

CHAPTER SIX

INTERPRETING HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will apply the theme of interpretation to history. The reader will be asked to consider the fundamental question of whether history progresses. Have humans succeeded throughout history in creating societies that are progressively more peaceful and prosperous or, at the opposite extreme, are we in a state of perpetual decline? Consider also a third alternative – do we move between the two extremes in cycles of rise and fall? What or who influences the interpretation of historical facts? Why do we study history? Why is it so important for us?

Some people would argue that advances in science and technology are indications of progress, while others would focus on the fact that some of the most ‘advanced’ societies have committed the most terrible crimes. How has the development of civilization helped and hindered our progress? The reader should reflect upon the criteria they would establish for an ‘advanced’ society and think about whether the major events in human history point towards a progressive interpretation.

The study of history involves more than memorizing a list of facts, such as dates, names and places. Rather, we use these facts as tools to interpret the significance of events in history, hopefully with the idea that we can learn from our past mistakes and have some control over creating a more positive future for ourselves. The reader should consider the roles education, the arts and sciences, and reason and religion play in the quest for a better society.

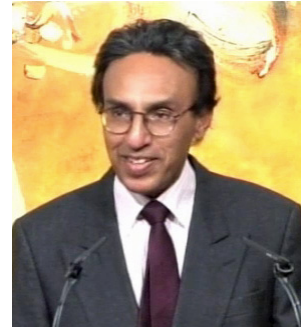
To help you communicate your ideas and state your position in a clear and convincing way, the Critical Skills Development section of this chapter includes an exercise on how to write an argumentative essay, and how to develop a thesis statement. It also includes a section on plagiarism, something you should definitely avoid.



Frontispiece from the *Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity*. Baghdad, 1287.

AZIZ ESMAIL: WHY HISTORY?

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the subjects taught in our universities, history is the least properly understood. Every month sees a spate of history text-books, volumes, and paper backs flooding the market. Yet both among intellectuals and lay people, this subject is scarcely understood in any depth. This is especially surprising since history is an ancient pursuit. Its very antiquity, however, makes it prone to neglect and misunderstanding. This inadequacy is brought out in various ways. Some people show at best a condescending tolerance for professional historians. Others worship them as men with a “fantastic memory”. In this article, I propose to discuss the nature and uses of history. Thus I will try to answer two essential questions: What is history? And how does the study of history benefit a group of people at a given moment of time? My examples will be drawn primarily from Islamic history. Finally, I will make a few general remarks about why I think the study of history has a special place in our community at present.

THE INGREDIENTS OF HISTORY

First, the nature of history. What is history? The answer which we give to this question will illustrate and will depend on the value we attach to history in our own lives. This in turn will bring to light the general philosophical attitudes that govern our lives. Now most people's answer to this question will be in some such form as this: history is the study of “facts about the past”. To most people this answer would come naturally and readily enough. Now let me make it clear at once that to my mind, and to many who might have given some thought to the subject, this definition is both inadequate and misleading. It contains two fallacies. These are brought out by the two terms “facts” and “past”, respectively. Both conceptions are misleading, and I will deal with each of them in turn.

THE BEGINNINGS OF ISLAM: AN EXAMPLE

To begin with, let us give some thought to this notion of “facts”. For the kind of man whom I have in mind (whose notion of history I am criticising), historical

“facts” are of the same order as those involved in saying, for instance, that such and such a man is so many years old, or Mr. So and So is the President of such and such a country, with the only difference that historical facts belong to the past and not to the present. This kind of man looks upon historical facts, as aptly put by an English historian, as “fish on a fishmonger’s slab”. They are all there, neatly arranged, countable, clearly visible for what they are, and ready to be picked up. Now historical facts are often much more complex, much less clear, and in many instances, far more uncertain. Moreover, it is worth noting that the more historical books you read, the more you will realise that not all historians quote the same facts. This is not necessarily because one historian knows more or less facts than another – though this may occasionally be true – but because different historians attach different significance to different facts. After all, a historian often finds himself faced with a large corpus of facts. In making a selection, for reasons of brevity if not anything else, he is compelled to discard or overlook some of the available facts. And in doing this, his interpretative bias inevitably enters into the process. A very interesting illustration of this can be found in the history of the Prophet of Islam.

As is well known, the first half of the Prophet’s mission was preached in Mecca. Why did the new religion of Islam displace or overshadow the old tribal worship of idols and astral gods? This is a question that would arise in the mind of any historian seeking to understand the rise and growth of Islam. Now some historians have held that the old religions had ceased to satisfy the spiritual needs of the tribal nomads. They were desperately in search of a new religion that would give them a fresh inspiration and sense of morale, and Islam offered them just such a sense of purpose. Others have held that the rise of Islam was promoted and encouraged by the growing sense of pride in the Arabic tradition, as borne out in pre-Islamic poetry, a pride which arose as a reaction against successive raids by foreigners.

A contemporary scholar of Islam, **Montgomery Watt**, has emphasised yet another aspect of the situation. He has pointed out that in pre-Islamic Mecca, a new class of merchants was rising as a result of the caravan trade for which the city was a centre. This was a new class which was clearly separate from the desert nomads. Trade, however, is apt to foster individualism, and Watt believes that the Meccan merchants were developing an individualistic way of life which was in sharp contrast with traditional tribal ethics, where the stress fell on mutual help and corporate solidarity. You can see how these different interpretations would lead to emphasis on different facts. The historian who thought that the triumph of the new religion was a consequence of the atrophy of the old forms of worship, would be apt to concentrate on evidence about pre-Islamic beliefs, and in particular, on any hints of dissatisfaction over these beliefs among the Arabs. The other historian, who might be inclined to attach importance to the growth of an Arabic consciousness as the chief ingredient in Islam, will naturally be led to stress the sense of pride exhibited in pre-Islamic poetry. He will also draw attention to the fact that there had been repeated incursions into Arabia by Romans, the Persians, and **Axumites**. Furthermore, he will tend to attach particular significance to independent Arab Kingdoms, such as the Nabataeans and the Palmyrenes who, he will argue, reflected a sense of independence among the Arabs long before the days of Islam, and of which Islam marked a lasting culmination. On the other hand, we find that Montgomery Watt is particularly struck by the fact that the early part of Prophet Muhammad’s

Montgomery Watt
(1909–2006) –
a British Islamic scholar,
Orientalist historian, Arabist
and author of numerous
works on Islamic history,
philosophy and culture

Axumites –
a people who lived the
ancient Ethiopian Kingdom
of Axum, which existed from
the first to tenth centuries
in an area now covered by
Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan,
Yemen and southern Saudi
Arabia

mission consisted of repeated references to social ethics, such as honesty in business, honouring one's word, the spirit of fellowship and brotherhood, etc. The fact that the Meccan verses in the Qur'an contain repeated references to these values is for Montgomery Watt a historical fact which serves to reinforce his thesis that it was the growth of mercantile individualism in Mecca which was an important factor in the rise of Islam. Thus, different historians select and stress different facts, not because their capacity for collecting evidence is different, but because their interpretations are different.

THE ISLAMIC CONQUESTS: ANOTHER EXAMPLE

The element of interpretation is vital in all history-writing. It is important that one should see that history consists of facts plus interpretation (and the facts, as we have seen, undergo selection in the service of differing interpretations). Let us take a well-known case illustrating the element of interpretation. In the Islamic field, one particular phenomenon which has always puzzled historians is the speed and the magnitude of the early conquests. Within a decade following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Arabs, who had hitherto been dismissed as marauding Bedouins, overran vast stretches of land previously under Byzantine and Persian rule. Swiftly they brought Palestine, Syria and Egypt under their control, and wrested from the mighty Persian (Sassanid) Empire the provinces of Iraq, and later, Khorasan. Thus they brought two powerful empires to their knees. What made this sudden and dramatic conquest possible? What was the source of the incentive for this extraordinary expansion? What facilitated an enterprise on such a grand scale?

Historians offer different answers. One interpretation rests almost exclusively on the religious element. It argues that the single most outstanding feature of the conquests was the religious drive behind it. The Qur'an urged the believers to strive to propagate the faith, and the Arabs set out to do this in obedience to the command. Other historians have argued that the conquests were more of an extension of habit. The Bedouins, they point out, often conducted raids in search of booty. The Islamic conquests, they argue, were raids carried out with the same aim in mind, but on a larger scale and under the banner of a new faith. Yet other historians have been more inclined to stress the economic and social unrest in Arabia on the eve of the conquests, which, they believe, led to a pouring out of the Muslims from the peninsula and into the lands previously occupied by the great powers. Other explanations have been somewhat more inclusive. Historians have drawn attention to the fact that the two great powers occupying the lands which were conquered by the Arabs, namely the Roman (Byzantine) empire in the West and the Persian (Sassanid) empire in the East, had been exhausted as a result of prolonged fighting; that over-taxation and religious persecution had turned their subjects against them; and that the Arabs,

galvanised by the energy of their new faith, delivered the last, lethal blow to these already prostrate giants. Thus we have significantly different interpretations for an event of vital consequence. All history is essentially an exercise in interpreting the doings of men. The element of interpretation, however, is something much more than subjective opinion. The professional historian does not form his judgements in a vacuum, nor does he base them on the dictates of mere impulse. These conclusions always involve a step by step building up of argument. The historian, like the adjudicator in a legal case, has to marshal the evidence at his disposal in order to arrive at a judgement, and this task demands both intellectual rigour and intuitive finesse. The criterion of validity in history lies in the extent to which he can appeal to facts, and the way in which he can use them to support his thesis. Even then there is bound to be more than one interpretation, and the process of historical inquiry and decision is a never-ending one.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PRESENT

This brings us next to the second assumption which I pointed out as a fallacy at the start – namely that it is the past which has the sole relevance in the study of history. It is clear that if an essential aspect of history consists of interpretation, it is bound to be influenced by the prevailing circumstances of the period in which the historian himself happens to be living. The historian is but a product of his times; his judgements are as much influenced by the social circumstances, intellectual assumptions and moral quests of his age, as are anybody else's. The prejudices, assumptions about what is important to us is not, about the relative importance of the individual and the society – and a host of such ideas – all condition and colour a historian's writing. Again, if the historian is honest and intellectually alert at his job, he will try as much as is humanly possible to eliminate any unnecessary bias that he may detect in his writing. Nevertheless, just as our perception of the present is conditioned by the legacy of our past, so is our perception of the past moulded by our experience of the present. Turning once again to Islamic history, it is interesting to consider, in some ways, the ideas of the greatest historian of Islam, Ibn Khaldun, who lived during the fourteenth century A.D. He believed that civilisation arose out of group solidarity, but that once a civilisation was so established, it was inevitably bound to decline. His was thus a cyclical conception of history. Now it is interesting to note that by Ibn Khaldun's day, the unity of the Islamic empire had already been torn apart. From the ninth century onwards, independent principalities had already begun to spring up in different parts of the empire, thus loosening the centralised authority at Baghdad. The Mongol onslaught in the thirteenth century left a gaping scar in the consciousness of the Muslims. Ibn Khaldun himself witnessed the defeat of the Mamluk Sultan, Faraj, under whom he was serving, at the hands of the Turks. It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of history was conditioned in a large way by a memory and experience of decline and defeat, of which the Muslims of the day must have been all too aware.

Turning to European history in the modern period, the same pressing influence of the historian's age on his writing becomes apparent. Until recently, England was the central focus of English historians. At its widest, the core of the English historian's concern extended only to Europe. The rest of the world, and especially Asia and Africa, received attention only in so far as these events

reflected or were relevant to events in Europe. This was a natural result of the age of imperialism. For in the period of colonial expansion, Europe was particularly susceptible to the habit of complementing herself for having acquired world supremacy, and hence the general assumption always was that the rest of the world had no distinctive histories in their own right. As a result, English historians usually treated these countries as appendages of Europe. With the dissolution of the empire, however, interest in the history of Asia and Africa in their own right, i.e. as peoples with their own past which had a parallel sovereignty to that of Europe, began to grow. Hence, nowadays, we find an increasing number of historians whose world history, if they are honest, refuses to be subservient to the outlook prevalent during the days of the empire. And a serious interest in the history of non-European peoples in their own right seems to be growing.

IMAGES OF THE FUTURE

These are but two examples demonstrating how history-writing is firmly anchored to the prevailing circumstances of the age. Any piece of historical writing, therefore, tells us as much about the period of the historian, as it does about the period which forms the subject of the writing. But this is not all. Most human beings have aspirations which they project, and which they hope to realise, in the future. A vision of the future seems to be an essential quality of the human imagination, and historians, no less than others, have their own ideas as to what the future ought to be like. Their notions of what "ought" to be the case, and what "might" be the case, determine their conception of what is the case. Thus experience of the present is subtly influenced by expectations regarding the future. Ibn Khaldun was probably led into thinking that group solidarity provided the impetus to the growth of civilisations by his encounter with Timur Lang, who came as a conqueror, heading a tribe well-known for their organisation and solidarity. Past, present, and future are fluid categories of time, and no other human pursuit brings this out as clearly as does the writing of history.

THE USES OF HISTORY

We must now turn to the second question we raised at the beginning of this article, viz. the value of studying history. What is the use of studying history for a society or nation? Is it a mere intellectual exercise for those who have nothing else to do? Is it, in other words, an intellectual luxury, or does it bring benefit to the scholar and the reader?

I have tried to show above that the study of history demands a severe intellectual discipline in its own right. This in itself is one of its values. Like the other humanities, it deepens the imagination, and like the other sciences, it sharpens the intellect. More specifically, history also serves, in a broad way, as

a guide to our actions now and in the future. By observing how men in the past harnessed the resources of their environment, and the energies in their soul in order to master challenges and create civilisations, we can obtain useful clues in coming to grips with present problems and realizing a vision for the future.

A vital mode in which history serves a function is derived from the fact that the present can never be understood in isolation from the past. This fact is more easily demonstrable in the case of the individual personality. You can hardly ever imagine a person as severed from the past. At any given moment in an individual's life, his attitudes, his values and his opinions form a long chain of experiences and influences throughout his life. We are all in the process of "becoming" all the time, and, in this process, each phase in our life has repercussions on the next. Thus, each individual personality has his past, so to speak, "encapsulated" in him. This is also true of groups of people. A community or nation is the product of forces that brought it into being in the first place, and shaped it through its career. To help us understand how the religions, the institutions, and the nations in which we find ourselves came to be what they are is one of the prime functions of history.

TRANSCENDING THE PRESENT

By extending one's consciousness in time, a sense of history heightens one's capacity for transcendence over the immediate present. To feel the past alive in one's bones, to rise above the frustrations and ephemeral currents of the present, is an exalting experience. A vivid sense of tradition, of the ever-flowing stream of history in which men like those of one's own time have struggled and striven to capture a sense of meaning and purpose is essential if one's consciousness is to expand beyond the limited point of the present. History fosters a partnership with the dead, and the dead come to life through history. It also serves as a therapy for undue obsession with the present, and this may help to liberate one from being bound excessively by time. In Ismailism, the fact that the Imam embodies a tradition extending considerably backwards in time creates the setting for just such an experience. By encapsulating the past within himself, the Imam serves as history incarnate, so to speak. In this sense, history is not only "learned"; it is also "experienced", with a heightening of one's intellectual and moral imagination.

HISTORY AND IDENTITY

Finally, history has a unique role to fulfil in promoting and fortifying a sense of identity. For an individual to have a recognizable personality, the latter should be "continuous". One's personality may change, but it should change within certain boundaries which are constant. Memory, for one thing, is integral to the human personality. An individual who experiences an abrupt rupture with the past suffers a break-down. In the same way, a society usually maintains its past within itself as a necessary core of continuous survival. Changes and modifications assume their significance only in relation to continuity. For this reason, a sense of continuity is important, and history is a self-conscious articulation of this sense. The element of persistence through time becomes especially important in moments of transition. In periods of rapid or fundamental change, the search for the past is a vital spiritual necessity. It lends to the people involved in the

change a sense of identity which can enable them to maintain some stability in the midst of flux. The Ismaili communities in East Africa have been going through a period of momentous change. The dissolution of colonial rule, and the dawning of independence, has created needs for fundamental adaptation on the part of ethnic and religious groups, such as the Ismailis. If this challenge is to be met, if what we usually term “integration” is to be achieved, a sense of our own identity is supremely important. This may sound self-contradictory on the face of it. Must we not, in order to integrate, cease to be ourselves? My answer would be that this is never possible. Creative interaction demands that the parties concerned realise their own identities to the full. People who are in love with each other, or exhibit co-operation in one form or another are yet, each of them, individuals in their own right. For a community or group to enter into a creative partnership with another community or nation, it is essential that it shall realise its identity to the full. By acquiring a vital self-image through assimilation of one’s historical past, energies for future adjustments and modifications are set free. For the Ismailis, the need for such a liberating and creative experience has never been so intense as it is today. Towards the satisfaction of such a need, history has an invaluable role to fulfil.

SOURCE: Esmail, Aziz. ‘Why History?’ *Africa Ismaili* (1970), pp. 20–27.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do facts reflect the objectivity and interpretation of our historical experience?
2. Esmail seeks to show that the definition of history as ‘facts about the past’ cannot properly explain to us what history is. What does he propose adding to the definition of history? Do you agree with him? Explain why you agree or disagree with him.
3. How does the article explain the rise and growth of Islam? Why does the author use this example as a way to explain what history is?
4. Which factors, according to the author, influence the interpretation of historical events?
5. How independent are historians of their social circumstances of their times in selecting and interpreting historical facts?
6. To what extent do historians’ ideas about ‘what the future ought to be like’ influence their interpretation of historical facts?
7. How far was the cyclical conception of history of the great Islamic historian Ibn Khaldun conditioned by his memory and experience of the decline and defeat of a once-great Islamic civilization?
8. What influences the development of identity more: the past or the present?



Pieter Boel (1626–1674), *Allegory of the Vanities of the World*, 1663. Palais des Beaux Arts, Lille
An ostentatious display of civilization

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU: DISCOURSE ON THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was born in Geneva, Switzerland. Abandoned at an early age, he had a rebellious and unhappy youth. His critical mind and insensitive nature led to difficulties with the young philosopher's family and society. Convinced that he must use his wits to survive, he left home at sixteen. Among his most famous works are *The Social Contract* (1762), which contains his political theory, and *Emile* (1762), a treatise on education. Although the authorities made every effort to suppress his writings, the ideas they expressed were of great influence during the French Revolution and later. However, Rousseau first became known for his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750). Pursuit of the arts and sciences, Rousseau argued, promotes idleness and corruption; the resulting political inequality encourages alienation; for Rousseau it is the noble savage who is virtuous and free. Rousseau, an independent spirit and free thinker, had frequent quarrels with the more conventional thinkers and clashed with the authorities of his time.



PREFACE

Here is one of the greatest and noblest questions that have ever been discussed. This discourse will not deal with those **metaphysical subtleties** that have spread into nearly all branches of literature and are not always absent from academic curricula; it will deal, rather, with one of those truths that are closely bound up with the happiness of the human race.

I foresee that I shall not readily be forgiven for the position I have dared to take. Directly opposing everything that is now most admired, I can expect only universal condemnation; I cannot count on the approval of the public because a few wise men have honoured me with theirs. I have therefore resolved not to concern myself with pleasing superficial intellectuals or men of the world. There will always be men of the kind who remain in subjection to the opinions of their time, their country, and their social group. There are those who pass for freethinkers and philosophers today, but would have been regarded only as fanatics in the days of the **Catholic League**. No one should write for such readers if he wants to live beyond his own time.

One more remark and I shall finish. Not expecting the honour that was bestowed on me, after sending in this discourse, I revised and expanded it to the point where it had almost become a new work. I now feel obliged to present it as it was when it received the prize. I have merely inserted a few footnotes and left two easily recognisable additions, of which the Academy might not have approved. I believe that fairness, respect, and gratitude require me to point this out.

metaphysical –
dealing with the nature
of existence, truth and
knowledge

subtlety –
a fine distinction

Catholic League
(1510–1511) – an alliance
formed by Pope Julius II
for expelling Louis XII of
France from Italy, thereby
consolidating papal power

DISCOURSE

“We are deceived by the outward appearance of right.”

272

Has the restoration of the arts and sciences been **conducive** to the purification or the corruption of morals? That is the question I am about to examine. What position shall I take on it? The position, gentlemen, of an honest man who knows nothing and esteems himself none the less for it.

I am aware that it will be difficult to adapt what I have to say to the tribunal before which I am appearing. How shall I dare to condemn the sciences before one of the most **erudite** assemblies in Europe, praise ignorance in a famous Academy, and reconcile contempt for study with respect for true scholars? I saw these **incongruities** from the start, and they did not dishearten me. “I shall not be mistreating science,” I told myself, “I shall be defending **virtue** before virtuous men.” Integrity is even dearer to **upright** men than erudition to the learned. What, then, do I have to fear? The **sagacity** of the assembly that will be listening to me? I do fear it, I confess, but because of the composition of the discourse, not the views of the speaker. **Equitable** sovereigns have never hesitated to pronounce judgement against themselves in dubious discussions, and a just claim has the greatest chance of being upheld when it is defended against a righteous and enlightened **adversary** who is the judge of his own case.

In addition to this consideration, which encourages me, there is another that is decisive to me: I know that when I have pleaded the cause of truth to the test of my natural ability, there is one prize which I cannot fail to receive, no matter how my efforts may be judged: I shall find it within my heart.

PART ONE

It is a great and noble spectacle to see man emerging from nothingness, so to speak, by his own efforts, **dissipating** by the light of his reason the thick darkness in which nature had enveloped him, rising above himself, soaring into the heavens by means of his mind, striding with giant steps, like the sun, across the vast reaches of the universe, and, what is still greater and more difficult, returning into himself to study man and know his nature, his duties, and his end. All these wonders have been renewed within the past few generations.

Europe had relapsed into the barbarism of the earliest ages. A few centuries ago, the peoples of this now enlightened part of the world were living in a state worse than ignorance. A kind of scientific jargon even more despicable than ignorance had **usurped** the name of knowledge, and erected an almost insurmountable obstacle to its return. A revolution was needed to bring men back to common sense. When it finally came, it was from the least expected direction. It was the **obtuse** Mussulman, the eternal **scourge** of letters, who caused them to be reborn among us. **The fall of the throne of Constantine** brought the remaining fragments of ancient Greece to Italy, and France was in turn enriched by those precious **relics**. The sciences soon followed literature;

conducive –
favourable

erudite –
learned; knowledgeable

incongruity –
something not suitable in a
particular situation

virtue –
moral goodness

upright –
decent; respectable

sagacity –
wisdom

equitable –
treating everyone equally

adversary –
opponent

dissipate –
to make something weaker

usurp –
to oust someone from a
position without right

obtuse –
slow or unwilling to
understand

scourge –
something that causes
trouble or suffering

**the fall of the throne of Con-
stantine** –
the conquest of
Constantinople by the
Ottoman Empire in 1453

relic –
an object that has survived
from a past period of time

the art of writing preceded the art of thinking, an order which may seem strange, but may be all too natural. The main advantage of **communion** with the **Muses** now became apparent: that of making men more sociable by giving them a desire to please one another with works worthy of their mutual approval.

The mind has its needs, as well as the body. Those of the body are the foundation of society; those of the mind create its **amenities**. Government and its laws provide for the security and well-being of men united in society, while literature, the sciences, and the arts, less **despotic** and more powerful, perhaps, strew **garlands** of flowers on the iron chains that bind them, make them forget the original freedom for which they seem to have been born, cause them to love their slavery, and turn them into what is known as a civilised people. Thrones were erected by need; the arts and sciences strengthen them. Powers of the earth, cherish talents and those who cultivate them.¹ Civilised peoples, cultivate them; to them, happy slaves, you owe the delicate, refined taste on which you pride yourselves, the gentleness of character and urbanity of manner which make your personal relations so easy and amiable; in short, you owe to them the appearance of all virtues, none of which you actually have.

It was by this kind of refinement, all the more gracious as it least affects to show itself, that Athens and Rome distinguished themselves in the **vaunted** days of their magnificence and glory, and it is no doubt in that respect that our time and our nation will rise above all others. A tone of philosophy without **pedantry**, a manner that is natural yet engaging, as far removed from German awkwardness as from Italian effusiveness—such are the fruits acquired by good education and improved by social intercourse.

How pleasant it would be to live among us if our outer appearances always mirrored what was in our hearts, if **decorum** were virtue, if our **maxims** were our rules of conduct, and if true philosophy were inseparable from the title of philosopher! But all those qualities are too seldom found together, and virtue almost never appears amid such great **pomp**. Luxurious clothes may indicate an **opulent** man, and elegant ones a man of taste, but a healthy and **robust** man is recognised by other signs: It is beneath the **rustic** attire of a ploughman, not the gold braid of a courtier that bodily strength and vigour are to be found. **Finery** is equally alien to virtue, which is the strength and vigour of the soul. The upright man is like a wrestler who prefers to fight naked: He scorns all those vile trappings which would hinder the use of his strength, and were invented, in most cases, only to hide some deformity.

Before art had fashioned our manners and taught our passions to speak an artificial language, our habits were rustic but natural, and differences in behaviour

communion –

a state of sharing or exchanging thoughts; a feeling of being part of something

Muse –

a Greek goddess who encourages the arts

amenity –

a feature that makes a place comfortable and easy to live in

despotic –

tyrannical; dictatorial

garland –

a wreath of flowers and leaves

vaunted –

highly or widely praised or boasted about

pedantry –

too much attention to small details

decorum –

polite behaviour

maxim –

a well-known phrase that is usually true

pomp –

splendour

opulent –

wealthy

robust –

strong and healthy

rustic –

typical of the countryside or country people

finery –

showy and elegant clothes, jewellery, etc.

were obvious signs of differences in character. Human nature was basically no better than it is now, but men found security in being easily able to discern each other's feelings and intentions, and this advantage, whose values we no longer appreciate, spared them many vices.

Now that more subtle refinements and more delicate taste have reduced the art of pleasing to a set of rules, there is a base and deceptive uniformity in our behaviour, and minds seem to have been cast in the same mould. Politeness and propriety make incessant demands on us; we always follow social usage, never our personal inclinations. We no longer dare to appear to be what we are. Under that constant constraint, the men who make up the herd known as society will always do the same things in the same circumstances, unless some more powerful cause drives them to do otherwise. Thus we can never be sure of whom we are dealing with, and to know our friends we must wait until some serious situation arises; that is, we must wait until it is too late, for it is precisely when such a situation arises that it is essential to know one's friends already.

What a train of vices accompanies this uncertainty! There can be no sincere friendship, no genuine esteem, no justified confidence. Suspicion, resentment, fear, coldness, reserve, hatred, and betrayal are always hidden behind that uniform and treacherous veil of politeness, behind that vaunted urbanity which we owe to the intellectual advances of our time. The name of the Master of the Universe is no longer **profaned** by oaths, but he is insulted by blasphemies that do offend our delicate ears. We do not boast of our merits, but we denigrate those of others. We do not hurl crude **vituperation** at our enemies, but we **slander** them **adroitly**. Hatred of other nations is dying out, but so is love of our own. Ignorance is despised, but it has been replaced by dangerous **scepticism**. Some excesses are banished and some vices are dishonoured, but others are adorned with the name of virtues, and one must either have them or pretend to have them. Anyone who may wish to **extol** the moderation of our modern sages is free to do so, but for my part I see it only as a refinement of intemperance that is as unworthy of my praise as their artful simplicity.²

Such is the purity that our morals have acquired. It is thus that we have become virtuous men. Let literature, the arts, and the sciences claim the share they have had in that salutary achievement. I will add only one observation: Let us imagine an inhabitant of some remote country who judges European morals on the basis of the state of the sciences among us, the perfection of our arts, the propriety of our public entertainments, the refinement of our manners, the amiability of our conversations, our endless professions of good will, and those animated gatherings of people of all ages and conditions who seem eager to oblige each other from morning to night; such a foreigner would form an idea of our morals which would be directly contrary to what they actually are.

Where there is no effect, there is no cause to be sought; but here the effect is certain, the depravity is real, and our souls have been corrupted in proportion as our sciences and arts have advanced toward perfection. Will it be said that this is a misfortune peculiar to our time? No, gentlemen, the evils caused by our vain curiosity are as old as the world. The state of morals is as closely controlled

Lionel Noel Royer,
*Vercingetorix throws down
his arms at the feet of Julius
Caesar*, 1899.

This painting depicts the surrender of the Barbarians to the might of Caesar. The Barbarians are conquered by the young Roman nation, which has not yet been weakened by the pursuit of art and science.

profaned –
disrespected; defiled

vituperation –
abusive criticism

slander –
to speak falsely about
someone

adroitly –
skilfully and cleverly

scepticism –
doubt that statements are
true

extol –
to praise someone highly

by the progress of the arts and sciences as the daily **ebb and flow** of the tides by the moon. We have seen virtue flee as the light of the arts and sciences rose above our horizon, and the same phenomenon has been observed in all times and places.

Consider Egypt, that first school of mankind, that fertile land under a cloudless sky, that illustrious country from which **Sesostris** set forth to conquer the world. Egypt became the mother of philosophy and the fine arts, and soon afterward she was conquered by **Cambyses**, then the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, and finally the Turks.

Consider Greece, once peopled by heroes who twice **vanquished** Asia: first at Troy, then on their own soil. Her nascent literature had not yet corrupted her people's hearts; but the progress of the arts, the dissolution of morals, and the yoke of the Macedonian came in close succession, and Greece, always learned, pleasure-loving, and enslaved, gained nothing from any of her revolutions but a change of master. All the **eloquence** of Demosthenes was unable to revive a body that had been **enervated** by luxury and the arts.

It was in the time of men like **Ennius** and **Terence** that Rome, founded by a shepherd, and made illustrious by tillers of the soil, began to degenerate. But after **Ovid**, **Catullus**, **Martial**, and that host of obscene writers whose very names are an offence to modesty, Rome, once the shrine of virtue, became a centre of crime, an object of **opprobrium** to other nations, and the plaything of barbarians. That capital of the world finally fell under the yoke that she had imposed on so many peoples, and shortly before her fall she gave one of her citizens the title of **Arbiter** of Good Taste.

What shall I say of that metropolis of the Eastern Empire which, by its position, seemed destined to be the metropolis of the entire world; that refuge of the arts and sciences which had been banished from the rest of Europe, perhaps more by wisdom than by barbarism? The most shameless **debauchery** and corruption, the foulest betrayals, assassinations, and poisonings, an aggregation of all the most **atrocious** crimes—this is what makes up the history of Constantinople; this is the pure source of the enlightenment on which our age prides itself.

But why go back to remote times for proofs of a truth that is clearly demonstrated to us in the present? There is in Asia an immense country where learning is so honoured that it takes men to the highest positions in the state. If the sciences purified morals, taught men to shed their blood for their country, and animated their courage, then the peoples of China ought to be virtuous, free, and **invincible**. But there is no vice that does not dominate them, no crime that is not common among them. If that vast empire could not be saved

ebb and flow –
coming in and going out
(of the sea tides)

Sesostris –
a legendary king of ancient
Egypt, who, according to
Herodotus, invaded Asia Minor
and Europe

Cambyses
(d. 522 BCE) –
Cambyses II, a Persian king of
the Achaemenid dynasty

vanquish –
to defeat completely

eloquence –
persuasive, fine speech,
especially in public

enervated –
weakened

Ennius, Quintus
(239–169 BCE) –
a Roman poet

Terence
(d. c. 159 BCE) –
a Roman writer of comedies

Ovid
(43 BCE – 18 CE) –
a Roman poet

Catullus
(c. 84 – c. 54 BCE) –
a Roman poet

Martial
(c. 40 – c. 104 CE) –
a Roman epigrammatic poet

opprobrium –
disgrace; severe criticism

arbiter –
someone who judges

debauchery –
immoral behaviour

atrocious –
very cruel

invincible –
undefeatable

from the yoke of the crude and ignorant Tartars by the sagacity of its ministers, the supposed wisdom of its laws, and the great number of its inhabitants, of what use to it were all its scholars? What has it gained from all the honours heaped upon them, other than the distinction of being peopled by slaves and **scoundrels**?

Let us, by contrast, consider the morals of that small number of nations which, preserved from the **contagion** of vain knowledge, have by their virtues made themselves happy and set an example for other nations. Such were the early Persians, who formed a singular nation in which virtue was taught as science is now taught in Europe; they easily subjugated Asia and earned the glory of having the history of their institutions regarded as a philosophical novel. Such were the **Scythians**, of whom such magnificent praise has come down to us. Such were the ancient Germans, whose simplicity, innocence, and virtues were described with relief by a man who had grown weary of writing about the crimes and **infamies** of an educated, opulent, and pleasure-seeking people. Such was even Rome, in the time of her poverty and ignorance. And such is still that rustic nation so renowned for its courage, which adversity has never overcome, and for its fidelity, which no example has ever corrupted.³

It was not from stupidity that these peoples preferred other activities to those of the mind. They knew that in some countries there were idle men who spent their time arguing about the supreme good, or vice and virtue, and that those proud reasoners, lavishing the highest praise on themselves, lumped other peoples together under the contemptuous name of barbarians. But they considered the morals of those men and learned to despise their doctrines.⁴

Let us not forget that in the heart of Greece itself arose that city as famous for its happy ignorance as for the wisdom of its laws, that republic of **demigods** rather than men, so far superior did their virtues seem to anything human. O **Sparta**, you are an eternal rebuke to vain doctrines! While vices were being introduced into Athens under the guidance of the fine arts, and while her tyrant was carefully gathering the works of the prince of poets, you were expelling the arts and artists, the sciences and scholars, from your walls.

This difference was accentuated by later events. Athens became the seat of refinement and good taste, the city of orators and philosophers. The elegance of her buildings was matched by that of her language. On all sides, one could see canvas and marble animated by the hands of the most accomplished masters. From Athens came those astonishing works that will always serve as models in corrupt ages. The picture of Sparta is less **sumptuous**. "There," said other peoples, "men are born virtuous; the very air of the city seems to inspire virtue." Her inhabitants have left us only the memory of their heroic acts. Are such monuments worth less to us than the curious marble relics that have come down to us from Athens?

It is true that a few Athenian wise men withstood the general **torrent**, and preserved themselves from vice in the company of the Muses. But let us listen

scoundrel –

someone who treats other people badly, especially by being immoral

contagion –

a disease that spreads quickly

Scythians –

here, one of various nomadic peoples inhabiting the region from the Danube to the borders of China from the eighth to fourth century BCE

infamy –

a publicly known evil or disgraceful act

demigod –

a partly divine being

Sparta –

a city-state in ancient Greece, the capital of Laconia

sumptuous –

impressive-looking; luxurious; magnificent

torrent –

a large amount of something that comes suddenly and violently

to the judgement that the greatest and most unfortunate of them pronounced on the artists and learned men of his time. “I have examined poets,” he said,⁷

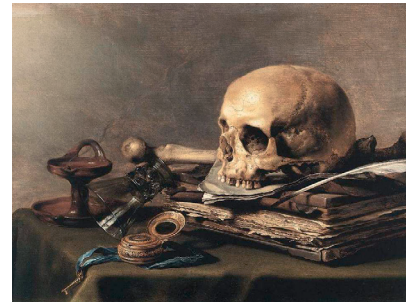
and I consider them to be men whose talent deceives them and others; they present themselves as wise men, and are regarded as such, while in reality they are anything but wise.

*From poets I turned to artists. No one was more ignorant of the arts than I; no one was more convinced that artists possessed **sublime** secrets. But I saw that their condition is no better than that of poets, and that both share the same misconception: Because the most skilful of them excel in their domain, they consider themselves the wisest of men. This presumption **tarnishes** their knowledge, so far as I am concerned. Putting myself in the place of the **oracle**, I asked myself which I would rather be: what they are, knowing what they have learned, or what I am, knowing that I know nothing. I answered, to myself and to the oracle that I would rather remain what I am.*

None of us—sophists, poets, orators, artists, and myself—knows what truth is, or goodness, or beauty. But there is one difference between us: the others all know nothing but believe they know something, and while I, too, know nothing, I at least have no doubt of my ignorance. Therefore all the superior wisdom attributed to me by the oracle consists only in being convinced that I am ignorant of what I do not know.

Thus we have praise of ignorance spoken by **Socrates**, the wisest of men in the judgement of the gods, and the most learned of the Athenians in the opinion of all of Greece. If he were to return to life now, would our scholars and artists make him change his mind? No, gentlemen, that just man would continue to despise our vain sciences; he would not help to swell the flood of books that overwhelms us on all sides, and the only precept he would give us would be the one he left to his disciples and our descendants: the example and memory of his virtue. That is the noblest way of educating mankind.

Cato the Elder continued in Rome what Socrates had begun in Athens: He **inveighed** against those subtle and cunning Greeks who **perverted** the virtue of his fellow citizens and undermined their courage. But the sciences, the arts, and dialectics prevailed again: Rome became filled with philosophers and orators; military discipline was neglected, agriculture was despised, sects were formed, and the fatherland was forgotten. The sacred names of freedom,



Pieter Claesz (1597–1661), *Vanitas Still Life*, 1625, Netherlands. Baroque. Mauritshuis, The Hague, Netherlands

sublime –
awe-inspiring; grand

tarnish –
to spoil

Oracle –
someone through whom a deity was believed to speak

Socrates
(469–399 BCE) – a Greek philosopher from Athens

Cato the Elder
(234–149 BCE) – a Roman statesman and moralist

inveigh against –
to criticize strongly

perverted –
corrupted

⁷ Rousseau is here paraphrasing, rather than quoting, a passage from Plato's *Apology* in which Socrates is speaking. (Translator's note.)

Epicurus

(341–270 BCE) – a Greek philosopher

Zeno

(c. 490 – c. 430 BCE) – a Greek philosopher of the Eleatic school

Arcesilaus

(c. 316 – c. 241 BCE) – a Greek philosopher

Fabricius

(d. 250 BCE) – Gaius Fabricius Luscinus, a Roman general and statesman known for his austerity and incorruptibility

illustrious –

very famous and much admired

revered –

respected; admired

thatched –

(of a roof) covered with straw, reeds, etc.

hearth –

the area in front of a fireplace

noxious –

poisonous; harmful

effeminate –

looking, behaving or sounding like a woman

frivolous –

silly but amusing

glib –

using clever but insincere words

Carthage –

a city-state in the western Mediterranean, founded in the ninth century BCE

odious –

extremely unpleasant

Louis XII

(1462–1515) – a king of France

Henri IV

(1553–1610) – King of France (1589–1610); the first French monarch from the House of Bourbon

unselfishness, and obedience were succeeded by the names of **Epicurus**, **Zeno**, and **Arcesilaus**. “Since learned men began appearing among us,” said their own philosophers, “upright men have disappeared.” Till then, the Romans had been content to practice virtue; all was lost when they began to study it.

O **Fabricius**, what would your great soul have thought if, having the misfortune of being called back to life, you had seen the pomp and luxury of the city which you had saved, and which had been made more **illustrious** by your **revered** name than by all its conquests? You would have cried out to the gods and said, “What has become of those **thatched** roofs and rustic **hearths** that were once the home of moderation and virtue? What **noxious** splendour has replaced Roman simplicity? What is this foreign language? What are these **effeminate** ways? What is the meaning of these statues, these paintings, these edifices? Fools! What have you done? You, the masters of nations, have made yourselves the slaves of the **frivolous** men you conquered! You are now ruled by **glib** orators! Was it to enrich architects, painters, sculptors, and actors that you shed your blood in Greece and Asia? Are the spoils of **Carthage** to be the prize of a flute-player? Romans, hasten to demolish these amphitheatres, break these statues, and burn these paintings; cast out these slaves who hold you in subjection, and whose pernicious arts corrupt you. Let other hands win fame by vain talents; the only talent worthy of Rome is that of conquering the world and making virtue rule it. When Cinneas looked on our Senate as an assembly of kings, he was not dazzled by empty pomp or affected elegance. He heard none of that meaningless eloquence which is the study and delight of fatuous men. What, then, did Cinneas see that was so majestic? Citizens, he saw a spectacle that all your wealth and arts will never produce, the noblest spectacle that has ever appeared beneath the heavens: an assembly of two hundred virtuous men, worthy of commanding Rome and governing the world.”

But let us return through time and space and see what is happening here and now; or rather, let us avoid **odious** descriptions that would offend our delicacy, and spare ourselves the effort of repeating the same things under different names. It was not in vain that I evoked the spirit of Fabricius: I attributed no sentiments to that great man which I could not equally well have attributed to **Louis XII** or **Henry IV**. Among us, it is true, Socrates would not have drunk the hemlock; but he would have drunk something even more bitter: contempt and insulting mockery it would have been a hundred times worse than death. Thus we see how luxury, dissolution, and slavery have always been the punishment of our proud efforts to emerge from the happy ignorance in which eternal wisdom placed us. The thick veil with which that wisdom has covered all its operations should have been sufficient warning to us that we were not meant to embark on that vain quest. But have we been able to profit from any of the lessons taught to us by Providence, and are there any that we have neglected with impunity? Peoples of the earth, know that nature intended to preserve you from knowledge, as a mother snatches a dangerous weapon from the hands of her child; that all the secrets which nature hides from you are so many evils from which she protects you; and that the difficulty you encounter in extending your knowledge

is not the least of her blessings. Men are **perverse**; they would be even worse if they had the misfortune of being born learned.

How humiliating these observations are to mankind! How mortifying they should be to our pride! What! Integrity is the child of ignorance? Learning and virtue are **incompatible**? What conclusions might be drawn from these suppositions? But to reconcile these apparent contradictions, we have only to examine closely the vanity and emptiness of the proud titles which we give so **gratuitously** to human knowledge, and which serve only to blind us. Let us therefore consider the arts and sciences in themselves. Let us see what must result from their progress; and let us not hesitate to accept all conclusions in which our reasoning is confirmed by historical inductions.

PART TWO

There was an ancient tradition that passed from Egypt to Greece, according to which the sciences were invented by a god who wanted to destroy the peace of mankind.⁵ What, then, must have been thought of them by the Egyptians themselves, among whom they had been born, and who had a close view of the sources that produced them? Whether we study the history of the world or use philosophical investigation to make up for the uncertainty of chronicles, we shall not find an origin of any field of human knowledge that corresponds to the idea we like to form of it. Astronomy arose from superstition; rhetoric from ambition, hatred, flattery, and falsehood; geometry from **avarice**; physics from idle curiosity; and all, even moral philosophy, from human pride. The arts and sciences therefore owe their birth to our vices; we would be less doubtful of their advantages if they owed it to our virtues.

The flaw of their origin is all too plainly reflected in their objects. What would become of the arts without the luxury that sustains them? Without human injustice, what would be the use of jurisprudence? What would history be without tyrants, wars, and conspirators? In short, who would want to devote his life to barren study and meditation, if everyone acted only in accordance with the duty of man and the requirements of nature, and had time only for his country, the unfortunate, and his friends? Were we meant to die at the edge of the pit into which truth was withdrawn? This reflection alone should be enough to discourage at the outset anyone who seriously seeks to enlighten himself by the study of philosophy.

Countless dangers and wrong paths await us in the investigations of the sciences. To reach truth, we must pass through errors a thousand times more

perverse –
behaving deliberately in an unacceptable way

incompatible –
unable to exist together because of basic differences

gratuitously –
done without reason and often having harmful effects

avarice –
extreme desire for wealth

dangerous than truth is useful. Our handicap is obvious, for falsity can appear in an infinite number of combinations, while truth has only one mode of existence. Even with the best of intentions, by what signs can we be sure of recognising it? Amid all our divergent opinions, what criterion shall we agree upon for judging it?⁶ And there is still this most difficult question of all: If we are eventually fortunate enough to find truth, who among us will know how to make good use of it?

The effects produced by our sciences are even more dangerous than their objects are vain. Born in idleness, they in turn foster it, and an irreparable loss of time is the first detrimental effect that they inevitably have on society. In politics as in morality, it is a great evil not to do good; every useless citizen must be regarded as a pernicious man. Tell me, illustrious philosophers—you from whom we have learned the ratios in which bodies are attracted to one another in a vacuum; the relations among the spaces **traversed** in a given time by the revolutions of the planets; which curves have **acnodes**, **flexes**, or **cusps**; how man sees everything in God; how the soul and the body act together without connection, like two clocks; which planets may be inhabited; which insects reproduce themselves in an extraordinary manner—tell me, you from whom we have received all that sublime knowledge: If you had never taught us any of those things, would we be less numerous, less well governed, less formidable, or more perverse? Reconsider the importance of your achievements; and since the labours of our most enlightened scholars and our best citizens are of so little use to us, tell us what we are to think of that multitude of obscure writers and **idle** men of letters who consume the substance of the state without giving anything in return.

Idle, did I say? Would to God that they were! Morals would be healthier and society more peaceful. But those vain and frivolous **phrasemongers** go everywhere, armed with their baneful paradoxes, undermining the foundations of faith and **annihilating** virtue. They smile **disdainfully** at such old words as “fatherland” and “religion”, and devote all their talents and philosophy to destroying or degrading everything that is most sacred to men. Not that they have any deep-seated hatred of virtue or our dogmas: Public opinion is the real object of their attacks; to turn them into ardent supporters of religion, one would have only to banish them to a land of atheists. Such is the power of a compelling urge to make oneself different from others.

Misuse of time is a great evil. Even worse evils flow from literature and the arts. One is luxury, which, like them, is born of the idleness and vanity of men. Luxury is seldom found without the arts and sciences, and they are never found without it. I know that our philosophy, always fertile in singular maxims, maintains, against the experience of all ages, that luxury is what makes the splendour of a state; but even if that philosophy overlooks the need for **sumptuary laws**, will it deny that good morals are essential to the duration of empires, and that luxury is diametrically opposed to good morals? Let luxury be regarded as a sure sign of wealth; let it even be credited with increasing wealth—what are we to conclude from this paradox, so worthy of having arisen in our time? And what will become of virtue if wealth must be acquired at any cost? Ancient political philosophers

traverse –

to move across or through

acnode –

an isolated point that satisfies a curve's equation but is not on it

flex –

a curving line

cusp –

a pointed end where two curves meet

idle –

lazy; not working hard

phrasemonger –

someone who makes fine-sounding but often hollow and meaningless phrases

annihilate –

to destroy completely

disdainful –

showing a lack of respect

sumptuary laws –

regulations based on social, religious or moral grounds aimed at restricting spending on luxury and extravagance

were always speaking of morals and virtue; ours speak only of commerce and money. One of them will tell you that in a certain country a man is worth the amount for which he could be sold in Algiers; another, following the same rule, will find countries where a man is worth nothing, and others where he is worth less than nothing. They evaluate men like herds of cattle. According to them, a man's worth to the state is only that of what he consumes; thus one Sybarite would have been worth thirty Spartans. But I would like them to tell me which of those two republics, Sparta and Sybaris, was subjugated by a handful of peasants, and which made Asia tremble.

The monarchy of Cyrus was conquered with thirty thousand men by a king poorer than the lowliest of Persian satraps; and the Scythians, the poorest of all peoples, withstood the world's most powerful monarchs. Two famous republics once **vied** with each other for control of the world; one was very rich, the other had nothing, and it was the latter that destroyed the former. The Roman Empire in its turn, after having swallowed up all the world's wealth, fell prey to peoples that did not even know what wealth was. The Franks conquered Gaul, and the Saxons England, with no other treasures than their courage and their poverty. A band of poor mountaineers, whose greed was limited to a few sheepskins, first humbled the pride of Austria, then crushed the opulent **House of Burgundy**, which had made the **potentates** of Europe tremble. And finally, all the power and wisdom of the heir of Charles V of Germany, supported by all the treasures of the Indies, was unable to overcome a handful of herring-fishers. Let our political philosophers lay aside their calculations to reflect on these examples; let them learn once and for all that money can buy anything but morals and citizens.

What, then, is the essential question in this discussion of luxury? The following: Is it better for an empire to be brilliant and short-lived, or virtuous and lasting? I say "brilliant," but what kind of brilliance is possible for such an empire? A taste for **ostentation** almost necessarily excludes a taste for honesty. No, souls that have been degraded by a multitude of trivial concerns can never rise to anything great; and even if they had the strength, they would lack the courage to do so.

Every artist wants to be applauded. The praise of his contemporaries is the most precious part of his reward. What will he do to obtain it if he has had the misfortune of being born in a nation and a time in which the learned men who have become fashionable, have placed frivolous youth in the position of setting the tone of society; his which men have sacrificed their taste to the tyrants of their freedom; in which, since one of the sexes dares to approve only of what is proportionate to the **faintheartedness** of the other, masterpieces of dramatic

vie –
to compete strongly

House of Burgundy –
a medieval French dynasty
(Burgundy is a region in
eastern France)

potentate –
someone with the power and
position to rule over others;
a monarch

ostentation –
exaggerated display of
wealth, knowledge or skill

faintheartedness –
lack of courage

puerile –
silly; childish

indigence –
poverty; neediness

oblivion –
a state when something
is forgotten and is no
longer famous

brush –
a tool used for painting

augment –
to increase

lascivious –
feeling or showing
strong sexual desire

inimitable –
too individual for
anyone else to copy
with the same effect

Pigalle, Jean-Baptiste
(1714–1785) – a French
sculptor

Praxiteles
(c. 370 – c. 330
BCE) – an Attic sculptor

Phidias
(c. 490 – c. 432
BCE) – a Greek sculptor

idolatry –
the practice of
worshipping statues
as gods

grotesque –
unpleasantly or
offensively strange

Corinthian –
the most ornate of
the classical orders of
architecture (named
after Corinth, a city-
state in southern
Greece)

Goths –
a people who by the
third century CE had
settled in the region
north of the Black Sea

Tuscany –
a region in northwest
Italy

the Kingdom of Naples –
a former state
occupying the south of
the Italian peninsula

poetry are ignored and wonders of harmony are rejected? What will he do, gentlemen? He will lower his genius to the level of his age, and he will prefer to produce commonplace works that will be admired during his lifetime, rather than marvels that would not be admired until long after his death. Tell us, famous Arouet,* how many strong and manly beauties you have sacrificed to our false delicacy, and how many great things the spirit of gallantry, so fertile in small ones, has cost you.

It is thus that the dissolution of morals, the necessary result of luxury, in turn brings about the corruption of taste. If, among men of extraordinary talent, there should happen to be one with enough firmness of soul to refuse to comply with the spirit of his time and degrade himself by producing **puerile** works, woe to him! He will die in **indigence** and **oblivion**. Carle and Pierre,** the time has come when your **brushes**, destined to **augment** the majesty of our temples with sublime and holy images, will either fall from your hands or be prostituted to decorating the panels of a carriage with **lascivious** paintings. And you, **inimitable Pigalle**, rival of **Praxiteles** and **Phidias**, you whom the ancients would have commissioned to create statues of gods that would have excused their **idolatry** in our eyes—your hand will either resign itself to polishing the belly of a **grotesque** figurine, or be forced to remain idle.

We cannot reflect on morals without taking pleasure in recalling the image of the simplicity of the earliest times. It is like a beautiful shore, adorned only by the hand of nature, to which we continually look back as we regretfully feel ourselves moving away from it. When men were innocent and virtuous, they liked to have the gods as witnesses of their acts, and lived with them in the same huts; but when they became wicked, they grew tired of those bothersome onlookers and banished them to magnificent temples. Finally they expelled them from the temples so that they themselves could live in them, or at least the temples of the gods became indistinguishable from the houses of citizens. This was the height of depravity; vice was never carried farther than when it was seen at the entrances of powerful men's palaces, supported, so to speak, by marble pillars, and engraved on **Corinthian** capitals.

As the conveniences of life are multiplied, as the arts are perfected and luxury spreads, true courage fades, the military virtues vanish, and this is the work of the sciences and all those arts, which secretly exert their influence in governmental chambers. When the **Goths** ravaged Greece, they refrained from burning all the libraries because one of them said that they ought to leave their enemies in possession of something that was so effective in turning them away from military exercises; and diverting them with idle and sedentary occupations. Charles VIII became master of **Tuscany** and **the Kingdom of Naples** almost without having drawn his sword, and his whole court attributed the unexpected ease of his success to the fact that the monarchs and noblemen of Italy were more concerned with cultivating wit and learning than with training themselves

* Voltaire, whose name was originally François-Marie Arouet. (Translator's note.)

** Carle van Loo and Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre, French painters who were contemporaries of Rousseau. (Translator's note.)

to be vigorous warriors. In fact, says the sensible man* who cites these two examples, experience has always shown that in military matters and everything similar to them, study of the sciences tends much more to make men soft and effeminate than to stir and strengthen their courage.

The Romans admitted that military virtue had declined among them in proportion as they became connoisseurs in painting, sculpture, and the art of the goldsmith, and began cultivating the fine arts; and, as though that famous country were destined always to serve as an example to other nations, the rise of the Medici and the restoration of literature obliterated again, and perhaps forever, the **martial** reputation that Italy seemed to have recovered a few centuries ago.

With the wisdom that shone in most of their institutions, the ancient Greek republic forbade their citizens to engage in any of those tranquil and sedentary occupations which debilitate and corrupt the body and at the same time weaken the vigour of the soul. If men are overwhelmed by the slightest lack, and repelled by the slightest effort, how can they be expected to face hunger, thirst, fatigue, danger, and death? How **tenaciously** will soldiers endure **strenuous** exertion if they are entirely unaccustomed to it? How resolutely will they make forced marches under officers who do not even have the strength to travel by horseback? It would not be a valid objection to cite the renowned **valour** of all those modern warriors who are so skilfully disciplined. Their courage in a one-day battle may be admirable, but how well do they endure excessive fatigue, and how well do they withstand the rigours of the seasons and inclement weather? It takes only a little sunshine or snow, or lack of a few unnecessary supplies, to make the best of our armies weaken and collapse in a few days. **Intrepid** warriors, listen for once to the truth which you hear so seldom: You are brave, I have no doubt of it; you would have triumphed with **Hannibal** at **Cannae** and at **Trasimenus**; with you, **Caesar** would have crossed **the Rubicon** and subjugated his country; but you would not have crossed **the Alps** with the former, or vanquished your ancestors with the latter.

The outcome of a war does not always depend on combat, and for a general there is an art superior to that of winning battles. A man may be fearless under fire, but still be a very bad officer; and even with common soldiers, a little more strength and vigour might be more useful than great courage, which does not protect them from death. What does it matter to the state whether its troops perish by fever and cold or by the sword of the enemy?

If cultivation of the sciences is **prejudicial** to martial qualities, it is still more so to moral qualities. Beginning in our earliest years, our absurd education

martial –

connected with fighting or war

tenaciously –

firmly; persistently

strenuous –

involving great effort or energy

valour –

personal bravery; courage

intrepid –

courageous; fearless

Hannibal

(247–183 BCE) – a Carthaginian general who was an implacable and formidable enemy of Rome

Cannae –

the Battle of Cannae (216 BCE), in which the Carthaginians defeated the Romans

Trasimenus –

the Battle of Lake Trasimene (217 BCE), in which the Carthaginians defeated the Romans

Caesar, Julius

(100–44 BCE) – a Roman statesman and general

the Rubicon –

a shallow river flowing into the Adriatic Sea; by illegally crossing it in 49 BCE, Caesar made civil war inevitable ('to cross the rubicon' means 'to take an irrevocable step')

the Alps –

a mountain range in central Europe, stretching from southeast France to Slovenia

prejudicial –

harmful or likely to harm

* Montaigne. (Translator's note.)

embellishes our minds and corrupts our judgement. I see everywhere immense establishments in which our youth are educated at great expense, and taught everything but their duty. Your children will be ignorant of their own language, but will speak others that are not in use anywhere; they will be able to write poetry which they themselves can scarcely understand; although they will not know how to distinguish between truth and error, they will be skilled in the art of making both unrecognisable to others by specious arguments. But **magnanimity**, equity, temperance, humanity, and courage will be only meaningless words to them; the cherished name of the fatherland will never fall upon their ears; and if they are ever told anything about God, it will be more to arouse fear of him than reverent awe.⁸ “I would as soon that my schoolboy had spent his time on a tennis court,” said a wise man; “at least his body would have been in better condition.” I know that children should be kept occupied, and that idleness is the danger most to be feared for them. But what should they learn? That is assuredly a great question! Let them learn what they ought to do when they become men,⁹ not what they ought to forget.

Our gardens are adorned with statues and our galleries with paintings. What would you expect to be shown by those masterpieces of art, exposed to the admiration of the public? Great men who have defended their country, or those still greater ones who have enriched it with their virtue? No. They are images of all the **aberrations** of the heart and the mind, carefully drawn from ancient mythology, and presented to the budding curiosity of our children, no doubt in order that they may have models of misconduct before their eyes even before they are able to read.

What is the source of all these abuses, if not the **pernicious** inequality created among men by the distinction of talents and the **debasement** of virtues? That is the most obvious effect of all our studies, and the most dangerous of all their consequences. We no longer ask if a man has integrity, but if he has talent; we ask not if a book is useful, but if it is well written. Rewards are lavished on cleverness, and virtue is left unhonoured. There are countless prizes for fine discourses, and none for noble acts. But is the glory attached to the best of all the discourses that will ever win the prize of this Academy comparable to the merit of having established that prize?

The wise man does not run after fortune, but he is not insensitive to glory. When he sees it so badly distributed, his virtue, which a little **emulation** would have animated and turned to the advantage of society, becomes **languid** and fades away in poverty and oblivion. That is what must eventually happen wherever agreeable talents are preferred to useful ones, as has been demonstrated all too clearly by experience since the renewal of the arts and sciences. We have physicists, geometers, chemists, astronomers, poets, musicians, and painters, but we no longer have citizens; or if there are still a few left, scattered over our forsaken countrysides, they die there, indigent and despised. Such are our feelings for those who give us food for ourselves and milk for our children, and such is the state to which they have been reduced.

magnanimity –
generosity of spirit; high-mindedness

aberration –
deviation from the normal

pernicious –
harmful

debasement –
lowering of status

emulation –
effort to equal

languid –
lacking in energy; listless

I admit, however, that the evil is not as great as it might have become. By placing healthgiving herbs alongside poisonous plants and making the substance of a number of noxious animals provide a remedy for the wounds they indict, eternal Providence has taught sovereigns, who are its ministers, to imitate its wisdom. It was by following this example that a great monarch, whose glory will continue to gain new **lustre** in every age, drew from within the arts and sciences, which are such an abundant source of dissolution, those famous learned societies which, along with the dangerous trust of human knowledge, also hold the sacred trust of morality, for each of them is devoted to maintaining moral purity within itself, and requires the same purity of those whom it admits to membership.

These wise institutions, strengthened by their founder's successor and imitated by all the kings of Europe, will at least serve to restrain men of letters, who, all aspiring to membership in the academies, will keep watch over themselves and try to make themselves worthy of it by useful works and irreproachable morals. For the prizes with which they honour literary merit, these academies will choose subjects capable of animating love of virtue in the hearts of citizens, and by their own morality, will show that the same love also reigns among them. They will give nations the rare pleasure of seeing learned societies imparting to mankind not only agreeable enlightenment, but also salutary instructions.

At this point an objection might be raised which would actually be another proof of what I am saying. The fact that so many efforts are being made shows all too clearly how necessary they are; one does not seek remedies for ills that do not exist. Why must these remedies share the nature of ordinary ones by being inadequate? Because so many institutions have been created to favour erudition, they are all the more capable of inspiring respect for the objects of the sciences and making men turn their attention to cultivating them. From the precautions that have been taken, it would seem that we had too many farmers and were afraid of running short of philosophers. I will not venture to make a comparison between agriculture and philosophy, because I know it would not be tolerated. I will ask only these questions: What is philosophy? What is contained in the writings of the most famous philosophers? What are the lessons taught by those friends of wisdom? Listening to them, we have the impression that they are **mountebanks** in a public square, each one shouting, "Come to me! Only I will tell you the truth!" One claims that there is no body and that everything is only an appearance, another that nothing exists but matter, and that there is no God but the world. One maintains that there are no virtues or vices and that moral good and evil are illusions, another that men are wolves and may **devour**

lustre –
shine; glow; splendour

mountebanks –
flamboyant charlatans

devour –
to eat up greedily

Gospel –
a written account of the life
of Jesus

impious –
showing a lack of respect
for God

Leucippus
(fl. fifth century BCE) – a
Greek philosopher

Diagoras
(fl. fifth century BCE) – a
Greek poet and Sophist

perish –
to die, especially in a
sudden, violent way

Hobbes, Thomas
(1588–1679) – an English
philosopher

Spinoza, Baruch
(1632–1677) – a Dutch
philosopher

versifier –
a writer of low-quality poems

Bacon, Francis
(1561–1626) – an English
intellectual reformer,
philosopher and champion
of modern science

Descartes, René
(1596–1650) – a French
philosopher, mathematician
and scientist

Newton, Isaac
(1642–1727) – an English
mathematician and natural
physicist

each other with a clear conscience. O great philosophers, if only you would limit those profitable lessons to your friends and children! You would soon reap the benefit of them, and then we would have no need to fear finding one of your disciples among our own friends and children.

Such are the wonderful men who enjoy the esteem lavished on them by their contemporaries while they are alive, and then attain immortality after their demise. Such are the wise maxims that we receive from them and continue to pass on from one generation to the next. Did paganism, rich in all the aberrations of human reason, leave to posterity anything comparable to the shameful monuments that have been erected by printing during the reign of the **Gospel**? The **impious** writings of men like **Leucippus** and **Diagoras** **perished** with them. The art of eternising the extravagances of the human mind had not yet been invented. But thanks to typographical characters¹⁰ and the use we make of them, the dangerous musings of **Hobbes** and **Spinoza** will endure forever. Such famous writings, which our ignorant, rustic forefathers would have been incapable of producing, will survive among our descendants, along with those even more dangerous works which reek of the moral corruption of our time, and together they will provide future centuries with a faithful history of the progress and advantages of our arts and sciences. If our descendants read them, they will have no doubt about the question we are now discussing, and unless they are even more foolish than we, they will raise their hands toward heaven and say in the bitterness of their hearts, “Almighty God, you who hold the minds of men in your hand, deliver us from the knowledge and the baneful arts of our forefathers, and give us ignorance, innocence, and poverty, the only goods that can make us happy and are precious in your sight.”

But if the progress of the arts and sciences has added nothing to our real happiness, if it has corrupted our morals, and if moral corruption has adulterated the purity of our taste, what are we to think of that host of elementary writers who have removed the difficulties which guarded the approach to the Temple of the Muses, and which nature had placed before it to try the strength of those who were tempted to seek knowledge?

What are we to think of those compilers of works that have rashly broken open the door of the sciences, and brought into their sanctuary a populace unworthy of approaching it, whereas it would have been better if all those who were incapable of making great advances in the career of learning had been disheartened at the outset, and had then turned to arts that are useful to society? A man who will now spend his whole life being a bad **versifier** or an inferior geometer might have become an outstanding cloth manufacturer. Those destined by nature to have disciples do not need masters. Men like **Bacon**, **Descartes**, and **Newton**, the teachers of mankind, have themselves had no teachers. What guide could have led them to where their vast genius has taken them? An ordinary master would only have lessened their understanding by confining it within the narrow limits of his own. It was from the first obstacles that they learned to exert themselves and develop the abilities that enabled them to cover such immense distances. If a few men must be permitted to

apply themselves to the study of the arts and sciences, it should be only those who feel strong enough to follow their predecessors' footsteps alone, and go beyond them. Only a few are capable of raising monuments to the glory of the human mind. But if nothing is to be above their genius, nothing must be above their hopes. That is the only encouragement they need. The soul is gradually proportioned to the objects with which it concerns itself, and it is great occasions that produce great men. The prince of eloquence was a Roman consul, and the greatest of all philosophers, perhaps, was **Lord Chancellor of England**. If one had been only a professor at some university and the other had obtained only a modest stipend from an academy, can there be any doubt that their work would have been affected by their situation? Let kings not disdain to admit into their councils those men most capable of giving them good advice; let them renounce the old prejudice, invented by the pride of those in high positions, that the art of ruling nations is more difficult than that of enlightening them, as if it were easier to induce men to do good voluntarily than to compel them to do it by force. Let them give honourable refuge in their courts to learned men of the first order. Let those men obtain there the only reward worthy of them: that of contributing by their influence to the happiness of the peoples to whom they have taught wisdom. Only then shall we see what can be done by virtue, knowledge, and authority, animated by noble emulation and working together toward the **felicity** of the human race. But as long as power is alone on one side, and knowledge and wisdom are alone on another, learned men will seldom turn their thoughts to great things, monarchs will do noble things even more seldom, and peoples will continue to be **abject**, corrupt, and unhappy.

As for us ordinary men, whom heaven has not endowed with such great talents and destined to such great glory, let us remain in our obscurity. Let us not pursue a reputation which would escape us and which, in the present state of things, would never repay us for what it had cost us, even if we were all qualified to obtain it. Why should we seek our happiness in the opinion of our fellow men if we can find it in ourselves? Let us leave to others the task of instructing peoples in their duties, and limit ourselves to fulfilling our own; if we can do that, we have all the knowledge we need.

O virtue, sublime science of simple souls, are such efforts and complications required in order to know you? Are your principles not engraved in all hearts? To learn your laws, is it not enough for us to withdraw into ourselves and listen to the voice of our conscience while our passions are silent? That is true philosophy; let us learn to be content with it. And without envying those famous men who make themselves immortal in the Republic of Letters, let us place between them and

Lord Chancellor of England –
the official responsible for
keeping the Great Seal of
England; the monarch's
closest advisor

felicity –
great happiness; bliss

abject –
miserable; greatly unhappy

us that glorious distinction which was observed between two ancient peoples: that one knew how to speak well, the other how to act rightly.

NOTES

1 Monarchs are always glad to see a taste for **superfluities** and the agreeable arts, which do not result in the exportation of money, increase among their subjects for they know that such things foster the smallness of soul that goes so well with servitude, and that all the needs which a people gives itself are so many more chains that bind it. When Alexander wanted to keep a fish-eating people under his domination, he made them give up fishing and eat foods common to other peoples; and the savages of America, who go barefoot and live entirely on what they obtain by hunting, have always been impossible to subdue. What yoke can be imposed on men who need nothing?

2 “I like discussion and argument,” says **Montaigne**, “but only with a few people, and for my own enjoyment. Serving as an entertainment for the rich and powerful, and vying with others in displaying one’s wit and glib chatter, is a trade that I consider unbecoming to a man of honour.” It is the trade of all our intellectuals, except one.

3 I dare not speak of those happy peoples that do not even know the names of the vices we have such difficulty in curbing: the savages of America, who govern themselves in a simple, natural way which Montaigne prefers, without hesitation, not only to Plato’s laws, but also to the most perfect ideas of government that philosophy will ever be able to imagine. He cites many examples of their conduct that are striking to anyone capable of admiring them. “But never mind,” he says, “they wear no **breeches!**”

4 Let me ask in good faith what opinion the Athenians themselves must have had of eloquence, when they were so careful to exclude it from that upright tribunal whose judgements could not be appealed even by the gods. What did the Romans think of medicine, when they banished it from their republic? And when a vestige of humane feeling prompted the Spaniards to forbid their lawyers to go to America, what idea must they have had of jurisprudence? Perhaps they felt that by that one act they could make up for all the evil they had done to the unfortunate Indians.

5 It is easy to see the allegory in **the fable of Prometheus**; and it does not appear that the Greeks, who chained him to **Mount Caucasus**, thought much better of him than the Egyptians did of their god Theuth. The **satyr**, says an ancient fable, wanted to kiss and embrace fire the first time he saw it, but Prometheus cried out to him, “Satyr, you will mourn the loss of the beard on your chin, because fire burns when it is touched.”

6 The less we know, the more we think we know. Did the **Peripatetics** have any doubts about anything? Did not Descartes construct the universe with cubes and vortices? And even today, in Europe, are there any physicists who do not boldly explain the profound mystery of electricity, which will perhaps be forever the despair of real philosophers?

superfluity –
overabundance; excess

Montaigne, Michel de
(1533–1592) – a French
essayist

breeches –
trousers

the fable of Prometheus –
the myth of Prometheus,
who stole fire from the gods
and gave it to man

Mount Caucasus –
an unspecified mountain in
the Caucasus Mountains,
a range stretching between
the Black Sea and the
Caspian Sea

satyr –
in Greek mythology, a
part-bestial, part-human
woodland deity

Peripatetics –
followers of Aristotle

7 I am far from thinking that this **ascendancy** of women is bad in itself. It is a gift that nature has given them for the happiness of the human race: Better directed, it might do as much good as it now does evil. We are not sufficiently aware of the advantages to society that would result if a better education were given to that half of the human race which rules the other. Men will always be what it pleases women for them to be; therefore, if you want men to be great and virtuous, teach women the meaning of greatness of soul and virtue. The reflections which are suggested by this subject, and which Plato made in the past, deserve to be better developed by a writer worthy of following such a great master and defending such a great cause.

8 *Pensees philosophiques* [by Diderot].

9 Such was the education of the Spartans, according to the greatest of their kings. It is noteworthy, says Montaigne, that in the excellent government of **Lycurgus**, which was almost monstrous in its perfection, yet devoted such great care to the upbringing of children, regarding it as its main responsibility, there are so little mention of doctrine, even at the very seat of the Muses. It was as if those noble-hearted youths scorned any other yoke, and had to be given, instead of our teachers of science, only teachers of valour, prudence, and justice. Let us see how that same author speaks of the ancient Persians. Plato, he says, reports that the heir to their throne was thus brought up: At birth he was given into the care not of women, but of eunuchs who were in high standing with the king because of their virtue. They undertook to make his body beautiful and healthy. When he was seven, they taught him to ride and hunt. At fourteen, he was placed in the hands of four men: the wisest, the most just, the most temperate, and the bravest in the kingdom. The first taught him religion; the second, to be always truthful; the third, to conquer his **covetousness**; the fourth, to fear nothing. All of them, let me point out, tried to make him good; none tried to make him learned.

Astyages, in **Xenophon**, asks **Cyrus** to tell him about his last lesson, and Cyrus replies, "It was this: In our school a big boy who had a small cloak gave it to a little boy and took away his cloak, which was larger. Our teacher asked me to judge the dispute. I decided that the matter should be allowed to stand as it was, since each boy now had a better-fitting cloak than before. The teacher then told me that I had made a bad judgement, for I had considered only what was appropriate, whereas my first concern should have been justice, which requires that no one shall be forcibly deprived of what belongs to him." And he says that he was punished, just as pupils in our villages are punished if they forget the **first aorist** of *tupto*. A modern teacher will have to give me a fine speech, in

ascendancy –

a position of power or influence

Lycurgus

(396 – c. 325 BCE) – one of the ten Attic orators of the Alexandrian canon

covetousness –

excessive desire for riches or money

Astyages

(fl. sixth century BCE) – the last king of the Median Empire

Xenophon

(c. 430 – c. 355 BCE) – a Greek historian

Cyrus

(c. 600 – c. 530 BCE) – Cyrus II, known as Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty and the Persian Empire

first aorist –

a verb tense indicating a completed action (often the equivalent of the simple past in English)

tupto –

an ancient Greek verb meaning 'to beat', 'to strike', etc.

in genere –
in general

Alexandrian library –
i.e. the Library of
Alexandria, Egypt, one
of the greatest libraries
of ancient world

Gregory the Great
(540–604) – a Roman
pope who left behind
a substantial literary
heritage

genere demonstrative, before he can convince me that his school is as good as that one.

10 If we consider the frightful disorders that printing has already caused in Europe, and if we judge the future by the progress that its evils continue to make from day to day, it is easy to foresee that sovereigns will soon make as many efforts to banish that terrible art from their states as they made to establish it in them. Sultan Ahmed, yielding to the insistence of a few self-styled men of good taste, consented to allow a printing press to be installed in Constantinople; no sooner was it in operation than he had to have it demolished, and the pieces thrown into a well. It is said that when Caliph Omar was asked what was to be done with an **Alexandrian library**, he replied, “If the books in that library contain things contrary to the Qur’an, they are evil and must be burned. If they contain only the doctrine of the Qur’an, burn them anyway, for they are superfluous.” Our learned men have cited that reasoning as the height of absurdity. But imagine **Gregory the Great** in the place of Omar, and the GGospel in the place of the Qur’an: The library would still have been burned, and that might have been the finest act of the illustrious pontiff’s life.

Source: Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. ‘Discourse on the Arts and Sciences.’ *The Essential Rousseau*. Translated by Lowell Bair. Harmondsworth: Meridian, 1983, pp. 203–230.

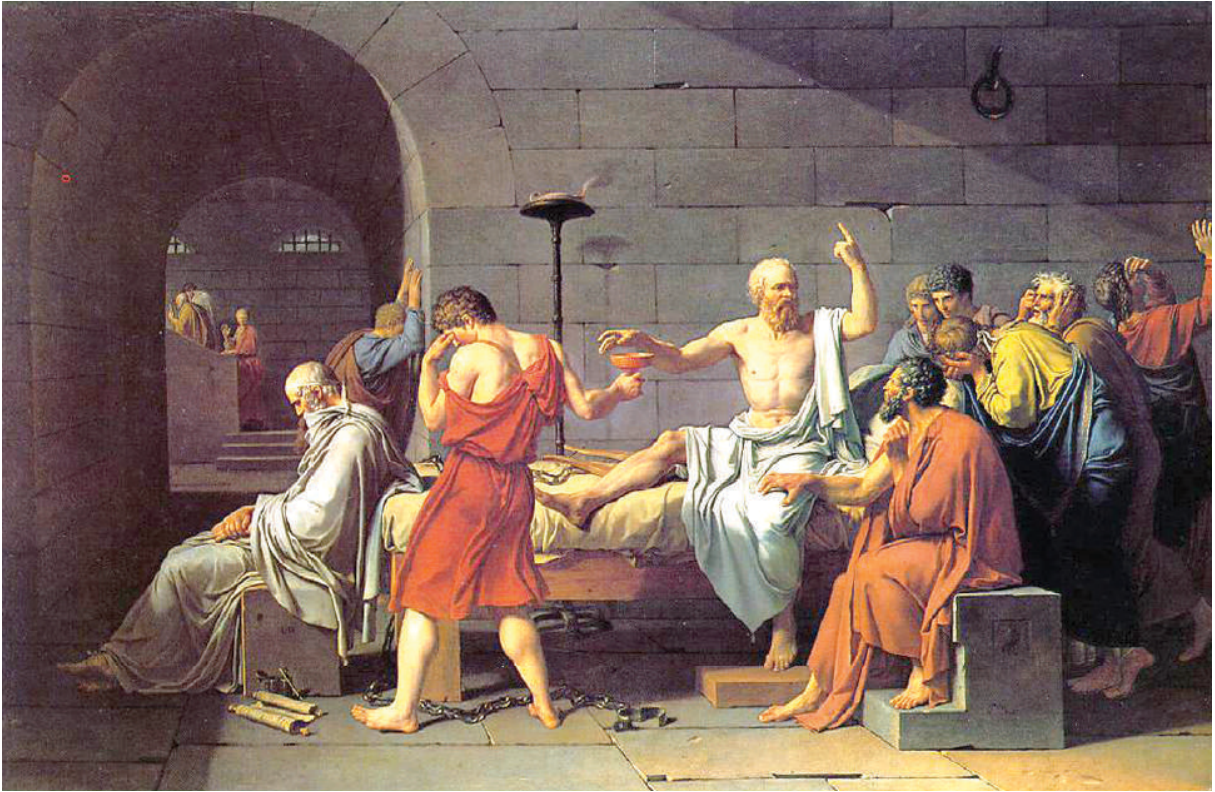
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the ‘historical course’ of human civilization that Rousseau presents in his *Discourse*?
2. Why does Rousseau claim there has always existed a correlation between the advance of sciences and arts and the decline of civilization? Explain.
3. With the advances of arts and sciences, what, according to Rousseau, made people still reside in the milieu of happy ignorance?
4. Describe the comparisons Rousseau draws in Part One between different civilizations and societies, ancient and modern. What is the connection between this comparative history and his description of human behaviour in Part Two?
5. What is the relationship, for Rousseau, between simplicity, luxury, virtue and civilization?
6. According to Rousseau, how does luxury help degrade our morals and virtues? How do arts and sciences relate to this?
7. Does Rousseau really deny human progress, especially towards the end of the *Discourse*? Explain your answer.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. In Part One of the *Discourse*, Rousseau says that 'our souls have been corrupted in proportion as our sciences and arts advanced...' Does this, in your view, correspond to Mrs Hopewell's perception of 'good country people'? Does Mrs Hopewell like good country people because they are not corrupted by science? Pay attention to a quote Mrs Hopewell reads from one of her daughter's books. Explain your answer.
2. Bakunin (whom you read in Chapter Three) calls the reign of scientific intelligence the most aristocratic, despotic and arrogant of regimes. Is this similar to Rousseau's cautions about knowledge and science?



Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Socrates*, 1787.

HOW TO WRITE AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

You are writing an argumentative essay, not a descriptive essay. A descriptive essay simply answers the question ‘what?’; it describes an event, a place, an institution, etc. An argumentative essay answers the question ‘how?’ or ‘why?’; it doesn’t simply describe what happened, but it explains why this happened.

An argumentative essay has several parts:

An **introduction** lets you introduce the issue your paper discusses and how this is relevant to the topic or course. All problems are interesting; in your introduction, you show the reader why your problem is interesting. The introduction includes the research question your paper will answer. A good research question is one to which you do not yet know the answer. Writing and researching the paper will help you find this answer. Avoid questions that simply lead to a description (what, where or when) and look for questions that let you give an explanation (why or how).

You also need to avoid questions that cannot be answered. This includes questions that are too general, and questions that rely entirely on a certain set of beliefs. Try to focus your question on a particular part of a problem, and think about whether you will be able to find *evidence* to support your answer.

The short answer to your research question is a **thesis statement**, a short (no more than a paragraph) version of your *argument*. A thesis statement does not simply describe the structure of your paper, it directly answers your research question. The thesis statement consists of a set of *propositions* – short statements that give part of the answer to the ‘why’ or the ‘how’ of your research question. These propositions must be related to each other. If you can’t think of how they are related, they should not be in the same paper.

Most of your paper will consist of **evidence** that supports your thesis statement. You need to provide evidence for each proposition in your thesis statement – what facts or arguments show you, and the reader, why your proposition is correct? You need more than one piece of evidence for each proposition. If your argument is strong, you should be able to find an assortment of evidence.

Each of your propositions, and the evidence supporting them, should have *connections* that make them fit together into a coherent argument. How is your first proposition linked to the second? The second to the third? The first to the third? You need to show these connections.

You must give your sources for all evidence. Where did you find these facts or these arguments? If you do not properly give these sources, you are guilty of *plagiarism*, and you have not written an acceptable paper.

A good paper will also consider **counter arguments**, and will *refute* these counter arguments. There is always more than one possible explanation: what are the other possibilities, and why is your explanation the best one? You need to show how the evidence you have presented demonstrates that your argument is the one that best fits all the facts. Without this, your argument is a *polemic*, an argument that ignores different possible answers to your question.

Analysis explains what the consequences of your argument might be. If your argument is correct (and you have tried to show this with your evidence and by refuting counter arguments) what does this mean? How might this affect our lives, or the way we understand the world? This step takes you from a good paper to an excellent paper.

Finally, end with a strong **conclusion**. A conclusion does not introduce new information, but it reminds the reader of what you argued in your paper, and why your argument is important. Don't just repeat your thesis statement. Find a new way to state what you have explained.

Source: Adapted from 'How to Write a Conference Paper.' Bishkek: Civic Education Project for Central Asian & Mongolia, 2002.

THESIS DEVELOPMENT EXERCISE

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*

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<p>INTRODUCTION: 'Here is one of the greatest and noblest questions that has ever been discussed. This discourse will not deal with those metaphysical subtleties that have spread into nearly all branches of literature and are not always absent from academic curricula; it will deal, rather, with one of those truths that are closely bound up with the happiness of the human race.'</p> <p>Research Question: 'Has the restoration of the arts and sciences been conducive to the purification or the corruption of morals?'</p>		
<p>THESIS STATEMENT: 'The effect is certain, the depravity is real, and our souls have been corrupted in proportion as our sciences and arts have advanced toward perfection. The state of morals is as closely controlled by the progress of the arts and sciences as the daily ebb and flow of tides by the moon.'</p>		
Evidence:	Evidence:	Connections:
<p>Proposition: 1 'Consider civilizations that have "seen virtue flee" with the advance of arts and sciences.'</p>	a) Egypt	a) 'Egypt, the mother of philosophy and the fine arts... soon afterward... was conquered by Cambyses'
	b) Greece	b) 'always learned, pleasure-loving... gained nothing... [it was] like a body enervated by luxury and arts'
	c) Rome	c) 'once... made illustrious by tillers of the soil, [Rome] fell under the yoke that she had imposed on so many peoples'
	d) Byzantium	d) 'a refuge for arts and sciences... [became] a place of shameless debauchery and corruption, ...an aggregation of most atrocious crimes'

2 'Consider present-day Asia and ancient Europe, and compare the effect of the advance of arts and sciences in places where the "vain sciences" were honoured or ignored.'	a) China	a) 'learning is honoured, ... but there is no vice that does not dominate them'
	b) Persia	b) 'preserved from the contagion of vain knowledge... virtues made them happy and set an example for other nations'
	c) Scythia	c) 'a magnificent nation'
	d) Ancient Germans	d) 'whose simplicity, innocence and virtue were praised'
	e) Romans	e) 'in the time of poverty and ignorance... was renowned for its courage'
	f) the savages of America	f) 'live entirely on what they obtain by hunting, have always been impossible to subdue'
3 'Let's look at the judgements that the greatest learners have pronounced on the artists'	a) Socrates	a) 'that just man [even if alive today] would continue to despise our vain sciences'
	b) Cato the Elder	b) 'inveighed against those subtle and cunning Greeks who perverted the virtue'
	c) Fabricius	c) he would say: 'what has become of... those rustic hearths that were once the home of... virtue?'

4 'The arts and sciences owe their birth to our vices and the effects produced by our sciences are dangerous'	a) idleness	a) sciences are born of idleness and in turn foster it
	b) luxury	b) born of idleness, it is seldom found without arts and sciences
	c) fading of true courage	c) this is the work of sciences and all those arts
5 'Cultivation of the sciences is prejudicial to moral qualities'	a) learning and education of children	a) our children are no longer able to distinguish between truth and error
	b) courage; fatherland	b) these are now meaningless words to our children
	c) inequality	c) 'created among men by the distinction of talents and the debasement of virtues'
<p>Counter arguments But what about those true learners and writers 'who have rashly broken open the door of the sciences, and brought into their sanctity a populace unworthy of approaching it...?'</p>		<p>Connections with evidence: 'Those destined by nature to disciples do not need masters. Men like Bacon, Descartes, and Newton, the teachers of mankind, had themselves no teachers.'</p>
<p>Analysis 'If a few men must be permitted to apply themselves to the study of arts and sciences, it should be only those who feel strong enough to follow their predecessors' footsteps alone, and go beyond them. Only a few are capable of raising monuments to the glory of the human mind.'</p>		

Conclusion

‘Let kings not disdain to admit into their councils those men most capable of giving them good advice; let them ... give honourable refuge in their courts to learned men of the first order. Let those men obtain there the only reward worthy of them: that of contributing by their influence to the happiness of the peoples to whom they have taught their wisdom. Only then shall we see what can be done by virtue, knowledge, and authority animated by noble emulation and working together towards the felicity of the human race.’

PLAGIARISM

PLAGIARISM IS A PRESENTATION OF ANOTHER'S WORDS OR IDEAS AS YOUR OWN. IT IS A BAD THING. DON'T DO IT.

Turning in a paper actually written by your room-mate and saying "I wrote this" would be a flagrant example of plagiarism. The same would be true if you were to buy a term paper from a "paper mill."

The lightest punishment for plagiarism of this sort would be a grade of **zero** for the paper. Other common punishments are **failing** the course or even **expulsion** from school. As you can see, plagiarism is a very serious offence in academia.

PLAGIARISM IS WRONG FOR SEVERAL REASONS.

First, it is **lying**. If you have been asked to write something as evidence that you have grasped the materials of the course you are taking, offering someone else's work as evidence is a lie. It is no different from having someone else take an examination in your name.

Second, it is an **insult** to your fellow students. When you plagiarise, just as when you cheat on an exam, you treat unfairly those who play by the rules. You seek an unfair advantage over them, and inevitably, you will find yourself looking down on those who devote their time and energy to the task which you have cheated on.

Third, when you use other people's words and ideas without their permission, it is **stealing**. It would be wrong to sneak into a factory and steal the products manufactured there during the day, and in the academy, words, ideas, paintings, compositions, sculpture, inventions, and other creations are what we produce. It is wrong to steal them and claim them as your own.

PLAGIARISM IS A BIG DEAL IN THE ACADEMY.

There are many forms of plagiarism, some less flagrant than the examples I began with. However, you need to understand and avoid all forms of plagiarism. Presenting someone else's words or ideas as your own – in any form – constitutes plagiarism. Some forms of plagiarism are probably not obvious to you, so I will spell them out in detail. I think much plagiarism is inadvertent and unknowing. I want to help you avoid that potential embarrassment.

Let's suppose you were assigned to write a book review of Theodore M. Porter's book, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public*

Life (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). In preparing to write your paper, you come across a book review by Lisa R. Staffen, published in *Contemporary Sociology* (March, 1996, Vol. 25, No., 2, pp. 154-156).

STAFFEN'S REVIEW BEGINS AS FOLLOWS:

It has become fashionable to reject the notion of absolute objectivity on the grounds that objectivity is simply unattainable or, even if attainable, is undesirable.

Staffen's opening is good, active prose. Let's suppose you like it. More importantly, you imagine that your instructor would like it *a lot*. You decide to start your paper as follows. (I've indicated Staffen's original comment in italics.)

PLAGIARISM: I feel *it has become fashionable to reject the notion of absolute objectivity on the grounds that objectivity is simply unattainable.*

This would be a clear case of plagiarism and therefore unacceptable. Adding, "I feel" at the beginning is a nice personal touch, but it doesn't change anything. Let's tell the truth: you have probably not spent a lot of your waking hours agonising over "the notion of absolute objectivity," much less worrying about whether others would reject the notion or embrace it with passion.

PLAGIARISM: I feel *it has become* stylish *to reject the idea of absolute objectivity on the grounds that objectivity* cannot be achieved.

Even editing the passage as I've done above would constitute plagiarism. While you have changed some of the words – "stylish" for "fashionable", "idea" for "notion," etc. – the idea being expressed, along with many of the phrases, have been taken from someone else, without acknowledging that fact.

Leaving off "I feel," by the way, wouldn't absolve the sin. Anything you write in a term paper, unless you indicate otherwise, is assumed to be your own original thought. It's fine to have original thoughts, incidentally. In fact, we encourage it. We're happiest when your thoughts and opinions are based on evidence and reasoning rather than rumour and belief, but don't feel that your professors are somehow perversely thrilled by the mindless parroting of ideas they already know about. (I know it sometimes seems like that.)

PLAGIARISM: Many people today have rejected **the idea** that there is such a thing as **absolute objectivity** since they do not believe that it can be achieved.

Even though few of the original words remain in the passage above, the thought expressed has been taken from another writer and offered as your own. Even if you found a way to express Staffen's idea without using *any* of her original words, that would still constitute plagiarism. Sorry. If you're going to use someone else's words and/or ideas, you have to give them due credit.

Use someone else's words and ideas, go to jail. Well, it's not quite that bad, but academics don't have much sense of humour about cheating. I'll admit, I kind of enjoyed the student who turned in a paper his friend had written for the same course the preceding semester. He just whited-out his friend's name and typed his own over it – and you could read the original name from the back of the page. He took the course again.

There is nothing wrong with presenting someone else's words and ideas in a term paper or in a published, scholarly work. In fact, any field of thought evolves as people read each other's ideas, learn from and build on those ideas. The key to doing this properly lies in *acknowledgement* and *citation*.

When we borrow words and ideas from others, we acknowledge that we are doing so, and we give our readers a full bibliographic reference so they would be able to locate and read the original.

It might be useful for you to leaf through some academic journal articles. It will be clear that academics think it's fine to use other people's words and ideas.

It's just important to use them appropriately. Use them as resources for building your own unique contribution to the ongoing conversation of ideas.

You might want to create a sculpture of an elephant. No problem. Get a block of granite and chip away everything that doesn't look like an elephant. Just don't pretend that you created the granite (unless you did, in which case I *really* apologise).

Here's an example of how you might properly include Staffen's comment in your term paper, with a bibliographic entry at the end of the paper.

PROPER USE: Lisa Staffen (1996:154) begins her review of Porter's book by suggesting "It has become fashionable to reject the notion of absolute objectivity on the grounds that objectivity is simply unattainable or, even if attainable, is undesirable."

This gets the information out for the reader, and it would be accompanied by an appropriate bibliographic citation at the end of your paper:

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Lisa R. Staffen, "Featured essays," *Contemporary Sociology*, March, 1996, Vol. 25, No., 2, pp. 154-156.

Here are some other acceptable ways to use Staffen's passage. Each would be accompanied with a bibliographic entry at the end of the paper.

PROPER USE: In her review of Porter's book, Lisa Staffen (1996:154) says the idea of absolute objectivity is now commonly rejected as "simply unattainable or, even if attainable, [as] undesirable."

PROPER USE: According to Lisa Staffen (1996:154), it has become fashionable to reject the idea of absolute objectivity altogether.

In summary, it is quite acceptable – even desirable – to include the ideas of others in your term paper. This can be a sign of good scholarship, as well as assuring your instructor that you've done some of the reading for the course. (We like to think you read some of it). However, it's important that you *acknowledge*

and cite materials properly. The key is that your readers know what you are borrowing and how to look up the original materials.

By the way, if your instructor asks you to write a report on plagiarism, don't copy what you've just read here unless you cite it properly...

SOURCE: Babbie, Earl. 'Plagiarism.' *Teaching Resources Depository*. Bakersfield, California: California State University, Social Sciences Research and Instructional Council, 1998.

URL: <https://www1.chapman.edu/~babbie/plag00.html>

BOETHIUS: THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480–524) was a Roman scholar, Christian philosopher and statesman. Boethius was well trained in Greek. His early works on arithmetic and music are impressive. When, however, he defended a fellow consul accused of treason, he was accused of the same thing, as well as practising magic, or sacrilege, which he strongly denied. In prison, awaiting execution, Boethius wrote his magnum opus, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which contains the main existing evidence of his fall but does not clearly describe the actual accusation against him. In this celebrated work Boethius describes the pursuit of wisdom and the love of God as the true sources of human happiness.



Fate and Providence¹

“It remains,” I said, “for you to explain this apparent injustice I’m suffering now (that is, Boethius’ imprisonment, torture, and impending execution).”

“The question you’re asking,” Lady Philosophy replied with a smile, “is the grandest of all mysteries, one which can never be explained completely to the human intellect, for, when one problem is removed, many more arise to take its place, and arise and arise unless the mind is keen and awake. For the problem you raise touches on a number of difficult questions: the simplicity of Providence, the nature of **Fate**, the unpredictability of Chance,² divine and human knowledge, **predestination**, and free will. You know the difficulty involved in these questions; nevertheless, I will try to answer them in the short space allotted us.”

Then, as though she were beginning for the first time, Philosophy said, “The coming-into-being of all things, and the entire course that changeable things take, derive their causes, their order, and their forms from the unchanging mind of God. The mind of God set down all the various rules by which all things are governed while still remaining unchanged in its own simplicity. When the government of all things is seen as belonging to the simplicity and purity of the divine mind, we call it ‘Providence’. When this government of all things is seen from the point of view of the things that change and move, that is, all things which are governed, from the very beginning of time we have called this ‘Fate’. We can easily see that Providence and Fate are different if we think over the power of discernment each has. Providence is the divine reason, the divine **logos**, and only belongs to the highest ruler of all things: it is the perspective of the divine mind. ‘Fate’, on the other hand, belongs to the things that change and is the way in which Providence joins things together in their proper order. Providence views all things equally and at the same time, despite their diversity and seemingly infinite magnitude. Fate sets individual things in motion once their proper order and form has been established. In other words, Providence is the vision of the divine mind as it sees the unfolding in time of all things, and sees

fate –
a force, principle, or power
that predetermines events

predestination –
the idea that everything
is decided or planned in
advance by God

logos –
word

all these things all at once, whereas the unfolding of these events in time, seen as they unfold in time, is called Fate. Even though the two are different, the one depends on the other, for the complex unfolding of Fate derives from the unity of Providence. Think of it this way: a craftsman imagines in his mind the form of whatever thing he intends to make before he sets about making it; he makes it by producing in time through a succession of acts that thing that he originally conceived of in his mind. God, in his Providence, in a unified and simple way, orders all things that are to be done in time; Fate is the unfolding in time through a succession of acts in the order God has conceived. Therefore, whether or not Fate is worked out by angelic **spirits** serving God, or by some “soul,” or nature, or the motions of the stars, or the devil himself, or by none or all of these, one thing you can be certain of: Providence is the unchangeable, simple, and unified form of all things which come into and pass out of existence, while Fate is the connection and temporal order of all those things which the divine mind decided to bring into existence. This leads to the conclusion that all things subject to Fate are in turn subject to Providence; therefore, Fate itself is subject to Providence.

“However, some things subject to Providence are not in turn subject to Fate. For example: consider the example of spheres orbiting around a central point. The sphere closest to the centre inscribes a motion very much like the centre itself, since its orbit is very small, whereas the outermost sphere circles about in a massively wide orbit which increases in size the farther the sphere retreats from the centre. If any of these spheres were to occupy the centre, it would become simple like the centre and cease to move in space. In this very same way are things related to the divine mind: whatever is at the greatest distance from the divine mind is the most **entangled** in the nets of Fate; whatever is nearest to the divine mind approaches the centre of everything. If anything should adhere directly to the divine mind, it ceases to move and frees itself from the necessities of Fate. We conclude that the changing course of Fate is to the immovable unity of Providence as reasoning is to intellect, as that which comes into and passes from existence is to that which always exists, as time is to eternity, as a circle to its centre. Fate moves the heavens and all the stars, governs the basic elements and their combinations, and transforms these mixtures and combinations of elements in reciprocal change. Fate renews all mortal things by allowing them to reproduce into similar creatures. This same power, this Fate, connects all the actions and fortunes of humanity into an unbreakable chain of causation; these causes have their origin in unchangeable Providence, therefore, these causes, too, must be unchangeable. This is how things of the world are governed: all things are produced and affected by an unchangeable order of causes that originate in the unity and simplicity of the divine mind, and this unchangeable order of causes, because it never changes, controls the changeable things which would, without this governance, fall into chaos and disorder. Therefore, even though to you, since you do not understand the unchanging order that governs all things, the changeable things of this world may seem to be chaotic and disordered, still everything is governed by a set and proper order which directs everything in existence towards the Good. Nothing whatsoever is ever done or created for the sake of evil, which includes the actions of evil men, which also are directed towards the good even though their perverted and wretched

spirit –
a supernatural being

entangled –
deeply involved, especially
in something complicated

wills do not conceive this. The order which derives from the centre of all things does not turn anyone from their proper course.

“Now, your original question concerns the **apparent** confusion and disorder which seems to be manifestly shown forth when good men both prosper and suffer, and evil men both prosper and suffer and get both what they want and what they do not want. First, is human judgement so perfect that it can discern who is truly good and who is truly evil? If that were true, why do humans disagree so often, so that the same person is thought by one group to deserve the highest rewards and is thought by another group to deserve the most miserable punishments? Even if I were to grant that some people can somehow distinguish between good and evil people, would that person also be able to look inside the soul and, like a doctor examining a body, discern the inner condition of the person?... Now the health of the soul is **virtue**, and the sickness of the soul is vice. Now, who else is the physician of the soul but God, who preserves and rewards the good and punishes the wicked, and who sees in the great panorama of Providence what is best for everyone? Here is the great conclusion about Fate we have been tending to: divine wisdom understands and does what humanity, in their ignorance, never can understand.

ENDNOTES

¹ “Providence” means more than “foreknowledge” or “prevision”, it also implies “governance”. God not only knows everything, but somehow governs everything through a chain of causation.

² Boethius will later define Chance as the explanation given to any outcome which occurs from a sequence of causes which had other purposes in mind. For instance, someone ploughing a field **unearths** a treasure chest; since the discovery of a treasure chest was not in the **ploughman’s** mind when he began to overturn the soil, he ascribes the discovery of treasure to “Chance”. There are, Boethius will argue, causes that are “above” the causes we know or think about.

apparent –
obvious; clear

virtue –
moral excellence

unearth –
to bring up out of the earth;
to dig up

ploughman –
a man who ploughs the
land; a farmer

SOURCE: Boethius. ‘*The Consolation of Philosophy: Selections.*’ Translated by Richard Hooker. Internet History Sourcebooks, 1994.

URL: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/con-phil.asp>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why, according to Boethius, is divine wisdom superior to the human mind and judgement? What is the role of divine force in shaping fate?
2. How, in your view, does human progress relate to the fact that God decides the order of all things happening? Does history progress then? If history is entirely metaphysical, and God predetermines human fate, what is there left for humans to pursue?
3. How does Boethius explain people's pursuits, even though God has predestined everything in advance? What is the relationship between good and evil, and how might human progress relate to that?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. For Rousseau, the state of morals is determined by the progress of arts and sciences. How does Boethius' argument that God has set down all the rules that govern society relate to this?
2. Boethius also mentions that the order set by God directs everything towards good. How do Boethius and Rousseau differ in their understanding of human progress? What determines human progress for them?
3. Rousseau says that our morals have been corrupted by the advance of the arts and sciences. Where does Boethius see the source for saving human morals and virtues?
4. In his *Discourse*, Rousseau asks 'But have we been able to profit from any of the lessons taught to us by Providence?' Does Boethius answer this question? If so, how?

AUGUSTE COMTE: A GENERAL VIEW OF POSITIVISM

Auguste Comte (1798–1857), was born in Montpellier, France. He may be considered a successor to the French *Encyclopédistes*, with tremendous respect for science and strongly opposed to established religion. He is known as the founder of Positivism, a philosophical school for which the goal of knowledge is simply to describe experienced phenomena, not to question their existence. Comte sought to apply the methods of observation and experimentation, as was beginning to be used in the sciences, to a field we now know as sociology – the study of human social relationships. For him, there are three stages of societal development: theological, metaphysical and positive. He believed that the solution to persistent social problems and human progress might be achieved through the science of sociology.



Positivism consists essentially of a Philosophy and a **Polity**. These can never be dissevered; the former being the basis and the latter the end of one comprehensive system, in which our intellectual faculties and our social sympathies are brought into close correlation with each other. For, in the first place, the science of Society, besides being more important than any other, supplies the only logical and scientific link by which all our varied observations of phenomena can be brought into one consistent whole. Of this science it is even more true than of any of the preceding sciences, that its real character cannot be understood without explaining its exact relation in all general features with the art corresponding to it. Now here we find a **coincidence** which is assuredly not fortuitous. At the very time when the theory of society is being laid down, an immense sphere is opened for the application of that theory; the direction, namely, of the social **regeneration** of Western Europe. For, if we take another point of view, and look at the great crisis of modern history, as its character is displayed in the natural course of events, it becomes every day more evident how hopeless is the task of reconstructing political institutions without the previous remodelling of opinion and of life. To form then, a satisfactory synthesis of all human conceptions, is the most urgent of our social wants: and it is needed equally **for the sake of** Order and of Progress. During the gradual accomplishment of this great philosophical work, a new moral power will arise spontaneously throughout the West, which, as its influence increases, will lay down a definite basis for the reorganisation of society. It will offer a general system of education for the adoption of all civilised nations, and by this means will supply in every department of public and private life fixed principles of judgement and of conduct. Thus the intellectual movement and the social crisis will be brought continually into close connection with each other. Both will combine to prepare the advanced portion of humanity for the acceptance of a true spiritual power, a power more coherent, as well as more progressive, than the noble but **premature** attempt of **medieval** Catholicism...

polity –

a society as a politically organised state

coincidence –

an example of things happening at the same time

regeneration –

revival or rebirth

for the sake of –

in order to support; out of consideration for

premature –

made or done too soon

medieval –

belonging to the Middle Ages

The regenerating **doctrine** cannot do its work without **adherents**; in what quarter should we hope to find them? Now, with individual exceptions of great value, we cannot expect the adhesion of any of the upper classes in society. They are all more or less under the influence of baseless metaphysical theories, and of aristocratic self-seeking. They are absorbed in blind political agitation, and in disputes for the possession of the useless **remnants** of the old **theological** and military system. Their action only tends to prolong the revolutionary state **indefinitely**, and can never result in true social renovation.

Whether we regard its intellectual character or its social objects, it is certain that Positivism must look elsewhere for support. It will find a welcome in those classes only whose good sense has been left **unimpaired** by our **vicious** system of education, and whose generous sympathies are allowed to develop themselves freely. It is among women, therefore, and among the working classes that the **heartiest** supporters of the new doctrine will be found. It is intended, indeed, **ultimately** for all classes of society. But it will never gain much real influence over the higher ranks till it is forced upon their notice by these powerful patrons. When the work of spiritual reorganisation is completed, it is on them that its maintenance will principally depend; and so too, their combined aid is necessary for its **commencement**. Having but little influence in political government, they are the more likely to appreciate the need of a moral government, the special object of which it will be to protect them against the **oppressive** action of the temporal power...

It is from the **feminine** aspect only that human life, whether individually or collectively considered, can really be comprehended as a whole. For the only basis on which a system really **embracing** all the requirements of life can be formed, is the **subordination** of intellect to social feeling: a subordination which we find directly represented in the womanly type of character, whether regarded in its personal or social relations...

The great object, which Positivism sets before us individually and socially, is the endeavour to become more perfect. The highest importance is attached therefore to the imaginative faculties, because in every sphere with which they deal they stimulate the sense of perfection. Limited, as my explanations in this work must be, I shall be able to show that Positivism, while opening up a new and wide field for supplies and in the same spontaneous way a new means of expression.

I shall thus have sketched with some detail the true character of the regenerating doctrine. All its principal aspects will have been considered. Beginning with its philosophical basis, I pass by natural transitions to its political purpose; thence to its action upon the people, its influence with women, and lastly, to its aesthetic power. In concluding this work, which is but the introduction to a larger **treatise**, I have only to speak of the conception, which unites all these various aspects. As summed up in the positivist **motto**, *Love, Order, Progress*, they lead us to the conception of Humanity, which implicitly involves and gives new force to each of them. Rightly interpreting this conception, we view Positivism at last as a complete and consistent whole. The subject will naturally lead us to speak in general terms of the future progress of social regeneration, as far as the history of the past enables us to foresee it. The movement originates in France, and is limited at first to the great family of Western nations. I shall show

- doctrine** –
a belief held and taught
- adherent** –
a supporter of an idea
- remnant** –
something left over; a remainder
- theology** –
the study of a god or gods
- indefinitely** –
with no limit
- unimpaired** –
not damaged or diminished in any respect
- vicious** –
violent and cruel with the intent of causing harm
- hearty** –
enthusiastic; earnest; zealous
- ultimately** –
in the end; finally
- commencement** –
beginning
- oppressive** –
powerful, cruel and unfair
- feminine** –
considered typical of women
- embrace** –
to enclose; to hold
- subordination** –
treatment of something as of secondary importance
- treatise** –
a systematic written discourse on a subject
- motto** –
a short phrase expressing the aims of a group

that it will afterwards extend, in accordance with definite laws, to the rest of the white race, and finally to the other two great races of man.

SOURCE: Comte, Auguste. *A General View of Positivism*. London: Routledge and Sons, 1907, pp. 1–7. Online version. Internet History Sourcebooks: 1998.

URL: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/comte-positivism.asp>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Comte, what is the only science that is able to explain social phenomena, and why?
2. What is the essence of Positivism that Comte champions? Where does Positivism lead us?
3. Who are the potential carriers of progress and reformation? How is Positivism to develop?
4. According to Comte, do we understand Positivism, or the positive stage of development, as simply scientific? Do the advances of the sciences drive human progress? Why do you feel this way?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How have our morals been affected by the advance of the arts and sciences for Rousseau and Comte?
2. In his *Discourse*, Rousseau says that the state of morals is closely controlled by the progress of the arts and sciences. Would Comte agree? Why, or why not?



'The Power and Challenge of the Modern Newspaper'
Muslims running from progress and literacy in Bukhara (*Mulla Nasreddin*, No. 15, 1907)

CHOLPAN: DOCTOR MUHAMMAD-YAR

Cholpan was the pseudonym of Abdulhamid Sulayman (1893–1938), one of the founders of modern Uzbek literature. A poet, playwright, novelist and translator, Cholpan was an important contributor to the Jadid movement, a modernist reform movement in Central Asia. The son of a wealthy merchant in Andijan in the Ferghana Valley, he attended a Russian school. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Cholpan produced his greatest work, beginning to show his nationalist leanings. He was arrested by the Soviets and executed in 1938, one of countless victims of Stalinist terror. Some of his poetry shows remarkable parallels to Rousseau, but set in the twentieth century, which he saw as an era of progress and science but also of horror and depravity. The story translated here was published on six occasions in the newspaper *Sada-yi Turkistan* ('The Voice of Turkistan') in 1914. It played an influential role in Central Asian modernism. The story is very much a juvenile work; Cholpan was a teenager when he wrote it. Even so, it incorporates many of the central themes of modernist rhetoric in Central Asia: the power of knowledge, the value of collective action, patriotism, a fascination with cosmopolitan modernity, and an intense didacticism. Bear in mind Cholpan's commitment to modern reform as you read this and consider his attitude to progress.

In a dark corner of Turkistan, in the town of –, lived a poor, sixty-year-old **barber** called Haji Ahmad. His wife had died of consumption after struggling bravely with it for nine months. She left behind a son called Muhammad-Yar. Haji Ahmad was known in his town as Haji Barber, because at the age of fifteen he had gone on hajj with his father. His father died on the hajj, and Haji Ahmad travelled alone in Egypt, Istanbul, Fars, Morocco, Baluchistan, Baghdad, Iran, and Afghanistan, as well as in inner Russia, for 10 years before returning home. As a result of his travels, he could speak Persian, Arabic, Russian, and English. But because he had suffered many hardships in his travels due to his **ignorance**, he energetically set about educating his son Muhammad-Yar as soon as he was old enough.

When Muhammad-Yar was ten, a teacher from Russia, a graduate of the great seminary in Ufa, arrived in town. He had been in town only for a week or two when he heard of the barber "who read newspapers and knew seventy-two languages", and went to his barbershop to meet him. Muhammad-Yar was also there. At a sign from his father, he got up and welcomed the teacher with the utmost respect. Haji Ahmad and the teacher sat and talked for a long time. During the conversation, Haji Ahmad said, "I have only this one son. I want to educate him according to the needs of the times. If you are willing, give him a good national education, so that afterwards I may have him taught in a government school." After some thought, the teacher accepted. Haji Ahmad closed his shop and took the teacher to his house. The young Muhammad-Yar studied enthusiastically with the teacher. And he spent his spare time not at tea houses, parties, and **brothels**, as uneducated boys do, but in physical training under the guidance of a Russian officer, and in reading useful books. In this time,

barber –
someone who cuts men's
hair for a living

ignorance –
lack of knowledge

brothel –
a house of prostitution

he mastered all the commands of Islam, as well as history and geography. After a year, Haji Ahmad wanted to send his beloved son to a government school. But alas! He had no money. This poverty was very **oppressive**, and threatened to **deprive** the poor child of all excellence and learning.

Having no other choice, Haji Ahmad and the teacher went to all the **notables** of the city in search of help. Some of the merchants refused them entry as soon as they saw the teacher's [modern] dress, while others received them; some, seeing Muhammad-Yar's beauty, offered him a salary as secretary and personal servant. However, our Haji Ahmad knew what these men were up to, and therefore refused to give his beloved son to them. Poor Haji Ahmad gave up hope of receiving any help from the rich merchants, and began to explore other avenues. At this time, numerous wedding feasts were being celebrated in the town,^{*} while gamblers and drunks knifed each other, and human blood cried, "Ignorance! Ignorance!" as it flowed. One after the other, all the student aid societies had closed.

In the meantime, the teacher prepared to leave town. At nine o'clock, Haji Ahmad went to the railway station along with his son to see the teacher off; on the way back, they came upon gamblers fighting over money. Haji Ahmad went up to separate them and give them advice. One of them came up and **strangled** Haji Ahmad to death, and injured Muhammad-Yar. As he gave up his life, Haji Ahmad looked at his son and said, "My son! Instead of a **legacy**... I... leave... you... as security... studies... study... study..."

Muhammad-Yar decided to seek out the murderers of his father and **exact revenge**. But the real murderer of his father was not these men but rather ignorance; so he peacefully buried his father and resolved to **struggle** against ignorance. As for the weapons in the struggle against ignorance, his father had already told him that they were not cannons, guns, pistols, daggers, or bows and arrows, but only "Study! Study! Study!"

The barbaric murder of his father, and the sorrows at seeing his homeland, Turkistan— which had once created a name for itself through knowledge and learning—swimming in a river of ignorance, made Muhammad-Yar fall ill with tuberculosis. The effects of the disease began to show on his face, though it did not **afflict** him fully. At this time, a big fire broke out in the town and destroyed six or seven neighbourhoods, leaving the Muslims hungry on the streets. In their midst was an Armenian shop as well, but its loss was smaller because the shop was insured. And what of our Muslims? Our Muslims didn't even know what insurance was. Those who knew what it was thought it was **illicit**, and therefore would have none of it. Seeing this state of affairs, how was it possible to remain unmoved? As he saw this state of affairs, poor Muhammad-Yar's illness began to worsen.

In the new city, an **admonitory** film called "Drunkness and Its Terrible Consequences" was showing at the Admonition theatre. No matter how bad he felt, he could not stay away. He waited impatiently for the evening in order to see the consequences of this **accursed** drunkenness.

At last, after the evening prayer, he set off on foot for the Admonition theatre. [As the film played,] a **shot** rang out from the yard of the theatre. The film was stopped and everybody ran outside. Poor, weak Muhammad-Yar, too, was

oppressive –
burdensome; overwhelming

deprive –
to prevent someone from
having something

notable –
someone of distinction

strangle –
to kill someone by squeezing
their neck

legacy –
money or assets left by
someone when they die

exact revenge –
to harm a person or group
as a response to a (real or
perceived) wrongdoing

struggle –
to fight for something

afflict –
to affect someone
unpleasantly

illicit –
illegal

admonitory –
acting as a warning to
people about their behaviour

accursed –
detestable; very bad

shot –
a sound of gunfire

^{*} Lavish celebrations were a major focus of modernist Islamic criticism in Central Asia.—Trans.

among them. What a sight! In the yard of the city theatre, drunks playing cards had argued over a small amount of money; one of them had taken out a handgun and shot the other. The **culprit** was apprehended, and the injured taken to the hospital, but he died along the way. The culprit, thoroughly confused, shot himself in the theatre's yard.

Two young Muslims said goodbye to this world due to ignorance. The horrible consequences of drunkenness were truly on display.

Seeing this, Muhammad-Yar **fainted**. The police took him to the city hospital. Muhammad-Yar had no father, no mother, no relatives... There was no one to ask after him. Ah, loneliness! Ah, **orphanhood**! Ah, the cause of it all: Ignorance! Go! Disappear!! Die!!!

Muhammad-Yar got better after a month's treatment in the hospital. As he left the hospital, the doctors recommended that he go to the Caucasus for treatment, and that he study while there.

Muhammad-Yar told the doctors of his pennilessness. The doctors consulted for a while and then gave him a letter that entitled him to be treated in any hospital in the Caucasus without having to pay a **kopek**. Muhammad-Yar left the hospital and went home. There was no one there: no father, no mother... What a sad sight! He rented the house to a Russian for six months for 225 roubles, and set off, at seven o'clock, for the railway station to see if there was a train. But there was no train until nine the next morning. Sadly, he went back home and became an overnight guest in his own house.

The next morning, he was at the railway station, waiting for the train. At last, twentieth-century civilisation arrived, **snorting** like a dragon, **spewing** water in every direction... Muhammad-Yar was about to leave his homeland. It was a strange sight at the station, as Muhammad-Yar's heart began to break.

A Muslim had lost his bags! Another didn't know the name of the station he was going to, and therefore had bought a ticket for the wrong station. Confronted with such scenes, Muhammad-Yar was left **immobile**. At last, after the second whistle, he got up and began to look for a place in the third class. The sad scenes mentioned above were in evidence in even greater force here. One Muslim had a bloody nose from fighting with another; another Muslim was taken away by train officials and beaten. Muhammad-Yar was left immobile. He left the car and, standing on one side, began to look around. An Armenian from some dark corner of the Caucasus had opened a shop at the station and had become rich. Two of his sons studied in government schools. Local Muslims, on the other hand, spent all their incomes on **circumcisions** and funerals, and were all in conditions of poverty and **humiliation**. His heart sank again; again, the nervousness... He was absorbed in thought. The third whistle came. The horseless carriage of the twentieth century announced its departure and began to move noisily forward. With that, Muhammad-Yar had left his sacred homeland

culprit –
someone responsible for something bad

faint –
to lose consciousness and collapse

orphanhood –
being a child whose parents are dead

kopek –
the lowest-denomination coin used in the Russian Empire

snort –
a noisy sound made by breathing forcefully

spew –
to eject forcefully or in large amounts

immobile –
unable to move

circumcision –
a ceremony involving the removal of the foreskin of a young Muslim boy

humiliation –
shame

and was on his way to other lands, to see other societies. He entered the third car and began walking around aimlessly. His head was full of worries about Turkistan. Suddenly somebody called out, “Muhammad-Yar!”

Muhammad-Yar looked up. It was Petr, the Russian officer who had given him physical training.

“Where are you going?” Muhammad-Yar asked the officer.

“I’ve been transferred to a different station on military business. Where are you going?” he asked.

Muhammad-Yar thought for a while and then said, “Into exile.”

“Why?”

“To study–study–study.”

“Is your father all right?”

Tears came to Muhammad-Yar’s eyes at this question. “He’s dead”, he replied.

Hearing these words, the officer’s eyes too filled with kind tears. Muhammad-Yar borrowed a pair of binoculars from the officer and went out into the corridor. The train was marching on, spewing water onto the soil of his homeland and attracting the attention of the local Muslims living in the vicinity. Muhammad-Yar stood looking at the distant mountains through the binoculars. His eyes filled with tears and he addressed the homeland he was leaving behind:

“O black mountains who have seen the troops of **Genghis** and **Timur**, died 1227 and 1405. O old mountains who have seen the older epochs of my land Turkistan! Tell honestly: now you see the civilisation of the 20th century too! Seeing that this **stallion** of 20th-century civilisation can cover a three-day journey in 10 hours, why do my **compatriots** stand around with their mouths **agape**? Why don’t they do anything to enter this civilisation? How long will they keep these two-wheeled carts that don’t belong on the streets?”

“O compatriots! How long this ignorance? Why this **heedlessness**? After all, you too are human beings! Act like human beings! Why don’t you make use of the fruits of knowledge and education that you see before you? Why don’t you participate in these things? Awake from your sleep. Struggle! Seek out knowledge, education, skills! The time has come–indeed, it is past!”

At seven in the evening, the officer and Muhammad-Yar parted, and Muhammad-Yar went to his place and fell asleep.

A few days later, Muhammad-Yar found himself at the great railway station of **Baku**. With his **bundle** and other things in his hand, he quickly descended from the train, and took a carriage to the city centre. The city of Baku, famous for its Muslim millionaires, wealthy Muslim **merchants**, many Turkic societies, and charitable funds worth millions, seemed wonderful to Muhammad-Yar. He went to the offices of the city’s premier newspaper, *The Caucasus*, a 10-page daily which circulated in every Muslim city. He explained his circumstances in detail to the editor, who replied, “I’ll **seek** a solution.”

Muhammad-Yar left the offices to see the city. That night he spent in a hotel called “The Caspian Sea”, which had been built according to Eastern architectural traditions by one of the city’s [Muslim] millionaires. In the morning, he bought a copy of *The Caucasus* from a famous bookstore. At the top, he saw the following announcement:

Genghis Khan

(1162–1227) –

a Mongol conqueror who united the Mongol tribes and created an empire stretching from China to the River Danube and into Persia. In 1206, he took the name Genghis Khan (‘supreme conqueror’).

Amir Timur

(1336–1405) –

also known as Tamerlane; a Central Asian conqueror and ruler who founded an empire with its capital in Samarkand

stallion –

an adult male horse

compatriot –

a citizen of the same country

agape –

wide open

heedlessness –

lack of attentiveness

Baku –

the capital of modern-day Azerbaijan

bundle –

a package

merchant –

a trader; a seller

seek –

to look for

ANNOUNCEMENT: From the Muslim **Benevolent** Society: We wish to send Muhammad-Yar, a 14-year-old **coreligionist** who has come here in search of knowledge from our neighbour Turkistan, to a government school at our expense. There will be a meeting of the Benevolent Society on this matter at 7:30 this evening. All the esteemed members must gather punctually at this time. Mr. Muhammad-Yar should also be present. Respectfully, The Director.

At half past seven that evening, after some discussion among members, the Society decided to give Muhammad-Yar a scholarship on condition that he lecture in Baku and its **environs** for two years after completing his studies. Muhammad-Yar had struck good fortune indeed. From here on, he would be able to reap the fruits of all the struggles he had **endured**. He was ready to serve his homeland and his nation with his body and soul.

Muhammad-Yar, who had received no aid in his own land from his compatriots, had achieved his hopes through the efforts of the youths of Baku. That is, he entered the city school, achieving his most sacred goal. Now he would serve his homeland and the compatriots who had humiliated him. Muhammad-Yar thought about his land and his place, and it made him cry.

One evening, he was reading a newspaper on a bench in the city park when he saw the headline, “The First Theatre Performance in Turkistan”. When he finished reading the story, he could hardly sit still, and began to jump for joy. Meanwhile, one of his friends among the young journalists of Baku had appeared and was startled at his jumping. He caught him by the shirt-tail, sat him down on the bench, and asked, “Muhammad-Yar! Why are you so happy?”

Muhammad-Yar could only say, “The first theatre p... p... performance in T... Tur... kis... stan.” The Baku journalist sat for a while, then got up and left. When Muhammad-Yar looked at the time, it was midnight. Nobody was left in the park, so Muhammad-Yar also stood up and left.

As exams approached, Muhammad-Yar worked day and night. At last, the exam came. Muhammad-Yar stood first among his classmates. Because of his **unstinting** labours, Muhammad-Yar began to show signs of illness again. On his doctors’ recommendation, he went to the waters of Borzhum for a month of treatment. Now, again with the help of the same benevolent society, Muhammad-Yar entered the Baku **gimnazia**. He loved his lessons so much that he didn’t leave school, even on holidays. Hours passed, then days, then years. The time eventually came for Muhammad-Yar to leave the *gimnazia* as well. At last, it was time for his final exams. Muhammad-Yar stood first again and won a gold medal for his efforts. Muhammad-Yar entered the medical faculty of Petrograd University—again with the help of the Benevolent Society and the efforts of the Baku merchants. In his second year there, he

benevolent –
kind and generous

coreligionist –
someone having the same
religion as someone else

environs –
the surrounding district

endure –
to tolerate; to put up with; to
experience difficulty

unstinting –
very diligent; persistent

gimnazia –
a Russian school

wrote *Students for Life*, a novel based on the lives of **madrasa** students in his native Turkistan. It had twelve chapters—no novel of this size had ever appeared about national life in Turkistan. The novel was even translated into Russian and published by a Russian journal in Petrograd. This novel was so well written that nobody—even if they spent forty to fifty years in a *madrasa*—could have better described the *madrasa* students and how they spent all their time hanging around samovars instead of studying. A year before he finished his studies at the university, he wrote *Guests of the Capital*, a play about Turkistani merchants in Moscow and Petrograd. This play showed with consummate expertise the insults suffered by uneducated merchants in the hotels of the capitals, simply because of their ignorance of language and science. This book Muhammad-Yar translated into Russian himself and published. Along with some friends, Muhammad-Yar staged the story as a play in Petrograd to support themselves. Muhammad-Yar played the lead role himself and received much applause. After expenses, the players were left with 3,000 rubles for themselves.

Finally, exam time came. Muhammad-Yar stood first yet again, and received his doctor's diploma. But still he did not return home. With the help of the philanthropic merchants of Baku and his own money earned from the theatre, this Turkistani student went to Switzerland to gain practical experience in Swiss universities.

All his school friends were present at the railway station to see him off on the evening train. A poor Turkistani boy, having finished Russian schools through his hard work and energy, was on his way to study in one of the most advanced countries of Europe.

Here then was the fruit of his labour, the fruit of his hard work, the harvest **yielded** by his efforts. May this be an example... an example... an example... Such are the benefits of benevolent societies, the product of solidarity, the fruits of unity...

Our Turkistani child reached the capital of Switzerland on the “stallion of civilisation”, and enrolled as an auditor in the medical faculty of the university. The poor student spent seven years in Switzerland, enduring good times and bad with patience and steadfastness. At last, he left Switzerland. Travelling through the lands of Italy, Turkey, Rumania, and Bulgaria, he reached Odessa, and then Baku.

All the young intellectuals of Baku were present at the railway station to receive Muhammad-Yar, their “spiritual father”, and gave him a banquet with fifty or sixty people in attendance. He taught in the Muslim medical courses that had begun in Baku three years before and then got ready to return to his homeland, Turkistan. Having taken leave of his **mentor** in Baku, he asked his advice of helping his homeland, which seemed to be swimming in a sea of ignorance. When his mentor gave his permission, all the young intellectuals of Baku came to see him off at the **steamer** docks in the evening. His mentor gave him a gold watch with the inscription “Souvenir of Baku”. Those present asked for a brief speech. Muhammad-Yar gave a short speech from the deck. The audience applauded him loudly and began **tossing** flowers at him. Finally, the steamer gave a whistle and, ruffling the waters of the sea, set off toward Turkistan.

madrasa –
a traditional Muslim school

yield –
to produce

mentor –
an experienced person who
gives advice to others

steamer –
a boat driven by steam

toss –
to throw

Muhammad-Yar's speech given from the deck of the steamer was as follows:

"O spiritual brothers! And O spiritual fathers! I was a poor student who came to your city in search of knowledge and education from the darkest corner of Turkistan. With the national effort of your **zealous** inhabitants, I followed education through Russian universities all the way to European ones. In reality, this is all the fruit of benevolent societies and publishing companies. I too will roll up my **sleeves** to help my land and work to awaken my brothers who are left behind in ignorance. I sincerely thank my spiritual home Baku, and you, my spiritual parents, and acknowledge your help in awakening us Turkistanis, who are like dragon fish in the river of ignorance, and helping us find the path." At this point, the steamer began to move slowly. "Be well, my fathers and brothers!" he finished.

The mechanical fish, splitting the water, was bringing a servant to his homeland. At last he alighted in a **savage** place and **mounted** the "stallion of civilisation." Where were the seas and waters with their delicate breezes? Where were the beauties of the Alps that he had seen a few years earlier in Switzerland, France, and Italy? Where were the Swiss villages built atop the Alps, where they spend their earnings in educating their beloved children, and not on feasts, **uloq**, dancing boys, or providing embroidered clothes for noblemen, *mullas*, and other fat-bellied types? Now they were all gone! In their place were low buildings made of **thatch** and mud, and the Muslims living in them in an orphaned state! The Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkmens, and other Muslims, having spent their incomes on dancing boys, *uloq*, and drink, or on providing expensive **garments** and **brocades** for teachers, noblemen, and the wealthy, had become slaves to their landlords.

Ah! Ah! Ah! Muhammad-Yar, who had seen progress and civilisation and who knew all, was deeply affected at seeing this **baseness** in his own nation, among his own people. Sometimes tears flowed from his eyes. On top of it all, inside the train, disorderly Muslims slept noisily and were beaten by the conductors for having lost their tickets. Muhammad-Yar couldn't stand it any longer. He went to the corridor and stared with tear-filled eyes at the majestic mountains visible in the distance—historic mountains which in the times of his **ancestors** had borne huge forts—and the peaks, rivers, forests, and sands. The beautiful scenes, the distant, tall, green mountains, were no less than in Switzerland. The water flowing in the rivers and the fertile land that gave to whomever sowed it—they were in no way inferior to America. Because of uneducated merchants, ignorant "scholars," false noblemen, and wastefulness, it resembled nothing. Even the Chinese were not so lazy!

How wonderful would it be if the people understood what was good for them—if they opened national schools and colleges, sent their children to European universities, and produced doctors, lawyers, journalists, skilled merchants

zealous –
enthusiastic; keen

sleeve –
part of a garment that covers the arm

savage –
fierce and violent

mount –
to place oneself upon

uloq –
buzkashi, a traditional game similar to polo, in which horse riders fight for a sheep's corpse

thatch –
straw or reeds used to cover a roof

garments –
clothes

brocade –
a thick fabric with a pattern woven from gold or silver thread

base –
low in value; worthless

ancestor –
someone who lived a long time ago from whom a person is descended

and engineers—and if each one of them stuck to his duties and looked out for the good of our people. Such were his thoughts. But he couldn't believe this could happen. The farther we go, the farther behind we seem to fall. No, no! If intellectuals like Muhammad-Yar began to appear in every town in ones or twos that would almost be enough. Muhammad-Yar's head was filled with many thoughts all the way to his town.

His town approached. Since he had left, five or ten intellectuals had emerged in his town too. They welcomed him. They got into a carriage and set off for the old city. There were all sorts of changes in the Russian part of town: new hotels, houses, parks, shops, theatres, schools; the streets were **paved**, the alleys wide, the electric lamps resembled Switzerland! The part of town where Muslims lived, however, was exactly the same. More **grief**... Muhammad-Yar got down in front of his own house. It had been redone in the European manner by the Russian who had rented it from Muhammad-Yar for 225 roubles for six months. Muhammad-Yar saw him and introduced himself in Russian.

The Russian said, "I rented it from you for six months. No one appeared after six months, or a year. In the third year, I built this. It cost 5 or 10 thousand roubles. But three years ago, I finished recovering all the money. In the last three years, I made 9,000 roubles from 3,000. I'll vacate your place quickly and also give you 5,000 roubles. Please forgive the rest."

[Muhammad-Yar said:] "If you don't have a place, stay here. I only need two rooms here."

"I have another nice place. I'll move there. I would have given you 9,000 roubles, but 4,000 went for improvements."

Muhammad-Yar happily accepted. The next morning, the Russian vacated the house and gave Muhammad-Yar 5,000 roubles. Muhammad-Yar began to live happily in the spacious place. He rented out the shops below the house and, with the permission of the government, opened a private clinic upstairs and began **treating** patients—the wealthy for a fee, the poor for free. He made fifty to sixty roubles every day from his practice alone.

He bought a small plot in a village. Because of Muhammad-Yar's effort and God-given luck, he **struck** oil. Now millionaires came to Muhammad-Yar to work with him. On one hand, he started his own business; on the other, he gathered the few intellectuals in town and opened a benevolent society to which he gave a lot of money. A reading room opened in the city. This year, Muhammad-Yar began publishing an illustrated weekly called *Homeland* and a daily newspaper called *News*. When he raised the issue of vocational schools, many opponents emerged, so in its place he started summer courses for teachers where they were given lectures on the principles of education. Thus houses of learning began to **proliferate** in a small town, which became a model for others. The Turco-Tatar press began calling Muhammad-Yar "Doctor Muhammad-Yar, servant of the nation."

Source: Cholpan, Abdulhamid Sulayman. 'Doctor Muhammad-Yar.' *Modernist Islam 1840–1940: A Sourcebook*. Edited by Charles Kurzman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 264–269.

paved –
covered with a pavement
(firm surface)

grief –
sorrow; unhappiness

treat –
to give someone medical
care

strike (struck) –
to find something

proliferate –
to increase rapidly in number

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Cholpan understand ignorance? Why does the word appear so often in the story?
2. What is civilization for Cholpan's imaginary character, Muhammad-Yar? Why does Muhammad-Yar think Turkestani citizens are ignorant? What example should they follow to emerge from 'the sea of ignorance'?
3. How did Muhammad-Yar imbibe civilization and progress? How can education help Muhammad-Yar's compatriots catch up with the advances of European and world civilizations?
4. Does Cholpan remind you particularly of any author you studied in Chapter One? Why?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Both Cholpan and Rousseau denounce ignorance. According to them, what brings people to the state of ignorance and what should help them emerge from that state?
2. In his *Discourse*, Rousseau says that 'our absurd education embellishes our minds and corrupts our judgment'. Would Cholpan agree with that statement? Justify your answer.



William Blake, Plate 9 from *The First Book of Urizen*, 1794
 Urizen is a personification of reason; in Blake's imagination, reason has enslaved mankind.

T. S. ELIOT: THE HOLLOW MEN

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888–1965), an American-British poet and critic, born in St. Louis, Missouri, USA, was one of the most distinguished literary figures of the twentieth century, winning the 1948 Nobel Prize in Literature. He studied at Harvard, the Sorbonne and Oxford. In 1914, he moved to London, and in 1927 he became a British subject. After working as a teacher and a bank clerk, he began a publishing career; he was assistant editor of *The Egoist* from 1917 to 1919) and edited his own quarterly, *The Criterion*, from 1922 to 1939. In 1925, he was recruited by publishers Faber and Gwyer (a forerunner of today's Faber and Faber), eventually becoming one of its directors. 'The Hollow Men' is a poem describing his view of the future.



I
We are the **hollow** men
We are the **stuffed** men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without
colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without
motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other
Kingdom
Remember us—if at all—not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

II
Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are

Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such **deliberate disguises**
Rat's coat, **crow**skin, crossed **staves**
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer –

Not that final meeting
In the **twilight** kingdom

III
This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The **supplication** of a dead man's
hand
Under the **twinkle** of a fading star.

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom

hollow –
empty; without substance or
character

stuffed –
filled with soft material

deliberate –
done on purpose rather than
by accident

disguise –
clothing worn to avoid
recognition

crowskin –
the skin of a crow (a large
black bird)

stave –
a stick

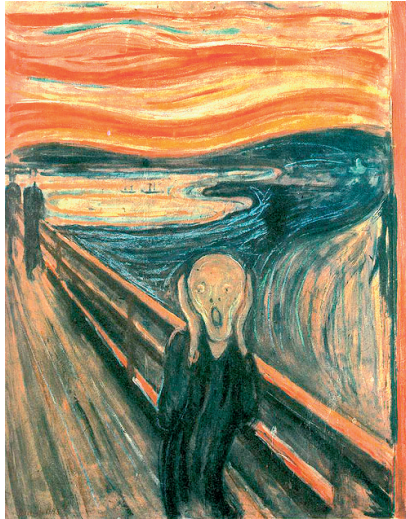
twilight –
the faint light of early
evening

supplication –
the act of asking for
something in a very humble
way

twinkle –
a small flickering light

trembling –
shaking; quivering

tenderness –
gentleness; softness



Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1893. In this famous painting, Munch expresses the horror and pain felt by painters and intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century.

jaw –
the bones that teeth are set in

grope –
to try to find with one's hands something one cannot see

tumid –
swollen; enlarged

reappear –
to appear again

multifoliate –
having many leaves

prickly pear –
a cactus, usually with flattened, spiny paddle-shaped stem segments

thine –
yours (in Old English)

spasm –
a sudden and often painful tightening of a muscle

bang –
a loud noise

whimper –
a weak crying noise

Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

IV
The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken **jaw** of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We **grope** together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the **tumid**
river

Sightless, unless
The eyes **reappear**
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

V
*Here we go round the **prickly pear***
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.

Source: Eliot, T. S. 'The Hollow Men.' Indiana: History Department, Hanover College.

URL: <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/111eliot.html>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a hollow man? What is the 'final meeting in the twilight kingdom'?
2. How does the world end for Eliot?
3. Is Eliot depicting a different world or our world as he sees it?
4. What is death's kingdom? Is it hell? What is a 'shape without form, shade without colour...?'
5. Do you see human progress in Eliot's 'The Hollow Men'?

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
*For **Thine** is the Kingdom*

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long

Between the desire
And the **spasm**
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
*Not with a **bang** but a **whimper**.*

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. 'This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper.' How does T. S. Eliot's 'whimper' relate to the corruption of the modern world described by Rousseau? Compare Eliot's poem and words to Rousseau's argument that 'the progress of the arts ... Has added nothing to our real happiness'.
2. In *The Consolation...*, Lady Philosophy asks Boethius, 'Is human judgement so perfect that it can discern who is truly good and who is truly evil?' How does this relate to Eliot's words 'the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper' and 'Our dried voices, when / We whisper together Are quiet and meaningless'?
3. Eliot interprets the memories of history in a negative way: 'Remember us... not as lost / Violent souls, but only / As the hollow men / The stuffed men'. Contrast this with Comte's positivist motto: 'Love, Order, Progress'.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Can knowledge and learning save human progress from the *inevitable* decline that Rousseau notes? How would you respond to Rousseau's denial of human progress?
2. Do you think human history is unfolding for the better or the worse? Why?
3. Which of the following is the source of human progress according to Rousseau?
 - Civilization
 - Reason
 - Science
 - Religion
 Explain your answer.
4. What does Rousseau think about human knowledge? What leads us to something better?
5. Where would Comte fundamentally disagree with Rousseau?
6. What would Cholan and Boethius tell Rousseau in response to the latter's denial of human progress?
7. How are Rousseau's and Eliot's views of human progress similar?
8. What does Aziz Esmail think about history and its role in our lives?

SUGGESTED READING

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1. Project Gutenberg. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/>
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ISBN 978-601-7187-70-5



9 786017 187705

Printed in Kazakhstan by Image Technology,
Office 2, 30 Nurmakova St, Almaty 050026,
(727) 258 48 02/03,
info@tech.kz, www.tech.kz