (honnêteté) which you still find in their hearts, the virtuous men who still subsist in the midst of corruption, and whose race will never be extinguished, shouldn’t all that bring you back to a more human and consoling philosophy . . . ? Society itself, by its laws, its institutions and its discipline, can give us all the virtues we need to be happy. When we say that we were born with an inclination to the good, and that our sociable qualities prepare and invite us to find our private happiness in the public good, we must . . . be careful not to believe that we can abandon ourselves without danger to these virtuous affections. . . . Why? because nature has not done everything, and because she has left something for our reason to do.

We must keep in mind that at this point we are dealing with purely moral assessments of human nature, that is, with the springs of action. Few would have denied that men’s actions in themselves may be judged both good and evil; but we have seen to what egoistic origins the majority of writers ascribed even the good actions. The writers we are discussing in this chapter were concerned with establishing the reality of non-egoistic motives, and the love of good for its own sake. Consequently, those who believed that man, from this viewpoint, is both good and evil, might also believe in the predominance of evil in his actual behavior, either because of its inherent strength, or because of the conditions of social life. Marivaux’s position is particularly interesting, in this regard, because he was aware of the ubiquity and dominance of evil, but found in this fact the very proof that man is also ineradicably good.

The most astonishing thing in the world is that there is always on earth a mass of virtue that persists despite the affronts it suffers and the encouragement given to iniquity itself; for it

54 For Hume, see, for instance, “Of the Obligation of Promises,” in Aiken p. 87. For Buffon, see Oeuvres (ed. Piveteau), p. 337 ff.
55 Principe de morale, Oeuvres, x, 229 ff. The natural motives are pleasure and pain; but these are not safe guides to our true interest.
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[i.e., iniquity] receives all the honors, when it can escape the laws that condemn it. And assuredly, there are more guilty who are honored in the world than punished. How many times is the crime redeemed by the gain from the crime itself? Men must bear in the depths of their soul a colossal fund of justice, and they must have in their original nature a powerful vocation for following order, since there are still honest people among them.  

If men were all wicked, continues Marivaux, who rejects the Hobbesian explanation, they would abolish laws against wickedness. A society of wicked men could not even agree, in order to prevent mutual slaughter, to kill the perpetrator of a murder; one thing would be lacking in such an agreement: "that is, being made among creatures capable of observing it." Marivaux's conclusion is similar to that of writers who regarded men as evil. Fear of punishment is needed to balance iniquity and to reach "a certain mediocrity of peace, such as we have in this world." So we have a world of hypocrites, of "wicked men who will not dare to be as wicked as they would like." This is the best we are capable of, and it is up to each man to watch out for himself. Although Marivaux does not condemn men absolutely, his pessimism is supreme, and his conclusions are not too distant from those of Diderot's Rameau or of Sade. It will be interesting to see how Marivaux's concept of human nature is reflected in his novels.

This evaluation of human nature is again apparent in Leroy's important *Lettres philosophiques* (1768). To the defense of human goodness which we saw earlier in this chapter, he adds a qualifying statement. "When I maintain," he writes, "that man is born good, I do not imply that this quality is a habitual principle of action in men." This is so, simply because personal interest is the most powerful motive in life. The most we can say is that "they usually do not reject opportunities to do good to others," and that when not preoccupied with themselves, "they yield gladly to pity."  

56 *Le Cabinet du philosophe* (1734), p. 75-80. In an earlier work, Marivaux had emphasized the feeling of dignity and excellence we experience in not following self-interest. (*L'Indigent philosophe*, in *Le Spectateur français* (1728), II, 80-82.)

57 p. 277-278. Leroy also expresses his thought as follows: "Man may then be considered as a good being, or at least endowed with a disposition that develops simultaneously with the other faculties and which inclines him strongly to goodness when he is not agitated in a contrary direction." Passions may produce a de-
A particularly interesting example of the difficulty of defending man's goodness in the eighteenth century intellectual climate is provided by Mirabeau, in his *Essai sur le despotisme* (1775). He opens the essay with a stout affirmation of the optimistic position, based on the thesis that men are necessarily, if not naturally sociable. Sociability, he argues, is itself a virtue, and involves justice, which includes all other virtues, even benevolence. Society, then, does not need to postulate wickedness to explain its origin: "man, whom an irresistible instinct attracts to society, is not a wicked being. . . . I promise only to prove . . . that social man is essentially and naturally good, that he can be happy only in fulfilling this necessary condition of his being, and that he will always be just and happy when he will be enlightened about his true interests, which are always in conformity with justice and with his happiness." Consequently, all passions can be easily directed to the general good; otherwise nature (which obviously cannot be contradictory), would not have made man social.

A more optimistic statement would be hard to find. But then Mirabeau gradually becomes entangled in a web of his own spinning. Man, he must admit, has a natural desire to dominate, enslave and exploit his fellows. This is not really a contradiction, Mirabeau argues, since goodness and justice (which, we remember, are his natural disposition) consist in subordinating these passions to the general interest. Of course, the existence of despotism shows that abuses are possible, but only when the despot is not éclairé as to where his true happiness lies. Still, Mirabeau is honest enough to admit it is true that egoism has always been, and will continue to be humanity's greatest flaw. This is so generation of this original nature. See also his *Examen des critiques du livre intitulé De l'Esprit*.

Similar opinions, in the writing of J.-Ph. Varennes, Duclos, Boudier de Villemaire, Vauvenargues, Rivarol and Marmontel contain little that requires special mention. Duclos stresses the influence of education, while Marmontel points out the fact cooperation is equally, with competition, a law of nature that extends to many species. Bonnet, on the other hand (like Rivarol) lays emphasis on "physical organization" as the important determinant, though not refusing all influence to education. In effect, he denies the transcendent value of good will, claiming that right understanding—which "resides in the organization"—will induce right choice; once again, the moral sphere is assigned to reason. See Bonnet, *Essai sur l'âme*, ch. xxix; Varennes, *Les hommes* (1727), p. 3–10; Duclos, *Considérations sur les moeurs de ce siècle* (1751), p. 8, 28–29; Boudier de Villemaire, *L'Andromètrie, ou examen philosophique de l'homme* (1753), p. 127–150; Vauvenargues, *Oeuvres*, III, 12, 33, 71; Rivarol, *De la philosophie moderne*, p. 57–58; Marmontel, *op. cit.*, p. 149 ff.
cause men, to whom nature “prescribed the desire and need to love themselves more than all else, tend to love themselves exclusively.” Unfortunately, this is an irremediable condition.

Now, it is not possible to remake humanity; the whole trick consists in doing the best we can with it: we have to be governed by our prejudices and our passions. The science of political education is to inspire in us prejudices which tend to the general welfare, and to direct our passions to it; and these passions, these so active interests, apparently so opposed, eternal sources of human divisions, will be the basis of the citizens' unity, the link of their fraternity when they will be enlightened. . . . One should therefore speak to men . . . only of their own interest. . . . Generosity, bienfaisance, justice are only words to them.

So, “enlightenment” is indefinitely postponed and gives way to “useful prejudice,” or falsehood, and to effective social conditioning! No wonder Mirabeau in later years ruefully admitted that he had “mutilated his subject”! But it is probable that he never realized why. It is doubtful that he ever realized that he had confused “nature” and “reason”—the natural (or animal) demands of human nature, and its rational demands (which stem from his being as a child of culture); and that, in refusing to allow nature to be contradictory, he was trying to avoid an admission of that unique transcendence of nature which makes it impossible to explain man in purely “natural” terms.

The counterpart of this first current, namely, that we are born neither good nor evil, but morally neutral in our inherited dispositions, was to receive its first important exposition in the writings of Morelly. Following Locke, and before Condillac or Helvétius, he develops a fairly comprehensive theory of sensualism, in a book that was little read, Essai sur l'esprit humain, ou principes naturels de l'éducation (1743). The mind is essentially passive, “like a mirror that one takes out from behind a curtain.” All men have essentially the same mental powers; all differences are caused either by different degrees of sensitivity of the receptor organs, or by the experiences to which they are exposed. If a man is only what he is made to be, la conclusion s'impose: he is indefinitely malleable, morally neither good nor evil in his inherent nature. His moral judgments, like his intellectual judgments, are extraneous to his nature; and he does not, primarily,

58 P. 2–11, 364.
have the responsibility for them. Responsibility devolves on the people among whom he is brought up, thus most importantly of all, upon the society or culture, its ideals and its faults. In his later chef-d’oeuvre, Code de la nature (1755), Morelly not only enlarges and perfects his basic theory, but tells us the specific flaw which is the cause of all human evil. It is the unlawful and unnatural institution of property. Without the hatreds, rivalry and vices engendered by property (and it is the origin of all vices), men would live together in cooperative and loving fraternity, in simple and perfect harmony.

Morelly does not deny that men are actuated by love of self; but, without making Rousseau’s distinction overtly, he uses the phrase amour de soi (although he also uses the more common term, amour-propre). In his mind, self-love definitely refers to a pre-moral motivation. However men also possess an equally natural love of their fellows, which only our competitive society distorts and suppresses. But Morelly, far from believing (as it has been claimed) that the free play of individual interests would result in their harmony—a theory that belongs rather to Helvétius (with reservations) and to the Physiocrats—reveals his fundamental distrust of human nature and of “amour de soi.” The society he sketches, here and in earlier pieces, Le Prince (1751) and La Basiliade (1753), relies upon a complete repression, a complete totalitarianism. In this, Morelly merely confirms what many egalitarian Utopias foresaw, and what history has confirmed, that a state of true communism and “fraternal love” can exist only at the price of total regimentation. Human nature, it would seem, is not what Morelly pretends to believe it is. In Newtonian fashion, he had described men as actuated by laws of attraction and repulsion—love of self, fraternal love. The suppression of prop-

60 It is only the desire of self-preservation, by innocent means. The import of Morelly’s theory is that a good society will prevent the necessity of other means. However, the means of prevention he urges betray a fear of the evil in human nature. Gauchat (op. cit., xvi, 116–123) properly criticizes Morelly’s theory for reducing man to physical motivations and satisfactions, “without supposing in man feelings, desires, superior to those of his animal part.” Morelly, to be sure, would use repression to keep it that way.

60 Neither of these motivations, however, is innate; both develop naturally from experience. This seems to be Morelly’s thought, though he does call self-love an “inclination.”

61 Note, however, that (in contrast with Rousseau’s Contrat social), Morelly supposes no constituted State, but a res publica in which citizens govern by turns.
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erty, he avers, will secure economic equality, and simultaneously cause the "love of self" motive (at least in the distorted phase of *amour-propre* or competitive self-love) to wither away, leaving only fraternal love. But Morelly must assure the working of this theory by an Inca-like regime of benevolent totalitarianism.62

The second great system to incorporate the "neutral" evaluation of human nature was that of Helvétius. It is true that we have also classified Helvétius among man's detractors, and in a certain sense that was appropriate. He is always more eager to depreciate men than to elevate them, always ready to take up arms against the theory of *bonté naturelle*, and to point out the tendency to wickedness. All this is in accord with his naturalistic view of the world. But Helvétius could not accept the theory that men are inevitably, or irremediably evil in conduct; for that would be to ruin his major thesis, which is the complete modifiability of men. Consequently, as he states his position in *De l'Esprit*, he maintains that men, sensitive to themselves alone, indifferent to others, are born neither good nor evil, but ready to be one or the other, according to whether a common interest unites or divides them; that the sentiment of preference that each feels for himself, a feeling to which the conservation of the species is attached, is engraved by nature in an ineffaceable way; that physical sensitivity has produced in us the love of pleasure and the hatred of pain; that pleasure and pain have then planted and made bud in all hearts the seed of self-love, whose development gave birth to passions, from which all our vices and virtues have come forth.63

This theory represents a terminus of the sensationist psychology of the *tabula rasa*. It is taken up again in *De l'Homme*. The wickedness or virtue of men, Helvétius there proclaims, is purely "the product of their good or bad laws." He rejects both the Hobbesian theory that men, because of their desire to possess the same things, are born in a state of war, and, on the other hand, the "original goodness" and moral sense of the English. Men want only to be happy. They are not necessarily bad, for the simple reason

62 Morelly's writings had at first little influence; not so much because of their moral notions [as Delisle de Sales claimed], but mainly because current moral and political theories, and the theory of man, were based on the idea of property as a natural instinct and right. The best edition of *Le Code* is that of Professor Gilbert Chinard.

63 P. 298.
that their happiness is not necessarily attached to another's harm. (Here is where Sade went far beyond his master.)

We do love others, when we feel or know it will be good for us to do so. But the necessity for laws proves that men are not naturally good. Even Rousseau, charges Helvétius, admits, in the first book of his *Emile*, that we must experience suffering before we can pity others. The child has all the vices of the man. The great examples of virtue are found not among savages, but among civilized peoples; in any society, the most detestable person would be the natural man, obeying only his caprice and passing feeling. Here it is obvious that Helvétius, unlike Rousseau, confuses goodness with virtue. For him there is only one criterion, the general welfare, and only one way to attain it, through "sound education" and the proper political arrangement, which must unite self-interest with public interest, largely through the mechanism of esteem.

If Helvétius inclined to the pessimistic side, another great materialist, d'Holbach, tended toward optimism. Applying physics to human life, he conceived of history as an inevitable advance towards truth, an advance determined by the law of egoism (or the desire to better ourselves), and by the harmony of nature. His central tenet is again that of the sensationalist-materialist school. "Man by his nature is neither good nor evil. He seeks happiness at each instant of his duration." Passions are determined by the pleasure-pain reaction, which is merely necessary, and pre-moral. A man becomes moral if he complies with these impulses and satisfies his needs in a way useful to himself and his fellow-men.

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64 Helvétius does say that "one necessarily becomes the enemy of men when one can be happy only by their unhappiness" (p. 378).

65 De l'Homme, p. 137 ff., De l'Esprit, 371 ff. Whereas Condillac's own reasoning left man a prisoner of experience, Helvétius and other materialists thought man could make environment, and, by determining experience, determine behavior, through the pleasure-pain motives. Helvétius, as we know, believed that character, as well as ideas and reactions, could be thus formed. Another "optimist" in this regard was the marquis de Chastellux, who also proclaimed the malleability of human nature and the power, through environment, to manipulate it. The constancy of human nature in regard to its needs and motives could be counted on to produce the desired results, with the certainty of physical determinism. (Cf. Ch. Frankel, p. 57 ff.)

66 Système social, ou principes naturels de la morale et de la politique (Londres, 1773), I, 9.

67 See the long development in Système de la nature, I, 161 ff. "The heart of man is a field which, according to its nature, is equally suited to produce the thistles or useful grains . . . according to the seed that will be sown in it, and the culture that will have been given it."
(But if the need and the impulse are necessary, will he not be inclined to satisfy them at any cost? This is one of the ethical problems the materialists had to face!\textsuperscript{68} This summary statement could be attributed equally to Helvétius or to d'Holbach.

What determines a man to fulfill the conditions of virtue? Like Morelly and Helvétius, d'Holbach gives full weight to “circumstances,” emphasizing examples, habits and above all government. “You can make of man whatever you want.”\textsuperscript{69} The greatest scoundrel could have been a model of virtue, the most virtuous man an arrant villain. “Our conduct, good or bad, always depends on the true or false ideas we fashion or which others give us.” This will determine how we go about satisfying our necessary needs—in egoism, or in bienveillance.\textsuperscript{70}

Optimism infiltrates d'Holbach's theory when he objects to man being “unjustly considered” as inclined to evil, and as an enemy of his fellows; and when he declares, “No man is evil gratuitously.”\textsuperscript{71} Passions are natural; but the bad use of them is not.\textsuperscript{72} Also optimistic is the implication of d'Holbach's whole theory, that men are reasonable, and will, if properly enlightened, choose the way of virtue. Virtue is the choice of reason.

We shall close this section of our discussion with the mention of several lesser writers who upheld the “neutral” theory, and with a brief consideration of the Encyclopédie. One of these lesser, but fascinating figures, is the anarchist Dom Deschamps—an eccentric but powerful thinker. In the primitive state, he believes,

\textsuperscript{68} In Le Christianisme dévoilé, d'Holbach writes that man does good when it is to his interest, and evil only when he would otherwise be obliged to give up his welfare.

\textsuperscript{69} Système social, p. 12. D'Holbach does not deny a temperamental penchant towards what society qualifies as good or evil, but believes it can almost always be overcome.

\textsuperscript{70} “It is our parents and our teachers who make us good or evil. . . . Their examples and their lessons modify us for our entire lives.” (Système de la nature, loc. cit.) In his refutation of d'Holbach, Richard attacks this whole theory. “Experience proves that we cannot make of man whatever we wish, and that our vices are born with us.” Bad men often spring from the best upbringing, and vice versa. (Op. cit., p. 9 ff.) The malleability theory was defended, however, by the abbé Coyer, who was interested in refuting Hobbes' description of man as evil. “If education had no effect, man would be less perfectible than the brute we put to sleep by discipline.” (Plan d'éducation publique, Œuvres (1782–1783), III, 116–119. Diderot's refutation of Helvétius, consequently, is simultaneously a refutation of d'Holbach.

\textsuperscript{71} P. 24. See note 68, supra. This belief ties in with d'Holbach's uncompromising defense of truth, in the controversy over the values of truth and falsehood.

\textsuperscript{72} P. 117.
men were only slightly inclined to evil. In the "state of laws," they are necessarily evil, because laws contradict their desires. But in the anarchic state, or "état de moeurs," of which he is the proponent, there would be none of the rivalry or factitious passions which "make of us the most unreasonable animal species," and we could not be evil. The results of these factitious appetites have been the development of man's intelligence and everything excessive that he does. "His morality is so insane, that, physical being though he is, he seems to form a genre à part and to be of another nature than the physical. Whence the idea which we have, that he is indeed of another nature." 73

A second figure is Charles Lévesque, who in 1775 published a book entitled L'homme moral. 74 Lévesque was clearly influenced by Rousseau, as well as by the sensualists. Man, according to him, is born ni bon ni méchant, since he is born without ideas. In the state of nature, he thought only of satisfying his needs—or rather, he felt, since he could not reason. He had therefore no moral notions, no respect for property, no relationship with others. Then he acquired ideas, and mostly false ideas. Once he has reached that point, a man's inclinations will always be determined "by the way in which he considers his interests." Consequently, to make man good again (sic), what we have to do is rid him of his imaginary self-interest. Lévesque concludes that men must either give up living together, or give up their freedom and submit to repression—such are the vices of their nature. "Men infect each other, when they touch each other too closely." Like Rousseau and Morelly, Lévesque blames an acquisitive society—but he envisages no other.

Rivarol also fits within the logic of this position. Natural goodness is an imaginary entity.

Man is born with physically good organs and useful needs; but there is nothing moral in that; if he were born good or evil, he would be born a man fully made and determined; nothing could convert him or pervert him. But man is born able to become just or unjust, and especially to be both, and in general, to be good and evil in mediocrity. 75

73 Le vrai système, p. 105-106.
74 P. 33-40, 106.
75 De l'homme intellectuel et moral (1800), in Oeuvres choisies, ed. de Lescure, i, 212. Rivarol does not deny that men are capable of virtuous deeds (1, 135).
Rivarol, with little confidence in man, nonetheless reserves a wide field to the powers of conditioning and coercion, thereby justifying his political authoritarianism.

The belief that men are born neither good nor evil by a necessary and natural predetermination dominates in the *Encyclopédie* and was shared by a large number of writers. René Hubert has shown that to a certain degree the philosophers' primitivism is deceptive. Many writers, including Jaucourt and Diderot, acknowledged or even emphasized the vices and aberrations of primitive peoples. They could not really believe in man's *bonté originelle*, because they did not believe in an “original” human nature which “fell” and was corrupted. Primitive society, no matter how primitive, is already conducive to vice and corruption, to a greater or lesser extent, and there is no earlier human nature to talk about. In other words, man in himself is not a rigidly defined being, but rather, as Diderot wrote in the *Rêve de d'Alembert*, an ensemble of faculties and tendencies. It means nothing to speak of these as developing “normally,” since they will respond to precise situations that differ widely, and will conflict among themselves, as self-interest and compassion, for instance, are bound to do. Yet, paradoxically perhaps, we may properly speak of human nature as being depraved or corrupted, when this development is harmful to the self or to others, or contradicts what we feel man might have been. As Gilbert Chinard has noted, the problem for Helvétius and d'Holbach, for instance, “is not to bring man back to a [moral] goodness which he never knew in the state of nature, but to the innocence from which he has strayed, under the influence of charlatans who have invented religion and ambitious men who have invented government. . . .” Thus Morelly satirizes philosophers who have given men innate vices and virtues, as well as innate ideas of virtue and vice, and who have put within his breast “the fateful seeds of depravity which impel him to seek his good at the ex-

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76 Although I do not agree with all of Hubert's analysis, his summary of this concept of man's nature is excellent. “He is only a faculty of receiving impressions, a tendency to seek them and retain them. Morally man is capable of justice and virtue, but the tendency of a being to affirm itself, which is the principle of all forms of life, may lead equally to egoism, to rivalry among individuals, to inequity and to vice.” (*Op. cit.*, p. 173-174.) The influence of Spinoza and Condillac is particularly evident in this summary.

77 Morelly, *Code de la nature*, p. 162 n.
pense of all his race and the entire universe, if it were possible.” Man, he contends, is born only with faculties enabling him to acquire all of these. This is also Rousseau’s basic opinion, though it is not possible to harmonize all his statements. Hence, for all these thinkers, the molding and conditioning powers of society are of supreme importance—a view which Diderot, in his Réfutation d’Helvétius, was to criticize because of the limits imposed by heredity.

Although the names of the four most famous of the philosophes have frequently come into this discussion, it would be well, at this point, to examine some of their ideas more closely. This is particularly important in regard to Rousseau. His opinions on man’s goodness, frequently debated, have frequently been misunderstood, and I have reserved a general discussion of them until this point in our survey.

Montesquieu’s principal statement comes early in his work, in the episode of the Troglodytes. The story is developed by Usbek, in reply to his friend’s request for a justification of his earlier opinion, “that men were born to be virtuous.” There is, then, a fusion of two separate questions in this episode. Montesquieu not only paints men as naturally good, but contrary to the distinction Rousseau was later to make between goodness and virtue, he attributes to them a concomitant knowledge of moral distinctions and obligations. We must further emphasize the fact that Montesquieu presents us two groups of Troglodytes. The first are a supposed incarnation of the Hobbesian concept of human nature (or, mutatis mutandis, of Sade’s). Montesquieu, in this part, shows how utter selfishness leads to self-destruction; a society based on pure egoism is not viable. The annihilation of the Troglodytes spares two families, who were “very strange.” They were innocently good, affectionate and benevolent; they worked willingly for the common good, and found their pleasure in virtue, of which they had a natural knowledge and perception. These Troglodytes, possessing both moral knowledge and moral will, form a happy and prosperous society, one which proves that all virtues do not derive from selfish motives, and that happiness never does. But

78 Ibid., p. 161-162.
79 Lettres persanes (1721), Lettres xi-xiv. For an excellent study of this question, see A. S. Crisafulli, “Montesquieu’s Story of the Troglodytes.”
Montesquieu shows, as Rousseau was also to do in his *Discours sur l'inégalité*, that the state of innocence is a temporary one. As social and economic structure becomes more complex, the Troglodytes find it necessary to develop at least mildly coercive political mechanisms, and to add utilitarian motivations to their natural propensities toward altruism and social welfare. With these aids, it is possible for natural virtue to survive in an artificial society.

The apologue of the Troglodytes does not really pretend to prove that men are naturally good. Its first purpose is to show that the concept of human nature as radically evil is not the only possible assumption; that it is, in fact, an impossible one. In view of the persistence of functional societies, it is equally possible to assume an original human nature that is innocently good and altruistic—even though present reality indicates degeneration from such a state and the need to cope with human selfishness. The episode of the Troglodytes is an abstract reconstruction, a lesson in what might be, or what might have been. Another alternative is set up against Hobbes, as an equally plausible, or perhaps a more plausible assumption to explain the origination and the continuance of societies. Most important of all, perhaps, Montesquieu, before Rousseau and Morelly, emphasizes the possibility, and indeed the necessity, of a society based on cooperation, in preference to a society motivated by competition and self-seeking. This outlook stands in opposition to the theories of Mandeville, to those of the Physiocrats, and to the tide of nascent laissez-faire capitalism.

Montesquieu is essentially a realist. In the Troglodyte apologue, he does not lose sight of the power of self-interest, and of its struggle against good and moral impulses. In a later part of the *Lettres persanes*, he emphasizes this conflict, and especially the separation between knowing the good and willing it. Men will not do evil gratuitously, for its own sake, but they will do it for their own sake.

It is true that men do not always see these relations; often, even when they see them, they turn away from them; and their in-

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80 "This is clearly recognized by Montesquieu in 'Letter 83' where he states that if men are not always just, it is because the voice of justice is often drowned by passions and by stronger feelings of self-interest." (Crisafulli, p. 387.)
terest is always what they see best. Justice raises her voice; but she has difficulty making herself heard in the tumult of passions . . . nobody is evil gratuitously: there must always be a determining reason; and that reason is always a reason of self-interest.\textsuperscript{81}

The \textit{Esprit des lois} (1748) reveals no significant change in Montesquieu's realistic views on the combination of good and evil in human nature. He admits men may be good in an abstract state of nature, or in a primitive relationship. But as soon as they form an organized society, "they seek to turn in their own favor the principal advantages of that society, which produces a state of war among them." Laws and government become necessary.\textsuperscript{82} Montesquieu thus reverses Hobbes. Society favors the development of certain selfish tendencies that become evil because of the harm they do to others. Because the combination of good and evil in men is shifting, and because they are malleable, Montesquieu sees the necessity of different forms of government based on different moral principles. Democracy, relying on virtue, assumes that they are capable of far more than self-love, that they are capable of living in a cooperative society. Monarchy, depending on honor, that is, on the desire for distinction, utilizes self-love for the betterment of a competitive society. We have already noted that Montesquieu considers this form of government to be the most practical, because non-selfish virtues are not to be depended on, though it is ideally inferior to democracy. The system of checks and balances, which he considers necessary to liberty (and which he perhaps intends to apply to democracies also) relies not on the goodness of human nature, but on competition among rather selfishly inclined men. "Ambition," James Madison was to say, "must be made to counteract ambition."\textsuperscript{83} As for despotism, which relies on fear, it can only be considered as destructive to all virtue, and even, in a sense, to self-interest.

We have followed the general course of Voltaire's thought, as well as the oscillation of his feelings, in regard to the evaluation of human nature. However, since the general tenor of my earlier analysis laid considerable weight—and properly, I think—on his increasing pessimism, it would not be inappropriate, in this chap-

\textsuperscript{81} P. 213.
\textsuperscript{82} Livre I, ch. 3.
\textsuperscript{83} Havens, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 155.
ter, to emphasize a bit further the more optimistic aspects. Again, what we are considering is not man's moral knowledge, but his will and capacity. The most important element of optimism in Voltaire's evaluation is his persistent rejection of the doctrine of original sin, and consequently, of natural depravity. This is a central point in his humanistic opposition to Christianity, and to Pascal in particular. To be sure, Voltaire's own pessimistic pronouncements often sound perilously close to this very doctrine, but there is an important distinction to be made. Voltaire's unalterable opposition is to the absolute derogation of human nature implied in the theological doctrine, with its consequent dependence on divine grace, mediated through the Church. In society, Voltaire would hold, men are evil, because they become so. It is not impossible that under other conditions they might become good. "Man is not born evil; he becomes it. . . . You have at most on earth, in the stormiest times, one man in a thousand who can be called evil, and even he is not always so." 84 And again: "Man is not born evil; he becomes it, as he becomes ill." 85 Evil is a pathological state, to which men are, indeed, very prone. Unfortunately, the depth and import of Voltaire's philosophy suffer from his defense of the prevailing society and its basic values (notwithstanding his attack on particular abuses), and from his failure to take up the ultimate challenge implied in his defense of human nature. His attitude was essentially pragmatic; he was anxious only to bring about those reforms which seemed feasible within an immediately foreseeable future.

With Diderot, too, we have seen the alternating moods, and examined his pessimism. We should not forget that he wrote that man is the most ferocious animal, and the only cruel one. 87

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85 Art. "Méchant," xx, 85–86. A more complete and definitive statement of the good and evil Voltaire sees in men is contained in the article "Homme" (xxix, 373–385). He specifically blames "education, example and the government" into which men find themselves thrown, and chance, which often determines a man one way or the other. He repeats the same judgment in his *Notebooks* (i, 382), referring here to the innocence of children and the generosity of young people. "Pity is in all hearts." In an earlier work, the *Traité de métaphysique* (1734), Voltaire asserted that bienveillance for others of his species is one of man's three natural instincts, self-love and reproduction being the others; it is a distinctively human trait.
87 Art. "Féroce."
His emotional nature, however, led him to moments of enthusiastic rapture such as Voltaire was not inclined to. Much depended on the stimulus of the moment. On hearing a tale of heroism, he exclaims,

No, my dear, nature did not make us bad; it is bad education, bad examples, bad legislation that corrupt us. If that is an error, at least I am satisfied to find it at the bottom of my heart, and I should sorely regret it if experience or reflection ever disillusioned me. What should I become? I should either have to live alone, or else believe myself continually surrounded by wicked men.\textsuperscript{88}

Voltaire and the deists began their defense of man by rejecting outright the dogma of original sin. Diderot scarcely considered it worth refuting.\textsuperscript{89} He was more concerned—when not pursuing materialistic paradoxes—with establishing his belief that man loves the good. This was for him an article of faith. He gives it most revealing expression in a letter to Sophie Volland describing a heated discussion among the encyclopedists.

We tore each others’ eyes out, Helvétius, Saurin and I. Last night they claimed that there were men who had no feeling of rectitude and no idea of immortality. . . . I admitted freely that fear of resentment was indeed the strongest dike against wickedness, but I insisted on joining to this motive another which arose from the very essence of virtue, if virtue was not to be a word. I insisted that its imprint was never entirely effaced, even in the most degraded souls; I insisted that a man who preferred his own interest to the public good must feel more or less that there was something better to be done, and that he must esteem himself less for not having the strength to sacrifice himself; I tried to say that, since a person could not make himself mad at will, neither could he make himself wicked; that if order was something, one could never succeed in ignoring it as if it were nothing; that however one might pretend to scorn posterity, there was no one who would not suffer a little when assured that those whom he would not hear would say of him that he was a scoundrel.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{88} Correspondance, \textit{éd.} Roth, iii, 226. It is likely that, in this last thought, Diderot had Rousseau in mind. He goes on to blame religion for human cruelty.

\textsuperscript{89} He makes only a mocking reference to it in an early work, \textit{La Promenade du sceptique} (\textit{Oeuvres}, 1, 201), and elsewhere in a footnote (ii, 98).

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{1er} décembre 1760, \textit{Correspondance}, \textit{éd.} Roth, iii, 281.
This optimism about human nature is recurrent in Diderot’s writings.\textsuperscript{91} Lying in between it and the pessimism we observed earlier, is an adherence to a middle ground. Men do feel pity and sympathy, and this is a great source of happiness for them.\textsuperscript{92} But at the same time, rivalry and competition are inevitable in the pursuit for self-fulfillment, and men can therefore desire the hurt of those who are most like themselves.\textsuperscript{93} This view, which we noted in Saint-Mard and others, is a secular version of the Christian dualism. For Diderot, too, the balance can be turned by social factors. In his Dedication of the \textit{Père de famille}, Diderot declares his belief in two equal forces in man, self-love and benevolence. Both are proper, and the great ethical problem in life is to establish “a just relationship between these two motives of our life.” Men are evil, but are capable of good: “Remember . . . that men would not need to be governed if they were not wicked; and that, consequently, the purpose of all authority must be to make them good.”\textsuperscript{94} But in either direction, there are limits; man can go, or be led, only so far.\textsuperscript{95} We have seen that these opinions were held by a large group of writers.

Diderot’s moralistic reaction against his materialistic comrades, La Mettrie (from whom he borrowed many ideas), and Helvétius, is at times dramatic. In his last major work, \textit{Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron} (1778–1782), he excoriates La Mettrie’s character and writings, accusing him of vilifying mankind in his \textit{Traité du bonheur}, which holds that “man is perverse by his

\textsuperscript{91} See article “Passions,” xvi, 211 f., and the following from the Second \textit{Entretien sur le Fils naturel}. “When I see a scoundrel capable of a heroic action, I remain convinced that good men are more truly good than wicked men are truly wicked; that goodness is more inseparably a part of us than wickedness; and that, in general, there remains more goodness of heart in the soul of a wicked man, than wickedness in the soul of good men.” (vii, 127–128).

\textsuperscript{92} Lettres à Sophie Volland, ii, 280. Diderot’s faith has deep roots in his early study of Shaftesbury. Although he later spurned the latter’s moral sense theory and innatism, the distinction between man and animal in motivation remains strong in his heart. Shaftesbury maintained that sympathy or compassion is not a physical reaction of pleasure or pain. Diderot comes to believe that sympathy is an accompaniment of self-love, but he never ceases to praise acts of altruism and self-sacrifice.

\textsuperscript{93} Art. “Droit naturel,” “Homme.”

\textsuperscript{94} vii, 181 f.

\textsuperscript{95} Art. “Hobbisme,” xv, 122–123. Both Hobbes and Rousseau go to improper extremes, he asserts. “Between the system of one and the other, there is another, which is perhaps the true one. The fact is that although the state of the human species is in perpetual change, its goodness and wickedness are the same: its happiness and its unhappiness circumscribed by limits it cannot cross.”
nature, and which makes of the nature of beings, moreover, the rule of their duties and the source of their happiness." 96 The significance of these lines should not be overlooked. Faced with a choice between naturalistic materialism and morality, Diderot, in the last analysis, sacrifices the former.

The most important and original statement of Diderot's position is the one he had developed in the Réfutation d'Hélpétius. 96a We have already observed how he was repelled by the materialistic reduction of man to the physical. Without abandoning materialism, he seeks to enlarge it and to surpass the narrow eighteenth century concepts. In the article "Fin," he had written, "Take a man from motive to motive, and you will find that his personal happiness is always the final end of all his purposeful acts." Diderot's refutation of Helvétius does not contradict this basic position. His entire purpose is to argue that man acts and exists on a truly moral level, as well as on a physical level, and that the first is not reducible to the second. There are two orders of pleasure: these are not moral and immoral, but physical and moral. It is not, then, the reduction to pleasure and pain to which he takes objection, but rather the reduction of these motives to the physical, or to the lowest common denominator.

. . . I am a man, and I insist on causes appropriate to man . . . Of what use is a series of consequences which are equally applicable to the dog, the weasel, the oyster, the dromedary? . . . Is it certain that physical pleasure and pain, perhaps the only principles of action in the animal, are also the only principles of the actions of man? . . . I would be taking the condition of all animal action in general to be the motive of the action of an individual of an animal species called man. All that I do, I do assuredly in order to feel agreeably, or for fear of feeling painfully; but does the word feel have only one meaning? Is there only physical pleasure in possessing a beautiful woman? Is there only physical pain in losing her by death or inconstancy? Isn't the distinction between the physical and the moral as solid as that between an animal that feels and an animal that reasons? 97

96 Oeuvres, iii, 217.
96a Written at intervals between 1773 and 1776.
97 There is an interesting parallel between Diderot's refutation of Helvétius, and Spinoza's argumentation in Prop. xvii of the third part of the Ethic. After establishing that all affects are related to desire, joy and sorrow, Spinoza, in the Scholium, asserts that the affects of animals "differ from human affects as much as the nature
Like most others in his time, Diderot was impressed with man's duality, his capacity for great good and great evil. We see in Diderot's work his belief that men could not escape the knowledge of good and evil, or love for the one and aversion for the other. But this belief is an aspiration, unable to free itself from the reality of the human situation. Man is immersed and entangled in nature, whose only right is of the strong, only value success, and only law selfishness. If Diderot's logic often cast him on the side of the beasts, his heart and his humanism always put him on the side of the angels. To the point where, in moments of primitivism, his faith in man's goodness leads him to favor a Lahontan-type of semi-anarchism, in which the impulses of nature would alone prevail, trusting that these impulses would not be the ones that society has nourished (impulses typified in his portrait of Rameau's nephew), but rather those of innocence.

With Rousseau's attitude, or attitudes, towards man's goodness, we enter into a problem that has understandably perplexed innumerable readers and critics. Part of the difficulty derives from confusing the idea that man is naturally good with the idea that man is naturally moral. Rousseau himself took some care to separate these two notions; yet, it must be confessed, he at times writes in such a way as to lead others to confuse them, if indeed, he did not do so himself. The deep sense of his whole work is to separate them. Consequently Delvolvé errs in concluding that "the optimistic finalism of Shaftesbury . . . will end up, in Rousseau, with the rehabilitation and exaltation of sensitivity, with faith in primitive instincts, with the perfection of the state of nature." Rousseau does not trust the feelings or passions, does not believe the state of nature to be the perfect state, and will not let individual instincts have their sway in society. This is why his work, though it deceptively sets out from a similar criticism of society as that of a brute differs from that of a man. Both the man and the horse, for example, are swayed by the lust to propagate, but the horse is swayed by equine lust and the man by that which is human. . . . Finally, it follows from the preceding proposition that the joy by which the drunkard is enslaved is altogether different from the joy which is the portion of the philosopher. . . ."

98 Compare Shaftesbury, who on the contrary, had made no such distinction, holding that man's nature is good and so tends spontaneously to virtue and social harmony.

of Dom Deschamps and certain primitivists, terminates at the opposite pole, and bears more analogy to that of Morelly.

Rousseau's principal writing on the subject is his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*. It is the most developed, the most original, and the most clearly thought out. In contrast to later statements that are often brief, emotional and defensive, this one is reasoned, systematic and part of a total philosophical view.

Let us first examine what Rousseau says in regard to the goodness of man in the original state of nature, which he conceives of as a pre-social state of individual isolation and independence. Since society, according to Rousseau, is a deformation of man's original nature, we cannot judge of this nature until we go back in our minds to a hypothetical uncontaminated man. Such a man is not, properly speaking, a human being, but beast-like. He lacks speech and abstract thought, which develop from social relations. He is incapable of moral judgments, since these, too, derive from social relations, as well as from reason. Original man is not, therefore, a moral being by nature; he is only what Dr. Lovejoy has called "a non-moral but good-natured brute." He owns all the qualities of a moral being only *in potentia*, eventually to be awakened when the principal human trait he does presently possess is set into motion: that is, perfectibility, an attribute of intelligence which is associated with his unique freedom and consciousness of freedom. The fact that the moment at which man leaves the state of nature is the moment at which this distinctive quality comes into play signifies that the state of nature is a condition in which man is like other animals.

Like other animals, this original of man is not what we should call evil. That is, although his actions are motivated by exclusive concern with his own comfort, safety and well-being, he will not

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100 In the *Préface*, Rousseau defines a moral being as one who is "intelligent, free, and considered in his relations with other beings." *Discours sur l'inégalité*, in Vaughan, I, 137. Rousseau will later reaffirm his belief that men become moral in society.

101 Dr. Lovejoy concludes, with perfect logic, that one cannot therefore speak of a "degeneration" from this state. Rousseau, however, does ("thinking man is a depraved animal"), for reasons that will become obvious in this discussion. See A. O. Lovejoy, "The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*." In this article, Dr. Lovejoy has already pointed out, in a somewhat different fashion, Rousseau's emphasis on the evil in human nature. My own conclusions were reached independently.
purposely hurt others; whereas social man, as Rousseau goes on
to show, necessarily finds his self-interest and pleasure in so doing.
On the other hand, he does possess a second human trait: a bi-
ological reaction of pity for his fellows in distress. Both these
qualities, self-interest and compassion, are pre-moral. There is
no judgment of right or wrong, no impulse whatsoever to sacrifice
one’s own good for the sake of another. This original man will,
without hesitation, hurt others when it is necessary for his advan-
tage—though Rousseau assures us that such occasions would be
rare. He will, as Rousseau puts it, do his own good with the least
harm to others. He will help those who need him, when he can
do so with no cost to himself.

Much of the difficulty in understanding Rousseau’s thought lies
in a double semantic confusion. The first confusion inheres in
the words “good” and “virtuous.” While Rousseau separates these
two qualities (though not so sharply in the Discours as in later
writings), it is very difficult for us to think of man as “good”
without thinking of moral good. On the other hand, Rousseau’s
natural self-love is not evil; but it does turn evil, under social
conditions, when knowledge of right and wrong, unnecessary hurt
to others, and moral effort or struggle become involved. In con-
sequence of this chain of definitions and postulates, Rousseau can

Mandeville had said that pity resembles virtue, “but as it is an impulse of
nature, that consults neither the public interest nor our own reason, it may pro-
duce evil as well as good.” (Fable of the Bees, I, 42.) The same idea is found in
Condillac. “Through instinct alone men asked and gave help to one another. I
say, ‘By instinct alone,’ because reflection could not yet play any part in it. The
one did not say, ‘It is necessary for me to act in such and such a manner in order
to make known what I need, and in order to get him to help me,’ nor the other,
‘I see by his movements that he wants such and such a thing, I am going to give
him possession of it,’ but both acted in consequence of the need which urged
them on.” (Quoted by Ch. Frankel, op. cit., p. 53.)

Anthropologists properly reject Rousseau’s concept of the state of nature, and
affirm that men have always been social animals. Aristotle states that man is a
social animal more than any bee or ant, because without living in community with
other human beings he cannot even become a human being. Rousseau is consistent
and logical, in the sense that the creature he paints is not really man, but a pre-
human being. He is illogical, in taking this pre-human creature as the point of
reference to judge the nature of “fully” human beings, since the implication is
perfectly clear that men do not become human beings until they develop con-
sistent relationships. Rousseau doubtless means that this is what men would be,
even now, if they were to grow up in isolation, or if the nature with which they
are born were left to blossom by itself. Fundamentally, Rousseau is wrong, inas-
much as the evolution of animals testifies to the fact that social living preceded
even the pre-moral qualities of which he speaks.
assert that man is "naturally good," and that he becomes evil in society, the reader taking him to mean (in fact, Rousseau later sometimes seems to take himself to mean) that man is morally good by nature; whereas both the qualities he has postulated (self-love and pity) are pre-moral.

The second semantic confusion enters at this point. While we may set up two words for Rousseau's concepts of "good" and "morally good" ("virtuous"), we have only one word for "evil," with no pre-moral analogue. Consequently, when Rousseau asserts that man becomes evil in society, he leaves the assumption that there was no correlative of evil in man's original nature, corresponding to the pre-moral "natural goodness" that is the correlative of moral goodness. This is a fallacious impression. Evil has its analogous correlative, in pre-moral self-love.

The following diagram will perhaps help to clarify the true relationships of ideas. (The solid arrows represent the proper progression implied by Rousseau's theory. The broken arrow represents Rousseau's partial, or fallacious formulation which is apparently implied when he says "man was good, society has made him evil.")

Original Man
self-love

Social Man
evil (selfishness, pride)

pity (pre-moral goodness) moral goodness (virtue)

To say "man was naturally good and society has corrupted him" is as illogical—and as meaningless—as to say, "man was evil and society has made him good." Both statements are meaningless, because they lack a common element, and exist in two separate frames of reference, the pre-moral and the moral. What Rousseau could properly say, according to his own account, is that man has progressed from one frame of reference to the other. To be rigorous, we should have to formulate his theory somewhat as follows. The original nature of man (or of the clever primate which he was originally), being devoid of moral judg-

104 Rousseau does not trace the psychological origin of moral goodness in the Discours. In the Profession de foi, however, he makes it clear that the impulse to moral goodness springs from innate good will, a "voix intérieure." This is not unrelated to ego-satisfactions; but the latter are moral satisfactions, and not those which belong to innate (pre-moral) self-love. (Emile, p. 348–354).
Human Nature and Motivation

ments, is neither morally good nor morally evil. It has egoistic and altruistic tendencies, self-directed and other-directed motives. Evil is inevitably developed by society, through the processes of self-consciousness, the habit of comparison and the cultivation of amour-propre as distinguished from amour de soi. The significant point is that hurting others comes into being as soon as a man has to deal with other men. Equally important is the fact that this condition does not exclude men's having good impulses towards each other, as well: social relations lead also to judgments of right and wrong, and to the moral conscience. In society, virtue is also developed; that is, the suppression of the egoistic impulse (which must necessarily achieve its goal at others’ expense), in the light of moral law. But it is rarer and more difficult to cultivate, requiring special care and favorable circumstances. Since man is naturally social (“naturally,” not in Rousseau's sense of “originally,” now, but in the implied sense of “inevitably” 105), Rousseau’s real thought is that man is “naturally” (but not “originally”) evil. He is also, in the same sense, “naturally” moral; but the evil is dominant, and therefore men in society are predominantly evil. “Men are wicked, a sad and continual experience makes the proof superfluous.” Rousseau several times assures us, in his writings, referring both to others and to himself, that we can be “good” (i.e., admire and desire the good), even as we do wrong, and act as wicked men. 106 This is not moral goodness, then; and man does not naturally possess it, since, to achieve it, he must conquer himself. To put it succinctly, men in society are necessarily wicked, and men must be in society. Man, as soon as he becomes man, is evil; but he is a moral being, aware of good and evil. It is this idea alone that can explain the meaning and direction of Rousseau’s work.

Consequently, the central problem and principal subject of his writings will be the ways of diminishing and controlling this evil, and of changing the balance by artificial means. Sade’s philosophy is truly implicit in Rousseau’s; but Jean-Jacques shunned his conclusions and desperately sought a way out, through perspectives

105 This is clear not only in the Discours, but in later writings, e.g., the Profession de foi (ibid., p. 354): “Man is sociable by his nature, or at least made to become it.”

106 “I see the good, I love it, and I do the wrong.” (Emile, 11, 249 ff.)
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on the past and on the future. From Rousseau's point of view, the important thing is that there is not an absolute or ontological identity between the "original nature" and what it becomes. The child does become something. Even if evil is a necessary outcome of virtual and latent characteristics, the fact that an intermediate developmental process is involved allows the possibility of intervention—of conditioning—so that a wide latitude for character-formation exists. (This is also the basis of modern psychoanalytic theory.)

Natural man, then, is not what Rousseau thinks man should be. Jean-Jacques harbored some sentimental, primitivist regrets for a lost state of innocence; and, as Dr. Lovejoy has written, "he was not emancipated from the assumption of 'natural' as excellent per se," nor from the eulogistic, deistic usage of the word to indicate an uncorrupted model. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that he preferred the state of inner conflict which impels us to live on the moral level. Civilized man is at least capable of acting as a rational being, determined by justice, while the original man was

107 It seems that Rousseau would often wish us to conclude from his thought that while man in society is evil, this is not his true nature. What he has demonstrated, however—accepting his premises—is that wickedness is not his original nature, but that it is his true nature, since his true nature is specifically the freedom and perfectibility that produce the wickedness. Or else we must admit that man must be defined as an amoral, or premoral creature, which Rousseau himself would never have allowed. As Dr. Lovejoy has put it, "It is therefore as true to say that Rousseau teaches the méchanceté naturelle, as to say that he teaches the bonte naturelle of man; and the former teaching is the more significant of the two since it alone relates to what is 'distinctive' in man's nature" (op. cit., p. 178). Of course, we must not forget the compassion which is also natural and distinctive. Nonetheless, the source of evil is in human nature.

Morelly, writing in the same year as Rousseau (1755), points out the essential identity between the view that men are born wicked, and the view that, because of their nature and the circumstances of life, they inevitably become wicked. Rousseau, like Morelly, pins his hopes on the "freedom" or malleability of human nature, and on the possibility of developing more favorable circumstances. (See Code de la nature, p. 159 ff). Morelly also sees the basic human nature as premoral, therefore not evil. The view of man's detractors, especially Sade, like the later theory of Freud, is the contrary. They held, as Morelly puts it, that man "bears within his breast the fatal seeds of depravity that impel him to seek his good at the expense of his species, and of the entire universe, if it were possible." Both Rousseau and Morelly err in thinking they have succeeded in escaping the noose by attributing this wickedness to a social development, general in the case of the former, specific in the case of the latter. As Reinhold Niebuhr has remarked, if man believes himself essentially good, and attributes evils to social and historical causes, he is begging the question. These causes are "no more than particular consequences and historical configurations of evil tendencies in man himself." A capacity for, and an inclination toward evil are presupposed. (Op. cit, l, 2.)
“a stupid and limited animal,” a slave to his impulses. For man to place himself on the level of beasts, “which are the slaves of instinct,” would be “to degrade human nature.” What Rousseau longed for most of all was to prove that man is not born wicked in his given nature. He would then be able to refute both the doctrine of original sin and the cynicism of certain philosophes. In opposition to the Church’s original perversity, he proposed original innocence, to which is added “inevitable perversity,” but one which may yet—in view of the original innocence—be checked or modified. He thought he could then, like the Christians, free God from the onus of evil and preserve faith in divine providence. At the same time, man, and his own conscience, were also to be relieved, by this new theodicy, of their burden of guilt. And the dream of a better world, of happiness, was not shut out.

All his life, Rousseau was haunted and depressed by the evil in man—in others, and in himself. To begin with, he could not completely escape the grip of Calvinism. But the effective confirmation came in his own life; the injustices (genuine and fancied)

108 Important confirmation of this view is given in the first version of the Contrat Social (Vaughan, 1, 448-449). There has never been an ideal society in the past; this is for us to create.

109 It seems, then, that “naturally good,” in one sense, is similar to the Christian idea, in its concept of an innocent, non-historical past, before the Fall, and in another sense—that of the unspoiled babe—is opposed to the Christian doctrine of innate depravity. When Rousseau speaks of man being naturally good, he refers to this ontologically “real” human nature, innocent, unmindful of evil. He must insist that this man is not a social being, or else the ontological basis of a non-evil human nature disappears. Rousseau’s theory also agrees with Christian doctrine in affirming that man, in the context of history and society, is inevitably evil (omitting, of course, the help of grace). Dr. Lovejoy excludes the psychological meaning of “naturally good” from Rousseau’s hypothesis, and considers it a later confusion in his thinking between an anthropological culture stage and the native psychological endowment of infants. A passage in the Préface, however, seems to indicate that he had both ideas in mind: “it is no light enterprise to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in the present state of man, and to know well a state which exists no longer, which perhaps never existed, which probably will never exist, and about which we must nonetheless acquire accurate notions in order to judge properly of our present state.” [Italics added.] Assuredly, it would not be necessary to know the past, or original, condition of man in order to understand his nature now, and what is “natural” in it, unless the pre-social man in the state of nature and the pre-social child were equivalent transpositions, the former being a useful hypothesis to illuminate the latter. Rousseau’s frequent “natural-artificial” antithesis, in writing about social man, also indicates the transposition. Assuredly, the child, like “original man,” is both self-interested and innocently amoral. Rousseau is thus enabled to contemplate man free of the historical and contingent, in his “essential” nature. It is, of course, dubious that man, in infancy, is “man as he really is”; this qualification belongs rather to what he becomes, when his virtualities are developed.
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which he suffered, and his unhappiness, had, he was convinced, no other cause. Man has spoiled everything. Man's nature is such that he had to become civilized, and thus to corrupt himself and all about him. At the same time, Rousseau was oppressed by his own guilt. This wickedness in himself, this guilt, he could not understand, for he felt his own good impulses and his love of virtue. There was only one explanation, one way out. He had to prove that man is not inherently or essentially evil, but has been made so. Consequently, he imagines him outside of society, an unsocial creature, a human animal who has not yet tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Thus man (including Jean-Jacques) is innocent, yet destined by his own virtualities to fall, when he commits the "original sin" of society. "As soon as I lost sight of men, I ceased to despise them; as soon as I lost sight of the wicked, I ceased to hate them. . . . I became again shy, courteous and timid, in a word, the same Jean-Jacques I had been before." 110 If Rousseau had not been obsessed with man's wickedness, he would not have pursued the dream of a state, past or future, in which man is a different being from the one we know. His struggle was to escape from the Calvinist idea of depravity, and from his own sense of guilt. Hence the desperate flights from original sin, from society, and from his own vices and failures, through the hypothetical state, and hypothetical nature, of men who existed free of the corruption which living with other men must bring about.

The ground for Rousseau's optimism lies only partly in his belief that man, considered in a situation prior to society, has no wicked impulses towards his fellows (which is all his theory really asserts). His optimism is grounded also in this other belief: it is only what might be called "natural society" that depraves man—by which term I mean the society which is formed in the inevitable course of history under the pressure of men's evil instincts. This "natural society" is the society which Rousseau calls "artificial," because he is contrasting it with the "original," pre-social state. Because this "natural society" inevitably depraves man, as described in the Discours sur l'inégalité, Rousseau deems it essential to create a truly artificial society—that is, one designed with intention and forethought—in order to dominate the natural evil in

110 Confessions, Livre IX.
us, and favor the good. Men grow more evil and unhappy as society grows more complex, and as artificial needs increase. But they are not fatally condemned to this. They may yet control their own cultural evolution. This is the faith of Rousseau, and it is the faith of the Enlightenment, with which Rousseau seems so often to quarrel.

Because of his concept of human nature, Rousseau opposed the moral and political program of the Encyclopedists, which was based largely on frank exploitation of invincible egoism, and that of the Physiocrats, which held that egoistic forces, if allowed free play, would work out to a natural harmony. His purpose was to attenuate the force of egoism, to annul its social effects, by the creation of an artificial, or "social" man. Precisely as he had rejected the sensationist reduction of the personality and insisted on the distinctively human, so he felt that such qualities as spontaneous sympathy, fraternal cooperation and moral feeling, which were as real as the motives of pleasure and pain, could become dominant social factors. But this would never come about naturally. To achieve it, a complete social, political and educational reorganization was necessary. Individual rights, as an immutable concept of Natural Law, had to be abandoned, and powerful coercive and conditioning forces put at the disposal of the collectivity, to be used from earliest childhood onward. Rousseau's theory, though it is more complex and far-reaching than the more naïve doctrines of Morelly, Helvétius and their comppeers, although it traces out an entirely different road, proclaims essentially the same lesson. Our hope lies in conditioning and repressing natural instincts, which are selfish, wicked or unsocial, by creating the proper societal environment. Since there is no fixed human nature, since man is malleable, he will respond to the stimuli of these processes.

Rousseau's opinions on man's goodness, in his other writings, are usually more fragmentary, and consequently are sometimes confusing. The majority of his statements, duly considered, do not infirm our interpretation. In the Discours sur les sciences et les arts, he tells us that in primitive times "human nature, at bottom, was not better"; and that "men are perverse; they would be worse still, if they had had the misfortune to be born
learned.” By “perverse,” Rousseau means that their impulses lead them to desire those things in the denial of which virtue consists—a situation which can exist, of course, only in society. If primitive men had fewer vices, it was only because conditions did not lead to temptation and to destruction of their innocence. Rousseau’s Réponse au roi de Pologne contains this remark concerning curiosity, which is already pregnant with the whole system he will develop: “He [man] should thus strive to repress it, like all his other natural inclinations.” Natural inclinations, harmless in a state of isolation, are dangerous to virtue in society. In the Lettre à d’Alembert and in Emile, Rousseau’s strictures on Molière and La Fontaine again testify to his belief in the wickedness of human nature; for he is certain that both adults and children will, in each case, put the worst, the most vicious interpretation upon the situation presented, regardless of the author’s intentions.

In the Lettre à d’Alembert Rousseau also declares that love of moral beauty is as innate in us as self-love. “Man’s heart is always right about what does not concern him personally. . . . When our self-interest gets involved, our feelings are soon corrupted and it is only then that we prefer the evil that is useful to us to the good that nature makes us love.” Obviously, however, nature makes us love ourselves first and most. Rousseau’s social reform is designed with the hope of a state of things in which there will be no advantage to evil-doing; consistently, he stresses our weakness in love of the good, and the necessity of avoiding temptation. His assertion of man’s “goodness” is, as I have said, principally an effort to prove that man is not naturally perverse; that is, he does not naturally love evil for its own sake, and derive pleasure from it. Social man, it is true, develops inevitable perversity, but to be good is not against nature. It is significant that contrary to the statements of Diderot and Sade which we noted in an earlier chapter, Rousseau exclaims, “He who could be all-powerful (celui
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qui pourrait tout) would never do evil.” 114 In other words, assuming natural “goodness” in such a creature, he would do no evil, having no need to.

Rousseau’s theory also holds, however, that when man becomes fully human, in society, he becomes a moral being; he knows good and evil, and is capable of good, even though evil is dominant. All this is clearly seen in La Nouvelle Héloïse. To be sure, when we do good, we are in the deepest sense doing it for ourselves, since it makes us happy to follow our natural longing for the good. The same instinct for happiness carries us to love of the good and to passions that destroy it. Left to ourselves, the passions will triumph over virtue; “for what can all that do against my personal interest, and in the end which matters most to me, my happiness at the expense of the rest of mankind, or the happiness of others at the cost of mine?” Our feelings mislead us; nor can we count on our reason; for reason, corrupted by egoism, corrupts the conscience itself.115 We must fight, Rousseau warns us, not only against the artificialities and corruptions of society, but against penchants and passions which, non-moral in the state of nature, are vicious in society—even though they are “natural.” But here, and elsewhere, Rousseau does not fail to insist on men’s compassion and humanity, on his impulsive (or “natural”) love of the good purely for its own sake. Julie learns that self-interest is not the only motive of action;116 and that self-love may be made either good or bad “by the accidents that modify it, which depend on customs, laws, ranks, fortune, and our whole human polity.” 117 All this is consistent with the main drift and tenor of Rousseau’s work: that virtue is necessary to happiness; and for men to be virtuous, the good in them must be fortified, and the wickedness deterred, by such recourses as belief in a personal, provident God, by proper ways of living, by education and by the institutions of a rationally constructed State.

In Emile we read, “It is not true that the inclination to evil is

114 Emile, Oeuvres, ii, 235.
115 La Nouvelle Héloïse, ed. Mornet, ii, 297–298, ii, 2; iii, 65–85.
116 In the Profession de foi, Rousseau repeats the common argument, “What does it mean, to go to one’s death for one’s own interest?”
117 La Nouvelle Héloïse, iii, 250–251, ii, 297–298. All the ideas referred to are stated by Julie de Wolmar, who is Rousseau’s porte-parole in these parts of the work.
invincible.” The word “invincible” implies both the innateness, or inevitability of wickedness, and the belief that it can be overcome. Rousseau’s “negative education” similarly implies that although goodness is an innate potentiality in the child, so is evil.

The reader of Rousseau, as is well known, will not obtain from his writings such an impression of logical consistency. As the years advanced, he tended more and more to fragmentary, epigrammatic statements, to the effect that man is naturally good and society has corrupted him. Whether it be due to impatience and reluctance to explain the intricacies of his thought at each moment, or to an increasing polemical sharpness, or even to a confusion in his own thinking, such isolated, facile phrases distort the deeper meanings of his philosophy. And yet, quite understandably, they have been generally taken as its final formulation, and have been the carriers of his influence.

That there are some changes, or divergences, in Rousseau’s opinions, is undeniable. He will even occasionally confuse the concepts of man as naturally good and naturally moral, by making conscience, which is (in some of his formulations) the faculty of knowing good and evil, or (in others) the innate love of moral good, a part of bonté naturelle. He will stoutly maintain that all our first impulses are “droites,” oblivious that this means nothing in view of their absence of context; for innocence cannot exist in a social context, but only morality and immorality. There is, perhaps, no more typical or succinct statement, than the one which occurs in his Lettre à M. de Beaumont (1762): “... that man is a being naturally good, loving justice and order; that there is no original perversity in the human heart, and that the first impulses of nature are always droits.” All of this statement, except the phrase “loving justice and order,” is consistent with the Discours sur l’inégalité; but a casual reading leaves a quite different impression. Rousseau’s awareness of the contradiction, and his desire for consistency, are apparent when he asks, almost in objection to his own lines, how man can be called naturally good if his sole innate passion, amour de soi, is “indifferent to good or evil.” And his explanation is precisely that man is not originally good, but pre-moral; and that his goodness, his moral and spiritual

118 Oeuvres, iii, 64.
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being, develop only from his relations with others, even as his wickedness does. The rest of the explanation follows the three cultural stages of the Discours.

It would be most interesting to follow in detail the vagaries of Rousseau's opinions in all his works. We do not have space for this, and we can afford to spare ourselves the task, in view of the notable series of articles on this subject by George R. Havens.119

The real import of Rousseau's "theory of natural goodness," is, then, that social man (i.e., man) is naturally wicked; and that he also has knowledge of the moral good and rather weak inclinations to it which it is our problem to encourage in every way. Man is good, but that is not enough; he is also so wicked, that we must look forward to his learning to be virtuous—by which is meant his learning to overcome his wickedness. Thus, in a roundabout and unique way, Rousseau belongs with those who considered man to be both good and evil. His accent is often on the goodness; but paradoxically, this was because he was so profoundly convinced of the evil.

In closing our discussion of this subject, we should take brief note of Kant's chapter, "On the Radical Evil in Human Nature" (1792).120 It is not my intention to analyze Kant's moral philosophy; but there are several points of relationship with the thought of the French Enlightenment that are worthy of mention.

In his essay, Kant poses the problem of man's nature in the dual form we have examined: "the question is, whether a mean is not at least possible, namely, that man as a species may be neither good nor bad, or at all events that he is as much one as the other, partly good, partly bad?" Kant rejects both formulations. In answering this question, he eliminates the two criteria that were most characteristic of the writers we have studied. On the one hand, he rejects the criterion of actions, since their adherence to or violation of objective moral laws does not necessarily correspond to subjective motives, or "maxims." On the other hand, he rejects equally those impulses or inclinations, altruistic or egoistic, usually called "natural," which determine the elective will (e.g., compassion, or Rousseau's pre-moral "goodness"). De-

119 "La théorie de la bonté naturelle de l'homme chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau."
120 From First Part of the Philosophical Theory of Religion, in T. K. Abbott, Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and other works, pp. 325–360.
spite the use of different vocabulary, Kant follows the drift of Rousseau's distinction, and limits moral goodness, or the decision as to whether a man is morally good or bad, to "the rule that the elective will makes for itself for the use of its freedom," that is, its maxim.\textsuperscript{121}

For Kant, as for Rousseau, the test of moral goodness comes in a situation in which our knowledge of right, or objective moral law, is in conflict with pleasure, passion, self-interest. A person is good if he follows the former out of free preference—free of coercion, of fear of punishment or remorse, and of desire for reward. We have seen that only a minority of French thinkers considered this possible, and almost none considered it a consistent likelihood, in view of their estimate of human nature. Many believed men were not free, many more believed men could follow only self-interest, and some did not believe in an objective moral law. Men, they concluded, had to be conditioned, coerced, or lured by ultimate self-interest. They were good if their actions coincided with positive law or what was held to be public good; or if they possessed natural (i.e., necessary) altruistic impulses, and followed them. We can apply to them Kant's statement, that they are satisfied "to call a man good who is a bad man of the average class."

We shall not try to follow Kant in his interesting analysis of human nature, but merely note the points of reference to our earlier discussion. Included in his analysis is the non-moral concept of "mechanical self-love," and that of the "vices of culture," which derive from man's rational nature and bring in the peculiarly human characteristic of "estimating oneself as happy or unhappy only in comparison with others." Jealousy, rivalry, and fear of superiority in others result from the latter. A third factor is man's moral nature, his ability to choose the moral law as spring of his will.

In discussing man's propensity to evil, Kant makes some distinctions that are related in interesting fashion to the thought of the French writers of the Enlightenment. He sees three degrees in this propensity: frailty, or weakness in following maxims (Rousseau's "I see the right, I love it, but I do the wrong"); im-

\textsuperscript{121} That Rousseau, however, was not able to free himself from an admixture of enlightened self-interest, we shall see later in this study.
purity, or mixture of non-moral motives even in good purposes ("dutiful acts are not done purely from duty"); depravity, or the propensity to adopt bad maxims—which is perversity, as it reverses the moral order, even when the actions performed are legally good.

For if other springs besides the moral law itself are necessary to determine the elective will to actions conforming to the law (ex. gr., desire of esteem, self-love in general, or even good-natured instincts, such as compassion), then it is a mere accident that they agree with the law, for they might just as well urge to its transgression. The maxim, then, the goodness of which is the measure of all moral worth in the person, is in this case opposed to the law, and while the man's acts are all good, he is nevertheless bad.

Contrary to Rousseau, Kant declares that in the state of nature men do evil for its own sake, without the excuse of advantage. In civilization, they are more vicious: we find conquerors taking satisfaction merely in their superiority; secret falsehood in the most intimate friendship; hatred for benefactors; secret joy in the misfortunes of those we love. Here, then, is the picture we found sketched by man's detractors, the same evaluation which led Sade to draw the conclusion: this is the way men are, therefore this is the way they must be, and should be.

For Kant, however, this badness cannot be imputed, as was usually done, to inclinations springing from sensibility (pleasure and pain). These have no direct reference to badness, and we are not responsible for them. Nor does the cause of wickedness reside in the Reason, for such a malignant Reason would then be the spring for action; it would disown its own moral law and abolish obligation. \(^{122}\) The first of these two imputations would make of man a mere animal being; the second, a devilish being. Man can never abandon the moral law, as it is part of his essential nature; but it is opposed by his physical nature (sensibility, and self-love, which are blameless in themselves). The evil lies, then, in his subordination of the first to the second, in making self-love the condition of his obedience to moral law. This is Kant's conclusion, and we see how contrary it is to the general drift of eighteenth century

\(^{122}\) This, of course, was precisely Sade's attempt.
French thought, which held that self-interest is the legitimate, best and only way for man to adopt the moral maxim.

There is, then, in human nature this radical propensity to evil; a natural propensity, corrupting the source of all maxims, which cannot be destroyed, and which is rooted in the free elective will. Yet it is possible to overcome this propensity. Human depravity is not so much a disposition to adopt the bad as bad (this would make man devilish, as Sade did); it is rather perversity, which makes us look, at best, at the conformity of actions to moral law, not to their derivation from it. Like Rousseau, Kant wonders at the original moral capacity within us:

What is that in us (we may ask ourselves) by which we, who are constantly dependent on nature by so many wants, are yet raised so far above it in the idea of an original capacity (in us) that we regard them all as nothing, and ourselves as unworthy of existence, if we were to indulge in their satisfaction in opposition to a law which our reason authoritatively prescribes; although it is this enjoyment alone that can make life desirable, while reason neither promises anything nor threatens.

While we shall not try to go into the complexities of the relation between Rousseau and Kant, the following few lines from the Profession de foi strike significant echoes:

The origin (le principe) of all [moral] action is in the will of a free being; we cannot go back any further . . . There is then at the bottom of our hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue, by which, despite our own maxims, we judge our actions and those of others as good or bad . . . in meditating on the nature of man, I thought I discovered in it two distinct principles, one of which raised him to the study of eternal truths, to the love of justice and moral beauty, to the regions of the intellectual world whose contemplation is the delight of the sage, the other of which lowered him into himself, enslaved him to the empire of the senses, to the passions which are their ministers, and through them frustrated all that the first feeling inspired in him.

On the basis of a rigorously logical development, Kant has rejected the formula that man is both good and evil. But his theory works out in such a fashion, that many of the French moralists we have discussed would have reached precisely that conclusion from
his presentation of the basic phenomena of man’s indestructible moral capacity which is always at grips with an innate propensity to pervert it. Like the majority of the French thinkers, Kant finds this propensity both radical and generally triumphant. Unlike them, he will not admit the pragmatic evasions on which they pinned their hopes for making man a “moral being.” In all this, we can see how close Kant is to the French Enlightenment—and yet how far beyond it he has gone.

The analysis of human nature performed by eighteenth century moralists left ethics and the problem of values in an impasse. The struggle of these moralists to find a way out, which we shall examine in the second part of this study, was unsuccessful. Its failure left as other possibilities the moral nihilism of Sade, Kant’s return to ethical rigorism, or the Romantic return to Catholic absolutes. The choice was between authoritarianism or dogma, and the absurd. The revolt of Western man was to become a concrete reality; but the middle road, the humanistic quest for the realm of justice, was unable to maintain itself against the two extremes, the absolute of the sacred and the absolute of violence. It is significant that Kant and Sade were writing in the same years, at the very close of a century of philosophie.