VILLE LÄHDE

Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'

A study on *Discourse on Inequality*

■

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
To be presented, with the permission of
the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Tampere,
for public discussion in the Auditorium Pinni B 1100,
Kanslerinrinne 1, Tampere,
on Sebtember 27th, 2008, at 12 o'clock.

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
University of Tampere
Department of History and Philosophy
Finland

Distribution
Bookshop TAJU
P.O. Box 617
33014 University of Tampere
Finland

Tel. +358 3 3551 6055
Fax +358 3 3551 7685
taju@uta.fi
www.uta.fi/taju
http://granum.uta.fi

Cover design by
Juha Siro

Layout
Pekka Lähde

Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 1344
ISBN 978-951-44-7438-5 (print)
ISSN 1455-1616

Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis 759
ISBN 978-951-44-7439-2 (pdf)
ISSN 1456-954X
http://acta.uta.fi

Tampereen Yliopistopaino Oy – Juvenes Print
Tampere 2008

Acknowledgements

No work is created in a vacuum, and the closer one gets to conditions that approximate such a void, the more likely one ends up with a bad work. In our heroic delusions we may dream about sculpting a masterpiece from our own clay, but it is only fortunate that those aspirations remain what they are, pipe dreams. Science, art and politics, just like any craft, are at their core communal efforts. Thus I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people whose enlightening company I have had the honor and privilege to share.

For fifteen years I have had the opportunity to benefit from the teaching and guidance of Lecturer Lauri Mehtonen. Especially Lauri's reading seminars of the Enlightenment classics sparked my interest in the intricacies of that era and in the fine art of deep reading – at times perhaps deeper than I dared or wished to swim, but always leading to better understanding. But more than that, his encouragement and, shall we say, educational use of humor, have kept me on my toes and safe from complacency.

One of the constant figures in the reading seminars in Tampere has been Lecturer Markku Mäki, whose readings of Rousseau ignited in me the interest to study Rousseau. His influence in my understanding of Rousseau's philosophy cannot be overstated. Our conversations after seminar and conference sessions have been most inspiring and enjoyable.

I learned to appreciate the skill and the openness of mind of my supervisor Professor Leila Haaparanta already when she was supervising my M.A. thesis, and the long sessions over the dissertation manuscript have only strengthened my admiration and gratefulness. For a student and a researcher it is so valuable to know that an interlocutor's question is motivated not only by the demands of the job but above all by the willingness to understand.

I am immensely grateful for my long-time mentors Professors Yrjö Haila (University of Tampere) and Charles Dyke (Temple University). Yrjö adopted me into that motley crew of environmental research, or "Yrjö's Orphans", as Chuck once called us. Without those wider vistas I would have surely drifted into dead-ends of armchair philosophy. Yrjö and Chuck basically taught me what it means to do science, and helped to mould intellectual *Weltschmerz* into something constructive. I am not always sure what is under construction, but something surely is.

I would like to thank the official referees of the dissertation, Dr Timo Kaitaro (University of Helsinki) and Dr Petter Korkman (University of Helsinki) for their valuable comments.

Dr Merja Kylmäkoski has offered invaluable advice over the years. I would also like to thank Dr Markku Hyrkkänen (University of Tampere) for advice and encouragement. Jussi Nousiainen helped me in checking the coherence of the references.

My colleagues in the department have formed an important part of my life for years. You all have made my life brighter, especially in the sessions around the coffee table, whether I am participating in the discussions or listening to the heated debates about such burning issues as the true meaning of Led Zeppelin and Bob Dylan. I would especially like to thank Sami Syrjämäki for valuable advice on conceptual research, Jani Hakkarainen for his insightful questions and contextualizing advice, and Tommi Vehkavaara and Petri Räsänen for their patience in listening to my tirades and being honest when I got incoherent. Another important community has been "the Umbrella crew" at the Department of Regional Studies (and Environmental policy), especially the old gang that worked on the books "Ympäristöpolitiikka" and "How Nature Speaks". My thanks to all of you. I also wish to thank my friends and colleagues in the journal *niin & näin* and in the publishing cooperative Vastapaino. Working with you kept me in touch with more general interests even in the darkest dungeons of research.

There is not enough space to mention all you friends, comrades, loved ones and confidants who have made my life happy and fulfilling, in the escapist journeys to strange lands in dusty cellars, and in the down-to-earth moments together, especially in Hulaus. I am especially grateful to my close friend and trusted comrade Mikko Kanninen. We have been sounding boards and intellectual punch-bags for each other for years, and there is hardly a paragraph in this book that has not in some form floated around in our long conversations.

The works of authors Iain M. Banks and Ken McLeod helped me to remain sane in the most grueling stages of work. My thanks.

Above all, I want to thank my father and Raili for support, and my three brothers who have always been and remain my closest and dearest friends. My brother did the layout for this book, for which I am very grateful. I offer my gratitude also to Jukka and Hillevi for all the days of tranquility in Makholma, which rejuvenated me no matter how exhausted I was. Beloved Helmi-Orvokki is resting with her kin in the orchard, but I want to thank her for all the wordless love and company.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife and best friend Marjaana, whose gentle and firm touch has helped me to grow into a much better person. My love for you deepens with the passing of each day.

❧ ❧ ❧

The University of Tampere and the Finnish Cultural Foundation have supported this study financially. City of Tampere has supported the publication of the thesis with a grant. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Academy of Finland for the funding of the project "Nature, Ideas of Nature, Politicization of Nature, and Environmental Politics", led by Professor Yrjö Haila. My time as a researcher in the project was vitally important for the dissertation. And although I did not participate full-time in the project "How Does Nature Speak?" which was also led by professor Haila, I benefited immensely from the various project seminars and conferences. Emil Aaltonen Foundation funded the project.

Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'
A study on *Discourse on Inequality*

Ville Lähde
Tampereen yliopisto

Tiivistelmä

'Luonto' lienee kulttuurimme ongelmallisimpia ja monimutkaisimpia sanoja. 'Luonnon' merkitykset vaihtelevat meille tutuimmasta ympäristön merkityksestä lukuisiin eri tieteen- ja taiteenalojen teknisiin merkityksiin sekä lukuisiin varhaisempiin merkityksiin. Joskus sanan merkitykset ovat varsin yhteneviä, toisinaan arkisessakin keskustelussa ne voivat hajaantua hyvin laajalle.

Monet filosofit ja käsitehistorioitsijat ovat eritelleet 'luonnon' eri merkityksiä, mutta merkitysten luettelointi ei tavoita keskeisten kulttuuristen sanojen käyttöön liittyvää retorista valtaa. Merkitysten kirjavuus ja toisaalta itse sanan keskeinen asema antavat mahdollisuuden käyttää merkitysten muutoksia hyväksi. 'Luonnon' ongelma on väistämättä kytkeytynyt kysymyksiin arvoista, normeista ja vallasta. Tämän tutkimuksen päätarkoitus on kehittää ja koetella työkaluja, joiden avulla 'luonnon' moninaisia merkityksiä ja niiden käyttöä voisi ymmärtää.

Nämä käsitteelliset työkalut on luonnosteltu useissa nykyisissä keskusteluissa toistuvien ongelmien pohjalta ja niiden selkeyttämistä varten. Samanlaiset ongelmat toistuvat keskusteltaessa geeniteknologiasta, ilmastonmuutoksesta, luonnonkatastrofeista ja monista muista aiheista. Voimme ymmärtää näitä ongelmia paremmin erittelemällä luonto*käsitteitä* ja luonto*käsityksiä*. Tarkoitus ei ole kategorisoida 'luonnon' merkityksiä vaan tunnistaa merkityksen erojen ja samankaltaisuuden asteita. Tätä ei voi tehdä yleistasolla vaan tutkimalla sanan käyttöä jossain tietyssä kontekstissa.

Tässä tutkimuksessa luontokäsitteellä ei siten viitata mihinkään vakaaseen merkitysyksikköön, vaan käsitteet ovat heuristisia konstruktioita, jotka viittaavat jotakuinkin samankaltaisiin sanan 'luonto' ilmentymiin tutkitussa kontekstissa. Ne viittaavat suunnilleen samaan ilmiöiden joukkoon (esim. luonto ympäristönä). Käsitteellisestä samankaltaisuudesta huolimatta merkitykset voivat kuitenkin erota siinä, millaisiksi nuo ilmiöt ymmärretään (esim. opettava, uhkaava tai herkkä luonto). Joskus näennäinen käsitteellinen yhtenäisyys

voi kuitenkin paljastua harhaksi (esim. kuuluvatko ihmiset luontoon, tai tietyt kulttuurin tuotteet?).

Nämä nykyiset keskustelut ovet kuitenkin meitä niin lähellä, että merkityksen muutoksia on usein vaikea huomata. Tässä tutkimuksessa kehittelenkin näitä heuristisia työkaluja historiallisen erimerkin valossa. Tutkimuskohteeni on Jean-Jacques Rousseaun teos *Tutkielma ihmisten välisen eriarvoisuuden alkuperästä ja perusteista* (*Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes*, 1755). Valinta perustuu ensinnäkin siihen, että sana 'luonto' on teoksessa keskeisessä asemassa, ja toiseksi siihen, että sen merkityksestä on kiistelty tutkimuskirjallisuudessa loputtomasti.

Tutkielman tulkinnat eroavat toisistaan merkittävästi ennen kaikkea siinä, miten termin 'luonnontila' asema ymmärretään. Tutkimuksessani osoitan, että erimielisyyden taustalla on oletus teosta hallitsevasta yhtenäisestä filosofisesta motiivista ja siihen liittyvä oletus hallitsevasta 'luonnon' merkityksestä. Esitän tulkintastrategian, jossa *Tutkielmaa* lähestytään neljän erillisen filosofisen motiivin näkökulmasta, joista jokaiseen liittyy omat avainkysymyksensä ja käsitteelliset kehyksensä. 'Luonnon' merkityksiä on tulkittava näissä eri konteksteissa. Olen nimennyt nämä motiivit *filosofiseksi kritiikiksi*, *aikalaisyhteiskunnan kritiikiksi*, *filosofiseksi antropologiaksi* ja *poliittiseksi filosofiaksi*.

Tutkielma jakaantuu kahteen osaan, joista ensimmäisessä kuvataan puhdasta luonnontilaa, ihmisen äärimmäisen primitiivistä elämää. Jälkimmäisessä osassa kuvataan ihmisyyden kehitystä kohti kaupungistuvia poliittisia yhteiskuntia. Tutkimuskirjallisuudessa vallitsee vahvahko konsensus siitä, että 'luonnontilan' merkitys näissä osissa on erilainen, ja kiista on koskenut ennen kaikkea puhtaan luonnontilan filosofista funktiota. Osoitan kuitenkin, että 'luonnontilan' merkitykset ja filosofiset funktiot vaihtelevat paitsi näiden osien välillä myös niiden sisällä. Avain tämän vaihtelun ymmärtämiseen on filosofisten motiivien kirjavuus.

Esitän tutkimuksessani, miten Rousseau käyttää *Tutkielman* alkuosassa melko yhtenäistä puhtaan luonnontilan käsitettä, joka viittaa äärimmäisen primitiiviseen ihmisyyteen, joka on eristetty historiallisen kehityksen mahdollisuuksista. Tämän kuvauksen yksityiskohdat kuitenkin vaihtelevat filosofisen motiivin mukaan. Kritisoidessaan toisia filosofeja Rousseau korostaa puhtaan luonnontilan ihmisten kehittymättömyyttä, mutta käyttäessään puhtaan luonnontilan kuvaa yhteiskunnallisen kritiikin välineenä hän korostaa heidän älykkyyttään, nokkeluuttaan ja taitavuuttaan. Lisäksi kritisoidessaan muita filosofeja Rousseau käyttää käsitteellisiä siirtymiä taitavasti hyväkseen hyökätäkseen heidän luonnontilan käsitteitään vastaan.

Tämä erittely vahvistaa näkemystä, että puhtaan luonnontilan kuvaus on lähes eristetty teoksen jälkiosan historiallisesta kertomuksesta. Osoitan kuitenkin, että Rousseau käyttää myös toista puhtaan luonnontilan käsitettä, joka ei ole eristetty historiallisesta kehityksestä. Tämä on näennäinen ristiriita, jonka selittää hallitsevan filosofisen motiivin muutos. Teoksen jälkiosassa Rousseau keskittyy filosofiseen antropologiaan. Tämän lisäksi rekonstruoin useita muita luonnontilan käsitteitä, joita Rousseau käyttää historiallisessa kertomuksessaan.

Tällä tutkimuksella on arvoa sekä Rousseau-tutkimukselle että nykyisten 'luontoa' koskevien kiistojen paremmalle ymmärtämiselle. Ensinnäkin luentani *Tutkielmasta* tarjoaa tien ulos pitkään jatkuneista tulkintakiistoista, ja yleisemminkin se antaa uuden näkökulman Rousseaun filosofista koherenssia koskevaan väittelyyn. Rousseau teosta ei tulisi lukea yhtenäisenä filosofisena väitteenä, vaan se on kirjallinen väline, joka antoi hänen käsitellä monia aiheita yhtaikaa. Ennen kaikkea hän pystyi sen avulla haastamaan luutuneita filosofisia näkökulmia ihmisluontoon, luonnonoikeuteen tai yhteiskuntien legitimaatioon. Käsitteelliset siirtymät auttoivat häntä käsittelemään näitä kysymyksiä uudella tavalla.

Toiseksi, tämä tutkimus tarjoaa käsitteellisiä välineitä nykyisten 'luonnon' merkityksiin liittyvien ongelmien ratkaisuun. Radikaalien merkityksen muutosten ja käsitteellisten hyppäysten tunnistaminen antaa mahdollisuuden huomata umpikujaan johtavia keskusteluita tai tilanteita, joissa keskustelun aihe huomaamatta vaihtuu. Näin voidaan sekä selkeyttää keskusteluja että välttää ohipuhumista. Rousseaun esimerkki osoittaa kuitenkin myös, että käsitteellinen ja terminologinen selkeys ei ole aina paras tapa kulkea eteenpäin. Käsitteellisen yhtenäisyyden haastaminen voi myös raivata tietä kohti uudenlaista ajattelua.

Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'
A study on *Discourse on Inequality*

Ville Lähde
University of Tampere, Finland

Abstract

'Nature' is one of the most complex and problematic words in our culture. The meanings of 'nature' shift and move in the tension between the familiar meaning of nature as the environment, various technical meanings in sciences, arts and politics, and a host of elder meanings which we have inherited. On the one hand there is remarkable convergence of meaning, a dominant meaning of 'nature', on the other hand meanings diverge radically even in everyday use.

Many philosophers and historians of ideas have explicated different meanings of 'nature', but typologies of meanings cannot grasp sufficiently how the use of central cultural words involves rhetorical power. The divergence of meanings and the central status of the word itself afford opportunities to take advantage of transitions of meaning. The problem of 'nature' is inevitably linked to questions of values, norms and use of power. The main object of this study is to develop and test tools for understanding both the divergent meanings of 'nature' and their practical applications.

I have drafted these tools on the basis of recurrent problems in various contemporary debates over issues like genetic engineering, natural disasters and climate change. I propose that we can understand these changes by differentiating *concepts* and *conceptions* of nature. The object is not to create a categorization of meanings but to identify degrees of difference and similitude of meaning. This can however only be done in the relevant context of use.

Thus concepts of nature are not in this study supposedly stable units of meaning but rather heuristic constructions of somewhat similar instantiations of 'nature' in a certain context. They refer approximately to the same realm of phenomena (e.g. nature as the environment). But despite this similitude there may be differences regarding the moral status or the internal dynamics of those phenomena, that is, different conceptions of nature (e.g. nature as the educator, the nemesis, the fragile card-house). Yet again sometimes differences of conceptions of nature may turn out to be more radical conceptual differences (e.g. does nature include humans, or what is the status of certain artifacts?).

These contemporary discussions are however so familiar that it is hard to notice these transitions of meaning. Thus I have chosen to test the viability of these heuristic tools with a historical example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous work *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (*Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes*, 1755), or *Discourse on Inequality*. This choice is based first of all on the fact that 'nature' is the most important term in that work, and second that its meaning has been debated endlessly in the research literature.

Interpretations of *Discourse on Inequality* contrast sharply, especially regarding the status of the term 'state of nature'. In this study I show that these deadlocked disagreements derive from the assumption of a single philosophical motive behind the book, and the corollary assumption of a dominant meaning of 'nature'. I offer a new strategy of interpretation, which approaches *Discourse on Inequality* from the viewpoint of four distinct philosophical motives, each with its own key questions and conceptual frameworks. Accordingly, the meanings of 'nature' must be explored within each of these contexts. These philosophical motives are *philosophical critique*, *critique of contemporary societies*, *philosophical anthropology* and *political philosophy*.

Discourse on Inequality is divided into two main parts. The first part is the depiction of pure state of nature, an extremely primitive state of human existence. The latter part describes the development of humanity towards urbanizing political societies. There is fairly strong consensus in the literature that the meaning of 'state of nature' differs between them, and the debate has focused especially on the philosophical function of pure state of nature. I show however that the meanings and the philosophical functions of 'state of nature' differ also radically *within* these two parts, and that the key to understanding that is in the diversity of philosophical motives.

In my analysis I show how in the first part of *Discourse on Inequality* Rousseau uses a somewhat unified concept of pure state of nature, an extremely primitive humanity detached from the possibilities of historical development. But the details of this description vary significantly according to the current philosophical motive. When he criticizes other philosophers, he tends to emphasize the ignorance of humanity in the pure state of nature. But when he employs the pure state of nature as a vessel of social critique, he emphasizes the wit, skill and ingenuity of the humans of that state. Also in his critique of other philosophers Rousseau uses conceptual transition ingeniously in order to attack their concepts of state of nature.

Although this shows how the historical narrative of the latter part of *Discourse on Inequality* is radically detached from the previous depiction of the pure state of nature, I point out that Rousseau introduces a different concept of pure state of nature, one which is not detached from historical development. This apparent contradiction can be understood by the change of dominant philosophical motive, his focus on philosophical anthropology in the latter part. Further, I reconstruct several distinct concepts of state of nature within Rousseau's historical narrative.

This study has relevance both for Rousseau-research and for understanding contemporary debates over 'nature'. First, this reading offers a way out of enduring conflicts of interpretation over *Discourse on Inequality*, and more generally the debate on Rousseau's coherence or incoherence. Instead of trying to read the book as a unified philosophical statement we should see that it is a literary device which allowed Rousseau to address several important issues at once, and above all, to challenge reified philosophical discussions on human nature, natural law and the legitimation of societies. Conceptual transitions allowed him to open up new space to address these issues.

Second, this study offers resources for disentangling contemporary problems with the meaning of 'nature'. Identifying radical changes of meaning, leaps from one concept of nature to another, helps us to pinpoint situations where discussions lead to dead-ends, or when the very subject of discussion is imperceptibly altered. This can help to clarify discussions and intercept deadlocks. Rousseau's example illustrates however that conceptual and terminological clarity is not always the most fruitful way forward. Challenging conceptual unity can also clear the way for novel ideas.

Contents

1. Prelude: Contemporary problems with 'nature' 15

1.1. Dominant meanings of 'nature' 18

1.2. Divergence of meanings 21

1.3. The problem of history 24

1.4. Transgressing the boundaries 29

1.5. The challenge of 'nature' 32

1.6. Words, concepts and conceptions 34

1.7. Aims of this study 42

1.8. Contents of the study 44

1.9. Notes on forms of presentation and the editions and translations of Rousseau's text 46

2. Rousseau's problematic 'natures' 49

2.1. Unity, Fragmentation, Precursor 52

2.2. How are Rousseau's 'natures' read? 59

2.3. Rousseau as a philosophical actor 62

3. Rousseau's philosophical motives in *Discourse on Inequality* 67

3.1. The Narrative in *Discourse on Inequality* 69

3.2. Interpretations of the Narrative 76

3.3. Philosophical functions of state of nature? 78

3.4. Disjunctions in the Narrative 80

3.5. Divergent philosophical motives 82

4. Purification of Man 86

4.1. Pure State of Nature 89

4.1.1. Background of Purification: "First changes" 89

4.1.2. Life in the Pure state of Nature 96

4.1.3. Faculties of natural man, and lack thereof 104

4.2. Detachment from History 124
4.2.1. Impossible Transitions 125
4.2.2 No Return 132
4.2.3 Conclusive Notes on Natural Man 134
4.3. The Philosophical Functions of the Pure State of Nature 136
4.3.1. Philosophical Critique: Redefining 'nature' in natural right 137
4.3.2. Critique of Contemporary Society 152
4.3.3. Political Philosophy 161
4.4. Conclusions: Moving into History 164
5. Emergence of Man 166
5.1. Continuities and Disjunctions 168
5.2. Development through Relations 179
5.3. Ends of State of Nature 192
5.4 Contemporary Critique: the Savage versus the European 203
5.5. Remarks on 'Nature' in Rousseau's Political Philosophy 205
6. Conclusions 210
6.1. Relevance for research on Rousseau 212
6.2. Relevance for understanding 'nature' 214
6.3. Relevance today: there is no natural nature 216
References 218

” Which is farther from us, farther out of reach, more silent – the dead, or the unborn? Those whose bones lie under the thistles and the dirt and the tombstones of the Past, or those who slip weightless among molecules, dwelling where a century passes in a day, among the fair folk, under the great, bell-curved Hill of Possibility?”

- Ursula K. Le Guin, Always Coming Home

1. Prelude: Contemporary problems with ‘nature’

We all know nature. It is everywhere, within and without, so it is only – yes, natural – that we all talk about it. Nature is the ultimate topic of conversation around which we gather when we are talking about environmental problems, sexual behavior, social policies, dietary habits or a multitude of other issues both vital and marginal. But it also puts a plug on the discussion: when nature is invoked, there is not much left to say. We drift into oppositions of natural and unnatural. We use nature as the supreme authority.

But what are we talking about when we say ‘nature’? The word is so familiar that we rarely stop to think about it. This familiarity however hides a confusion, which can be unintentional but often is intentional – labeling something as ‘nature’ or ‘natural’ makes it self-evident, incontestable and fundamental. It is a prime example of the power our words can have. In order to understand this power we have to learn what we are doing when we use the word ‘nature’. The prime mover of this study is to develop tools that help such understanding.

This is also a study of one creative user of the word ‘nature’, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). The rationale of choosing a historical case study for understanding a contemporary conundrum is twofold. First, learning to appreciate the intricacies of the use of ‘nature’ in contemporary discussions is hard as many current social issues such as environmental problems overshadow our thinking. It is hard to distance oneself from the accompanying dominant meanings of ‘nature’. Historical study can give us the required intellectual distance and it can serve as a learning example. Second, historical study also helps us to understand the complex history of the meanings of ‘nature’ and to learn about inherited meanings which condition present use of the word.

It is however useful, even necessary, to start with an explication of the present problems with use of ‘nature’. I believe that their extent and intricacy is rarely appreciated. One must understand where one is before looking for ways out. I start with a few examples. Although they are fictional, any contemporary reader can recognize such use of ‘nature’. This kind of rhetoric is commonplace not only in everyday life but also in popular culture and scientific debate.

❧ ❧ ❧

[Discussion 1]

"Gene technology is a natural extension of the time-honored practices of selective breeding. What the geneticists are accomplishing in the applications of natural science is eventually no different from traditional artificial selection: certain traits are selected and efforts are made to strengthen them in later generations. The principle is the same, although techniques change. Now it is possible to find the origins of the traits and select precisely them, we do not have to rely on mere phenotype and the imprecise process of crossbreeding. Sure enough, gene technology allows crossing species boundaries: it has become possible to introduce traits from other species. But there is nothing unnatural in that. Gene transfer through species barriers takes place in nature all the time – after all, viruses are some of the most important tools in modern gene technology. Our techniques are developing and giving us new opportunities, but all of it happens according to nature."

"Gene technology is a quantum leap from earlier breeding practices. We are no longer looking at biological beings in a natural way, developing in their environment and manifesting their abilities of their own accord. Their natural abilities are abstracted, isolated and reduced into 'traits' that are determined by the power of naked genes. The animals and plants themselves are detached from the whole developmental process and become mere products of genetic decoding – and eventually also of human artifice. Thus instead of breeding new generations we are engineering life forms. This whole technology is unnatural in the way that it tries to bypass the limits of possibility in natural reproductive systems. Ducks, humans and flu viruses are part of the natural order of things; engineered production of insecticides in plants is something completely different."

[Discussion 2]

"The climate of our planet has always been in a state of flux. Ice ages are the most radical examples of course, but periods of warmer or colder climate have also varied in shorter timescales and less extremely. It is possible to find many distinct reasons for such changes: changes in the activity of the Sun, volcanic activity, oceanic currents et cetera. But most of all, we are dealing with a complex climate system. As in so many other things, change is the very essence of nature. Thus whether the present changes have been induced by human activity or not, they are part of the nature of the climate. Some environments may suffer and change and some species may become extinct. But again, that is part of nature. Nature itself destroys species continuously and gives birth to new ones."

"Empirical evidence of the present climate change is growing all the time, and only the most stubborn skeptics or those with vested interests refuse to see the truth. The climate is warming, and the main reason is accelerated use of fossil fuels since the onset of the industrial revolution. This is not just statistical handwaving or lack of proper timescales: we have scientific models that can explain the change and make predictions. We have gravely disturbed the natural state of the climate and are literally reaping the whirlwind as we speak. It is pointless to try to confuse the issue by talking about natural changes of the climate. The dominant political and economic form of development is responsible for the present change."

[Discussion 3]

"The destructive earthquakes of the recent years have taught us a lesson we had almost forgotten: nature is a force to be reckoned with. We like to think of nature as peaceful meadows and fascinating ecosystems, but we are constantly faced with potentially dangerous forces. We would be well advised to remember that we are dancing through our lives on thin layers of land which float on fiery magma. Like deadly diseases, the next quakes are just around the corner. Thus we can ill afford complacency. We must continuously learn to predict natural disasters and to alleviate their effects. Some prospects are so horrendous that any war or famine pales in comparison: our planet is traveling in a field of rocks. Nature has created disasters that have decimated civilizations and other dominant species before us. We might yet go the way of the dinosaurs."

"Nature is not a Sword of Damocles. The effects of natural forces depend on our way of life. It should be pretty obvious that clearing protective vegetation from coastal areas and building houses on sand is a recipe for disaster. Who told us to build megacities on tectonic fault lines? Seeing nature as an enemy and trying to control it is a profound mistake. Nature will get back at us, but only because the very actions we take to safeguard ourselves increase the danger. Every crumbling levee is a testimony of this. Do not impose morality on nature's actions. Our own choices determine whether they will be harmful. Learn to appreciate nature's rhythms and live with them. As for asteroid impacts: in the face of such a threat we humans and the rest of nature are in the same boat. Such cosmic forces scarcely offer lessons for our earthly life."

[Discussion 4]

"If we look at the world of nature, we see competition and struggle. Each creature strives for its own good in order to survive and perpetuate its bloodline. We humans are no different – at heart we are all egoists. Selfishness is human nature: 'Man is a wolf to man.' This old ad-

age is given support by evolutionary thinking. At the surface we may see human actions that seem selfless or altruistic, but their true goal is to further our own genetic heritage."

"Nature is not one but many. In addition to competition and conflict there is cooperation, mutual aid and symbiosis. The choice to take 'the law of the jungle' as the guiding metaphor is an ideological one – as can be seen from the bias that developed in the popularized versions of evolutionary theory during the Victorian era. Our fundamental nature is equally multifaceted: egoism and altruism both find models in nature. But does this matter at all in the end? We are creatures of nature, but we are also creatures of culture. Nurture and education allows us to surpass the instinctual level."

❧ ❧ ❧

Even though the main themes of these examples vary from concrete environmental issues to the fundamentals of human behavior, the powerful status of the word 'nature' is a unifying feature. On a quick reading we can easily discern a recurrent meaning of the word running through all of them, one very familiar to us – nature as the environment. But the more we examine them, and the everyday use of 'nature' around us, the more multifarious the meanings of the word become.

1.1. Dominant meanings of 'nature'

When we hear the word 'nature', we usually think about trees, birds, fish, bees, coral reefs, tsunami... everything non-human out there. The dominant meaning of 'nature' is the non-human material domain of the world. This meaning was stabilized in the process of modernization and was supported by many developments: demarcation between natural and human sciences; the advent of industrialization and urbanization; the strengthening divide between nature and artifice/technology; exploration and colonization which made possible the notion of the world as a closed whole. This meaning of 'nature' is often linked to *nature–culture dualism*, a deep division of the world into two distinct domains. This dualism has been seen as one of the prime products of modernization, its intellectual endpoint (high or low, depending on who is talking).

And it was a product indeed. During the 19th century the notion of science or philosophy in general was being replaced by the idea of two realms of science: natural and human. The

humanities of course had their early progenitors during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, but the 19th century champions of the humanities were engaged in real conflicts over scientific legitimacy. For them it was a question of showing the specific nature of their objects of inquiry against the primacy of the natural sciences. The constant conflict between different views of science emphasized and renewed the idea of two domains of scientific objects. This division conditioned the modern understanding of the world in a significant way, and it is still very familiar to us.

Similar changes were taking place in other intellectual areas. The changes in aesthetic conceptions drew a line between natural and artificial much more strongly than before. Early conservationist movements of the second half of the 19th century and certain forms of Romanticism championed wilderness or untainted nature as something worth preserving, as a moral counterpoint to urbanized culture. During the environmental awakening of the latter half of the 20th century the opposition between human and nonhuman worlds was yet again amplified. The natural world was seen as threatened by human activity. The early environmentalist movements built heavily upon such oppositional rhetoric.

Thus nature–culture dualism and the concomitant meaning of 'nature' were upheld in various cultural practices for specific purposes. Nature became an object of study, inquiry, appropriation, control, contemplation, adulation and conservation, and it was defined in and through these practices. Of course definition of 'nature' as a realm distinct from human or cultural was not a wholly new phenomenon, a leap in worldview. But in the long march of modernization this became the dominant meaning of the term. Nature–culture dualism has become a cultural commonplace, and its critique an integral part of many critical political and moral projects.

Usually 'nature' in this sense is understood as synonymous with 'environment'. The word 'environment' was originally used in a different sense. In 19th century biology it referred to the surroundings of a living being. In medicine it meant virtually the same thing, the world in which an individual grows and develops. In the early modern anthropology and cultural history the influence of climate, soil and other factors on the development of a people were debated. Although the word itself, in the literal sense of environing or surrounding, was an early modern neologism, these ideas had long roots in classical literature (Glacken 1967, 432–433). In short, 'environment' was subject-centered. But as Tim Ingold has noted, during the 19th and 20th centuries, and especially with the rise of the environmental movements, 'environment' has partly lost this subjective connotation and begun to refer to the nonhuman world in general. As Ingold elegantly puts it, instead of the environment surrounding

us, we have spread around it, environed it. (Ingold 1993, 31) *Nature as the environment* has become a focal point of our age.

In this sense nature is an important political theme today. Nature as the environment rallies considerable moral and political concern. This trend will continue, especially when global environmental problems increase. In the previous examples one can see how issues so diverse as gene technology, climate change and tectonic movements drift towards this centre.

As a part of the nature–culture dualism nature is usually restricted to the nonhuman domain of the world. There is however some ambiguity of usage. Sometimes 'nature' refers to the nonhuman biological beings of our world and their overlapping interrelation (for example ecosystems); sometimes it refers to everything material beyond significant human influence – or on the other hand, under very heavy influence indeed. But in any case, when opposed to humanity or culture, nature is usually restricted to our earthly domain. However, alongside this familiar meaning another wider sense of 'nature' is in general use. Sometimes 'nature' refers to the whole cosmos, the totality of material reality. From this viewpoint humanity is a part of the material domain of nature – dualism loses its basis of meaning. Roughly speaking: everything is nature, all is natural.

There are frictions between the restricted and the cosmic sense of 'nature' in everyday discussion. After the destructive tsunami in the Indian Ocean on December 2004 natural disasters became a focal theme for politicians, theologians and many others. In the ensuing debates 'nature' had conflicting meanings. It became an obscure threat that was opposed to human life everywhere – like God it worked in mysterious ways. In this vocabulary tectonic movements joined the company of deadly viruses and doomsday asteroids from blockbuster movies. On the other hand the disaster was used as an example of the inevitable connection that humans have with the rest of the nature, as a basis of critique of the dualistic attitude to nonhuman world. In other views the whole of earthly nature – humans and nonhumans alike – was seen as equally threatened by cosmic forces. Thus asteroids and movements of magma, both beyond earthly reach, were beyond nature. Discussion 3 traces such arguments.

The common factor of both the limited and the cosmic meanings of 'nature' is that the word is used to refer to *domains of material reality*[1]. Nature is the world we see before our eyes, in whatever way it is demarcated. It is evident however that there are many other meanings of 'nature'. I will now look at the relationships of these diverse meanings. The reader should

1 Of course the meaning of 'material' and 'reality' is problematic to say the least both in everyday and philosophical use. Like 'nature' these words and their derivatives are used to convey normative statements, and they are technical terms in various philosophical contexts.

note that throughout this work I will always approach meaning in the context of use – I do not assume any sphere of meaning beyond that. In various philosophical discussions the relationship of use and meaning is a contested issue, but this work does not have that general epistemological perspective. I also note a conscious restriction of scope: I will not explore different translations of 'nature' and their historical and linguistic relationships. Something will always be lost with such limitations, but I believe that I have sufficiently tracked the relationship of Rousseau's French and its historical reception in translations and commentaries to show that working with the term 'nature' is a sufficient approximation.

1.2. Divergence of meanings

Even though we have a dominant meaning of 'nature', the one that most of us think first upon hearing the word, it is used with various other meanings. Exemplars of such use in everyday language can be found in the previous examples. At the surface they all seem to handle nature as the environment, but the meanings drift to a much wider area. Still we rarely notice the divergent and even contradictory meanings of 'nature'. The word is simply too familiar, and the dominant meaning is too customary: the preassumptions of meaning shroud differences. We tend to assume that when we are using the word 'nature', everyone is talking about pretty much the same thing – nature out there, around us, everywhere. But if we focus our attention to everyday use of the word, we notice differences. For example, Discussion 4 begins with perceptions of nonhuman life but moves to arguments about the fundamentals of human behavior, about human nature. Of the four examples it is the one most clearly removed from environmental themes, but if we delve deeper we can see how the meanings of 'nature' and 'natural' diverge in all of them:

- Whole Earth as a physical domain including or excluding humans (nature as the environment in general)
- The cosmos including humans (all is nature)
- A process or force that guides the world (e.g. change/harmony/conflict/cooperation as the essence of nature – the nature of nature: including or excluding humans)
- Self-evident, proper, fitting the order of things (e.g. a natural way of doing something, a natural conclusion)
- The way the world works (e.g. according to nature)
- Essence of a being, fundamental basis of a being (e.g. natural heritage, human nature)

- Something essential or inborn (e.g. natural behavior or development of a being)
- Essential dynamics of a phenomenon (e.g. nature of the climate)
- A domain of scientific study, a demarcated area (natural science, nature as a realm of scientific objects)
- The opposite of artifice (e.g. unnatural results of technology – compared to the present biological order)
- The opposite of culture or nurture (non-nature both within humans and as physical structures and cultural institutions)
- The biological world, proceeding along the lines of the present biological order (e.g. natural product of breeding, natural niche of a species)
- A personalized force (e.g. a selective breeder, a mentor, a nemesis, a teacher, an author of individual essences)
- A neighbor, a communicative partner, environment always within human influence (and thus within moral responsibility)
- A model for society (e.g. the law of the jungle)

When people are using the word 'nature', especially when it is being used as an argument to prove a point about morality, metaphysics or politics, they are not always talking about nature in the most familiar sense. Nature as the environment is an important contemporary theme, but 'nature' in its various guises is equally central in our culture.

The ambiguity of 'nature' is not limited to everyday discussions, and it surely is not the monopoly of laymen. Any practitioner of modern philosophy is aware of the protean uses of the term 'naturalism'. Sometimes naturalism is defined by opposition with transcendental, and it becomes a loose term which covers very different epistemological attitudes which deviate from a supposedly Kantian perspective. But in other instances 'naturalism' can refer more strictly to evolutionary or biological explanations, and its definition is linked to the modern demarcation of sciences. The constitution of naturalism is of course dependent on the views of the participants in the discussion: 'naturalism' can become equally a scarecrow or an edifying term, and the term can be more or less inclusive regarding the views it covers. (See e.g. Haack 2001, 8, 118–124, 130, 167–168) In some aesthetic or epistemological uses 'naturalism' or 'naturalist' refers to direct representation, or an ideal of it, as opposed to mediated representation, or 'nature' can refer to any object of perception. Despite the differences, 'nature' in naturalism is usually left undefined. It is such an important part of the philosophical traditions that it is taken for granted.

Let us return to the opening discussions. In Discussion 3 'nature' oscillates between earthly living nature, earthly material nature and cosmic material nature. In Discussion 4 nature as

the environment, more specifically as the world of nonhuman life, forms the basis, but the discussion moves to fundamentals of morality. Indeed, friction between different meanings of 'nature' is especially visible in the scientific debates about the foundations of human behavior. On the one hand the word 'nature' gets its meaning through opposition to culture or nurture. It can thus refer to instinctual behavior, genetic determination or other explanation models. On the other hand all human activity, even culture, is regarded as natural in an overarching cosmic sense of 'nature'. Often 'natural' has a connection to a specific meaning of 'nature', but sometimes such a connection is archaic or missing (e.g. natural as logical). Thus participants of such discussions tend to talk to deaf ears: they are using the same words but talking about different things.

Historically this is nothing new. As Raymond Williams noted in his essay "Ideas of Nature", the idea of nature has been "central, over a very long period, to many different kinds of thought" (Williams 1980, 67). In *Keywords* he noted that "nature is a word which carries, over a very long period, many of the major variations of human thought – often, in any particular use, only implicitly yet with powerful effect on the character of the argument..." (Williams 1988, 224) It is precisely in and through this varied usage that 'nature' has become one of the most complicated and powerful terms in Western cultural history.

If we understand 'nature' in the most familiar sense, as the nonhuman material domain of the world, we can without reserve say that all human societies have necessarily thought a lot about nature – as humans are necessarily all the time involved with it. But it is a whole another matter to determine if those thoughts have been expressed with the word 'nature' or any single term (implying a single concept), and especially to judge if that term has been a part of a conceptual constellation similar to modern nature–culture dualism (Descola 1996, 82–84). It is precisely that constant conjunction of human and nonhuman which makes it implausible that a strict dualist division is a necessary way of thinking. Successful dealings with nonhuman material world require communication of sorts. (Haila & Dyke 2006, 6, 34) But the birth of the modern nature–culture dualism in various intellectual fields and the practical endeavors that were linked to them has radiated into our everyday thought. The dominant meaning of 'nature' is recreated in practice. Still, in many instances the use of 'nature' does not follow along these lines. One common way to explore this tension of unity and divergence is through historical research.

1.3. The problem of history

Historical studies of the use of 'nature' often draft typologies of *distinct concepts* of nature to make sense of the divergence of meanings. Typologies can have a diachronic approach and trace the development of concepts in history, or they can synchronically differentiate between concepts of nature in a certain period, historical or contemporary. In "Ideas of Nature" and in *Keywords* Raymond Williams separates three basic concepts of nature in Western thought.

1. The inherent and essential quality or character of something.
2. An essential principle or an inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both.
3. The material world itself, including or not including human beings.

Williams makes three key points. First, the reference of these broadly determined concepts, especially (2) and (3), is far from clear, and sometimes two versions of the same concept can be mutually opposed: e.g. nature as the material world can include or exclude humanity. Second, Williams claims that these meanings of 'nature' have developed in succession through these three stages, (1) being seemingly the earliest[2]. Third, despite this chronology all three concepts are "active and widespread" in contemporary usage. (Williams 1988, 219) The third point, the historically inherited layers of 'nature', is vitally important in understanding contemporary debates. Even though nature–culture dualism is central in our culture, especially when 'nature' refers to the environment, other meanings of the word are very much alive.

As I said, Williams drafts a rough genealogical story alongside this division of concepts. In a nutshell, he claims that nature as essence is the earliest meaning of 'nature'. In that sense the word refers to the essence of something or someone, a particular thing. Very soon it develops into the notion of a general principle, which is shared by and guides many things, eventually the whole perceived world. 'Nature' becomes the constitution of the world and its laws. As Williams puts it, definition of quality changes into a description of the world. (Williams 1980, 68) He notes that although it seems easy to differentiate between these three concepts of nature, there is continuity and overlap both in the historical development and contemporary use (Williams 1988, 219).

In his genealogical story Williams emphasizes how 'nature' tends to refer to various totalities. 'Nature' as a guiding principle and as the material world moves from multiplicity towards

2 Williams focuses on words stemming from the Latin root 'nasce' and the derivative 'natura'. He does not address the complications that translations from Greek bring to the issue.

totality. One important facet of this is the way nature as a principle has been personified in various ways – Williams focuses on Christianity and emerging evolutionary thinking. He also points out how the abstraction of a totality of nature from a perceived multiplicity is always a social choice – in their arguments about the nature of humans, societies, or the whole world, people have been projecting ideas of their own societies. An important question arises: what is the experience behind various formulations of nature? The physical world can be seen as a limited vista or a limited, closed whole. People who see themselves besieged by barbarians make natures different from those of merchants, and from those who find new alien environments and cultures. One important dimension is the way societies have modified their environments. Successes and failures in molding nature catalyze different images. In short, how have we learned the world? I'll return to this issue later.

Williams approaches concepts of nature through a rough genealogy. In his article "Rousseau's Normative Idea of Nature" Ludwig Siep takes a typological approach. Siep has adopted the typology from Robert Lenoble, but I examine his formulation of it, not only because it focuses on Rousseau, but because it reveals some problems with this kind of approach[3]. Siep distinguishes two classes of concepts of nature and divides them further into subcategories. He applies a synchronic classification and does not look into the long-term historical developments – or rather, he suggests that such a classification can be used to evaluate concepts over long periods of time. Siep proposes that this classification is useful for examining both contemporary discourse and 18th century thought.

Siep's primary conceptual division is into extensionally defined concepts of nature, which refer to a realm or sector of objects, and intensionally defined concepts, which refer to certain aspects or properties of objects. It should be noted that this way of using the terms does not follow the standard semantics: of course "intensional" concepts have an extension. Siep divides these two classes of concepts further, and the division is structured as follows:

1. Extensional: demarcate realms of natural objects
1.1. Universe of things including human body
1.2. Limited aspects of the previous whole: realm of material things, perhaps limited to living things
1.3. Further limitations: Beyond human will or intention, sometimes part of the human body (opposed to cultural, artificial and technical)

3 Original reference: Lenoble, Robert: "L'Évolution del'Idée de "Nature" du XVI au XVIII Siècle", in *Revue de Métaphysique et Morale*, Vol. 58, 1953. pp. 108–129.

2. Intensional: aspects or properties of objects
2.1. Essence of things both natural and artificial (essence of life, love or politics)
2.2. "Evaluative touch": original, authentic, uncorrupted, non-alienated (a natural environment, a natural smile, the natural state of humans)
– Siep adds that these concepts can cross the lines drawn by extensional concepts of nature. That is, they can refer to the nature of something that is not natural in another sense of the term.

3. Models, metaphors and ideals of nature
(This is an addition to the previous distinction. Siep claims that these "models" include elements from the previous concepts but cannot be reduced into them.)
3.1. Laws of nature as a model for human behavior or society
3.2. Nature as a subject with human or superhuman traits

(Siep 2000, 56–57)

This classification is unclear on many points, especially as the three groups are not commensurable. Even though Siep seems to use especially the first two as an exclusive division of concepts, applicable across the span of historical eras, I take it here as a loose classification of the meanings of 'nature' in concrete use, from differing viewpoints. When people use the term 'nature', they combine connotations across these division lines. For example, one can talk about nature as the non-human realm of objects and processes, which is supposed to have an authentic or original state that has long since corrupted (totally or in parts – the assumption is that there can be "pristine" environments). The authentic or original state of nature can then be seen as a lesson or a model for human action. The virtues and flaws of a classification like this are evident in this case. On the one hand this example is of course a more or less whole conception of nature as the environment, hardly consciously constructed from basic conceptual elements. Breaking it up into its supposed conceptual constituent elements does not help us understand how such a conception comes about. On the other hand, in everyday use of 'nature' there are some frictions of meaning that such classifications can help to make clearer. For example a blunt statement like "It is the nature of humans to destroy nature" clearly invokes two meanings of nature, and conceptual critique can question the assumed self-evidence of that statement. (Although as we can later see, these gaps are easily bridged.)

This classification is thus heuristically useful, but it is also problematic. The division into two classes of concepts[4] does not work in the end. It leans on the assumption that there are no

4 The third class is a specific case, and Siep does not seem to read it as part of the division.

connections between extensional and intensional meanings of the word 'nature'. When we look at the everyday use of the word 'nature', it becomes evident that these connections are endemic, and laborious to explicate. There is no self-evident extension of 'nature', although we may have learned to think that way. Intension always figures in forming extension: what is natural delineates what is nature. But at the same time, in concrete use of the term 'nature', changing the extension of 'nature' will affect the conditions of determining what is natural. This is a great challenge for any attempt of classifying concepts of nature.

Another potential problem is overemphasis on differences between historical eras. Siep applies this classification loosely to understand Rousseau's concept of nature, and the way he does this betrays certain simplifying assumptions. He says that Rousseau's concept of nature (around 1755) "combines traditional and rather modern tendencies" and while on the one hand for Rousseau "nature is a teleological order, on the other hand it is governed by contingent facts and their consequences." (Siep 2000, 57) Siep's opposition between traditional and modern seems to be built on the distinction of normative and descriptive, respectively. But as far as nature is concerned, we are scarcely very modern. As Raymond Williams convincingly shows, contemporary normative use of the word 'nature' is not limited to romanticized ideas of the environment or religious notions of order in the creation. The word is used normatively in various different meanings. Williams points out popularized images of evolution, where nature works as an invisible hand, which brings out the best outcomes.

On the other hand, the simple comparison between traditional and modern is problematic. It is questionable whether the modern concept of nature (as the environment) can be fruitfully compared with worldviews in which morality and politics were intrinsic in the conceptual organization of the world. For example, certain Stoic views were important influences for Rousseau. A passable generalization of a Stoic conception of nature is an overarching normative order where inner and outer nature, human and nonhuman, follow the same universal laws. Stoics of different eras varied in details, but the notion of nature as a universal order remained. (Roche 1974, 5–6; Glacken 1967, 55–57; Passmore, 1970 53–55; Rommen 1998, 19–21). It is very problematic to compare this conception of nature with a modern concept of nature as the environment, which excludes human and cultural by the way of definition. Thus Siep runs the risk of reading the present dominant meaning of 'nature' into earlier usage, as a conceptual baseline of comparison. We have to ask to what extent are certain teleological or normative concepts of nature referring to roughly the same thing as we do when we use the word 'nature'? Are Siep's traditional and modern concepts commensurable at all – that is, do they refer to the same classes of phenomena?

One possible way to avoid these problems is to look at the concept of nature as defined from a predetermined viewpoint, limiting the possibilities of reference beforehand. R. G. Collingwood reconstructs changing notions of *nature as cosmos* in his book *The Idea of Nature* (1945). Collingwood does not address the multifarious uses of the word 'nature'. Instead he looks at how the world as a whole has been seen as the object of human inquiry in various times, using science (broadly defined) as his yardstick. He presupposes a general 'idea of nature' that assumes different forms in the history of ideas. (Collingwood 1960, 1) Glarence Glacken's monumental work *Traces on a Rhodian Shore* (1967) has a similar approach, although he focuses somewhat differently on the changing views of the environment and the human status on the Earth, using a much richer and more diverse empirical base. He is not focusing solely on the one word, and thus he bypasses many problems with the diverse meanings on 'nature'.

It is however clear that such an approach merely steers clear of the problem of different meanings of 'nature' by avoiding focusing on the word itself, but the potential of anachronism remains. Nature as the environment, determined by the modern dualism, is a collection of beings and processes, which can be studied, utilized, adored and protected. Comparison with any cultural environment beyond the influence of modern nature–culture dualism, and the attendant scientific, economic, and aesthetic models, is bound to be problematic. Of course these other worldviews include distinctions in the world, born out of practical relations with the environment.[5] But the world is not necessarily divided into nature and other realms in the same ways, which again raises the question of the viability of these comparisons.

The problem is multifaceted: present use of 'nature' seems to be affected by our cultural history. Different meanings are available for us, as certain meanings were present for Rousseau, for example. Our own bias regarding the meanings of 'nature' makes it however hard to understand these historical relationships. Before asking questions about the historical influence in our use of 'nature' we have to understand better that which we are inquiring about. We need to delve deeper into the contemporary use of 'nature' in order to understand its intricacies better.

5 There is also always the danger of overemphasizing the relevance of philosophical or religious views, as opposed to everyday attitudes.

1.4. Transgressing the boundaries

Typologies of concepts of nature tend to resolve the issue of divergent meanings of 'nature' too simplistically. They lean on the presupposition that there are separate concepts of nature whose history and usage can be neatly traced. As heuristic tools or aids for understanding they can be useful. But the whole picture is much more complicated. Instead of distinct concepts of nature, there are family resemblances and connotative connections behind the single word 'nature'. This complicated relationship of the word and the changing field of meanings is not usually addressed sufficiently.

From the viewpoint of conceptual typologies, a crucial question emerges: why can we make leaps from one conceptual realm into another so easily? Let us look at Discussion 1. How can notions from one conceptual realm (e.g. description of the present order of the biological world or of the dynamics of genetics in general) be so readily utilized to legitimize or criticize notions in another realm (e.g. the moral status of gene manipulation)? Nature as a factual description and nature as a basis for moral valuation are easily connected. How is this possible? If one leans on a classification of distinct concepts of nature, this seems to be a transition of meaning, even a transgression. But such transitions are an everyday occurrence.

1) Meanings change

a) Extension widens within a single argument: "The relationship of humans to nature is not fundamentally problematic. Every biological being in nature changes its environment, and so do we. Humans are part of nature and live in and off nature." (oscillation between human–nature dualism and a cosmic sense of nature which includes humans)

b) Meaning is extended to other conceptual realms: "Environmentalists wish to protect nature and live naturally. But why do so many of them insist on being vegetarians, if humans are naturally omnivores?" (nature as the environment → nature as the biological background of a being → assumption of overarching naturalness that defines the moral problem)

2) Meanings overlap

a) Arguing for a connection: "It is remarkable that wild animals did not suffer so much in the tsunami disaster. As creatures of nature they live within its rhythms and are sensitive to its signals. Similarly many primitive communities managed to escape destruction. They still live in communion with nature and are sensitive to it." (Nature as the whole of the environ-

ment, including contingent events, is connected to the more immediate life environments of humans and animals, and a connection is assumed with their inner nature.)

b) Moral arguments: "Humans are biological beings who have an innate need to create offspring. This is the main reason of our existence. Homosexual relations go against this grain and are thus deeply unnatural." (Description of the biological order widens into an argument of teleology, and a moral judgment is based on this. Following nature or deviating from it is made into a normative criterion.)

One way of using 'nature' as a tool in moral argumentation is to forge connections between different meanings of nature in a way that seems to transcend the limits of the dominant conceptualization of nature. A common variant of this is to claim connection between nature without and within:

(A) NATURE as the order of the world

as examples of the perceived nonhuman world

→ assumed connection to:

(B) NATURE as human essence

e.g. human inner nature reflects the workings of outer "general nature"

→ defining the moral axis:

NATURAL is following NATURE (C) as the principle manifest in both A and B

UNNATURAL is deviating from that principle (C)

It would be very hard to grasp this transition with such a typology as Siep is employing. When meanings of 'nature' are reified into conceptual categories with distinct boundaries, any connections of meanings seem suspect. But on the other hand, certain meanings do seem to be effective forces in everyday life. The meaning of 'nature' as the nonhuman world is an objectified way of thinking in the present world. Another objectified meaning of 'nature' is the essence of a being, especially in the expression 'human nature'. These are objectified concepts which have been inherited from scientific, philosophical and other cultural sources, and which have been more or less stabilized in those contexts. If we look just at these objectified concepts and assume them to be basic elements of our thought, it seems strange how we so easily forge the connection with nature within and without, and graft it into a normative argument.

But it is much easier to understand this transition of meaning if we explore it in the context of use. Nature as cosmos, more specifically a cosmos the laws of which are explicated by

natural science, is also a powerful notion in the modern world. The definitions of morality have been closely linked to the conflicting relationship of various sciences, the process of secularization and the role of religions. Nature as an object of scientific study, the foundation of morality and an exemplar of moral behavior is connected in such contexts. We are not looking at distinct classes of concepts; we are looking at concrete use of the word 'nature'. The extension of 'nature' is not predetermined; nor are there self-evident intensional criteria of naturalness. Even though there are many objectified concepts of nature, which we have inherited in our culture, the meanings of 'nature' are not limited to them. In the following chapters I explore how in very much the same way Rousseau's use of 'nature' converged with and diverged from the existing meanings of the word.

The meanings of 'nature' change with the views and the intentions of the people who use the word, and the history of meanings affords resources for it. The use of 'natural' as a moral argument has long roots, as does the descriptive concept of nature as the environment. Moral connotations of the previous can be extended to the latter. This way 'nature' can be recruited as a moral authority. The illusory self-evidence of the word 'nature' makes it easy to mask the use of power that is involved here.

Raymond Williams's idea of totalisation of nature can be helpful here. By totalisation I mean the tendency to see something – like the nonhuman realm of reality – as undifferentiated and homogenous, ruled by common principles. As Val Plumwood has noted, totalisations are symptomatic of dualistic constellations. Differences within one pole of dualism (nature) are downplayed, and difference from the other pole (culture) is emphasized. It becomes easy to see both poles as expressions of some overarching principle. (Plumwood 1993, 47–60) But it seems that the tendency of totalizing nature is strong even beyond dualistic constellations. Williams talks about singularisation and abstraction: nature becomes something unified and singular, removed from the context. In the case of nature as the environment he notes how easily observations of the surrounding nature are "gathered... into singular statements of essential, inherent and immutable characteristics; into principles of singular nature" (Williams 1980, 70). The extreme form of this is personification of nature, which does not have anything to do with animism or such, quite the contrary. The notion of nature as the monarch, as the constitutional lawyer, as god's deputy, as the selective breeder, is built on the notion that there is something unified beyond the multitude of experience.

Many divergent meanings of 'nature' seem to share this bias on totalisation. This makes it easier to erect bridges between meanings that may seem clear and distinct from a typological point of view. A notion of a general principle is easy to transport to other realms held under

'nature', as totalisation is expected there also. In his insightful essay "Voices from the Whirlwind" William E. Connolly explores how important the idea of an overarching normative order and definition of morality through deviation is even today. His analogue between Job's fate in the monotheistic cosmos and the fate of a hermaphrodite in a bipolar world of sexuality shows that the normative notion of a natural order of things reaches beyond seemingly stabilized dualistic thought. The identity of 'nature' changes, but we are entrenched in the morality and politics dictated by it. (Connolly 1993, 206, 212) Thus it is understandable how strong normative claims can be made on the basis of supposedly neutral fact: nature as an object of inquiry is framed as a totality.

In the midst of the dominant meanings of 'nature', with the emphasis on the distinction between human and nonhuman on the one hand and the reduction of human/cultural distinctiveness by natural sciences on the other, with the tension between amorality of nature and naturalizations of morality, we need to understand such transitions of meaning. It is not enough to say that 'nature' has always been a powerful word and then to go on classifying its uses and contextual meanings. We need to understand how that power has been inherited into contemporary thought.

This is not merely an intellectually intriguing problem of meanings. Struggle over the meanings of 'nature' is an important part of political and moral discussion, from verbal barroom brawls to magazine editorials and addresses to the nation. Issues like gene technology and climate policy are constantly redefined through the use of the word. For example, labeling something like climate change natural can become a vessel for avoiding and blaming guilt and responsibility (see Lähde, 2006).

1.5. The challenge of 'nature'

Let us recapitulate the various problems. In certain contexts we seem to have a dominant meaning of 'nature' as a material domain of the world. Such use of the term has clear historical roots in certain subject areas. Nature–culture dualism can be a fruitful description of the practices that strengthen and renew these meanings and the accompanying conceptual constellations[6]. The dominant concept of nature as the environment (or as the material cosmos) can however hide the fact that the word is used in many other ways. The reference of

6 However, critique of dualism easily becomes a claim of an underlying Western logic or rationality, which again tends to lose the practical dimension of the meanings of 'nature'. Such generic descriptions in any case rarely offer anything tangible.

the word may differ significantly. On the other hand, shifts between areas of meaning are common.

Historical research is inevitably involved with similar problems, and projecting some meaning of 'nature' to the past is a constant danger. Assuming a continuity of distinct concepts of nature, or even a genealogy of divergent concepts, simplifies many problems. Is one looking at the history of the word 'nature' and its use in some specific context? Or is one presupposing some generic concept of nature and researching its history (or a class of concepts and their history)? In the previous case, the focus on the word itself can lead one to see connections where there are none. If one adopts the latter approach, one needs to recognize that many instantiations of the word 'nature' are irrelevant. Or more to the point: a specific concept of nature, nature as the environment for example, may be handled with altogether different terminology in some contexts.

Similitude is a constant problem in translation. When are two meanings of a word close enough that we can say that they are similar or the same? Or when can we at least say that they are referring approximately to the same thing? Even if we make a ruling on similitude, the justification of comparisons or connections between radically different cultural contexts is always questionable. Such difficulties arise with all translation, even in the instantaneous translation of everyday discourse, and they are notably worse in the case of philosophical terms[7]. But the difficulties seem absolutely daunting when we are dealing with a culturally central word like 'nature'. The range of its potential meanings is so diverse that we cannot credibly speak of a general conceptual structure of the word.

I propose that the most credible approach is to explore 'nature' in use, both in contemporary and historical cases. History of 'nature' is too easily reified into typologies of concepts of nature which are superimposed on the present, just as the present objectified concept of nature as the environment is too easily projected into the past. Instead we must learn to understand the disjunctions and continuities in the use of 'nature'. We must get rid of the presupposition that there are clear-cut concepts of nature out there, somewhere. Constructions of concepts can sometimes be useful tools for understanding a specific corpus, and objectified concepts are sometimes effective forces (in as concrete forms as a textbook or an immortalized quote) which need to be identified, but we must not lose sight of the fact that often use of 'nature' goes against this. We need tools to understand these problems. In this book I fo-

7 'Philosophy' is problematic enough. Anyone who has spent time with philosophers should recognize the frustration when people are talking about philosophy as a loose field of intellectual endeavor, an institutional discipline, a way of thinking, a strictly defined project, a tradition or a way of life – without recognizing the differences and the intentions linked to different conceptualizations of philosophy.

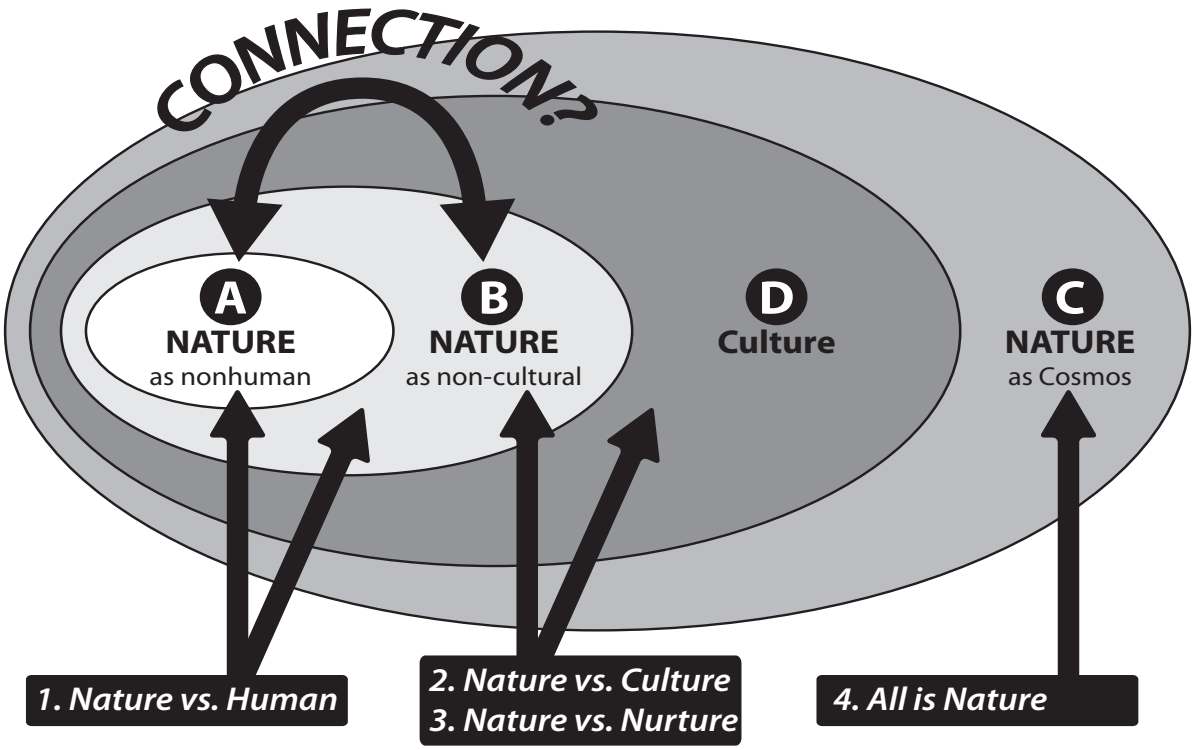
cus on exploring how changes in the meaning of 'nature' can figure as part of philosophical argumentation. Thus I also focus on analyzing the meanings of nature mainly through those arguments themselves, not primarily as part of a wider cultural discussion[8]. I believe however that these tools can be useful beyond this scope of inquiry.

1.6. Words, concepts and conceptions

The first important distinction is of course *word* and *concept*. It highlights the obvious fact that when people are using the word 'nature', they can mean radically different things. Sometimes it is relatively easy to discern this gulf of meaning, for example in the case of nature as essence and nature as the environment. There are however many instances when two meanings of 'nature' are close, or transitions of meaning take place, and making distinctions is harder. Such instances question the notion of distinct concepts. In this work I take no position regarding conceptual ontology. Instead I understand concept as a heuristic tool. The motive of identifying concepts of nature is make comparisons possible, to discern similarity and difference between instantiations of the word 'nature'. This is a methodological choice informed by the fact that in practice conceptual borders become fuzzy.

Let us look at nature as a concept that delineates domains of reality. When we are framing the world around us with concepts, we look at it in varying aspects, depending on what we are looking for. Sometimes it is essential to limit nature as the environment to some specific domains of the world and leave others out. For example: in the modern environmental debate the protagonists can frame nature in different ways in order to support differing arguments. An argument for the conservation of a forest can limit nature to the physical constitution of a region and the dynamics of forest ecosystems – an opposing argument can invoke larger scales of place and time and question the naturalness of a certain forest. The same protagonists can however quickly switch sides, when an environmentalist invokes large-scale interrelationships against the commercial exploitation of a seemingly isolated region. Thus we have to be sensitive to what kind of *conceptual oppositions* a concept of nature becomes part of. The following graph is a rough approximation of different versions of nature as a realm of reality in contemporary usage.

8 Although when needed, I of course supplement the analysis with references to wider philosophical, theological and scientific discussion of the era. Still my research focus makes this aspect of the study somewhat sketchy, for example regarding the influence of political climate of Rousseau's philosophy. On balance I believe that this kind of detailed breakdown of philosophical arguments can be useful in framing the questions of general cultural influence more fruitfully.



This constellation can be best understood with a series of questions:

- Are we (1) opposing humans with nonhuman nature (A vs. B)? Is culture included in the human pole (B&D), or do we focus on the specific difference of humans as biological (or spiritual etc.) beings? Do we draw a strict line between humans and other animals, for example in emphasizing our certain abilities or in discussing the environmental crisis?
- Do we include certain aspects of humanity in nature? Does the line of opposition form within us? Nature (B) is equated perhaps with the biological, instinctual, sensual or the wild in a more metaphorical sense. Historically some humans have been pushed into nature completely and thus stripped of legal or moral rights.
- How do we see the relationship of outer nature (A) and inner nature (B)? Is there a connection and if there is, on what basis is it formed?
- If nature is opposed to culture, do we (2) equate culture with our concrete artifacts, institutions and symbolic systems? Or do we (3) include some aspects of our "inner nature", calling it perhaps nurture? Do the environments that we have radically al-

tered become part of culture? That is, how do we see the physical borders of nature (A&B) and culture (D)?[9]

– Or do we (4) wish to do away with distinctions altogether and merely say that all is nature (C), either on this planet we are on, or in a wider cosmic sense?

Changing the conceptual oppositions changes also our perception of the world. For example the meaning of 'nature' in natural science varies depending on which aspects of reality one thinks that its objects of inquiry form. Oppositions are an important part of such framing: is natural science seen as demarcated from some other sciences? Is there a division of labor regarding objects of inquiry, or is the viability of other viewpoints questioned (for example by denying the specific difference of social phenomena)? Nature can become that which is non-human, non-cultural – or it can in the end include everything human and cultural. For example, the debates about the origin of morality hinge on this: is a line of demarcation assumed, and if so, are explanations sought exclusively on either side? The binary oppositions that these conceptual oppositions uphold are very powerful. And as we could see, the constitution of A, B, C and D is hardly self-evident but an intrinsic part of such framing. We should be sensitive to the context of use that gives 'nature' in different discussions its distinctive characteristics. There is both similitude and difference in the use of 'nature', and we must be able to compare them somehow. I propose some tentative tools for understanding these similarities and differences.

Realms of Signification

Even if one only looks at concepts of nature as realms of material reality, one can see how their *realms of signification* vary. I use the term realm of signification in a very literal sense: the realm of reality that is bordered with the concept in question. Thus the realm of signification of nature can be nonhuman, non-cultural, all of the Earth, or even the whole cosmos. Why not simply talk about extension? In standard use extension is a fairly unproblematic concept, as it does not take into account differing views regarding the world. In concrete use of the word 'nature' the extensions of different instantiations of the word may seem to be similar, but they differ radically in their content, because the experience behind these conceptualizations varies. I talk about realm of signification to highlight the fact that mere comparison of extension tells us very little about the similitude or difference of concepts – as the perceptions of reality behind them may be radically different.

9 Williams notes how the history of human labor can be ignored as something is regarded as natural – in the sense of original, unchanged by humans. (Williams 1980, 83) Intentional ignorance of generations of human labor, especially that of so called primitive societies, is a very concrete example of the applications of such thinking. An important example today is the appropriation of traditional crops as nature whose "code" is read and transformed into intellectual property.

Thus the cultural experience that informs concepts of nature is an important factor: what kinds of beings and processes are known and thus included, and can be included, within their realms of signification? How does the *content* of the realm of nature vary in different times and places? Crossing an ocean, "finding" strange new cultures and primitives, discovering isolated species in the Galapagos, circumnavigating the globe and taking pictures of Earth out of the confines of a tin can in vacuum transform that content significantly. With modern concepts of nature as the environment the possibility of thinking about the world as a closed whole, as a sphere in a void, is essential. Tim Ingold talks about a godlike viewpoint of nature as the environment – there is no experiential centre from which nature is bordered. Instead an outsider's viewpoint of the whole is assumed. (Ingold 1993, 37)

For example, when we are comparing concepts of nature as the environment between different European philosophies in distant times, we have to be sensitive both to the realms of signification and to the content of the signified. We cannot be content with just determining the extension of 'nature', as seemingly similar extensionally bordered realms of signification can differ very much in their content. Nature can be infinite, finite, stable, chaotic, teleological, contingent, eternal or forever changing.

If we move beyond definitions of nature as only material reality, it can include things that we nowadays often limit to the sphere of the cultural, religious or metaphysical. Then the realm of signification becomes radically different. So if we for example compare certain Stoic concepts of nature as the cosmos with some form of modern nature as cosmos, we have to be conscious of this difference in the realms of signification. Comparison is possible but only through careful understanding of these differences.

Moral Registers

But this is not enough, because as we have seen, the normative connotations that are linked to 'nature' are legion. In contemporary thought nature as the environment is often purged of moral agency. After this demarcation there are two basic solutions: either morality becomes the monopoly of culture, excluding all nature, or nature as human essence remains relevant regarding questions of morality. In the latter case there are again different approaches. Morality can still be seen as exclusively human, but linked to our specific inner nature. There is not any necessary connection between concepts of outer nature (environment) and inner nature (human essence) except the word 'nature' itself. But as we have seen, the link between inner and outer is easily made. It can be based on some scientific theories (biological, psychological, evolutionary) or general philosophical or theological worldviews, but in everyday usage the *conceptual* connection – in addition to the terminological one – is often

just assumed. Thus for example a continuum of moral agency can be seen in the biological world. For some people morality, both in the case of its genesis and its practical conclusions, becomes a project of natural science. A link between inner and outer nature is operationalized by genetic or evolutionary stories. For others, the genesis of morality does not say much about morality in practice and about the moral relevance of different beings. The battle of interpretations is waged by demarcations of nature within and without.

In many other contexts nature as the environment or nature as the cosmos are of course morally very relevant. Environmental debate consists in part of conflicts over the moral status of nonhumans. This is however only the most visible and obvious example. For some people nature as the environment serves as a social and moral model in some more metaphorical sense: this way of thinking has been shared by many proponents of socialism and capitalism, communitarians and individualists, people of all creeds and ideologies throughout the modern history.

Thus the *moral registers* in which the word 'nature' is used vary. Nature can be amoral in the sense that moral agency does not reside there, or in that natural beings matter only as mediated through human concerns. Nature can be considered moral in the sense that moral agency emerges from it, or as morally relevant in itself. Note that questions of moral agency can be linked to questions of moral relevance, but not necessarily. But by now it should be clear that moral dualism does not cover the whole field. Irrespective of the answers one gives to the questions on the origin of morals or the moral relevance of nature as the environment (or as nonhuman living beings), 'nature' in some other sense of the word can serve as a moral lesson or model. Indeed, blatant disregard for nonhuman nature can be channeled into a generic argument about the harshness of nature. And one should not forget that there are still worldviews – some of which are much more powerful than secularized thought – in which all of nature, including humans and their cultures, is guided by some overarching principles or personalities. Differences in moral registers show connections between realms of signification of 'nature' in different light. From different viewpoints the same connections may seem self-evident or they may appear to be transgressions of meaning.

Concepts and conceptions of nature

Differentiating words and concepts is obviously important, so that we do not confuse radically different meanings of 'nature' and uncritically assume some kind of general conceptual structure behind the word. In this study *concept of nature* is a heuristic devise that allows us to recognize radical differences and to compare at least seemingly similar meanings of the word 'nature'. Identifying concepts of nature is a result of analyzing the use of the word 'na-

ture', not an assumption that directs reading from the outset. Why then speak of concepts at all? The simple reason is that there are different degrees of divergence in the meaning of 'nature'. People can talk about totally different natures (nature as the environment, perceptual data, instinctual basis), but they can also use the word 'nature' very differently within a seemingly similar realm of significance. In my reading of Rousseau I identify separate concepts of nature in order to find relevant similarities and differences, to identify situations when comparison of meanings is useful.

Explicating different concepts of nature is linked first of all to the way the realm of signification is bounded: what areas of reality are subsumed under 'nature', and what is it opposed to conceptually? As has been discussed before, such delimitation is always connected to the experience behind these conceptualizations. So comparing two concepts of nature as the environment – for example between an 18th century philosopher and a contemporary environmentalist – is always an abstraction of sorts, as some of the content must be left out if we wish to talk about similarity. The dialectical relationship between extension and intension makes it impossible to compare extensions per se. Extension is not something that is self-evident; it is a result of analysis. Constructing a common concept of nature as a basis of comparison is thus always a contextual *choice*. Explicating realms of signification, conceptual oppositions, content and moral registers are heuristic perspectives, which aid in making these decisions in an informed way.

By *conception of nature* I refer to the concrete description of nature in some specific context, the precise meaning that the word 'nature' is given. In this study I use it to compare meanings of 'nature' in situations when there seems to be at least some degree of conceptual consensus. For example: two philosophers may seem to employ a similar concept of nature as the environment, but on closer examination their conceptions may differ radically. In general terms: by employing similar *concepts of nature* people can end up with radically different *conceptions of nature*. Thus we can say that there is a dominant modern concept of nature – the nonhuman material domain of the world. As we have seen, there are conflicting concepts of nature, especially regarding the demarcation of humanity (e.g. nature as the whole of material reality). So conceptual consensus in any situation is not a given. But even if the participants of a debate seem to share the same concept of nature, their conceptions of nature may be in conflict: is nature a threat to survival, a force to be countered, a resource that can be molded or an ideal that should be emulated?

Thus methodologically *concept* and *conception* do not form a dually opposite pair in this study. They are results of different dimensions of interpretation. Both are always approximations,

as the intent of this study of Rousseau's use of 'nature' is not to find and define fixed concepts of nature (in fact such endeavor is questionable in any case) but to understand transitions of meaning and their use in argumentation. Concept and conception are meant to be research coordinates, not fixed points in some supposed mental or linguistic space.

I'll explicate these tools by an example. Lilith and Marcus debate environmental issues. Both of them speak of 'nature' roughly as the nonhuman material domain of Earth, and employ the term in connection with modern environmental problems. At the outset we may claim that they are using similar concepts of nature, despite their differences. They are speaking of nature as the environment.

- Lilith sees nature primarily as a resource and as the living environment of humans. She neither denies nor affirms the moral relevance of nature, but claims that it can only be valued through human interests, as a resource for a multitude of human pursuits. The world of nature is one of conflict and obstacles, and humans by necessity have to learn to deal with it. Only through such human enterprise can humans achieve sustainable economies, renew resources and discover new ones.
- Marcus believes that nature has moral value in itself, or least that humans should live according to such a creed. According to him, natural systems tend towards balance and harmony – even in their apparent conflict. Nature is however also fragile, and upsetting natural balances can be dangerous. Instead of invasive economies, humans should learn to emulate the workings of nature.

Both of them frame nature in a similar realm of signification and by the same conceptual opposition (humanity vs. nature). Thus we can say that they use the same concepts of nature[10], but their conceptions of nature differ significantly: they interpret the workings of natural systems very differently and speak of nature in different moral registers. Still their concepts of nature are similar enough to allow them discussion and comparison of views. They debate over the results of ecological sciences and other sources of their descriptions of nature.

Sometimes instead of structured debate they get into fierce disagreements. One of their pet peeves is gene technology. Marcus is insistent in his claim that it is unnatural, which annoys Lilith to no end. She tends to rebut his tirades by proclaiming that because all is nature, because gene technology takes advantage of perfectly natural processes, Marcus's claim is absurd. Marcus replies by speaking of species barriers, results of evolution and ecosystem stability, appealing to nature as a realm ordered by history. At this point discussion tends to

10 Which of course is another way of saying "similar enough", unless one postulates a philosophical perspective from which rulings on similitude can be made with a view on universal validity.

degenerate. Relative conceptual agreement has changed into *radical conceptual disagreement*, as both have changed their viewpoint. Lilith is speaking about nature as the cosmos, including humans, without any inherent normative criteria. Marcus has moved to a much stronger moral register where a specific constellation of the biological world is equated with a moral axis of norm and deviation. Discussion becomes impossible.

Sometimes such disagreements may be unintentional, but quite often they are intentional – not only in this fiction of two friends, but in many contemporary debates. Transitions of meaning may be part of conscious *rhetorical strategies*. Conceptual redefinition is a common way of using power in environmental debates. The mutability of the word 'nature' makes it especially easy. But speaking about strategies implies intention. Determining intention is always problematic, especially if one cannot question the parties involved. In this study I explore the transitions of meaning of 'nature' in Rousseau's early work, and I claim that many of them are intentional rhetorical acts. The only way to make such determinations is through analysis of the textual context, by pointing out if transitions of meaning are connected to recurring textual motives. Thus the analysis of Rousseau's text itself must be very detailed. Exploration of rhetorical strategies cannot proceed on a general level of conceptual typologies.

It must be remembered that there is not only divergence in the meanings of 'nature' and similar culturally central words. There is also remarkable convergence. Today the shared realms of significance of 'nature' – shared experience of nature as the environment in science, art, education and travel, and the inherited tradition of nature–culture dualism in many cultural fields – offer some room for relatively meaningful discussion and comparison of conceptions of nature. As I said earlier, there are *objectified concepts of nature* which structure discussion and thought in specific contexts. They are in effect cultural artifacts. I each era there have been objectified uses of 'nature', which have been supported by longstanding practices, for example political or religious texts and education. Just as we have inherited the strong preassumptions from the debate about scientific demarcation and the birth of the environmentalist discourse, so did the thinkers of the 18th century inherit meanings and uses of 'nature' that were linked to important debates: natural law, natural religion, natural signs, state of nature, natural man... In certain areas of intellectual culture there was a localized consensus about the concept of nature. The effectiveness of objectified concepts of nature in directing discussion can vary, however, as conceptual transition can be used to question them.

1.7. Aims of this study

In this work I study the use of 'nature' in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's early philosophy. The main intent of the study is to develop and test the tools that I have described, and to prove their fruitfulness by uncovering Rousseau's rhetorical strategies. The contemporary challenge of 'nature' forms the bookends of this work – as the setting of the problem and the research aim of developing tools for understanding and reacting to the pitfalls of contemporary debates. The choice of subject matter has several reasons.

First of all, during the Enlightenment many struggles over humanity, morality, society and politics – their genesis, structure, content and legitimation – were waged on the battleground of 'nature'. The meanings of 'nature' in central theoretical concepts like human nature, state of nature, natural right and natural law were transformed in these struggles of definition. The themes of humanity and society were challenged by key developments: the fall of the ancient regime, the advent of secularization (and the conflicts over reformation), the birth of new sciences and the adjoining idea of humans as creatures of earthly nature. A new space of possibility was being formed for moral and political thought. On the other hand, the participants in these debates used terms which were laden with traditional significance. Philosophical, juridical and religious tradition afforded them with objectified concepts of nature. These objectified concepts such as natural right structured the discussion, but the words could also be appropriated for new uses. I propose that such a transformative period can function as an analogue to our contemporary situation and the challenges of 'nature' we face, and exploring it can aid our self-understanding.

Second, many central terms of the early modern era, like 'state of nature' or 'natural man,' are an important part of our cultural heritage, but the meanings of 'nature' in them are often understood only vaguely, or more to the point, read through established textbook interpretations, crystallized as epochs or schools of thought. Despite the distance in time we can also say that in many ways thinkers of the Enlightenment were addressing issues that we can relate to. There are inevitably strong conceptual differences due to the difference in cultural experience, but certain concepts of nature seem still very familiar to us: nature as the wilderness, nature as the universe of scientific inquiry, nature as resources for human enterprise et cetera. The diverse realm of meanings of 'nature' is partly inherited from that era, even as objectified theoretical concepts still in use (just think about the prevalence of 'state of nature' even today). In our political and moral discussions we continue to employ transitions of meaning that have long historical roots. By exploring the use of 'nature' for example in the Enlightenment we can better understand the history of our thought, and break the easy

familiarity of central cultural terms like 'nature'. However, as in this study I focus on the previous research aim of learning through example, and not on direct historical inheritance, these results remain in the background.

Third, of the thinkers of that period, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is even now remembered as the philosopher of Nature. He has been labeled the enlightenment Green, as the arch-Romantic defender of nature, as the first proponent of "natural education" et cetera. This history of Rousseau-reception is of course a fait accompli, and through it Rousseau has had influence in those fields. But reading Rousseau as *proposing* such views is highly problematic, as it tends to include projecting later concepts and conceptions of nature on him. In order to understand the use of 'nature' in Rousseau's time, we have to read 'nature' in the terms of the debates in which he took part and look at the ends he intended the word to serve. I propose that Rousseau as a philosopher can be understood better by examining how he appropriated and redefined the meanings of 'nature' in the tradition and in contemporary discussion. In effect he moved the discussion to new areas. But this was only possible by taking advantage of the terminological continuity and the assumption of conceptual connection, which the shared philosophical traditions created. Rousseau offers an example of ingenious conceptual innovations, and their successes and failures.

The meanings of 'nature' in Rousseau's work have not been thoroughly investigated from this viewpoint. In his texts 'nature' is a central term, but in Rousseau-scholarship it is very much debated, and its meaning is a source of constant polarities of interpretation. As I show in the following chapters, Rousseau is a prime example of a thinker whose use of 'nature' is interpreted through pre-existing conceptual assumptions. There is a common assumption of conceptual coherence or continuum behind many of these interpretations. We can move beyond these problems by seeing how self-consciously Rousseau seems to employ 'nature' in different meanings to suit different needs. This, I believe, has wider relevance for Rousseau-research, even though in this work I limit my attention mainly to his *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (*Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes*, 1755), or *Discourse on Inequality* or *Second Discourse* as it is usually called. Inevitably the results of this particular study apply to the Rousseau of mid 1750's, but I believe that this kind of approach would be useful for further study. The choice of focus on *Discourse on Inequality* is based on the fact that in this particular work Rousseau engaged the philosophies of predecessors and contemporaries more directly than in any other, and did it especially through the meanings of 'nature'. The *Discourse* and the surrounding discussion form a sufficiently limited context of investigation, in which Rousseau's use of 'nature' can be examined in relation to specific subject matters and to contemporary use of the word.

In such a specified context it is possible to construct and compare concepts and conceptions in a sensible way. To research "Rousseau's concepts of nature" in general would – in addition to being too large a subject for a single book – almost inevitably lose these possibilities and have to lean on predetermined conceptual categories. As a focus the *Discourse* is also fruitful because the book is one of the most contested in Rousseau-research, a focus of many of the polarities mentioned earlier.

In conclusion, the general theoretical and practical aims of this study can be distilled into four main theses:

1. The word 'nature' is used in various meanings in all walks of life. Stating this divergence is not enough. It poses a research challenge that goes beyond semantic interests into contemporary politics and general cultural self-understanding.
2. We have to examine how use of the word 'nature' is linked to different concepts and conceptions.
3. Categorizing different concepts is not enough. We have to understand how meanings of 'nature' are transformed, merged and how connections are formed. This may be intentional and may not. The challenge is to understand how the transitions of meaning are directed, and by whom.
4. This connects the research inevitably to questions of values, norms and use of power.

1.8. Contents of the study

In Chapter 2, *Rousseau's problematic 'natures'*, I examine the polarization of Rousseau-research regarding the coherence or incoherence of his work. The question of unity, posed by Gustave Lanson already in 1912 and partly instigated by Rousseau himself, is still very much alive. I look at these views in light of how Rousseau's 'nature' has been understood in these debates and propose that pre-assumptions of conceptual unity explain some of the problems in them. I propose that a new perspective on Rousseau's use of 'nature' as rhetorical action can help to open some of these deadlocks.

In Chapter 3, *Rousseau's philosophical motives*, I focus my attention on *Discourse on Inequality*. I present a common reading of that book as a speculative history of humanity and societies. Even though in Rousseau-research there is no consensus on the status of the various elements of this story, it is still usually approached as a unified story nonetheless. I point out several problems with that reading which question its validity. I address the discussion sur-

rounding this problematic, the core of which is formed by the meanings of 'state of nature' and 'natural man'. I propose that the whole book can be understood better if it is approached by examining how and to what ends Rousseau defines and uses these terms. I offer a division of *philosophical motives* as a tool of interpretation: philosophical critique, critique of contemporary society, philosophical anthropology and political philosophy.

Chapter 4, *Purification of man*, deals with *Part I* of the *Discourse*. As was explored in the previous chapter, the relationship of *Part I* and *Part II* is highly problematic. In *Part I*, Rousseau describes the pure state of nature, a rudimentary state of existence. The meaning and philosophical function of the pure state of nature have been debated continuously in Rousseau-research. Because I am working against the background of strong and conflicting interpretations of this part of Rousseau's book, this chapter by necessity involves a lot of close reading and detailed examination of the text. On the basis of analyzing Rousseau's construction of the pure state of nature and examining the ways he uses this construction, I claim that the pure state of nature can be understood as a literary device created for various philosophical motives. Some of its qualities which have perplexed readers so much can be understood through this multiplicity of uses, especially philosophical critique and critique of contemporary societies. Trying to understand it independently of these differing contexts would be futile. By employing the heuristic tools that I described earlier I try to reconstruct Rousseau's rhetoric strategies. In general, I propose that *Part I* constitutes a radical exercise in abstraction, which I call *purification of man*, but the relevance of which is divergent, depending on Rousseau's philosophical motives.

Building on these foundations I claim in Chapter 5, *Emergence of man*, that the relationship of the pure state of nature in *Part I* and Rousseau's speculative historical narrative in *Part II* is much more complicated than has been thought. The dominant philosophical motive of the text changes, leaving many elements of the preceding description seemingly irrelevant. Instead of critical pursuits, philosophical anthropology and political philosophy become central. However, due to his choice of textual form Rousseau is forced to forge continuities between sections of the text which on other levels seem contradictory. On the other hand, this approach reveals that even though there are strong discontinuities between the two sections, Rousseau is able to handle themes more relevant to the motives of *Part II* within the critical apparatus of *Part I*. Approached from a systematic point of view, looking at the book as a unified statement, this may seem absurd. But if we approach Rousseau as a philosopher from a different point of view, we can see that for him form of presentation is a practical choice. The change in philosophical motives also leads to changes in the philosophical functions of the word 'nature', which I explore with the aforementioned heuristic tools.

In Chapter 6, *Conclusions*, I compile the results of the study from the different research questions. First, I describe in general terms Rousseau's different rhetoric strategies of 'nature'. Second, I point out how this approach questions the assumption of conceptual unity behind such terms like 'state of nature', and how in Rousseau's case it emphasizes their background as instruments of contestation. Third, as the second bookend of this work, I propose how this kind of study can help us to recognize and combat the rhetoric intentions in contemporary usage of 'nature'.

1.9. Notes on forms of presentation and the editions and translations of Rousseau's text

As is no doubt evident from the previous discussion, I use single quotation marks when I write about words ('nature') and no quotation marks when I write about concepts or conceptions (nature). In the following chapters I use single quotation marks also when I am referring to a single *term* or a compound expression used by Rousseau of some other thinker ('amour propre', 'state of nature'), but without quotation marks when I handle a concept/conception – for example, some specific meaning of 'state of nature' in Rousseau's text. Any large quotations are marked by double quotation marks ("...the Savage lives within himself; sociable man, always outside himself, is capable of living only in the opinion of others..."). Sometimes I also use double quotation marks in the customary way to mark irony, reservation, to point out uncritical use of words et cetera. (e.g. This is surely a "natural" way of looking at things.)

When I quote Rousseau I always include the French original after the quote. This burdens the text somewhat, but shifting the French quotes into an appendix or footnotes would make it much harder to follow the terminological continuums, differences and problems with translation. Over the years I have been equally frustrated with Rousseau commentaries who either use only French quotes and Rousseau's original terms, or else resort purely to translations. As this is a study in the use of words, it is of course necessary that the reader can check whether there is a terminological continuum or change in both the original and the translation. But it is equally important that, as this is a study written in English, it remains accessible to people not fluent in French[11].

11 Including myself. I have been following all of Rousseau's texts with several translations and the original (see below for editions), but I admit that I have not mastered French as a language properly. However, I believe that the following study shows enough diligence on this account.

I use American English in this study because most of the translations of Rousseau's texts that I use are in that form. This choice is based on aesthetic reasons alone, on the wish of textual coherence.

In the following chapters all references to Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* will be from the collected edition *Rousseau: The Discourses and other early political writings*, edited and translated by Victor Gourevitch and published in the series *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* by Cambridge University Press, 2002 (first edition 1997). French references are to the standard Pléiade edition, *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social, Écrits Politiques*, for which the *Discourse* has been edited by Jean Starobinski. The edition was published by Gallimard in 1964. The references are marked in the following style: (DOI xx [yy]), where xx gives the page reference to the Cambridge edition and yy for the Pléiade edition. DOI is one of the established abbreviations for *Discourse on Inequality*, which I decided to use instead of another common abbreviation DI, to avoid confusion with yet another common convention of naming Rousseau's *Discourse on Sciences and Arts* and *Discourse on Inequality* the first and second discourses, sometimes abbreviated as DI and DII. For merely aesthetic reasons I often call *Discourse on Inequality* just *Discourse*, and use the longer form only when clarity requires.

Sometimes I refer to other available English translations of the *Discourse*. The translation by Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters, Christopher Kelly and Terence Marshall in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau, Vol. 3: Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse), Polemics, and Political Economy*, edited by Masters and Kelly and published by University Press of New England in 1992, is referred to, for the sake of simplicity, as "Masters & Kelly DOI". Maurice Cranston's translation *A Discourse on Inequality*, published by Penguin books in 1984, is referred to as "Cranston DOI". Donald A. Cress's translation in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings*, published by Hackett Publishing Company in1987, is referred to as "Cress DOI".

When I refer to annotations, translators' comments or editors' comments, for these latter editions I use for the sake of simplicity the same references. I refer to Gourevitch's edition by "Gourevitch DOI", and to Starobinski's annotations in the Pléiade edition with the customary abbreviation "OC III" (or "OC IV" in the case of *Emile*). Of course all of the translators and editors take advantage of other sources, and for example Gourevitch lists the sources of the annotations other than his own. I deemed it more useful for the reader to have the actual textual references than the sources, however, so I do not separate these sources further.

Gourevitch's translation and the Pléiade edition have some differences, for example in the use of capital letters, which for Rousseau was very important (Gourevitch DOI, xxxv; Masters&Kelly DOI xxvii-xxviii). Gourevitch has consulted several editions of the French text and many existing translations, so generally it is safe to assume that his is more exact. However, I have decided not to change the texts when quoting them, for example to harmonize the use of capital letters. Neither have I corrected the errors in the French of the Pléiade edition. I felt it more important that the reader can rely on the quotes being exact. In those cases where I have corrected misprints or emphasized the text with italics I always mention it.

When I refer to *Emile*, my source is Allan Bloom's translation *Emile or On Education*, published by BasicBooks in 1979. The French references are to the Pléiade edition *Œuvres complètes IV: Émile, Éducation – Morale – Botanique*, edited by Charles Wirz and annotated by Pierre Burgelin, published by Gallimard in 1969. The English source for the *First discourse*, or *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (abbreviation DSA), is the aforementioned Gourevitch's Cambridge edition, and the French source is accordingly the Pléiade edition. The editor of that text is Francois Bouchardy. The English source for Rousseau's posthumously published *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (abbreviation EOL) is yet again the same Cambridge edition. Unfortunately I could not gain access to the corresponding Pléiade edition, so the French source is Jean Starobinski's edition, published separately by Gallimard in 1990 in the series *Collection Folio/Essais*. References to *Discourse on Political Economy* (abbreviation DPE), sometimes called his third discourse, are to Victor Gourevitch's translation in *Rousseau: The Social Contract and other later political* writings, published in the series *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* by Cambridge University Press in 2003 (originally 1997). French references are to *Œuvres complètes III* (see above). The form of references is in all these analogous to that of the Discourse: (Emile xx [yy]), (DSA xx [yy]), (EOL xx [yy]) and (DPA xx [yy]). Passing references to other Rousseau's works not central to this study are made, and the sources are given in the References section.

Original years of publication are often mentioned in brackets in the main text: e.g. *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (1968), but references are always to the edition that I used (e.g. Masters 1976). I have not repeated the original publication years in the References section.

2. Rousseau's problematic 'natures'

Rousseau is a philosopher of contradictions. His literary style is ripe with paradoxes, contradiction, counterfactuals and irony, which sometimes make reading his work an arduous experience. But he also writes with vigor, with a poetic touch which has immortalized many fragments of his text. When we think of Rousseau, we immediately hear that "the state of reflection is a state against Nature, and the man who meditates is a depraved animal" (... que l'état de réflexion est un état contre Nature, et que l'homme qui médite est un animal dépravé) (DOI 138 [138]) or another equally powerful statement. Yet nearly always in these cases it is easy to find a caveat that questions the surface reading. If the quote is evocative, one can bet that an 'if' or a 'but' is close. Textual context is especially important in *Discourse on Inequality*, as Rousseau changes his tone of voice and viewpoint constantly. He moves without any warning from historical narratives to firebrand judgments of his age and onwards to speculations on the fundamentals of humanity.

All this prepares a fruitful soil for conflicting readings. Although in his correspondence and in his later works Rousseau often complained how he was misread and misunderstood, as he surely was, during his early years he certainly was aware of the contested reception of his writings. After the publication of *Discourse on Sciences and Arts* (*Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, 1750) he engaged his critics in many polemical writings, as he did after *Discourse on Inequality* was criticized. In the latter work he even anticipated that others would accuse him of paradox (DOI 216 [218]). One might wonder whether he invited this controversy.

The diversity of Rousseau's reception, especially his adoption as a public figure for very different political and cultural movements from the French Revolution to Romanticism, and his vilification for example as a forerunner of totalitarianism or praise as a pioneer of democracy, adds another dimension. Rousseau's peculiar life and personality, combined with his later confessional writings – in their frankness a veritable novelty – have provided history with a kaleidoscope of a man. In effect, there is a host of inherited Rousseaus, all speaking in his disjointed words.

A lot of Rousseau-scholarship has centered on these issues. Under scrutiny, appraisals of Rousseau's philosophy seem to divide into two camps, one supporting Rousseau's coherence as a philosopher, the other his incoherence that in some accounts borders on irrational or gleefully jumps into the realm of madness. And there are those in both camps who may agree on the overall question but disagree on the grounds for conclusions. Are Rousseau's

contradictions real or illusionary? Do they disappear under closer investigation, or do they point to thematic divisions, changes in his thought or to its incoherence? Was Rousseau a good philosopher but terrible in his argumentation (and in need of a ghost writer)? Or was he precisely the opposite, a wonderful writer but a mediocre philosopher? Are the contradictions symptoms of an inner malady? Few philosophers have been in so great a demand of justification and condemnation.

In his time Rousseau was charged of inconsistency on many points, especially after the publication of *Discourse on Sciences and Arts*. For many people it seemed inconceivable that an acclaimed playwright, a composer and a theoretician of music was able to write a seemingly wholesale condemnation of the arts – science, art and philosophy in modern terms. Even though Rousseau defended himself against these accusations both in public and in private correspondence and showed how simplistic they were, and although during this defense he developed the rudimentary critique into a more refined form, the accusation stuck.

Undoubtedly the most important source of this controversy in Rousseau interpretation has been his own claim that his work reflected a unified system or principle. In the posthumously published *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques* (*Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jaques*, 1782), one of his later autobiographical works of self-justification, self-critique and confession, which he began writing in 1772 and finished in 1776, he said that in his works he had always upheld the two principles "that nature made man happy and good, but that society depraves him and makes him miserable" (que la nature a fait l'homme heureux et bon mais que la société le déprave), and that "human nature does not go backward" (la nature humaine ne retrograde pas) (RJJ 213 [934–935]). Rousseau had made a similar claim earlier after the tribulations that followed the publication in 1762 of *Emile or On Education* (*Émile ou de l'Éducation*) and *Social Contract* (*Contrat Social*), presumably the first time in his third letter to Malesherbes in 1762. He described a transformative event of his life, "the Illumination at Vincennes" in 1749.

Rousseau was on his way to visit Diderot in prison, when he rested under a tree, read the October issue of *Mercure de France* and spotted the prize question of the Academy of Dijon, which would spawn his *Discourse on Sciences and Arts*. The question "Has the restoration of the Sciences and Arts contributed to the purification of morals?" struck him like a thunderbolt. During this ever so dramatic vision he grasped all at once the founding thoughts of all his later work: "that man is naturally good, and that it is through these institutions alone that men become bad." (Dent 2005, 11–12, 183; Cranston 1983, 227–228) In his *Letter to Beaumont* (*Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont*, 1763) he again claimed that all his works had

been founded on the same fundamental principle "that man is a naturally good being, loving justice and order; that there is no original perversity in the human heart, and that the first movements of nature are always right" (que l'homme est un être naturellement bon, aimant la justice et l'ordre; qu'il n'y a point de perversité originelle dans le cœur humain, et que les premiers mouvemens de la nature sont toujours droits) (LB 28 [935–936]) In his later confessional writings he would restate this "principle" of his "system" many times, and the link to the Illumination at Vincennes held. But he only talked of the Illumination in retrospect. It was not visible in his writings of the 1750's.

This claim of unity has been an object of controversy. In his *Political Philosophy of Rousseau* Roger D. Masters not only bases his reading of Rousseau on unity and its supposed origin at Vincennes, he takes at face value Rousseau's recommendation that his major works should be read in reverse order, from "the first principles" in *Emile* to the last in *Discourse on Sciences and Arts* (Masters 1976, x-xi, xiii). This approach influences his reading of Rousseau significantly, for example in the way he interprets Rousseau's remarks on natural law and pity in *Discourse on Inequality*[12]. In a recent edition of his book *Rousseau* Timothy O'Hagan begins his preface by referring to Rousseau's claim, and defends attempts of rational reconstruction of Rousseau's system (O'Hagan 2003, xi). Others are less convinced. N.J.H. Dent notes that Rousseau's recommendation in *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques* is masked in the figure of "a Frenchman", and the figure of "Rousseau" does not fully approve it. (Dent 1988, 1) This would suggest a more polyphonic approach rather than explication of a system in any strict sense of the word. In relation to *Discourse on Sciences and Arts* and the whole Vincennes affair, Maurice Cranston suggests that Rousseau may have been spurred on by Diderot, to whose sense of irony and paradox the critical approach appealed. At any rate, Cranston suggests, Rousseau was hardly aware of the implications of the views he proposed in this youthful text. (Cranston 1983, 229)

On the other hand, Rousseau was already in his own time seen as a new kind of thinker who combined the person and the work much more closely than was customary in the philosophical world. He dug deep into his self and its vicissitudes, objectifying himself as "Rousseau", "Jean-Jacques", "Frenchman" and many other figures who engaged in dialogue or became objects of scrutiny. This has given plausibility to the notion that autobiography is an intimate part of his philosophical thinking. Be as it may, Rousseau's claim of unity has been an important building block of the controversy. Fittingly, the recent addition *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* to the Routledge series *Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers* opened with a volume titled *Paradoxes and Interpretations* that focuses on general assessments of Rousseau

12 See further remarks in section 4.3.1.

and the question of unity. John T. Scott, editor of the series, sums it up: "More perhaps than any thinker, with the possible exception of Nietzsche, Rousseau himself has set the agenda for the assessment of his philosophy." (Scott 2006a, 1) Rousseau's contradictions, apparent or real, continue to engage readers and researchers.

2.1. Unity, Fragmentation, Precursor

Diverse backgrounds of unity

Among those who see unity in Rousseau's work, there is no consensus as to what it is based on. The different interpretations stem partly from differences in selecting from Rousseau's multifarious corpus, which consists of a wide range of style and subject matters from botany to musical theory, from drama to traditional philosophical studies. Partly they are due to differing perceptions of philosophy, as Rousseau's separate works are demarcated as being philosophical or non-philosophical, or within individual texts some sections are held to be more philosophical whereas others are seen as "mere polemic" et cetera. General attitudes to philosophy as a discipline or a form of intellectual pursuit direct the criteria of selection, making them more inclusive or exclusive. Rousseau as a philosopher is understood in radically different ways – which is understandable, since his own life and work eschewed strict boundaries, and especially in his later work he emphasized the unity of his work as a comprehensive life's pursuit. This understandably invites controversy as to how strict a conception of philosophy can be applied to such a case: what kind of questions and goals does it include?

Rousseau's diverse corpus has also invited interpretations from many fields of inquiry, not only academic philosophy. He is an object of study in psychology, pedagogies, political sciences, aesthetics, literary studies... all these and many others can lay claim to Rousseau. Again, ways of understanding philosophy can affect readings: philosophy may be seen as a distinct discipline or more like a general attitude or perhaps a methodological or theoretical aid to other sciences. In effect, an interpreter can try to read certain discipline-related material out of Rousseau's work, leaving "philosophical" material alone, or he or she can read Rousseau's "philosophical" work as relevant to the discipline in question.

This means that, for a variety of reasons, Rousseau's supposed contradictions are approached in very different ways. One may take literally Rousseau's claim that *all* of his work follows or is founded upon the same principles. Or one may focus for example on his "political writ-

ings". Thus the eclectic tapestry of Rousseau's corpus can be downplayed and instead one can look for his intellectual core, or one may affirm that Rousseau's work indeed has tensions and contradictions but claim that beneath that stormy sea is an undercurrent of continuous philosophical themes that runs through his writings. These are of course general philosophical concerns: does being "systematic" require logical coherence and clear demarcation of different subject matters, that systematic writings can be distinguished from non-systematic ones, or is Rousseau's reference to a system better understood as a general moral or political pursuit which is realized in different contexts?

One of the earliest academic attempts to call for Rousseau's unity was Gustave Lanson's 1912 essay "The Unity of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Thought" (L'Unité de la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau). Lanson wrote against a prevailing perception of Rousseau's incoherence and competing interpretations of his work. He did not take Rousseau's claim about the illumination at Vincennes at face value; instead he urged his contemporaries to look at Rousseau's system as "a living thought that developed under the conditions of life", developed by a peculiar personality but yet exhibiting certain general tendencies (Lanson 2006, 14–15). The central dilemma for Rousseau is that society is deplorable but at the same time necessary. His central works offer different practical solutions to the dilemma, and they surely can be read as incompatible projects of individualism and collectivism – usually *Discourse on Inequality* and *Social Contract* respectively. But Lanson claims that at heart Rousseau saw both dimensions as complementary parts of the same practical solution. (ibid., 19–21, 24; Gay 1956, 18–19).

Twenty years later, Ernst Cassirer's "The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau" (Das Problem Jean Jacques Rousseau, 1932) started from the same basis of unresolved oppositions of individualism and collectivism, liberty and authoritarianism, rationalism and irrationalism (Cassirer 1956, 38–39). Like Lanson, Cassirer emphasized the importance of looking at Rousseau's life and personality, but he insisted more strongly that Rousseau's philosophical content can be separated from such backgrounds – but this can be done only if one understands Rousseau's style of thinking and writing, especially his aversion to the "systematic compulsion" of presenting ideas in abstract and generalized form (ibid., 39–40). Cassirer opposed the often repeated interpretation that there was a radical break between *Discourse on Inequality* and *Social Contract*, a move from critique of social life into social reformation. He claimed that the key to interpreting Rousseau was his conception of freedom – not as absence of restraint, but as a human creation, which would place new kinds of challenges to any strive for liberty (ibid., 55–56). The problems which Rousseau perceived could only be corrected by transforming society. According to Cassirer, this changed the sphere of address-

ing central questions of morality radically, breaking away from traditional issues of theodicy (ibid., 66, 75–76).

Peter Gay's introduction to Ernst Cassirer's essay, published with the 1954 translation, is still an interesting description of the early stages of Rousseau reception and research. He notes how the idea of unity gained credence during the first decades of the 20th century. One of the originators of this trend was E.H. Wright, who in his influential book *The Meaning of Rousseau* (1929) took seriously the idea that 'nature' was at the core of Rousseau's work, nature not understood in the emerging natural scientific sense, but as "living nature" echoing ancient ideas of potentiality and laying ground for Romantic conceptions of nature. (Gay 1956, 17–21)

In his book *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (1968), which I already mentioned, Roger D. Masters took Rousseau's claim of the system of his philosophy as the point of origin, assuming from the start that Rousseau's political writings form a coherent whole. It should be emphasized that Masters focused on a selected group of Rousseau's works, precisely those which were most clearly referred to in Rousseau's proclamations: *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, *Discourse on Inequality* and *Emile*. Masters also explicitly separated Rousseau's life and personality from the philosophical insights of his works. (Masters 1976, vi, ix–x, xii) The general structure of Rousseau's political philosophy which Masters is looking for boils down to a simple idea, echoing the illumination at Vincennes: "that men are naturally good and become evil only as the consequence of the perfection of the human species" (ibid., 254). Masters interpreted Rousseau's historical speculations on the development from the pure state of nature towards modern societies literally, as scientific claims on which Rousseau founded his central moral and political notions. He saw Rousseau's description of natural freedom as the ultimate criterion of his political philosophy, and eventually criticized it on the basis of later scientific knowledge, especially evolutionary theory. (ibid., 430–431)

N.J.H Dent's book *Rousseau, An Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory* (1988) is perhaps the most ambitious attempt to look for Rousseau's philosophical core in recent decades. Dent, also the author of *A Rousseau Dictionary* (1992), has presented seminal interpretations of Rousseau's central themes which no present study can ignore, however controversial his conclusions may be. Dent not only argues that Rousseau's central works present a consistent argument; he claims that Rousseau's fame as a philosopher of contradictions stems from faulty pre-assumptions and incomplete comprehension. (Dent 1988, 2–3) He attacks mercilessly many prevailing textbook portraits of Rousseau. His strategy of interpretation differs significantly from that of Masters, for example. He argues that Rous-

seau presents a system, but one which develops through his major works. He claims that *Emile* contains Rousseau's argument in its mature form, and although earlier works from *Discourse on Arts and Sciences* onwards handle the same issues, the younger Rousseau had not yet managed to develop his thoughts well enough. Thus for example *Discourse on Inequality* is eclipsed by *Emile*. (ibid., 45, 47, 53, 81) Rousseau is a coherent but also a *developing* thinker. On the other hand, Dent intentionally reads Rousseau's various works, especially the two just mentioned, as if they were written from the same perspective, with the same theoretical aims. Thus he sees both works mainly as discussions of "the Everyman", humanity in general, and downplays the significance of historical speculation in *Discourse on Inequality* and pedagogy in *Emile*. (I will address this aspect of Dent's interpretation in later chapters.)

In his essay "The Theodicy of the Second Discourse: The 'Pure State of Nature' and Rousseau's Political Thought" (1992) John T. Scott also takes up the often remarked difference between *Discourse on Inequality* and *Social Contract* and approaches the issue on the basis of Rousseau's claim of unity, the idea of natural goodness. He proposes that Rousseau's work can be understood as a theodicy of nature, but 'nature' understood in a very specific sense. In Scott's interpretation Rousseau sees humans as embedded in an ordered whole of nature which is vindicated of the evils of human experience. This normatively understood nature as a moral order forms a model for Rousseau's political philosophy. (Scott 2006b, 226, 228–229, 251)

Some interpreters take a very different look at Rousseau, seeing him as a man first and a philosopher only after that. They do not try to glean a philosophical argumentation out of his texts but focus on *psychologically derived unity* in his works, whether it has philosophical merit or not. They wish to interpret a philosopher primarily through his psychology and personal history, perhaps taking some stand on his philosophical worth only after that, and never detached from this background. The concept of philosophy is of course very different from that employed in the previously referred interpretations, where philosophy is understood to be bounded by certain methods and subject matter. From this perspective, a philosophical reading in the traditional sense is flawed from the outset, as it leans on the assumption of independence of philosophical notions. This struggle over the meaning of biography and psychology reaches of course much further than Rousseau, but in his case the discussion is extremely bipolar. Rousseau was so clearly mad in some stages of his life, he was so outspoken about his fears, passions, memories and longings, that psychological readings have much more ammunition than usually. With Rousseau the case seems inverted: it is up to the "philosophical" interpreters to justify their position with this emotional tumbleweed that is Rousseau.

Jean Starobinski's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* (*Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle*, 1971) is a prime example of this kind of an interpretation that disentangles a unifying strand from Rousseau's life and claims that it determines all his work. Starobinski claims that Rousseau is seeking after a lost unity with the world, an immediacy that is symbolized in many different figures of his writings and pitted against mediated life in equally multifarious forms. The same longing for immediacy is seen in everything Rousseau did, from his early musical theories to his novel, his political writings and thoughts on language et cetera. (Starobinski 1988, 5, 10, 16, 20, 23, 25...)

Fragmented wisdom or madness

Often such general interpretations of Rousseau's philosophy, which proclaim its unity and coherence, are accompanied by claims that they work against a prevailing description of Rousseau's incoherence (see for example Dent 1988, 2). The sheer number of such interpretations erodes the credibility of that claim somewhat. Nevertheless, many interpreters have seen tension, incoherence and contradiction in Rousseau's work, even if attention is focused on a selected range of writings, such as the "political" ones. The most common interpretation is that there is a bipolar disjunction in Rousseau's work, a tension between two central ideas. Such a Rousseau of extremes is an understandable figure to emerge, as opposite pairs can be easily found in his works: the solitary natural man vs. the social man; condemnation of society vs. necessity of society; individualism vs. collectivism; sentiment vs. reason et cetera. Conclusions differ, however. Was Rousseau contradictory, or did he change his views during his literary career? For example, Emile Faguet vouched for Rousseau's individualism and saw his later political theory – *Social Contract*, which he saw as profoundly "anti-liberal" – as an isolated contradiction. (Gay 1956, 5–7, 9; Plattner 1979, 4) Even though such a reading of *Social Contract* has been contested many times, the apparent discord between Rousseau's writings from 1754 to 1762 is still on the table (Scott 2006b, 226–227).

Jean Wahl's brief essay "Rousseau's bipolarity" (La bipolarité de Rousseau, 1955) is perhaps the purest example of this. Wahl claims that Rousseau's thought moves around two intellectual centers, but unlike Cassirer (although Wahl alludes to him) he does not look for any kind of resolution. Rousseau is stuck between the notions of freedom of independence and freedom of autonomy, between the aims of solitary oblivion and social assembling. These are epitomized in the two incompatible programs, "making a man" and "making a citizen" – which in Wahl's interpretation are found in *Emile* and *Social Contract*. Wahl intentionally reads Rousseau as a thinker who eschews systematic approach and freely unites his personal-

ity and life experience with his work. (Wahl 2006, 194–197) Thus unlike Cassirer, Wahl is not willing to engage in rational reconstruction of Rousseau's assumed core notions.

A similar opposition between individual and society was proposed in 1953 by Leo Strauss in his *Natural Right and History*, although in a very different form. Strauss reads Rousseau's political philosophy and especially *Discourse on Inequality* as a painstaking attempt to work out a distinctly modern problem of individual and society. The tension between two ideals, return to nature and return to the classical ideal of city, self or society, remains in the end insoluble. Strauss argues that although Rousseau's description of life in nature becomes an ideal that must be approximated, in the end solitude and civil society remain two incompatible answers to the modern problem. (Strauss 1992, 254–255, 282, 292)

The distinction between interpretations of unity and disunity is thus of course a fuzzy one. One can affirm Rousseau's bipolarity as Cassirer does, but still point out to a unifying theoretical undercurrent. The other alternative is to see Rousseau genuinely struggling with incompatible perspectives, or developing from one to the next[13]. Jonathan Marks notes one common structure of interpretation where Rousseau is seen to develop according to the scheme "natural wholeness–civilized dividedness–restored wholeness" (Marks 2005, 8). Of course there is the possibility to say that Rousseau simply was incoherent. He was either a poor philosopher or a madman, jumping from theme to theme without any discernible motive. As I said earlier, his mental problems and peculiarities afford a good munitions depot for such attacks. His paranoid tendencies, his sexual tastes, his relationship to the deified mother and the father who left him, his complex relationships to women, his inability to keep friendships alive, the abandoned children, his self-loathing and self-justification... there are more than enough ways to empty him of philosophical content.

Rousseau the precursor

The previous interpretations focus on looking at Rousseau's text in itself, either as the product of a complex psyche or as a more or less coherent philosophical corpus. But there is a host of readings of Rousseau that look for his significance through his influence and history of reception. Instead of trying to find inner unity or coherence, such interpreters link him to a longer philosophical span, making him a precursor of this or that tradition of thought. Thus Rousseau's "true meaning" is found in his ability to lay ground, to anticipate. Rousseau has

13 This is of course linked to a more general question: which of Rousseau's writings are seen to be relevant for study? Was *Discourse on Sciences and Arts* a youthful pamphlet, irrelevant for his properly "philosophical" views? Or does it already address Rousseau's key themes? Rousseau's popular novel *Julie, or new Heloise* (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761) is another example of a work that is seen as both central and peripheral.

been both acclaimed and condemned in this way: he is a pioneer of egalitarianism and totalitarianism alike. Rousseau's influence on the French Revolution is still discussed (Dent 2005, 215–218). But in addition to such claims of generic influence, Rousseau is seen as a precursor of specific philosophical or scientific ideas. Cassirer for example reads Rousseau openly through Kant and claims that Rousseau anticipated Kant's ideas on freedom, and that it was Kant who stayed most true to Rousseau's thought (Cassirer 1956, 58, 70; Gay 1956, 21; see also Weil 2006, 142).

One of the most famous examples of this kind of interpretation is Claude Lévi-Strauss's claim that Rousseau founded the modern science of ethnology. He presented the idea for the first time in his lecture and later essay "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Founder of the Sciences of Man" (1962), and it was part of his *Structural Anthropology*, *Volume II* (1973). Lévi-Strauss proposed that the idea of the sciences of man creates unity between the most diverse areas of Rousseau's work, from botany to music and autobiography. His reading is based most of all on *Discourse on Inequality* where Rousseau used travel books, naturalists' reports and ancient stories to discuss humans and peoples distant in time and place. But he also sees that Rousseau is emphasizing the self-understanding and self-critique which is important for any ethnologist. (Lévi-Strauss 2006, 199, 203)

In a similar vein Robert Wokler has claimed that Rousseau was one of the founding figures of evolutionary thinking, especially the notion that humans evolved from other animals. A key text is his essay "Perfectible apes in decadent culture: Rousseau's anthropology revisited" from 1978. (Wokler 1978; see also Masters 1972, 403–404)

These readings are not without controversy either. Dent, for example, repeatedly downplays the significance of Rousseau's proto-evolutionary comments and the genetic perspective in general. The status of animals in Rousseau's philosophy is contested, as there is textual support that he explicitly opposed the idea of evolution of other animals and especially the link between humans and animals. This is a general problem in Rousseau-research: his texts offer so diverse a field that all participants in the debate can find support for their views.

2.2. How are Rousseau's 'natures' read?

The question of unity is of course only one way to see differences in Rousseau-literature, and one that bypasses many others, such as different attitudes to certain key themes as liberty, personality et cetera. But it is a revealing one, as it is linked to general attitudes to philosophy and the way Rousseau's central terms are handled. Some who assume a strong coherence in Rousseau's writings read his works with a wide radar cover, connecting fragments that are distant from each other in time and in style. This is symptomatic of Starobinski's approach in *Transparency and Obstruction*, but he is not alone in this. On the other hand Dent, antipodal to Starobinski in the extreme, is very careful in contextualizing quotes from Rousseau. The other extreme in Rousseau literature is interpreting radical disjunctions between different works. Lanson noted already in 1912 how there was a tendency to distill Rousseau's books into formulas, hermetic interpretations which are not open to criticism. *Discourse on Inequality* becomes a tract of individualism and judgment of society as such, and the assumption of this central message becomes a self-affirming hypothesis. (Lanson 2006, 12–13)

This is a challenge for understanding the meanings Rousseau gives to his central terms, especially 'nature'. Is there a basis to the claim that he has a dominant concept of nature, or does he have different concepts of nature in different works? We need to have reasonable grounds to propose that there is either *conceptual* unity or divergence if we wish to make claims about Rousseau's *conceptions* of nature. I believe that these issues have not been explored sufficiently in Rousseau-literature. If one merely assumes that the realm of signification in various instantiations of Rousseau's 'nature' is similar, there is the real risk of linking texts which do not handle the same issues at all – and thus seeing contradiction and confusion where there is none. There is also the risk of interpreting some statements on 'nature' as relevant to Rousseau's conception of nature as the environment, for example.

The assumption of theoretical unity or continuity in Rousseau's work tends to imply that recurrent terms like 'nature' have the same or nearly the same meaning in various textual sources. This is of course dependent on how Rousseau's systematicity is understood. If Rousseau is seen to be systematic in a strong sense of the word, a developer of a coherent whole of thought, the assumption is that he is writing from a constant philosophical perspective, through which nature is defined as a stable theoretical concept. This downplays the significance of textual context and the context in which Rousseau wrote. If Rousseau is seen as a coherent but also a developing thinker, like Dent sees him, the analysis of terms like 'nature' can be more refined. But here too the underlying idea is that Rousseau is in the end developing answers to the same questions, implying conceptual unity. Rousseau's conceptions of

nature may have changed, but the realm of signification has been similar. In the research literature this has led interpreters to define a distinctly "Rousseauian" conception of nature. I give some examples.

Lanson interprets Rousseau's central conception of nature to be simply an ideal that can be posited against the evils of society, and he forges a connection between the early *Discourse on Inequality* and Rousseau's later writings. He sees Rousseau's nature as an idealization and an intellectually necessary construct without any reference in reality. (Lanson 2006, 16–17, 27) In his footnotes he touches on other uses of 'nature' in *Discourse on Inequality*, regarding Rousseau's philosophical anthropology, but he does not relate these important remarks to this definition of nature (ibid., 27, fn. 4, 7). Masters on the other hand reads Rousseau's descriptions of the state of nature and natural man much more literally, as was mentioned earlier. He sees a transition in concepts of nature from *Discourse on Inequality* to *Emile*, thus seeing difference where Lanson interprets similitude, but still his definitions of nature are based on the same conceptual constellation *nature–society* and a literal reading of Rousseau's "principle". (Masters 1972, 9, 11–13)

Lanson and Masters both struggle with Rousseau's depictions of the state of nature in *Discourse on Inequality* and their apparent discord with his later writings. Dent too is committed to reconstructing Rousseau's systematic thought and tries to stay true to his text, but he brushes aside some textual material much more readily. He attacks literal readings of *Discourse on Inequality* and claims that 'nature' in the sense of original and pre-social is an accidental, not essential meaning in Rousseau's work. (Dent 1988, 15) For Dent, Rousseau's dominant conception of nature is normative: natural is that which is conductive to wellbeing and development of humanity, whereas unnatural is that which is formed by domineering and oppressive forces. Other meanings of 'nature' play no significant role. Dent links such a conception to the Aristotelian tradition. (Dent 1988, 31, 75, 88–89; Dent 1992, 175, 177–178) Dent's powerful analysis of Rousseau's system makes the general claim plausible, but the interpretative bias is obvious. In the following chapters I point out instances where his tendency to bypass many instantiations of 'nature' seems problematic. In the entry "nature" in *A Rousseau Dictionary* Dent links this normative conception of nature to the concept of nature as the environment very loosely, or at least leaves open the question as to how Rousseau's term 'nature' is related to ideas about the nonhuman world. This dictionary entry makes vague connections to certain Romantic conceptions of nature, for example. (Dent 1992, 177–179) Scott makes a stronger connection, as he sees Rousseau's central meaning of 'nature' to be "a good, ordered whole" in which humans are embedded unproblematically

– it is a description of natural life as a practical ideal and as a theodicy of nature as cosmos (Scott 2006b, 228, 244–245, 248).

All these readings of Rousseau vouch for his theoretical unity in some sense. Earlier I referred to other interpretations of Rousseau's 'nature'. When Rousseau is seen to be bipolar, a shared theme is the change of idolization of nature into the notion of denaturing in Emile, and the assumed gulf between individual and social (or a transition from one to the next).

Beyond the technicalities of Rousseau-exegesis, there are meanings of 'nature' that have been objectified into dictionary definitions and textbook examples as signifiers of epochs or schools of thought. As we could see in Chapter 1 in the case of Siep, these figure in the discussion. Rousseau can be labeled a follower of an elder tradition of thought, for example the Stoics, and his use of 'nature' is interpreted on the basis of these classics. In his book *Rousseau, Stoic and Romantic* Kennedy F. Roche reads Rousseau as a follower of the Stoic tradition, whose conception of nature was a normative order which manifests in both inner and outer nature (Roche 1974, x, 5)[14]. Rousseau certainly read many Stoic texts and referred to them, albeit his references were often vague and rewritten forms of the classics. The same is true of the earlier theorists of natural right and natural law. Rousseau worked on the tradition and it surely influenced him. By using the terms of Chapter 1, we can say that he had several *objectified concepts of nature* available – recurring uses of the term 'nature' that were tied to certain theoretical frameworks and core questions. But it is a much stronger claim to say that Rousseau subscribed to these views and that his work can be explained through them.

Like Ludwig Siep one can also claim that Rousseau was standing in the borderline of eras, in the tension between two "spirits of the age". Siep's distinction between Rousseau's traditional (evaluative) and modern (value-free) concepts of nature is built on such pre-existing conceptual categories (Siep 2000, 54–55) Of course if we draw such a distinction and read Rousseau through it, we can see that Rousseau uses 'nature' both in the normative sense and in a more or less neutral, even amoral sense, especially when he is referring to the emerging scientific studies. But herein lays the problem: the great transformation of thought is assumed beforehand, and the whole reading of Rousseau is colored by it. Yet as was discussed in Chapter 1, the disenchantment of 'nature' during modernization is not a simple matter.

14 Compare this with Laurence D. Cooper, who in his book *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life* discusses Rousseau's Stoicism in relation to the question of happiness. In his Stoic moments, Rousseau advocates natural simplicity and struggle against desires (Cooper 1999, 21–22).

As I said in Chapter 1, dictionarized concepts of nature can be useful heuristic tools. But dictionary definitions can easily become statements about content, which gloss over possible conceptual links between different uses of 'nature'. For example, if one compares Rousseau's use of 'nature' with *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, it often seems to follow the meanings in the entry "nature": order of things, the (personalized) force which keeps up that order, essence of a being, order of the world as upheld by laws of nature, the opposite to culture et cetera (*Dictionnaire historique* 1992, 1308). This is a useful indicator of the meanings that were available to a thinker at that time. But there is a host of unasked questions: are these meanings of nature linked in some way or not? Are there differences of meaning within them?

Rousseau's diverse use of 'nature' includes many of the connotations which have been pointed out in the research literature. By focusing the interpretation on one conception of nature, or arranging the reading on a pre-existing conceptual schema, one can find plausible definitions of nature and credible systematic readings of Rousseau. But the problem is that "nonessential" use of 'nature' has to be explained away. There is a great difference between explaining and explaining away, however. In the rush to find theoretical consistency or to advocate certain image of Rousseau it is too easy not to take other uses of 'nature' seriously.

2.3. Rousseau as a philosophical actor

The question is: on what basis can one decide upon conceptual unity or disjunction? That is, are there sufficient grounds for making connections between texts where the same terms are used, and for assuming that use of the same term signals commonalities in content? The realm of signification of the term in its different instantiations has to be similar enough to warrant comparisons.[15] One can compare for example whether the conceptual oppositions are the same or not, and what it means. The moral registers may be different. I propose that in order to make these choices we have to look at Rousseau not only as a philosopher in the sense of theoretical content but also as an active user of the word 'nature'. This entails taking seriously the idea that philosophical concepts can be understood only in their context of use, and avoiding such commitments to preexisting conceptual definitions which distort understanding. In a nutshell: what is Rousseau talking about and intending to do when he uses the word 'nature'?

15 Of course one can always compare, but it is not always relevant. Apples and oranges are different, sure, but they can be compared in meaningful ways. But to compare apples with precision-guided munitions wields little or nothing of relevance.

To answer such a question regarding Rousseau's work as a whole would be an impossible undertaking for any single work. Exploring the meanings of 'nature' requires deep delving into the texts themselves and focusing on the different contexts of the word. The best place to start is *Discourse on Inequality*, as it is notorious for its changes of style. Rousseau also wrote later additions and annotations to the text, trying to explicate what he was saying, yet never returning to rewrite the text in whole or recant any of its statements. The text is full of disclaimers, which seem to rule out certain intuitive interpretations.

I propose that we should take these textual changes at face value and explore whether Rousseau is actually saying many things at once. Rousseau claimed for unity in the later stages of his life, and this seems to have overshadowed the discussion. His self-defense created a presupposition that there is a single question that he tried to answer, a single motive behind his work. Even the attacks against unified interpretations hang on this: he did not have any coherence, he moved from one extreme to other, his philosophical motives changed over time... *Discourse on Inequality* is a central figure in this discussion. But what if varying perspectives are characteristic of his philosophical style at the time?

Rousseau was familiar with the circle of *philosophes* where changing literary styles was common (Diderot and Voltaire especially). Philosophy had not yet separated into a discipline, and the barriers between the sciences and the arts and between different sciences had not yet been erected. Everyone was a philosopher – and accordingly 'philosophy' could mean a whole lot of things. If 'philosophy' or 'philosopher' were used as pejoratives – as Rousseau often did – the target could be both a certain group of thinkers and the dominant intellectual culture of the time in general. As an edifying term 'philosophy' referred to an equally wide area of human endeavor. In this circle, eclecticism was the rule rather than the exception. A philosopher would write plays, compose operas, examine nonhuman nature, dwell on history and engage in political demagogy – all along writing about themes that were later picked out as the "truly philosophical" corpus. At the time of its writing *Discourse on Inequality* was still part of this intellectual culture, where rhetorical action was important. Of course the circle of the *philosophes* also reacted to Rousseau's acts. Initially after the publication of *Discourse on Sciences and Arts* Rousseau for the most part remained in their good graces, despite his attacks on the progressive spirit, attacks which he explained in depth in the following debate. By the publication of *Discourse on Inequality*, and especially after that, these relations became strained and in some cases broke. His colleagues knew very well the power of provocative statements. (Cranston 1983, 217–218, 228–229, 231, 271–272; Marks 2005, 90–91; Wokler 1995, 9–10)

As I need to focus on the textual context of the *Discourse* in order to explore the changes of meaning of 'nature', attention to general philosophical context of Rousseau's time is by necessity granted less attention, but I try to provide sufficient background where it is especially important. Still, the focus is to understand Rousseau's use of 'nature' through his own motivations, so I believe that this research emphasis is warranted. There is however one line of inquiry which should be mentioned. Interpreting philosophical texts against the political climate of their time has been an important trend during the recent years, and in conceptual studies it has great merits. In Rousseau-studies one recent example is Helena Rosenblatt's *Rousseau and Geneva*. Rosenblatt begins her book by stating the lack of contextualization in Rousseau-literature and by positing herself against the dominant view of Rousseau as incoherent. Her solution is to use Geneva of 1749–1762 as the key to reading Rousseau's political works. (Rosenblatt 1997, 1–2) Rosenblatt's work is undoubtedly valuable, and any study like this would benefit from deeper delving on the political background of the era, as I have benefited from her study[16]. But I also believe that focusing on the rhetorical context of Rousseau's text itself can offer resources for this kind of politically and socially contextualizing study, especially in pointing out conceptual divergence that might otherwise be unnoticed.

I have proposed that the changing meanings which Rousseau gives to the word 'nature' should be studied as part of rhetorical action. I emphasize that I do not place rhetoric and philosophy in conceptual opposition in this work. Jonathan Marks is one of the few contemporary interpreters who have tried to take Rousseau's rhetorical strategies into account. However, Marks's concept of rhetoric is in sharp contrast with the concept of philosophy. He is constantly trying to look out for Rousseau's essential argument and distinguish it from mere rhetoric and polemics. Thus the Rousseau who is criticizing contemporary societies and idolizing primitive cultures is merely trying to convince others of social maladies and criticizing prevailing doctrines – and these attacks themselves are not part of Rousseau's philosophical project. (Marks 2005, 90–93) I believe that this constitutes vulnerability in Marks's study, as the question of Rousseau's conceptual and philosophical priorities is not given sufficient attention: it is resolved beforehand by the assumption of "proper" philosophy.[17]

In this work I wish to show that the multiplicity of perspectives is an inherent part of the *Discourse*, and that Rousseau's assumed contradictions are a result of this conscious diversity. Thus when I talk about Rousseau's rhetoric strategies I am not exploring in general terms the ways in which he criticizes, convinces, praises, judges et cetera. I am exploring how Rous-

16 I would like to thank Petter Korkman for acquainting me with this study. Reading Rousseau through Geneva was also part of my early education. I would like to thank Merja Kylmäkoski for her enlightening presentations on Rousseau's political background.

17 Nevertheless, Marks's study is a valuable contribution, and I enjoyed it immensely.

seau uses *conceptual change* to change the terms of discussion. Instead of trying to find one central meaning of 'nature' in the *Discourse* I explore what functions the different meanings get in their context. Alan Garfinkel's notion of *contrast space* sheds light on this perspective. Garfinkel uses the concept of contrast space to explain how every explanation, and by implication every explanatory device, can only be understood against a background of asked questions. The object of inquiry is not an object in itself but only against a background of meaningful alternative explanations. (Garfinkel 1981, 28)[18] I apply Garfinkel's ideas loosely in my understanding of concepts. I look at the different meanings of 'nature' in the *Discourse* as relevant and meaningful precisely because they allow Rousseau to address a variety of subjects. Because of that, each of them is philosophically important in *some* sense for Rousseau.[19] As I wish to show, the *Discourse* does not constitute a unified contrast space, therefore it makes no sense to look for a primary concept/conception of nature.

Of course such rhetorical analysis does not guarantee that there are no real inconsistencies or breaks in Rousseau's work, nor does it preclude some kind of theoretical unity or continuity. There is the very real danger of method determining the result, the temptation to read intention in all breaks and tensions. This kind of research demands a careful balance between rhetorical analysis and rational reconstruction. Without well-founded ideas about the reasoning behind the text, rhetorical analysis lacks basis. Thus I inevitably make contentual claims about Rousseau's philosophy. But I claim that especially in the case of the mottled visage of the *Discourse*, and perhaps in the case of Rousseau in general, rhetorical analysis is indispensable in order to avoid needless and faulty association of textual passages that do not refer to the same subject. It thus helps to eliminate quasi-problems, which receive too much attention in Rousseau-literature. In the following chapters I point out many examples.

One of the oldest points of contestation regarding *Discourse on Inequality* has been 'state of nature' (l'etat de nature), a term which Rousseau shares with many other earlier and contemporary writers. One enduring question is whether Rousseau's state of nature was meant to be

---

18 I wish to thank Professor Yrjö Haila from the University of Tampere and Professor Chuck Dyke from Temple University for acquainting me with Garfinkel's work. I also wish to thank my former colleagues in the Department of Regional Studies and Environmental Policy in the University of Tampere, whose work made me see the merits of Garfinkel's conceptualization.

19 Jonathan Marks refers to Asher Horowitz, who hints at similar possibilities in his introduction to *Rousseau, Nature, and History*. As Horowitz puts it, Rousseau "did put some remarkably new wine in old bottles", that is, he used theoretical terms which originated in traditional contexts which Rousseau surpassed. Horowitz (and with him, Marks), however restricts this approach to possibilities of speaking to different audiences at once, to the vulgar multitude and the educated elite for example. The assumption is still that there is the "real" contribution under this facade. (Horowitz 1987, 11–12, 31; Marks 2005, 90–91) Regardless of this problem Horowitz's book is still valuable (see Chapter 5 of this work). A good example of the exclusionary attitudes towards interpreting the meaning of 'nature' in Rousseau's work, see Cooper's handling of Horowitz (Cooper 1999, 7).

a speculative historical description, an abstraction of human nature or a (perhaps necessary) philosophical fiction. The philosophical function of the term has been debated: is it supposed to legitimize certain moral and political notions, is it a proposition of human essence in historical disguise, or did Rousseau actually search for the genealogy of human societies? Third, does Rousseau have one or many concepts of state of nature? 'State of nature' and its auxiliary terms serve as a focal point in my reading. I present an interpretation that there is not a single *concept* of state of nature in the *Discourse*, but many. As Rousseau used the term to work out different issues its meanings changed. I explicate and explain these changes with the tools I introduced in Chapter 1 and hope to show how Rousseau appropriated a philosophical term from the tradition and continuously recreated 'nature' as an object of study. For now, let's leave it at quoting Rousseau himself on his use of words:

> "I have a hundred times in writing made the reflection that it is impossible in a long work always to give the same meanings to the same words. There is no language rich enough to furnish as many terms, turns, and phrases as our ideas can have modifications. The method of defining all the terms and constantly substituting the definition in the place of the defined is fine but impracticable, for how can a circle be avoided? Definitions could be good if words were not used to make them. In spite of that, I am persuaded that one can be clear, even in the poverty of our language, not by always giving the same meanings to the same words, but by arranging it so that as often as each word is used, the meaning given to it be sufficiently determined by the ideas related to it and that each period where the word is found serves it, so to speak, as a definition... I do not believe that I contradict myself in my ideas; but I cannot gainsay that I often contradict myself in my expressions." (Emile 108 [345], fn.)
>
> (J'ai fait cent fois reflexion en écrivant qu'il est impossible dans un long ouvrage de donner toujours les mêmes sens aux mêmes mots. Il n'y a point de langue assés riche pour fournir autant de termes, de tours et de phrases que nos idées peuvent avoir de modifications. La méthode de définir tous les termes et de substituer sans cesse la définition à la place du défini est belle mais impraticable, car comment éviter le cercle? Les définitions pourroient être bonnes si l'on n'employoit pas des mots pour les faire. Malgré cela, je suis persuadé qu'on peut être clair, même dans la pauvreté de nôtre langue; non pas en donnant toujours les mêmes acceptions aux mêmes mots, mais en faisant en sorte, autant de fois qu'on employe chaque mot, que l'acception qu'on lui donne soit suffisament déterminée par les idées qui s'y rapportent, et que chaque période où ce mot se trouve lui serve, pour ainsi dire, de définition... je ne crois pas en cela me contredire dans mes idées, mais je ne puis disconvenir que je ne me contredise souvent dans mes expressions.)

3. Rousseau's philosophical motives in *Discourse on Inequality*

The term 'state of nature' (l'etat de nature) is central in *Discourse on Inequality*. It was already well established in philosophical terminology by the time Rousseau wrote the book, but Rousseau's writings have had a substantial influence on later understanding of the term. Rousseau used the term in different ways within the *Discourse*, and there are marked differences between his various works. This, and the fact that Rousseau's use of 'state of nature' is both similar and different from the best known meanings of the term, continues to be a problem for Rousseau-research.

The most common meaning of the term derives from the writings of Thomas Hobbes, and it was used in a similar sense by a host of writers like Pufendorf, Locke, Diderot and Voltaire. 'State of nature' referred to a situation without authority of government or rule of law, or as Hobbes defined it, the state of men without civil society. Nature was opposed to law. (Tuck 1981, 125–126; Gourevitch 1988, 29; Rommen 1998, 73–75[20]) The realm of signification of the term was however not always the same. It could refer to a historical situation before the creation of political societies or after the dissolution of a civil society, or to both of these states – thus it could denote a specific historical state of existence or be a generic juridical term. In the latter sense it was also used to refer to the absence of law in the relations of political societies to each other. (Gourevitch 1988, 29; Lovejoy 2006, 30) 'State of nature' was also used to describe states of cultural primitiveness (ibid.). Usually some kind of historical depiction of the state of nature was used, but philosophers differed as to its historical status: had it really existed, or was the state of nature merely an explanatory device? Thus even though the term was shared, different concepts of state of nature were in use. And even if a similar concept of state of nature was used, for example the state of nature as a historical point of origin, there was no consensus as to the characteristics of that state. (Dent 1992, 232) One thing which explains this diversity is that the term was used in connection with different questions – the basis of morality (and its relation to religion), the origin of society, the legitimacy of political institutions, the basis of property rights et cetera.

'State of nature' was not an innovation of early modern political thinkers; they adopted the term from earlier use in theological writings. Victor Gourevitch notes that the term had been an object of intense theological debates which handled the difference between the state

20 Closer reading for example of Hobbes reveals that this constellation of nature and law was not simplistic in his work (Tuck 1981, 125–126; Rapaczynski 1987, 19). 'Law' is opposed to 'nature' in very specific meanings of both terms.

of humanity in God's grace and after the fall, and the religious limitations for considering the role of reason and freedom *vis a vis* divine commandments. (Gourevitch 1988, 26–27, 30; see *Dictionnaire historique* 1992, 1308) When Rousseau arrived on the scene, the term was already ambiguous, and he was aware of the preceding discussion. Gourevitch notes that Rousseau's close friend at the time, Diderot, commented explicitly on the differences between religious and philosophical use of the term, and according to Gourevitch's plausible interpretation Rousseau reacted to the same debates (ibid.; See section 4.1.1 below.)

In the *Discourse* Rousseau refers to Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf and many others and to their use of 'state of nature'. It is debatable to what extent Rousseau knew for example Hobbes's work directly, but it is clear that he read extensively, and in the *Discourse* he for example quotes Locke at great length. Rousseau was a self-made man of the Enlightenment, having no formal education, but he was also part of the circle of French Encyclopaedists and in constant correspondence with many intellectual figures of the day. In the *Discourse* Rousseau also writes about many earlier (especially Roman) thinkers who had discussed state of nature, but in these cases he seems to talk about the tradition of *natural law* or *natural right* in general, about thinkers who did not always use the term 'state of nature'.

Research on Rousseau's use of 'state of nature' is thus problematic in many ways. There was no consensus in earlier or contemporary use of the term, and Rousseau refers to many different conceptions of state of nature, often without quoting his sources literally or commenting on their specific use of the term 'state of nature'. As we can see later, he also uses the term in different senses. This and the already existing ambiguity of meanings implies that using any established definition of the state of nature as a guideline in reading Rousseau is questionable to say the least. Rousseau also used the term as a generic point of reference to more extensive subject matters, like the discussion over natural law. One has to be very sensitive to Rousseau's own use of the term, always on guard against projecting other meanings to it, and sensitive to the concepts and conceptions of state of nature that he was reacting against.

Rousseau used 'state of nature' and the concurrent term 'natural man' (l'homme naturel) extensively also in his later works, especially *Emile*. The interpretations of Rousseau's 'state of nature' are thus intimately linked to the general question of unity or coherence of his philosophy. For example: is there a theoretical shift between *Discourse on Inequality* and *Emile*, and must 'state of nature' be interpreted as different in each of those works but unified within each? Or is there already a conceptual disjunction within the *Discourse*? These questions continue to motivate Rousseau-researchers, and recent works like Jonathan Marks's *Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (2005) and Timothy O'Hagan's

Rousseau (2003) begin by commenting on this issue (Marks 2005, 3–4 & fn. 6; O'Hagan 2003, xii[21]).

In this work I intentionally avoid taking a preliminary stance to this general question. Instead, I examine how the meaning of the root word 'nature' changes in the various instantiations of these terms in the *Discourse*. Taking a stand on the question of unity tends to carry the pre-assumption of a distinct concept or a set of distinct concepts of state of nature. But as I have discussed, the assumption of distinct concepts of nature overlooks how easily the meaning of 'nature' is changed and links between different meanings are forged. I propose that this is vital for understanding 'state of nature' in the *Discourse*.

3.1. The Narrative in *Discourse on Inequality*

Like many other philosophical works, *Discourse of Inequality* is written in the form of a narrative. Rousseau describes a history of humanity starting from hypothetical first times and moving through several stages of development towards the onset of political societies and their subsequent differentiation. There are disagreements in the literature as to how to interpret the exact composition of the story, but it is often described as a linear development that is divided into more or less distinct stages. The prevalence of stage theoretical models of human history in philosophical tradition, from Lucretius to Turgot, and the influence of the idea of progress, has fed such readings (Meek 1976, 71–72, 83 ff[22]). In his annotations to the Pléiade edition of the *Discourse* Jean Starobinski divides Rousseau's narrative by consecutive 'revolutions' – Rousseau uses the term in some cases – which strengthens the image of a chronological sequence (OC III, lxii–lxiv).

On a surface reading the narrative structure seems evident, but it has been debated for decades in Rousseau-research, and no consensus is in sight. Still it is safe to say that most interpreters read the *Discourse* only conditionally as a historical narrative, or not at all, but there is no consensus regarding the conclusions that should be drawn from it. In this section I

21 O'Hagan's book was published originally in 1999, but in the preface to the 2003 paperback edition he took the opportunity to reiterate the aims of the book.

22 Meek does not read the *Discourse* throughout as a historical narrative. Like many other interpreters to whom I refer later, he questions the historical status of Rousseau's first state of nature. According to Meek, Rousseau in general is not a proper representative of stage theory. Meek's approach builds heavily on the notion of a long tradition of stage theory, which is "anticipated" by early proponents and reaches its true form in the 18th century. (Meek 1976, 4, 23) This makes the otherwise interesting book somewhat arduous to read.

offer a short exposition of the narrative as it appears on a surface reading, in order to give a reference point for the reader for the later chapters, where I engage the text closely and offer an explanation to its problematic structure. The purpose is to provide a reading aid, so I will not dwell on specifics or offer interpretations of contested sections of Rousseau's text. Some interpretation regarding the sequence of events or causal explanations is inevitable, but as I explain them in Chapters 4 and 5, I will not go into specifics. After this exposition of the narrative I look more closely at several interpretations of *Discourse*, specifically regarding the narrative structure and its problems.

1) The Pure State of Nature

Discourse on Inequality is divided into five sections. The first, *Epistle Dedicatory* [*Dedicace*][23], is an open letter to the Republic of Geneva. It is followed by two introductions, *Preface* [*Préface*] and *Exordium* [*unnamed*]. The main text of the *Discourse* is divided into *Part I* [*Premiere partie*] and *Part II* [*Seconde partie*]. Rousseau added several *Notes* to the text. He also made several changes and additions in later editions of the work.

The first phase of the narrative is described in *Part I*, and on a surface reading it takes most of that section. Rousseau describes a condition of humanity so far removed from any recognizable human experience that it can scarcely be called human at all. These natural humans live a completely solitary life, scattered all over the land, hardly meeting each other except to procreate or engage in fleeting conflicts over food and other resources. (DOI 136 [135], 145 [145]) They have no lasting relationships with each other – even the relationship between mother and child is temporary and leaves no enduring mark on either of them. (DOI 215 [217]) They have no language, no developed reason, not even memory in significant sense. (DOI 142 [143], 194 [199], 215–216 [217]) They do not use tools or inhabit a stable abode (DOI 135 [135], 139 [139–140]).

Rousseau calls this stage 'the state of Nature' (l'état de Nature), but he often adds specifying labels. It is *pure* (le pur état de Nature) (DOI 146 [147]), *primitive* (l'état primitif de Nature) (DOI 205 [208]), *genuine* (le véritable état de nature) (DOI 218 [219], see 157 [160]) or *first* (premier état de Nature) (DOI 166 [170]). Sometimes he calls it also 'primitive state' (état primitif) (DOI 145 [147]), 'original state' (état originel) (DOI 207 [210]), 'original condition' (condition originaire) (DOI 141 [142]), 'primitive condition' (condition primitive) (DOI 157 [160]) or 'state of animality' (l'état d'animalité) (DOI 216 [217]). The human who lives in this condition is called 'natural man' (l'homme Naturel) (DOI 159 [162]),

23 I follow the practice of naming the sections used by Victor Gourevitch in his translation. The bracketed titles are from the Pléiade edition.

sometimes 'Savage man' (l'homme Sauvage) (DOI 138 [139]). Whether each instantiation of such terms refers to the same concept of pure state of nature is a contested issue, and in the following chapters I examine many of them. Here I have however given examples that are less contestable.

Arthur O. Lovejoy was one of the first to point out the importance of these qualifications in Rousseau's use of 'state of nature' and its derivatives. In his essay "The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*" (1923) Lovejoy interpreted 'state of nature' as an overarching term under which several developmental stages are subsumed, and which in some cases has a general juridical meaning (Lovejoy 2006, 30–31, 39–40, 46) Only in some cases does it refer to the pure state of nature as described here[24]. In his article "Rousseau's Pure State of Nature" Victor Gourevitch made a strong distinction between the pure state of nature and later states, which Rousseau sometimes calls 'state of nature' (Gourevitch 1988, 31–33). But for example N.J.H Dent in the entry "state of nature" in his *Rousseau Dictionary* discusses almost exclusively the above mentioned solitary condition and does not point out the terminological overlap (Dent 1992, 232–234).

Noticing the differences of meaning is very important, as Rousseau in many ways points out how different the pure state of nature is from later stages of the narrative – especially due to the lack of human relations and language. From this original state Rousseau begins to trace the successive developments of humanity.

2) First Developments

Part II begins with an often-quoted paragraph on property, which is actually an anticipation of things to come as far as the narrative is considered. After it Rousseau restarts from the condition of existence of the purely natural man, now renamed 'nascent man' (l'homme naissant). (DOI 161 [164]) He begins to describe the successive development of humans in the state of nature (DOI 161–162 [165])[25]. This development stems from two sources. Nature as the environment presents all kinds of 'obstacles of Nature' (les obstacles de la Nature) which force humans to develop their faculties, both physical and mental. Growth of human population increases these environmental challenges, as resources become scarce. Slowly humans learn to recognize others as beings alike, and the first stirrings of cooperation arise. During these first developments humans unite temporarily in troops or herds, but Rousseau

24 True to his style, Lovejoy mentions that he has counted each instantiation of 'state of nature' and reached forty-four. He claims that twenty-nine of them refer to the pure state of nature. (Lovejoy 2006, 47, fn. 15)

25 In Chapter 5 I will examine this change in perspective closely, but for now it suffices to say that even if it is read as a continuous narrative, the shift from natural man to nascent man is problematic.

emphasizes that all such association is temporary. (DOI 162–163 [165–167]) These natural men cannot yet plan ahead long enough to form the notion of an enduring community. Cooperation is always tied to the moment.

In his classification Jean Starobinski names this the first revolution, and Lovejoy calls it a long transitional period, the second stage within the state of nature (understood in the more extensive meaning) (OC III, lxii; Lovejoy 2006, 39). These chronological labels however have been questioned in Rousseau-research, as we can see later.

3) Families, Nascent Society and the Youth of the World

The next phase in the narrative is not a simple transition either. Starobinski calls it the second revolution and Lovejoy names it the third and last stage of the state of nature (OC III, lxii–lxiii; Lovejoy 39–40). Both however include in it states of development which Rousseau describes as distinct: establishment of families and the emergence of first stable communities.

Rousseau calls birth of families the first revolution. It is a direct result of the intellectual and practical developments in the previous stage of development, in which no families existed (DOI 164 [167]). Families arise with stable inhabitation, the ability to construct an abode. In this 'small society' (petite Société) the sexes begin to differentiate in their ways of living. Stable inhabitation also brings 'a sort of property' (une sorte de propriété), and conflicts over material goods become more common than in the earlier dispersion. (DOI 164 [167–168]) Cooperation and new instruments allow leisure and thus give the developing humans a kind of surplus power that allows them to acquire conveniences – that is, the sphere of human needs widens beyond mere necessities (DOI 164–165 [168]).

From the soil of families grows 'the nascent Society' (la Société naissante) or the beginning society (la Société commencée) (DOI 166–167 [170]). In Rousseau's philosophical terminology it is not yet a society in a strict sense: instead of laws and instituted conventions it is ruled by tradition and habit, which however lack the force to prevent recurrent conflicts. (DOI 166 [170])

When he is describing the birth of the nascent society Rousseau introduces the idea of historical accidents, 'particular causes' (causes particuliéres) that force the small family societies into close proximity, a forced togetherness. He proposes that a natural disaster may have broken off a small mass of land, and both true languages and societies started in this isolation

(DOI 165 [168–169]).[26] It is important to note that nascent societies are not born due to any kind of inborn tendency of socialization in humans. This is a genuinely historical process, where environmental factors play a significant role. Both contingent events and constant environmental conditions are important. On the other hand Rousseau does not succumb to simplistic environmental determinism: acquisitions of earlier historical periods, new skills and needs, form the developmental possibilities of next ones.

Rousseau's description of nascent society has caused confusion in the research literature due to his changing depictions and the unclear sequence of events. Rousseau emphasizes that such societies are very violent, and he seems to denounce some developments absolutely (DOI 164–165 [168]). Still he describes this epoch as the happiest in human history and the one which was best for them. Sometimes the pure state of nature has been interpreted as an ideal proposed by Rousseau. But this 'genuine youth of the World' (la véritable jeunesse du Monde) is much more clearly the object of Rousseau's adoration – if it were not for the darker tones. (DOI 167 [171])

4) Growth of Powers and Dependency

Rousseau describes the nascent society as a stable condition which is not prone to revolutions. Moving away from this condition requires 'a fatal accident' (funeste hazard) (DOI 167–168 [171]). At the core of this process is moving from relative autarchy or independence to permanent division of labor. It is achieved by two key innovations, metallurgy and agriculture. Innovation of these new techniques is not a motor of development in itself; a historical transition is linked to new human relationships. As metallurgy and other new skills become specialized, large-scale cultivation is needed to create surplus. (DOI 168–169 [172–173]) Thus Rousseau differentiates between small-scale cultivation and agriculture proper. After that the technologies develop hand in hand, as metallurgy offers more effective tools of agriculture.

This results in the division of land and creation of property (propriété). It should be emphasized that Rousseau's ideas on the origin of property hang on the idea of recognition by others (DOI 161 [164], 169 [173]). The idea of agriculture as the basis of both (political) civilization and property is an old one, but Rousseau emphasizes that property is a *social relationship*. The earlier 'a property of sorts' was based in small family communities, but true property becomes a stable relationship, where the social recognition of one's property

26 Rousseau's ideas on the birth of languages in *Part I* and *Part II* differ somewhat, and in *Essay on the Origin of Languages* he describes it in very different terms. I examine these themes closer in the next two chapters.

requires that one recognizes the properties of others. Thus 'the first rules of justice' (les premiéres régles de justice) are born, partly detached from the immediate threat of force. (DOI 169 [173]) However, in the absence of laws this is still a precarious convention.

Unequal distribution of talents and imbalance in consumption inevitably begin to erode this state of things. For the first time in human history, unequal distribution of talents begins to seriously affect human life. Humans are slowly divided into haves and have-nots, into masters and servants (or slaves). A spiraling logic of domination develops. (DOI 169–171 [174–176])[27]

5) State of War

This new situation, growing inequality and weak forms of justice, results in a perpetual conflict. Nascent society gives way to 'state of war' (état de guerre). Human relations are through and through steered by egoism and violence. (DOI 172 [176]) This resembles Hobbes's famous descriptions of a state of war, but there is an important difference. Although both thinkers describe a similar condition, for Rousseau the state of war is a result of social development and is made possible only by the birth of property and the enjoining unequal relationships. On the other hand, for both thinkers the state of war precedes the institution of civil society, a society of laws and institutions.

6) Social Contract

Genuine political society or 'civil society' (la société civile) is born under the threat of constant conflict, but not as a result of an idealized consensus. Rousseau proposes that the first social contract is devised by the rich, since they have the most to lose in material goods. Their acquisitions lack security. Even though they are in a dominant position, they know that direct coercion cannot keep them in power for long. (DOI 172 [176–177]) The situation is ambiguous: people have become dependent on each other materially and psychologically – they have been civilized – so there is no possibility of return to solitude or life in scattered families (DOI 221 [221–222]). But the present order of power and material goods is constantly susceptible to violent overthrow.

So the rich propose a social contract[28] to secure the life and property of everyone. In effect it institutionalizes the existing distribution of property that had been supported earlier by the

27 In Starobinski's classification this development summarizes the third and part of the fourth revolution (OC III, lxii–lxiv).

28 Rousseau does not use the term 'social contract' (contrat social) in this instance.

conventions of nascent society and mere law of the stronger, immediate use of force. (DOI 173 [177–178]) This transition effects a profound change in human relations: humans move into 'civil state' (l'état civil) where their relations are mediated by instituted rules of justice.

Rousseau's rhetoric is ever so inflammatory here. "All ran toward their chains in the belief that they were securing their freedom." (Tous coururent au devant de leurs fers croyant assûrer leur liberté...) (DOI 173 [177]) The origin of Society "gave the weak new fetters and the rich new forces... irreversibly destroyed natural freedom..." (donnérent de nouvelles entraves au foible et de nouvelles forces au riche... détruisirent sans retour la liberté naturelle...) (DOI 173 [178]) It is no wonder that many have read *Discourse on Inequality* as an unmitigated judgment of political society.

Rousseau's description of the first social contract is definitely not a legitimating fiction. He describes a possible event (or a chain of events) that led to the institution of political society. But the preceding developmental stages are not unequivocally described as having maladies, which the social contract remedies. Neither does the first social contract present any models for politics. (Dent 1992, 232) Rousseau's normative claims regarding the state of nature, nascent society and civil state are more complex than that.

7) Development of Societies

As some human groups unite in civil societies and supposedly gain in power, surrounding societies are forced to adopt this invention to protect themselves. Thus the entire face of the earth is covered with civil societies – or we might surmise that "the civilized world" is formed, and only the distant "Savages" remain untouched until missionaries, traders, slavers and conquerors reach them. (DOI 174 [178])

Rousseau describes the clumsy beginnings of constitutions, the hard lessons that are learned when the power of government is formed and soon abused. (DOI 175–176 [180]) An important message is that absolute power is also a product of a long development, a kind of return to nature, but here 'nature' must be understood in a specific sense – as absence of not only laws but also meaningful moral relationships. Rousseau describes how legitimate power is degenerated into arbitrary power, 'a new State of Nature' (un nouvel Etat de Nature), in which everyone is at the mercy of the law of the stronger. (DOI 185–186 [191])

3.2. Interpretations of the Narrative

The immediate and perhaps the most enduring reaction to the *Discourse* was to see it as a wholesale rejection of civilization. Rousseau's evocative remarks about the goodness of natural men and his sentiments of regret about historical progress (and corruption) were often taken at face value. Voltaire's stab at the *Discourse* about wanting to walk on all fours is perhaps the best known of such reactions. But there were also admirers from the beginning, as such thoughts resonated with primitivist notions that were common at the time (Lovejoy 2006, 40–41). On a surface reading Rousseau offers praise for both the pure state of nature and the nascent society, and both have been interpreted as Rousseau's ideals (Plattner 1979, 11–12). It seems that today few if any researchers seriously advance the idea that Rousseau idealized the solitary condition of natural man, and if any ideal is seen in the *Discourse*, it is the primitive societies of 'the Youth of the World' and the so called savages of Rousseau's own time (e.g. Marks 2005, 84–85). Lovejoy was one of the first to emphasize this (Lovejoy 2006, 40–41). However, the idea of idealized pure state of nature is still alive. In his 1988 book Dent still felt obliged to attack this presumably dominant interpretation of Rousseau (Dent 1988, 3–4).

The idea that Rousseau simply condemned society, civilization and the arts can still be reproduced by seeing *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* and *Discourse on Inequality* as undeveloped or merely polemical works, where the young Rousseau was still promoting primitivism and critique of civilization. After that his thought took another turn. Any such reading necessarily ignores or belittles a lot of the material in *Discourse on Inequality*, especially Rousseau's constant reminders about the impossibility of historical return, the positive aspects of progress and even the veritable sanctity of civil society (DOI 133 [133], 203–204 [207–208]). Another problem is that Rousseau points out many negative features when he is discussing both the pure state of nature and the nascent society, especially the prevalent violence in the absence of stable conventions.

Another common interpretation is linked to the bipolar readings of Rousseau's philosophy which I described in the previous chapter. The solitary savage and the citizen of civil societies are seen as exclusive possibilities for human existence. Although the solitary state cannot be reinstated as such, the praise of the natural man is seen as a call for independence and immediacy (Starobinski is an extreme example of this). This ideal however fits only the select few, so most humans have to try and find a better life through new societies – *Discourse on Inequality* only hints at the possibility of the latter (DOI 203–204 [207]).

This enduring discussion has focused on different moral ideals, but others have taken a very different approach and read Rousseau's narrative as an attempt at serious scientific study. As I mentioned earlier, Claude Lévi-Strauss saw Rousseau as an emerging ethnologist. Thus instead of ideals the focus of the narrative is on the transitions "from nature to culture, from feeling to knowledge, from animality to humanity" and the exclusive human faculties which make these transitions possible. (Lévi-Strauss 2006, 201) In emphasizing the proto-evolutionist strain of the *Discourse*, writers like Wokler and Cranston at the same time focus on Rousseau as showing genuine scientific interest in the development of human faculties and especially language, and the relationship of humans to other animals (see Chapter 2). Rousseau's explicit statements in favor of investigating primates and the diversity of human societies, and his references to contemporary theories about animals, language, history and other societies give credence to such readings.

Yet it is difficult to ignore another strong element in the book, the descriptions of the social psychology of humans in developing societies. The speculative historical descriptions can be read as abstractions of human nature and development instead of as true ideals or claims about human history. Dent believes that in this lies the philosophical core of the book, and he relates practically everything else to it. The historical descriptions are mostly irrelevant. (Dent 1988, 33–34) Heinrich Meier, the editor of an important German edition of *Discourse on Inequality*, sees "the anthropological difference" between the potential of humanity and "the historical reality of his depraved existence" as the central philosophical challenge that Rousseau wants to address. The true intention of the exploration of the state of nature is to look into the possibility of nondepraved human existence – in other words, Meier sees the book as a discourse on human alienation and the possibilities for its reversal. (Meier 1988–89, 216–217) The descriptions of natural or primitive men are not true ideals rather than a venue of social critique (ibid., 224–225).

A common element of the discussion is the supposition that Rousseau had one story to tell, one motive behind this work. Some philosophical focal point must be found which can give us the key to reading this work. Sometimes this master key is sought in Rousseau's later works, sometimes in the *Discourse* itself. These terms of the Rousseau-debate determine also the interpretations of state of nature.

3.3. Philosophical functions of state of nature?

What is the philosophical function of the state of nature? In the narrative it is a point of origin, either in a specified sense (the pure state of nature) or a more general sense. But what purpose did that description serve? In the beginning of this chapter I referred to the diverse meanings of the term in philosophical tradition. There has been no more consensus as to its function. It has been seen as a historical claim, a legal fiction, a hypothetical test of legitimacy of political arrangements, and an abstraction of human universals. Some see it as a legitimating fiction, which is meant to present certain political institutions as having a well-founded purpose. (Rapaczynski 1987, 11; Dent 1992, 232)

An important question in Rousseau-research has been whether the state of nature was supposed to be a fiction or an attempt at historical description. The accuracy of the historical material that Rousseau used is not the issue here – it is quite clear that a lot of it is questionable or false, although a lot of it seems still surprisingly accurate. Rousseau's motives are at stake. Marc F. Plattner divided the interpretations in his book *Rousseau's State of Nature* into three groups:

> "Some believe that Rousseau intended to paint as accurate as possible a picture of the historical conditions of the first men; others hold that Rousseau's state of nature was meant to be a purely hypothetical or suppositional construct, whose relation to the actual historical situation of the first men is utterly irrelevant...a third group of scholars has been led to conclude that Rousseau was simply confused or undecided on this point." (Plattner, 1979, 17)

Much of the debate has focused on a few extracts from the *Exordium*, where Rousseau says he is "setting aside all the facts" (écarter tous le faits), on a section of the *Preface* where he says that he has tried "to know accurately a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist..." (de bien connoître un Etat qui n'existe plus, qui n'a peut-être point existé...), and on various statements to the effect that he is only making conjectures and letting philosophy fill the gaps left by history. (DOI 125 [123], 132 [132]) There is good reason for assuming that such caveats were a defense against accusations of deviating from religious doctrine – dangers which Rousseau would later know only too well. But as Victor Gourevitch states, we should still ask whether this is the only reason for such statements. Even if this is defense, it does not resolve the question about the historical status of state of nature. (Gourevitch 1988, 28)

Marc Plattner argues that Rousseau understands the state of nature – especially the pure state of nature – to be a historical fact, regardless of how sure he was about its details. Rous-

seau's recurrent remarks on 'conjectures' (conjectures) or hypothetical or speculative reasoning are linked to this uneasiness, not to his philosophical motives. For Plattner even the depictions of the most extremely individual and isolated 'natural men' were attempts at factual description: like many others he uses Rousseau's musings about 'orangutans' (great apes in general and perhaps some other primates) to support his argument. (Plattner 1979, 23–25) And as I mentioned earlier, there seems to be too much genuine interest in historical studies in the book to label it all as intentional fiction. But Plattner goes a step further and claims that Rousseau's state of nature should be read as a genuine point of origin and a statement about human nature in history.

Victor Gourevitch agrees that there are some historical descriptions in the *Discourse* that are not fictional or hypothetical, namely the so called savages of his own time. For Rousseau they are a living proof that there has been and still is a *pre-political* state of nature, which corresponds to the social state of nature or the nascent society. These descriptions may have an intended factual status. But *pre-social* state of nature or the pure state of nature is a pure fiction whose philosophical function is very different. The description of human nature in the pure state of nature is an exercise at "bracketing" or abstraction. Concrete historical humanity is stripped of all artificial or acquired characteristics in order "to extrapolate to the limits or conditions of humanity". (Gourevitch 1988, 36–37) Thus Gourevitch sees the pure state of nature as kind of a thought-experiment reminiscent of many others in Rousseau's time. Rousseau needed an abstracted depiction of humanity to explicate his philosophical principles, for example his ideas on fundamental human nature.

Jonathan Marks makes a similar claim but goes even further than Gourevitch by denying that Rousseau really makes so rudimentary a description of the pure state of nature. His interpretative strategy is to analyze the inner logic of Rousseau's description and show that it actually refutes the possibility of a great gap between the pure state of nature and the later historical stages. He emphasizes Rousseau's allusions to historical development and makes the pure state of nature a rhetorical exercise that is not related to Rousseau's core philosophical message. (Marks 2005, 22–23, 27–28, 163–164 fn. 10)

All parties can claim to have textual evidence for their claims, due to Rousseau's colorful and fragmented style of writing. Even a short exploration of the discussion on the state of nature in the *Discourse* leads to the same hopeless disagreement that dominates Rousseau-research in general. What most of the existing interpretations however have in common is that the state of nature is assumed to have one central function. The structure of the book itself however creates some serious problems for this interpretation.

3.4. Disjunctions in the Narrative

First and foremost, the term 'state of nature' is part of several conceptual oppositions in the book. Rousseau talks about the end of the state of nature in different ways, placing it at the invention of language (DOI 146 [147]), division of land (DOI 144 [145]) and the origin of recognized property (DOI 161 [164]) – and in an indirect way he places it also at the original social contract. The meaning of 'nature' in 'state of nature' changes in these instantiations of the term, as it refers to the qualities that are surpassed. The same term has a different realm of signification in these contexts:

solitary – social
instinct – reason
independence – dependence
physical – moral
traditional – civil
prepolitical – political
savage – civil
force, violence – right, law

For example, when Rousseau opposes European societies to the pure state of nature, the opposition between independence and dependence is central. Sometimes he opposes European societies to a primitive social state of nature and underscores the social stability and autarchy of the latter. But in other contexts when Rousseau opposes the institutions of political society with the state of nature, the difference between pre-social and social states of nature fades away, and 'nature' refers to absence of law and to human relations of force and violence. Then again, when Rousseau focuses on the solitary condition of the natural man, the central conceptual oppositions are instinct–reason and physical–moral. I will examine such cases closely in the next two chapters. I propose that this conceptual oscillation is an important research challenge.

All these conceptual oppositions play a role in the *Discourse*, and Rousseau-interpreters tend to choose one of them as primary. Meier claims that the opposition solitary–social is philosophically essential, whereas savage–civil is polemical. (Meier 1988, 215) Plattner opposes the interpretation that the decisive conceptual opposition is prepolitical–political and claims that in its central meaning 'state of nature' is linked to the conceptual oppositions animality–reasoning and solitary–social. (Plattner 1979, 100–101) There are credible reasons for all these readings, but I insist that the conceptual divergence must be also explained.

Second, Rousseau talks about *impossible transitions* in several circumstances. In *Part I* he strives to show how many obstacles seem to have been posed against the development of the natural men in the pure state of nature. (DOI 142–143 [144]) In a similar way he wonders how the need for languages and the capabilities for developing them may have arisen. (DOI 146 [147–148]) In the *Discourse* developed reason and language are tied together, and both of them require social relationships. Thus the transition to them from the solitary existence seems impossible, as languages can only be developed in communicative relationships. Society seems to require language, but language seems to require society.

Why did Rousseau create such problems for himself? Why is the description of the natural man so extreme as to cause problems for genealogical explanations? Even more so, as later on in the book Rousseau describes possible historical explanations for the birth of society and language (see phases 2 and 3 of the narrative). Gourevitch notes that Buffon, a constant source of support for Rousseau, criticized him precisely on this point (Gourevitch 1988, 55–56). Rousseau describes similar impossible or inconceivable transitions when he talks about the development of advanced skills and arts, cooperative associations and division of labor. This recurring rhetoric feature in the book begs explanation.

It is noteworthy that Rousseau's posthumously published *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (*Essai sur l'origine des langues*) does not include such an impossible transition. The timing of the *Essay* is controversial, and sometimes it is dated around 1760, but it is also claimed that Rousseau was writing it already during the writing of *Discourse on Inequality*. Maurice Cranston notes that there is a similar difference in thoughts on family between the two texts (Cranston DOI, 34–35). In the *Essay* families seem to be natural (as in original), whereas in the *Discourse* they are social creations that emerge with stable habitation (EOL 267 [91]). And if families are original associations, the impossible transition to language is not an issue. Plattner notes a similar difference on the theme of pity between the two texts (Plattner 1979, 83–84). This can be seen as evidence of change in Rousseau's views. In Chapter 5 I will address the relationship of the two texts more closely. But as Jonathan Marks notes, there is already a tension between the rhetoric of impossibility and natural transition in the *Discourse*. Sometimes natural men are purified of all things social and rational; sometimes those same things are already hatching. The narrative seems to be at the same time continuous and fragmented.

Third, the whole discourse is textually quite discontinuous. In the midst of long descriptions of the pure state of nature Rousseau suddenly starts to rant about medicine in contemporary society, city life and many other issues. *Notes* include long sections on study of animals, which

however "are not needed" on the basis of his problem-setting in the main text. For example in the early paragraphs of *Part I* Rousseau excludes discussion on the historical development of human body from his study, thus any notions approaching a proto-evolutionary stance, but he still addresses the topic in his notes. On the one hand Rousseau denies that natural men have any natural dietary habits, on the other hand he adds a note where he claims that humans are naturally herbivores. But he distances the note from his main argument by saying that "It is evident from this that I forgo many advantages of which I could avail myself" (On peut voir par là que je néglige bien des avantages que je pourrois faire valoir) (DOI 194 [199]).

Fourth, the figure of 'the Savage' (le Sauvage) is ambiguous. During his narrative Rousseau employs descriptions of contemporary or historical "savages" in many different contexts. The same savages, even taken from the same literary sources, are used as examples of both the pure state of nature and various social states of nature. Sometimes the savage is mentally very much like the solitary natural man: incapable of foresight and planning. At other times the same figure embodies features from the happy and/or violent nascent society.

3.5. Divergent philosophical motives

I propose that we can understand these problems better by getting rid of the assumption of a single *philosophical motive*, a prism through which the narrative should be read. Instead we should read the *Discourse* as a work with coexisting philosophical motives. Rousseau's narrative does not form a unified argument; it is a literary device that allows him to address various issues in a single work.

The question "Is state of nature meant to be a historical description?" can never be answered satisfactorily without doing violence to Rousseau's text, as the question itself makes sense only from certain perspectives of the book. To use Garfinkel's term, there is no unified contrast space in the book, even though Rousseau employs the same terminology. In the terms that I introduced in Chapter 1: the realm of signification of 'state of nature' changes constantly in the book, as do the conceptual oppositions it becomes part of. Instead of one concept of state of nature Rousseau employs several, and there is not any conceptual continuity of 'nature' that runs through the whole work. As I indicated in Chapter 1, close analysis of these transitions is a necessary requirement for any suggestions of Rousseau's central contribution in the *Discourse*.

This is the qualm I have with Dent's and Marks's otherwise valuable studies: both of them read the *Discourse* from the perspective of his later works and assume a conceptual continuum of nature which is supposedly valid for understanding the early work. Dent either brushes the historical perspective of the *Discourse* aside or sees it as an immature perspective. Nature as original, solitary or instinctual is a nonessential meaning of the term, which does not deserve any attention. (Dent 1988, 15–16, 79–81) It is this interpretative bias and Dent's insistence in looking at the relationship of the *Discourse* and *Emile* as immature and mature versions of the same idea, in considering Emile as "the Everyman" whose foundation was laid in the earlier book, and in ignoring many elements of the *Discourse* as mere rhetoric, which turns that excellent vintage a bit sour.

Marks too proposes a dominant concept of nature for Rousseau and sees other instantiations of the term as incidental. I agree with many of his conclusions in his rational reconstruction of Rousseau's position, but he goes out of his way to try to prove that Rousseau only has one coherent meaning of 'nature' and elsewhere he was incoherent or engaged in mere rhetoric. (Marks 2005, 89, 98–100) Marks wants to explain away meanings of 'nature' which deviate from his rational reconstruction as results of Rousseau's rhetorical strategy. As I stated in the previous chapter, this concept of rhetoric as opposed to philosophy proper directs Marks's reading too powerfully, and he fails to see the complexity of the functions that 'the pure state of nature' gets. Also his reliance on the assumption of conceptual unity causes him to make links between textual material, links which would require much more justification, or links which on closer inspection seem faulty. I point out such instances in the following chapters.

Both of these writers begin with the assumption of a dominant philosophical motive in the *Discourse* and thus tend too readily to explain away rather than explain the transitions of meaning of 'nature' and its derivatives. I propose a different approach; starting from the diversity of voices and trying to explore each of them in its own right. In the following two chapters I read the *Discourse* in light of four philosophical motives. All of them exist in some form in the Rousseau-literature, but always burdened with the petrified constellations of Rousseau-research. My intention is to show how each of these motives is important for Rousseau in the *Discourse*, and that the changing meanings of 'nature' can be better understood through their interplay.

1) Philosophical critique

Rousseau attacked earlier and contemporary philosophers and especially their notions of natural right and state of nature. The pure state of nature, and humanity purified of almost all recognizable aspects, is the central tool in this critique. This natural man is the most rudimentary of all and most extremely detached from possibilities of development.

2) Critique of contemporary societies

There are many passages in the *Discourse* which seem to praise primitive humanity – either solitary or social – and condemn developed society. Close reading of these sections reveals that it is most of all the urbanized European society which is Rousseau's target. When Rousseau employs the figure of natural man to this purpose, its characteristics change from the natural man used in philosophical critique. The different depictions of primitiveness are tools by which Rousseau can express key notions in his social critique.

3) Philosophical Anthropology

Rousseau seems to be genuinely interested in the genesis of societies and the development of human faculties. When the text focuses on these themes, the gap between the pure state of nature and the succeeding developmental stages narrows or disappears. This 'natural man' is not beyond history, but always changing and developing.

4) Political philosophy

In the *Discourse* Rousseau engages in debates over the legitimation of government and the correct forms of government, and he lays some outlines for his later constructive political philosophy. The meaning of 'nature' changes radically in these contexts.

In Chapter 4 I focus on *Part I* and the depiction of the pure state of nature, as a lot of the contention in Rousseau-literature centers on that description. In much of the existing literature references from *Part I* are used fairly carelessly, and there is no existing synopsis of the description of the pure state of nature that could be used as an unbiased reference point. This has forced me to engage in a detailed close reading in order to excavate the contexts in which Rousseau uses the word 'nature', and the problems which require explanation. In the latter part of Chapter 4 I examine how these problems can be understood by examining them in light of philosophical critique, critique of contemporary society, and to some extent political philosophy. In the beginning of Chapter 5 I offer some additional evidence and give a fuller

ruling on the question over the philosophical function of the pure state of nature. In the rest of Chapter 5 I examine *Part II* of the *Discourse*. In that section the structure of Rousseau's text is much less complicated, and there are fewer contested issues regarding the structure of the text. Thus the chapter is much less burdened by close reading of the text. There are still some complications with the relationship of philosophical anthropology, critique of contemporary society and political philosophy, where the meanings of 'nature' continue to be an important resource for understanding.

I believe that this approach helps us to enrich our picture of Rousseau as a philosopher. Instead of leaning on a preexisting conception of philosophy and branding conflicting trends of Rousseau's work as mere rhetoric or mere polemics, we can see that he used various rhetorical techniques of conceptual redefinition to ends which were no less important for his philosophical project. Rousseau's idea of philosophy in the *Discourse* cannot be reduced into some core questions; it is a broader intellectual practice, which includes cultural and political commentary.

4. Purification of Man

In the previous chapter I offered a shorthand description of *Discourse on Inequality* as a narrative of the development of human societies. In this chapter I focus on the supposed first stage of this narrative, *the pure state of nature* and its inhabitant, *natural man*. As could be seen, the relationship of the pure state of nature to the later parts of the narrative has been a contested issue. The interpretation depends largely on whether the pure state of nature is seen to be the actual point of origin for the historical development of humanity. Positive answer to this question is possible, regardless of whether the description itself is plausible, but it requires sidestepping many of the problems, which I introduced in section 3.4 – especially that in many ways Rousseau has detached the pure state of nature from any possibilities of historical development. If reading focuses on these aspects, the pure state of nature seems ahistorical. Thus many commentaries have answered the question negatively, distancing the pure state of nature from the narrative completely. It becomes a thought-experiment or an abstraction: a necessary premise for historical conjecture, exploration of human nature et cetera. But seeing the pure state of nature only as an exercise in abstraction ignores parts of the text that allude to continuity between it and later stages of the narrative. This is a recipe for polarized research.

In this chapter I offer an explanation for the problematic depiction of the pure state of nature. In the first half of this chapter, sections 4.1 and 4.2, I describe the pure state of nature in detail, pointing out its central features and various problematic issues: changes in emphasis and clear contradictions in the description. In general this description has two central features. First, Rousseau purifies natural men of many attributes which according to him are essential to humanity proper: language, developed reason, sense of time, use of tools and any forms of community. But as I show, sometimes he seems to relax these limitations. Second, Rousseau repeatedly denies this purified natural man the possibilities of historical development, yet sometimes he hints at development. Purification and detachment are however the dominant features in *Part I*, whereas the developmental tones are marginal, which requires explanation. I show that purification and detachment pervade the text so thoroughly that they comprise a consistent rhetorical operation, which I have named *the purification of man*. Rousseau defines 'nature' in the pure state of nature and natural man in an extremely rudimentary way for specific purposes.

Rousseau's description of natural men has been a source of contestation. Jonathan Marks notes how many interpreters have seen Rousseau to "empty" nature of any content, for exam-

ple to make way for freedom as a central force in human development[29]. He however denies that Rousseau actually empties nature and focuses on the previously mentioned allusions to development. (Marks 2005, 17–18, 25–27) Marks downplays the significance of the simplicity of natural man and the detachment from development, but due to the pervasiveness of such elements in *Part I* his conclusions lack credibility.

Discourse on Inequality has an uneasy relationship between the purification of man and sections of the text where Rousseau is unambiguously talking about historical development, especially in *Part II*. I call the latter his *historical narrative*. One clarification is in order: sometimes Rousseau talks about conjectures, speculations about history, but the meaning of these declarations is not self-evident. In this chapter and the next one I analyze these instances separately in their textual context. At this stage I just emphasize the difference between conjecture or speculation as abstraction or idealization, absolute removal from factual claims, and as speculation due to the lack of facts. In his historical narrative Rousseau by necessity resorts to unsure factual base, but the philosophical function of the description is the issue here, not its accuracy or credibility.

I claim that Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature includes elements of both the purification of man and the historical narrative. In this chapter I focus on explaining Rousseau's philosophical motives for the former. In section 4.3 I look at it through three philosophical motives: philosophical critique, critique of contemporary society and political philosophy. I offer an explanation for the various problems in the description of the pure state of nature which I have pointed out in the earlier sections. In Chapter 5 I will focus on Rousseau's historical narrative, especially from the perspective of philosophical anthropology. Due to the order of exposition some elements of the historical emphasis, which are part of Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature, are introduced in Chapter 4, but I will not dwell on them until Chapter 5.

To recapitulate, there are tensions and possible contradictions in Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature. I have already hinted at the difficulty in deciding whether this is a question of difference in perspective or genuine contradiction. Does Rousseau have a consistent conception of the pure state of nature, the different aspects of which he emphasizes in different contexts? Or is his description really incoherent or contradictory? I proposed in the previous chapters that many answers given to such questions run the risk of making too strong pre-assumptions about Rousseau's core philosophical notions (like projecting the philosophical position of *Emile* onto the *Discourse*). This issue is intimately linked to the

29 Marks mentions Strauss and Cassirer, see Chapter 2.

problematic status of the pure state of nature in the general structure of the whole book. I propose that if we try to understand these problems through concurrent philosophical motives, we can see that Rousseau invokes various concepts and conceptions of pure state of nature and natural man.

I explore this divergence of meanings with the tools that I introduced in Chapter 1. I point out several recurrent rhetoric techniques through which Rousseau changes the meaning of 'state of nature'. Its realm of signification changes, as do the conceptual oppositions which 'nature' becomes part of. The most radical changes take place when Rousseau engages in philosophical critique, as he argues against the use of 'state of nature' by other philosophers, but I also explore many other changes of meaning. I claim that the purification of man is a literary weapon with which Rousseau is able to change the terms of the discussion and address important issues.

In the following exposition of Rousseau's text I often examine terms that are heavily laden in philosophical traditions (e.g. reason, idea, right). Since this study is not an attempt at explicating Rousseau's views on human understanding, epistemology or philosophy of mind, I will not examine them deeply. One reason is that in the *Discourse* Rousseau uses such terms sometimes quite loosely. To reconstruct Rousseau's systematic views on reason, for example, would require comparison with many other texts, especially *Emile*. But due to the fragmented structure of the *Discourse* it is also hard to decide which passages of the book would be relevant for such a comparison at all. Focusing on the rhetoric structures of the *Discourse* helps us to see which are the relevant contrast spaces of different passages of text – to what questions they are answers to. I hope that my study can contribute to making these decisions in a more informed way.

The Male bias

All through the *Discourse* Rousseau uses the words 'l'homme' and 'il', which are almost always translated as 'man' and 'he' ('il' is also the masculine 'it'). This is of course part of the French practice where 'l'homme' includes the meanings human, human being et cetera, but certain gender bias is inescapable. However, especially when Rousseau is describing 'natural man', the reference is rarely restricted to males, as is evident when 'natural man' (l'homme naturel) is directly linked to expressions like 'human nature' (nature humaine) or 'human species' (l'espèce humaine). There are some instances where 'man' (l'homme) betrays a strong

male bias, but these are noted when they are relevant to this text. Rousseau has often been investigated on this account, but then the focus is on *Emile*, in which the male bias is much more important, and at times much harder to disentangle from remarks on the human condition in general.

4.1. Pure State of Nature

4.1.1. Background of Purification: "First changes"

Discourse on Inequality has three introductions. For the reader this poses some problems, even if one ignores the dedication to the Republic of Geneva, *Epistle Dedicatory*. Rousseau practically begins the book three times in *Preface*, *Exordium* and the early paragraphs of *Part I*. The actual description of the pure state of nature and natural man begins only after that. These sections of the text consist of a series of preliminary remarks, the relationship of which to each other is problematic. In this section I offer an interpretation of some especially puzzling remarks in order to show that they should not be interpreted as part of the description of the pure state of nature, but as serving other purposes.

The *Discourse* was written as a reply to a question posed by the Academy of Dijon in an essay competition: "What is the origin of inequality among men, and whether it is authorized by the natural Law?" (Quelle est l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes, et si elle est autorisée par la Loy naturelle?), published in the November 1753 issue of *Mercure de France*[30]. Rousseau answers this question as if in an offhand way in *Epistle Dedicatory*, his dedication to the Republic of Geneva: "the equality nature established among men and the inequality they have instituted" (l'égalité que la nature a mise entre les hommes et sur l'inégalité qu'ils ont instituée) (DOI 114 [111]). Rousseau however embarks on a long detour before he engages the idea of inequality being "instituted". Or not actually a detour, as Rousseau wrote *Epistle Dedicatory* only after finishing the manuscript. (Gourevitch DOI, 349) The book does not begin with the conceptual opposition of nature and society (institution). The first conceptual opposition is introduced in the opening lines of *Preface*. Humans should know themselves in

30 This is the form in which Rousseau writes the question (DOI 130 [129]). Starobinski gives a slightly different original formulation where instead of 'origin' there is 'source' (la source) (OC III, 1300, 129/1). Gourevitch notes that Rousseau also substitutes the question of authorization with the "non-committal" term 'fondements' (foundations) in the title of the book (Gourevitch DOI, xv–xvi).

their "as Nature formed" them (que l'a formé la Nature), as opposed to the changes brought about by the succession of times and of things (DOI 124 [122]). It is thus on the opposition between nature as original and *change* where Rousseau lays the first stones.

> "...through all the changes which the succession of times and of things must have wrought in his original constitution, and to disentangle what he owes to his stock from what circumstances and his progress have added to or changed in his primitive state..." (ibid.)
>
> (...à travers tous les changemens que la succession des tems et des choses a dû produire dans sa constitution originelle, et de démêler ce qu'il tient de son propre fond d'avec ce que les circonstances et ses progrès ont ajoûte ou changé à son Etat primitif...)

Rousseau makes two distinctions: original constitution vs. succession of times and things, and primitive state vs. circumstances and progress. Are these two the same thing? Should we regard 'succession of times and things' and 'circumstances and progress' as interchangeable? This is significant also because the term 'circumstances' reappears in the book many times, especially in reference to nonhuman elements such as soil (natural resources), climate and contingent events like natural disasters. Further examination of the text is needed before this question can be answered. Rousseau continues with a famous metaphor of the statue of Glaucus[31]:

> "[L]ike the statue of Glaucus which time, sea and storms had so disfigured that it less resembled a God than a ferocious Beast, the human soul altered in the lap of society by a thousand forever recurring causes, by the acquisition of a mass of knowledge and errors, by the changes that have taken place in the constitution of Bodies, and by the continual impact of the passions, has, so to speak, changed in appearance to the point of being almost unrecognizable; and instead of a being always acting on certain and unvarying Principles, instead of the Celestial and majestic simplicity its Author had imprinted on it, *all one still finds is*..." (ibid., emphasis mine, see footnote below)
>
> (semblable à la statue de Glaucus que le tems, la mer et les orages avoient tellement défigurée, qu'elle ressembloit moins à un Dieu qu'à une Bête féroce, l'ame humaine altérée au sein de la société par mille causes sans cesse renaissantes, par l'acquisition d'une multitude de connoissances et d'erreurs, par les changemens arrivés à la constitution des Corps, et par le choc continuel des passions, a, pour ainsi dire, changé d'apparence au point d'être presque méconnoisable; *et l'on n'y retrouve plus*[32], au lieu d'un être agissant toûjours par des Principes certains et invariables, au lieu de cette Celeste et majestueuse simplicité dont son Auteur l'avoit empreinte, que...)

31 Plato uses the same metaphor in *Republic* (Gourevitch DOI, 352; OC III, 1294, 122/2)
32 In the 1782 edition Rousseau had changed 'retrouve' into 'trouve' (OCIII 1293, note (b))

By the metaphor Rousseau seems to describe a pristine original condition that is opposed especially to society and the changes that it brings. He refers to the changes in 'human soul' (l'ame humaine), but as we can see, he also links it with the changes in 'Bodies' (Corps). In any case he presents an idea of humanity that is irreversibly altered by the tides of history. He also seems to pose an opposition between a changed, even disfigured, humanity and an original, untainted human essence that emerged from the hands of the Creator. Jean Starobinski builds on this idea in his interpretation of the Glaucus image, seeing it as an expression of Rousseau's conviction that "change is evil" and the possibility that beneath the layer of barnacles the natural goodness can still be found. Thus for him the Glaucus image posits a conceptual opposition of essence and deformation. (Starobinski 1988, 16) In the earlier quote Cranston translates 'fond' as 'essence', leaning in the same direction (Cranston DOI, 67) – and indeed one of those objectified concepts of nature which Rousseau and his contemporaries gleaned from tradition was nature as the original and pristine essence of a being.

There are two basic ways to interpret this. We may be looking at an image of a god-given eternal soul which is veiled by the sediments of mundane voyages, or else, the eroded and transformed block of stone, body and soul both, is indeed all we have left. In the Rousseau literature this is connected to two competing conceptual constellations: authenticity–appearance and origin–history. Starobinski seems to think that Rousseau was unsure on this, but he leans on the former image of veiling, where the original simplicity can still be restored (Starobinski 1988, 16). The emphasized phrase in the quote hints at the latter alternative, that the original simplicity can no longer be found/recovered[33]. In that interpretation Glaucus's whole constitution is transformed.

How should we understand Rousseau's words about the original human, "a being always acting on certain and unvarying Principles", about the simplicity that is celestially ordained? Rousseau alludes in the *Note* attached to the beginning of *Preface* to Buffon's idea of 'internal sense' (sens intérieur) (DOI 189–190 [195–196]) and in the main text he claims that our ability to follow the advice of the Temple of Delphi, "Know Thyself", has diminished with the progress of our knowledge – by focusing on the world around us we have deprived ourselves of the means of "Knowing Man" (DOI 124 [122]). It may seem that we are offered oppositions between original and deformed nature, between knowledge of the world and of the soul – and the kind of immediate relation to the self which Starobinski claims Rousseau is striving for.

33 Actually Starobinski noted in his annotations to the *Discourse* how Rousseau's use of the term 'human constitution' (constitution humaine) instead of 'human nature' (nature humaine) emphasized precisely such an idea of transformation. (OC III 1294, 123/1)

This would be reading Rousseau hastily. In the next densely packed paragraph Rousseau calls for a search of the first origin of the differences that distinguish humans from each other (DOI 124 [123]). This important passage is made understandable by the distinction between two kinds of inequality which Rousseau introduces in the beginning of *Exordium*: 'natural' or 'Physical' inequality (naturelle, Physique[34]) and 'moral' or 'political' (morale, politique) inequality. The first "is established by Nature" (est établie par la Nature) and consists of differences in age, health, strength and faculties both mental and physical. The latter "depends on a sort of convention, and is established, or at least authorized by Men's consent" (dépend d'une sorte de convention, et qu'elle est établie, ou du moins autorisée par le consentement des Hommes) (DOI 131 [131]).

When Rousseau calls for a search of the first origin of human differences he says that humans were 'naturally' (naturallement) as equal as animals of any species, before "various physical causes" (diverses causes Physiques) introduced individual variations in them. During these 'first changes' (premiers changemens) others remained longer in their 'original state' (Etat originel) whereas others developed good and bad qualities "that were not inherent in their Nature" (qui n'étoient point inhérentes à leur Nature). Here was according to Rousseau "the first source of inequality" (la premiére source de l'inégalité). (DOI 124–125 [123])

Let us now return to the first question which I posed earlier about the relationship of original constitution and primitive state. I will try to answer it by examining Rousseau's use of 'nature'. In *Preface* Rousseau writes about natural equality in absolute terms, denying natural inequalities. He also uses 'nature' in a traditional sense, as original and pristine essence ("inherent in their Nature"). But in the *Exordium* he sees nature as the author of certain inequalities. This seems to be a contradiction, but what if the concept of nature is different in these cases? Earlier I noted the opposition between 'original constitution' and 'succession of times and things'. When Rousseau speaks of natural equality, he refers to that simplicity which came from the hands of God/Nature, beyond any worldly life. This nature as essence is opposed to *change*, to the succession of times and things – that nature as the world which creates natural inequality. Living in a world and having an environment differentiates all living beings.

Despite the presence of the powerful Glaucus image and the attendant constellation of origin–change (deformation) I claim that Rousseau distinguishes 'original constitution' from 'primitive state', and thus 'succession of times and things' from 'circumstances and progress'. Thus it would be a grave mistake to read these fragments on the original simplicity and

34 I have corrected Starobinski's 'Phisique' in the Pléiade edition. Actually this was a viable orthographical form in Rousseau's time, but the Pléiade edition seems to use 'Physique' elsewhere.

original constitution as a part of Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature. 'Primitive state' refers to the pure state of nature, and circumstances and progress to the later developments in his historical narrative. But why does Rousseau speak of natural equality and original constitution at all? I claim that it is in order to pay lip service to Christian views and to distance him from certain proto-evolutionary ideas. There is textual evidence for it, and general reactions to the threat of religious persecution in that time offer support.

In the opening paragraph of *Part I*, when he is introducing the description of the pure state of nature, Rousseau explicitly states that he ignores 'successive developments' (devéloppemens successifs) in the bodily constitution of humans and looks at the human body as it now is. He also ignores all "supernatural gifts he may have received" (les dons surnaturels qu'il a pu recevoir) (DOI 134 [134]). Marc F. Plattner notes how Rousseau keeps away from suggesting anything on the lines of the transformist doctrine, a proto-evolutionary stance advanced by Diderot and Buffon, who were both important influences for Rousseau (Plattner 1979, 37). But it is also clear that Rousseau distances his description from theological views: he pays lip service to the notion of a God-given human soul, but he says that he does not include it into his description. He leaves alone humanity before the 'first changes', keeps away from the time immediately after the Creation.

Gourevitch claims that Rousseau must have been aware of the earlier theological debates about *pure nature* and *fallen nature*, and it is more than likely that Rousseau was crafting a defense against accusations of breaking against dogma, which was common for authors of that period (Gourevitch 1988, 26–27; see also Scott 2006b, 231). As Diderot wrote in defense of abbé de Prades in 1752, the time before the Fall "must be the object of our faith and not of our reasoning" (see Gourevitch 1988, 29–30, fn. 10). In his annotation to the *Discourse* Gourevitch reminds that even Buffon was forced to hide behind claims of speculation (Gourevitch DOI, 371) Elsewhere in the *Discourse* Rousseau also defends his speculations of the state of nature in general against possible religious accusations (see section 4.3.1).

This careful tone of voice is heard elsewhere, like in *Note V* where Rousseau looks for proof about human nature in other animal species, but draws back by telling the reader how "it is evident from this that I forgo many advantages of which I could avail myself" (On peut voir par là que je néglige bien des avantages que je pourrois faire valoir) (DOI 194 [199]). Infringements on the realms of theology are carefully, if mischievously, avoided by saying: I could strengthen my argument in this way, but of course I will not.

After this defense Rousseau writes that he wants to look at humanity as it "must have issued from the hands of Nature" (qu'il a dû sortir des mains de la Nature) (DOI 134 [134]). The conceptual transition in the use of 'nature' is again important. Rousseau is not speaking of any pristine essence of humanity. By 'nature' he refers to that 'succession of times and things' which has formed the object of his study, natural man. He is talking about the nature that causes the first changes. Now, it is important to note that Rousseau's references to humanity *before* these changes play no operative role in the *Discourse* whatsoever. There is nothing beyond the pure state of nature – except objects of faith, if one takes his defense against religious accusations to letter.

What about the image of Glaucus? It seems to merge this distinction that I make between god-given human nature and worldly human nature, and thus it may be seen to support interpretations such as Starobinski's. However, the image of Glaucus must be read in its context. Immediately after it Rousseau opposes the original and pristine human nature (simplicity imprinted by God) with a stark picture of contemporary humanity: all one still finds is "the deformed contrast of passion that believes it reasons and the understanding that hallucinates" (le difforme contraste de la passion qui croit raisonner et de l'entendement en délire) (DOI 124 [122]) Critique of contemporary society is an important motive for Rousseau in the *Discourse*, and he often opposes the pure state of nature with the societies he criticizes. Here Rousseau is writing from a similar perspective, but these two concepts of nature seem to merge, so the equation of original constitution and the pure state of nature by many readers is understandable. But ignoring the distinction may cause quasi-problems in interpreting the *Discourse*. That happens to Marks, who struggles with the tension between natural equality and natural inequality. He causes unnecessary problems for himself by reading all instantiations of 'nature' as referring to the same concept. (Marks 2005, 23–25)[35]. Scott claims that Rousseau does not directly address the theological notions of state of nature. Scott also misses this distinction of original and primitive nature. But so did Abbé Castel, Rousseau's contemporary who accused him of equating the pure state of nature and its "bestiality" with the state of innocence, humanity which emerged from the hands of God. (see Scott 2006b, 231–233) This is the first significant conceptual transition in the *Discourse* that shows how the meanings of 'nature' become understandable only against the background of the questions which Rousseau tries to address.

After Rousseau has briefly looked at the supposed birth of natural inequality he introduces another opposition. He talks about "man's present Nature" (la Nature actuelle de l'homme) and the difficulty in distinguishing what is 'original' (d'originaire) and what is 'artificial'

35 Marks also struggles with the term 'circumstances' in this context.

(d'artificiel) in it (DOI 125 [123]). There is again the danger of misinterpretation. It is easy to read this as an opposition of original and authentic essence versus deformation, in the style of Starobinski. But Rousseau has already used two different concepts of nature as essence: original and pristine essence versus *changing essence*. Now he is moving towards a concept of human nature that deviates from the traditional notion of essence as a model, an ideal form, or a pristine condition. In this context Rousseau is writing about the difficulties in speculating about the time of natural inequality, about the essence-natures of natural men who are already differentiated through living in a world. He is writing about the pure state of nature. The dominant concept of essence becomes radically historical, although its implications are fully realized only in *Part II*. His description, he admits, is only conjecture, and it is not likely that anyone can succeed in this task sufficiently. (ibid.)[36] But this conjecturality is very different from his earlier speculations about the state of innocence.

Rousseau's fencing with traditional concepts of essence/nature is a complex matter, which is explored further in section 4.3.1. But it should be clear at this stage that we must be careful when interpreting what kind of 'human nature' or 'human constitution' Rousseau is looking for when he asks for the possibility to "*know natural man*" (*à connoître l'homme naturel*) (DOI 125 [124], Rousseau's emphasis). In the next section I draw out the main characteristics of this natural man and his state of existence, the pure state of nature. Marks is right to point out that the description is problematic, but the analysis should not be burdened with the previous sections of Rousseau's text.

Why then did Rousseau write "the equality nature established among men" in *Epistle Dedicatory*? Does it refer to the primordial similitude of beings before the worldly changes and the onset of natural inequality? This question cannot be answered satisfactorily at this stage, as the theme of natural and moral inequality can be addressed properly only later in this chapter, but the answer is clearly no. Rousseau's changing use of 'nature' results in a seemingly contradictory idea: natural equality reigns between creatures that are naturally unequal.

36 See *Intermission: Defence* in section 4.3.1.

4.1.2. Life in the Pure state of Nature

> "...I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but, all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all: I see him sating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first Stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied." (DOI 134 [134–135])
>
> (...je vois un animal moins fort que les uns, moins agile que les autres, mais à tout prendre, organizé le plus avantageusement de tous: Je le vois se rassasiant sous un chesne, se désalterant au premier Ruisseau, trouvant son lit au pied du même arbre qui lui a fourni son repas, et voilà ses besoins satisfaits.)

With these words Rousseau opens up his description of natural man, whom he in many instances calls also 'Savage man' (l'homme Sauvage). In this section I look at how Rousseau describes the state of existence of natural man in the pure state of nature, his relation to the environment and other beings in general.

Mimesis and Abundance

This human animal is the most advantageously organized of all species, yet less optimized at least in its physical abilities. With this Rousseau refers to a general *mimetic* ability of humans, which seems at first glance very similar to *perfectibility* that is introduced later in the text (see section 4.1.3), but there is a marked difference. Perfectibility refers to the potential of developing novel faculties, and it seems to be mostly latent in the pure state of nature, whereas this unnamed mimetic ability refers to the way natural men can learn to imitate the behavior of other animals. Natural men 'observe' (observent) and 'imitate' (imitent) the behavior of other animals and, lacking their own 'instinct' (instinct), so to speak 'appropriate' or take part in (appartienne) those of other beings. (DOI 134–135 [135])

The reference is brief in the text of the *Discourse*, and it is linked to the theme of 'natural fertility' (fertilité naturelle), Rousseau's notion that uncultivated environment is more abundant. This is hardly an original position, and indeed in *Note IV* Rousseau appeals to Buffon's authority on this (DOI 192–193 [198]). But it is not just the case that Rousseau sees nature (as opposed to – literally – culture) as more productive: natural fertility is relative to the state of existence of natural man. The variety in lifestyles allowed by the mimetic nature of humans makes finding subsistence easier (DOI 135 [135]). The 'needs' (besoins) of natural men are also simpler, as can be seen in the previous quote. Even though in *Note IV* Rousseau claims that non-cultivated soil is abundant and notes that erosion is often due to cultivation,

in the main text he does not pose the idea of absolute natural abundance rather than that of *relative abundance*. This is crucial to understand, as the theme of needs is an important feature of Rousseau's social critique and philosophical anthropology. For example, Scott interprets Rousseau's claims of natural abundance as an expression of providence in nature understood as the environment. He does note the role of needs, but still he reads the passage as an expression of the embeddedness of natural man in a beneficent whole. (Scott 2006b, 235).

Humans are thus exempt from any preordained economy of nature. When Rousseau is talking about other animals, the reference of 'nature' is such a normatively ordered cosmos, a 'System of Nature' (le Systeme… de la Nature) (DOI 197 [201]) which is ordered according to 'Nature's destination' (la destination de la Nature) (DOI 196 [201]) into purposeful relations. Rousseau's remarks on the diet of natural men in *Note V* are interesting on this point. Even though in the main text to which the note is appended he has just claimed that natural man "feeds indifferently on most of the various foods" (se nourrit également de la pluspart des alimens divers) (DOI 135 [135]), in the note he offers evidence that suggests that humans are naturally frugivorous. As I noted earlier, Rousseau however tends to distance himself from any evidence based on naturalist observations. Even so, he argues, contrary to the spirit of the main text, how frugivorous life would have made nature relatively more abundant, which would strengthen his later claims about the pure state of nature (peacefulness, lack of incentive to develop) (DOI 194 [199]).

Later in *Part I* Rousseau writes: "Savage man, left by Nature to bare instinct alone, or rather compensated for the instinct he perhaps lacks, by faculties capable of initially making up for it, and of afterwards raising him far above nature…" (L'Homme Sauvage, livré par la Nature au seul instinct, ou plûtôt dédommagé de celui qui lui manque peut-être, par des facultés capables d'y suppléer d'abord, et de l'élever ensuite fort au-dessus de celle là…) (DOI 141–142 [142–143]). Note that 'nature' has a double reference. In the first instance it is a personalized dealer of essences, in the latter case (celle là) it is that essence itself, here instinctual life[37]. What is the difference between "making up for" and "rising above" nature/instinct? In his description of the pure state of nature Rousseau consistently makes a conceptual distinction between instinct and reason, and instinct is often called 'nature'. He keeps up the distinction here also. The former faculties refer to the mimetic abilities and the latter to perfectibility, development in a true sense. Only perfectibility truly removes humans from the realm of instincts and mimetic behavior. But it is also easy to interpret this quote as a suggestion that

37 Cranston has translated 'celle là' as 'instinct' incorrectly. I wish to thank Timo Kaitaro for informing me on the correct translation.

there is a connection between the two, that Rousseau sees mimesis and perfectibility as an expression of the same generic faculty of development and learning. The trouble is however that Rousseau explicitly states that perfectibility is not active in the pure state of nature, but mimetic abilities are.

Marks sees Rousseau's brief references to mimesis as proof that the depiction of the ahistorical pure state of nature does not hold up, that there is already historical development in it. Marks does not notice the difference between mimesis and perfectibility, as he is trying to reconstruct Rousseau's "considered" view of nature as a dynamic condition, to read the *Discours*e completely from the perspective of philosophical anthropology. (Marks 2005, 29) I agree that from such a methodological perspective this distinction does not seem important, but as a part of the purification of man, it needs to be explained.

Assumption of Solitude

Early on in *Part I*, when he is describing the condition of natural man, Rousseau introduces another central theme, natural solitude. He assumes that the natural men in the pure state of nature live in virtual isolation from each other, meeting only in fleeting encounters of violence and intercourse. In Rousseau's time this raised a lot of critique, for example from Buffon and Voltaire, and it has been an important factor in the interpretative disputes explored in the previous chapters. Rousseau's description differed from Diderot, for example. When Diderot explicated the philosophical meaning of 'state of nature' in his defence of abbé de Prades in 1752, he explicitly claimed that pre-social humans lived in herds by the prompting of nature, understood as instinct (see Gourevitch 1988, 29–30, fn. 10).

Natural men live "dispersed amongst the animals" (dispersé parmi les animaux) (DOI 136 [136], see also 134 [135]). Later in *Part I*, when he is discussing language, Rousseau claims that 'Mankind' (le Genre humain) is "scattered in the Woods among the Animals" (épars dans les Bois parmi les Animaux) (DOI 144 [146]). As we can see later, this *assumption of solitude* plays an important part in Rousseau's ideas about the faculties of natural man (or the lack of them) and the obstacles to development.

The assumption of solitude is extreme, to the verge of embarrassment, if read out of the context of Rousseau's purification of man. There is no family in any sense of the word, no lasting unions between individuals: "males and females united fortuitously, according to chance encounters, opportunity, and desire" (les mâles, et les femelles s'unissoient fortuitement selon la recontre, l'occasion, et le desir) (DOI 145 [147]). Mother and child stay together only for a short while, first due to immediate need of the mother – by which Rousseau most likely

refers to some sort of maternal instinct – and later out of habit which makes the mother care for the child as long as it lacks the power to fend for itself. Thus when the children no longer need care, the relationship ends. No lasting union results from that habitual relationship, however, as the mother and child cease to 'recognize' (reconnoître) each other as soon as they leave each other's sight. (ibid.) In *Note XII* Rousseau repeats the claim that in the pure state of nature man and woman stay together only during the act of procreation and part ways once "the appetite is satisfied" ([l]'appetit satisfait) (DOI 215 [217]). It is important to note that when Rousseau argues against a natural relationship of mother and child or of male and female, he uses lack of need as a central argument, in very much the same way as he builds his various *impossible transitions* (see section 4.2.1).

Peace and Love

These human animals live in the realm of instincts, and one of those drives them to procreate. Rousseau distinguishes this instinctual drive from love as we know it, from that "terrible passion that braves all dangers" (passion terrible qui brave tous les dangers) (DOI 155 [157]). He distinguishes "the moral from the Physical in the sentiment of love" (le moral du Physique dans le sentiment de l'amour). (ibid.)[38] Pure natural men are susceptible only to physical love, a general desire which drives males and females to procreate – not out of the intention to procreate but from immediate desire which stops after consummation. They cannot experience those aspects of love, which require developed notions of beauty, merit and the related 'comparisons' (comparaisons). (DOI 155 [157–158]) As we can see later, Rousseau links *comparison* and developed notions to stable human relationships. Thus natural man "heeds only the temperament he received from Nature" (écoute uniquement le temperament qu'il a reçu de la Nature) and yields to it without 'choice' (choix) (DOI 155–156 [158]). In this context 'nature' refers to instincts, but there is also the added connotation of nature as the creator. As I noted in Chapter 1, this has been a common conceptual connection.

The lack of constant desire and the lack of continuous attachments prevent physical love from becoming a disruptive influence. The pure state of nature is not broken by conflicts of envy and passion. As in many other places Rousseau takes up reports of contemporary "Savages" as a sort of proof for his description. In this case he looks at 'the Caribs' (les Caraïbes), his favorite example, who have "deviated least from the state of Nature" (écarté le moins de l'état de Nature) (DOI 156 [158])[39]. Rousseau claims that among them love does not cause

38 Gourevitch notes that a similar distinction is drawn by Buffon and Barbeyrac (Gourevitch DOI, 362–363).

39 This is the only instance in *Part I* when Rousseau qualifies his use of savages as examples of natural man. Elsewhere he takes them pretty unproblematically as humans in the pure state of nature.

havoc. He also skims over possible evidence gleaned from animal behavior, discounting the relevance of such evidence to understanding (even natural) humans. The reasons are the lack of sexual dimorphism in humans, the even ratio between males and females, and the non-cyclic mode of reproduction. In these regards humans differ from those animals who are used as analogues. (DOI 156 [159]) Still, just like when he was talking about the natural diet of humans, also here he examines an assumption *contrary* to his description. He claims that even if one could use combats over mates in many animal species as a model for humans in the pure state of nature, this would change nothing. Such recurrent conflicts do not wreak havoc among other species, so why would they disrupt the life of natural men? (DOI 156–157 [159])

Spartan or Paradisiacal nature?

In the early paragraphs of *Part I* Rousseau describes the relationship of natural man to his environment in very dark colors: "Nature deals with them exactly as the Law of Sparta did with the Children of Citizens" (La nature en use précisement avec eux comme la Loi de Sparte avec les Enfans des Citoyens) (DOI 135 [135]). Here 'nature' refers to nature as the environment: weather, seasons and beasts of prey – this is one of the few instances where the realm of signification of 'nature' approaches the dominant modern one. Personification of this nature is also apparent – then again, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, such connotations are hardly absent in modern conceptions of nature as the environment. This natural Educator makes humans develop a temperament that is robust, fit for all circumstances. Those who fail to pass the test are thrown down the mount Taygetos.[40]

It should be noted that this is different from the theme of the first changes, which was explored in the previous chapter. There Rousseau was speaking of transformation of the purely hypothetical original nature of humanity, which he distanced from his investigations. A conceptual change takes place, as the realm of signification of 'nature' moves from the hands of the divine into the concrete forces of environment. Marks does not notice this difference, which makes him to go to great lengths in order to prove that "natural man...is not natural at all", or the "Original man is not original" (Marks 2005, 24–25). Marks wishes to explain

---

Here he also makes a passing remark that approaches what is now called environmental determinism – he reiterates the old notion that hot climes rouse the passions.

40 Rousseau uses Sparta as a metaphor and an ideal in many writings, especially *Discourse on Sciences and Arts* and *Emile*. Sparta serves many functions. It epitomizes the virtues of citizenship and love of fatherland (Emile, 39–40 [249]; Shklar 2006, 228–229), but Sparta as an educator also teaches the value of necessity (Emile, 119 [361–362], 153 [410–411]). But in the current textual context the emphasis is on weeding out the weaklings, although Rousseau also discusses autarchy a bit later (see below).

away an idea of unchanged essence-nature of humans, which plays no significant part in the *Discourse* to begin with.

Marks also sees a contrast between Rousseau's earlier remarks on original humanity and this description of the Spartan nature as the environment. He considers the latter to be an expression of developmental or even evolutionary thought. But Rousseau is looking at two kinds of change, historical change of the species and individual change in an environment. As we saw earlier, he ignores the previous, for obvious contemporary reasons, but readily admits the latter. Granted, Rousseau sees the children of natural men coming to the world with the vigorous constitution acquired (sic) by their fathers and being strengthened by the same rough way of life. (DOI 135 [135]) But it would be quite a leap to read some kind of transformative doctrine or proto-Lamarckian view into this[41]. The text focuses on an individual natural man in his demanding environment.

Rousseau notes that natural men do not use tools to profoundly change their environment or the terms of their relationship to it. The lack of tools and the constant pressure of 'necessity' (la nécessité) force them to become extremely strong and adroit. (ibid.) Nature as the environment not only eliminates, it educates. On the other hand the constitution[42] of natural man is "almost unalterable" (presque inaltérable) (ibid.). In the context of natural education this remark seems obscure, but Rousseau explains it in *Note VI* which is appended to that section of the main text. As natural men live a solitary life, learned skills can never be communicated and preserved. Thus the first natural man may have been as skilful as his most remote descendants. (DOI 194 [199]) Still, Rousseau presents natural men as humanity in its physical peak, living in a state of nature "where everything proceeds in such a uniform fashion" (où toutes choses marchent d'une maniere si uniforme) (DOI 136 [136])[43]. There is a tension between the description of nature that offers obstacles and difficulties which impel development, and the depiction of nature that upholds a uniform existence.

The Spartan natural man is always near danger, and 'self-preservation' ([s]a propre conservation) is almost his only care. His life centers on fight or flight, and his constitution is developed accordingly. (DOI 139–140 [140]) Not being able to rely on the support or aid of his fellows, he needs to fend for himself, "always carrying all of oneself with one" (se porter... toujours tout entier avec soi) (DOI 135 [136]). Here Rousseau introduces the idea of *natural autarchy*, the total self-sufficiency, self-containment and independence of natural men. Au-

41 It is important to remember that the idea of historical transformation of a species did not at the time necessarily or even likely imply evolutionary relationships between species in a Darwinian sense.

42 Rousseau uses the word 'temperament' (temperament), but he describes also the physical abilities and the skills of natural men.

43 'State of nature' without qualifications, but it clearly refers to the pure state of nature.

tarchy in general plays an important role in Rousseau's philosophy, especially in his descriptions of primitive societies (see Chapter 5), and his latter ideas on education and freedom. Here Rousseau describes it in an extreme "natural" form.

Sometimes the Spartan nature makes way to virtually paradisiacal vistas of peace and tranquility. In his 'original condition' (condition originaire), which in this context refers to the pure state of nature[44], natural man spends "tranquil and innocent days" (des jours tranquilles, et innocens) (DOI 141 [142]). Aside from the occasions of gaining sustenance, he "is at peace with all of Nature and a friend to all of his kind" (est en paix avec toute la Nature, et l'ami de tous ses semblables) (DOI 198 [203]) Just like in their range of sustenance, natural men seem to be exempt from the preordained order of nature which destines one species to be the prey of another. No animal "naturally wars against man" (fasse naturellement la guerre à l'homme) (DOI 136 [137]).

Natural health

While 'the natural infirmities' (les infirmités naturelles) threaten all animals, including humans, Rousseau claims that in the pure state of nature illnesses are extremely rare. It is primarily the weakness of infancy and old age that troubles natural men. (DOI 136–137 [137]) Again there seems to be either a slight contradiction or a difference in emphasis with the idea of the Spartan nature. Of course one may say that weeding out the weakest children and the elderly (by predation, presumably) is the primary mechanism of the Spartan nature, and lack of illness does not go against this thread. However, I later show how this change follows the differences in textual context and the according philosophical motives. For example, later Rousseau seems to reel back this argument: "...while the sick Savage abandoned to himself alone has nothing to hope for but from Nature, in return he has nothing to fear but from his illness..." (...que si le Sauvage malade abandonné à lui-même n'a rien à espérer que de la Nature; en revanche il n'a rien à craindre que de son mal) (DOI 138 [139]) But here the focus of the text is not lack of illness in the pure state of nature as such, it is the absence of medicine – and the critique of contemporary medicine.

Earlier I noted how Rousseau denied humanity as a part of a system of nature (see *Mimesis and Abundance*). On the other hand, Rousseau handles the lifespan of humans and the rearing of young as part of a system of nature – but the influence of these remarks is limited by the description of the pure state of nature. Rousseau refers to 'rules' (regles) directing number of young (DOI 137 [137]), claiming that observations of 'Nature's destination' (la

44 Note that Rousseau used almost identical expressions in the description of 'first changes', but the realm of signification is now radically different.

destination de la Nature) and 'the most general System of Nature' (le Systême le plus général de la Nature) give yet another reason for classifying humans as a frugivorous species (DOI 196–197 [201]). The accuracy of his evidence aside[45], Rousseau once again withdraws from using such reflections: "this is not the place for them" (mais ce n'en est pas ici le lieu) and they "do not pertain to my Subject" (ne sont pas de mon Sujet) (DOI 197 [201], 137 [137]). Despite the specifics of the evidence he insists on the absence of illness in the pure state of nature.

Vagabonds

Humans in the pure state of nature are not only solitary; they lack a permanent abode, or even temporary dwellings. They wander "naked...without habitation" (le nudité, le défaut d'habitation) (DOI 139 [139]) and do not have "a fixed Dwelling" (Domicile fixe) (DOI 144 [146]). In this 'primitive state' (état primitif) "without Houses or Huts or property of any kind, everyone bedded down at random and often for one night only..." (n'ayant ni Maison[s], ni Cabanes, ni propriété d'aucune espéce, chacun se logeoit au hazard, et souvent pour une seule nuit...) (DOI 145 [147])

❧ ❧ ❧

I have thus far described some general characteristics of Rousseau's depiction of life in the pure state of nature: solitude, relative stability of life, and humanity as instinctual. On the other hand I have pointed out some tension in that description. Rousseau describes humans as part of a system of nature, but at the same time he denies that they are limited by such natural rules. Life in the pure state of nature is full of hardship and conflict, but it is also harmonious. Earlier I pointed out how the expectation of conceptual unity in the *Discourse* makes these and other parts of the description seem problematic or incoherent. In the next section I examine in detail how Rousseau describes human faculties in the pure state of nature. He addresses many subjects which were important for the philosophers of the Enlightenment, and which have had strong status in the European philosophical tradition in general: free will, reason, perception and language, for example. In the following I point out how the limitations set by Rousseau's purification of man dominate all these discussions, and how many apparent problems stem from that.

45 Rousseau's "observations" on frugivores and number of young were criticized by Charles-Georges Le Roy. In his replies Rousseau emphasized that civilization has changed the environment of animals so much that observations do not necessarily tell much about the pure state of nature. His reply is not especially brilliant, but it is a good indication of the primacy of his assumptions and not of the evidence. (LeRoy, 229–230 [237])

4.1.3. Faculties of natural man, and lack thereof

Despite his uneasiness regarding naturalist evidence, Rousseau often draws natural men in the pure state of nature close to other animals: "Such is the animal state in general" (Tel est l'état animal en général) (DOI 140 [140]). This vagabond and robust solitary Savage, especially in his bodily abilities, resembles in many ways animals living in nature. But as I have pointed out, the meaning of 'nature' is no simple issue here. The word refers to a non-cultivated environment, instinct, preordained creation, or the invisible hand of a personified God/Nature. Sometimes these meanings converge, and sometimes they are more distinct.

It is when Rousseau changes his perspective that more differences between humans and other animals emerge: "Until now I have considered only Physical Man; Let us now try to view him from the Metaphysical and Moral side" (Je n'ai considéré jusqu'ici que l'Homme Physique; Tâchons de le regarder maintenant par le côté Métaphysique et Moral.) (DOI 140 [141]) Rousseau builds on a terminological opposition physical–moral that was common at the time. 'Moral' was defined as that which concerned *mores*, but also as that which concerned the spiritual (*Dictionnaire historique* 1992, 1271). 'Physical' was traditionally linked to many of the same meanings as 'natural' had. In opposition with 'moral' it referred for example to the corporeal aspects of humanity. (ibid., 1509) But from the viewpoint of the conceptual divisions that are familiar to us, physical cannot be simply opposed with mental, for example. What we would usually call the realm of mental would be divided between these 18th century realms of physical and moral. Some aspects of human perception and cognition were often called physical (or mechanical). However, in many contexts Rousseau sets the division line between physical and moral firmly on the line natural-social (more on this later). Thus it is no simple matter to define what Rousseau means here by the terms 'physical and 'moral', especially in relation to the 'metaphysical', since the meanings are formed by the fuzzy lines which he draws between instinct and freedom, nature and reason, animal and human – all of which depend on the layered stories he is telling. I turn next to these faculties.

Instinct and Free Will

The first great difference that Rousseau draws between humanity and other animals is also the most familiar, and one about which he has very little original to say. He opposes the machine-like or instinctual behavior of 'the Beast' (la Bête) to the human capacity of self-determination, the ability of humans to withstand or overcome their instinctual nature (DOI 140 [141]; Dent 1992, 117). Rousseau does not give it any single name; he writes about

'capacity as a free agent' (qualité d'agent libre), 'act of freedom' (un acte de liberté) and 'the will' (la volonté) (ibid.) Dent calls it a rudimentary form of free will (Dent 2005, 61). The important thing to remember is that 'freedom' (liberté) is a central term for Rousseau, and so laden with meanings in his later works, that this capacity of self-determination should not be confused with his other concepts of freedom.

An animal is machine-like, working only by 'senses' (sens) dealt by nature, which allow it to "wind itself up" (se remonter elle même) and react to the world (DOI 140 [141]). In describing the workings of the senses Rousseau follows in the footsteps of his old friend Condillac, a follower of Locke, albeit his description is quite crude. By their senses animals gain 'ideas' (idées), apparently just simple impressions of the world, and are able to 'combine' (combine) them up to a point. This, Rousseau implies later, can be understood merely by 'Physics' (la Physique) and 'the Laws of Mechanics' (les Loix de la Mécanique). (DOI 140–141 [141–142])

In addition to senses nature has given every animal 'instinct' (instinct). Animal "chooses or rejects by instinct...the Beast cannot deviate from the Rule prescribed to it" (choisit ou rejette par instinct...la Bête ne peut s'écarter de la Regle qui lui est préscrite) (DOI 140 [141]). The meaning of 'nature' is again multifaceted. Nature deals the cards of essence, giving animals their senses and instincts. But nature is also the instinct itself, which operates in the animal, the Lawgiver of instinctual "rules" and the commanding voice that the animal obeys. (DOI 140–141 [141–142]). These meanings of 'nature' enforce each other, emphasizing that non-human animals are through and through in the instinctual realm – according to their essence and a preordained order of nature. The central conceptual opposition is thus instinct–freedom.

It is not so simple, however. First of all, Rousseau does not in this context differentiate humans and animals on the basis of cognitive abilities. In fact he sees 'the understanding' (l'entendement) working in both of them on the same sensationalist basis, with only differences in degree: both receive and combine ideas. In both beings this is the realm of 'Physics' (see *Limited mind and needs* below). Rousseau actually points out these commonalities in order to proclaim that 'the specific difference' (la distinction spécifique) is the human capacity of self-determination or free will:

> "...man contributes to his operations in his capacity as a free agent. The one [the animal] chooses or rejects by instinct, the other by and act of freedom." (DOI 140 [141])

(...l'homme concourt aux siennes, en qualité d'agent libre. L'un choisit ou rejette par instinct, et l'autre par un acte de liberté.)

Rousseau emphasizes that a human experiences the same 'impression' (impression) of instinct but can recognize his 'freedom' (liberté) to either follow the instinct or to bypass it (DOI 141 [141–142]). Later when he is describing the condition of natural man Rousseau claims that "To will and not to will" (Vouloir et ne pas vouloir) are among the first operations of his 'soul' (ame) (DOI 142 [143]). The consciousness of a choice constitutes the specific difference of humanity. Yet immediately after introducing this specific difference Rousseau concedes that there are still unsolved difficulties regarding this issue, and thus he tones down the importance of this distinction and perhaps leaves open the possibility of some kind of self-determination in other animals. In most of his descriptions of the pure state of nature this faculty has a very small or nonexistent role. Mostly Rousseau emphasizes submission to the call of instinctual tendencies. Where does this discord stem from?

This section of the *Discourse* is textually somewhat disconnected. Rousseau discusses animals and humans detached from any concrete environment, even the pure state of nature. Let us recall Rousseau's remark about purging all 'supernatural gifts' from his description of the pure state of nature. Indeed he does, as mostly in the description of the pure state of nature natural man begins from a near animal-like condition[46], where free will, that 'spirituality of his soul' (la spiritualité de son ame) (DOI 141 [142]), has little relevance. But for clear historical reasons, and perhaps because he truly believes so, he affirms that humanity indeed is different from the other animal species on this account, regardless of time and place. I believe that this is the 'Metaphysical' side of humanity to which he refers, the existence of soul irrespective of any temporal considerations.[47] On the other hand, Strauss suggests that by leaving open the question of free will Rousseau is making his doctrine neutral in the conflicts over the existence of soul (Strauss 1992, 256–257).

Regardless of Rousseau's actual beliefs on this, free will is not at all important in the description of the pure state of nature. Natural man is metaphysically a free being, not tied to instinct, but in the pure state of nature he lives mostly in the instinctual realm. In the *Discourse* the central conceptual opposition is not instinct–freedom but physical–moral. As I explained

46 According to a highly problematic conception of animality, of course.

47 Gourevitch includes "reason or understanding" in the realm of signification of 'Metaphysical', which I think is an error. 'Understanding' has in this context a wider realm of signification which includes elements from the general sensationalist account of cognition, including animals. 'Reason' on the other hand mostly refers to a specifically human and socially and historically derived faculty (more on this later). And most of all, Rousseau denies that human cognition constitutes a specific difference. (Gourevitch DOI, 358)

earlier, this was a common terminological pair at the time, but the concepts of physical and moral in the *Discourse* are ambiguous, and deeply tied into the distinction between the pure state of nature and society. A short explanation is enough for now: in Rousseau's terms, in the pure state of nature humans live in the physical realm (even in their mental aspects), as they lack any enduring human relationships and recognition of other humans as beings alike – this conceptual distinction is built on the assumption of solitude.

Masters reads too much into this fragment of the *Discourse*, as he tries to read a consistent argument out of the tension between the metaphysical claim and the description of the pure state of nature. He ends up merging free will with perfectibility or the capacity of development in general (Masters 1976, 147–149). Paul de Man goes much further and sees free will as the power that drives humans in the pure state of nature towards development (de Man 2006, 113). Thus both of them miss or ignore the hermetic quality of the pure state of nature, the pains Rousseau takes to precisely *detach* it from development.

Perfectibility

If the status of free will is ambivalent in the *Discourse*, Rousseau introduces another faculty which according to him clearly differentiates humans from animals: 'perfectibility' (perfectibilité) or 'the faculty of perfecting oneself' (la faculté de se perfectionner) (DOI 141 [142]). As I mentioned earlier, its relationship to Rousseau's remarks on appropriating the instincts of other beings, the mimetic ability, is problematic. It should be noted that there are significant textual differences. Earlier Rousseau was looking at natural humans in the pure state of nature and describing how they are able to adapt to their circumstances. The mimetic ability is an inborn faculty in the traditional sense. Perfectibility is described very differently:

> "...a faculty which, with the aid of circumstances, successively develops all the others, and resides in us, in the species as well as in the individual, whereas an animal is at the end of several months what it will be for the rest of its life, and its species is after a thousand years what it was in the first year of those thousand." (ibid.)
>
> (...faculté qui, à l'aide des circonstances, développe successivement toutes les autres, et réside parmi nous tant dans l'espéce, que dans l'individu, au lieu qu'un animal est, au bout de quelques mois, ce qu'il sera toute sa vie, et son espéce, au bout de mille ans, ce qu'elle étoit la premiere année de ces mille ans.)

'Perfectibility' was at the time a neologism. Although Rousseau contributed significantly to its latter widespread use, he did not invent it. (Passmore 1970, 179; Cranston DOI, 177) What meanings did the term have, and what did Rousseau mean with it? In his book *The Perfectibility of Man* John Passmore classifies several notions of perfection of humanity, but his approach is very inclusive: he constructs "perfectibilism" as a general intellectual trend, not tied to specific terms or subject matters. (Passmore 1970, 26–27) Thus the full classification is not relevant here, and a few selected remarks should suffice. Passmore notes the strong Aristotelian influences in various formulations of human perfection, the idea of natural ends and their attainment as actualization of inner potentialities. Such an idea was not restricted to theological views, as natural ends and the accompanying idea of teleological development were part of many more or less secular philosophical views. (ibid., 17–18, 26) Perfection was also understood as following an ideal model (ibid., 24–26). Passmore interprets Rousseau's conception of perfectibility mainly through *Emile*. He emphasizes an idea of a natural temperament and its free development, thus interpreting perfectibility as a teleological process[48]. But on the other hand he notes that Rousseau in the *Discourse* argued against perfectibility as a guarantee of positive moral development. (ibid. 178–179)

Raymond Wokler reads the *Discourse* consciously from the perspective of philosophical anthropology and mostly disregards the detachment of the pure state of nature from history. He emphasizes free will and the "indeterminacy" of humans, their freedom from instinctual restraints, as a moving force in history. Thus he sees human choice and the faculty of self-perfection as active forces in the pure state of nature. For him perfectibility is a human faculty which drives development, but without a predetermined end. (Wokler 1995, 42–45) Marks's reading is similar. Perfectibility is an inner force of human nature, which impels development even in the pure state of nature.[49] (Marks 2005, 100) Dent's reading is somewhat humbler, without inferences to the status of the pure state of nature: perfectibility is the ability of learning from experience and modifying the environment in order to survive, as opposed to "wired-in" instinctual behavior (Dent 1988, 96).

Should Rousseau's concept of perfectibility be understood as development towards a natural end, a faculty which allows development in general, or something else? I'll return to the previous quote. In this context Rousseau makes no reference to the goals of human development, nor does he anywhere in the *Discourse*. He is looking at a history of human develop-

48 Passmore notes that the idea of natural ends was used both to criticize and to legitimize present conditions: humanity has been perfected according to its natural end, or that perfection is still lacking or has been deviated from (Passmore 1970, 26). According to him Rousseau in *Emile* is using the notion of natural ends for both purposes.

49 Marks sees this too as evidence that Rousseau's remarks on historical detachment of the pure state of nature are a nonessential part of the *Discourse*.

ment, which has taken place, and especially he is speculating on the history of those societies which he sees around him. His perspective is retrospective and does not include a notion of natural ends. And although he calls perfectibility 'a faculty', he gives no description of its specific function but rather points out how the development of *other faculties* takes place with "the aid of circumstances". The reference to circumstances is crucial. The statue of Glaucus is not transformed by an inborn faculty; it is always affected by the environment. But precisely what does that environment consist in?

Later in *Part I* Rousseau claims that perfectibility is not active in the pure state of nature, as the solitary and vagabond natural men could not "perfect and enlighten one another" (se perfectionner, et s'éclairer mutuellement) (DOI 144 [146]). In *Note X* he claims that 'genuine Savage men' (véritables hommes Sauvages) lived dispersed and thus had no occasion to develop (développer) their 'virtual faculties' (facultés virtuelles) (DOI 205 [208]). Perfectibility requires *relationships*, other humans as a part of the living environment. Without human relations perfectibility remains latent. In some sense Rousseau seems to claim that perfectibility is a feature of human nature from the start. For example, in the famous *Note X* on great apes and creatures alike he emphasizes that monkeys lack perfectibility, "the specific characteristic of the human species" (le caractére spécifique de l'espéce humaine) (DOI 208 [211]). But it plays no part in the solitary condition.

The big problem with understanding the meaning of 'perfectibility' in the *Discourse* is indeed its close textual relation to the purification of man. As we can later see, the development of those "other faculties" like reason seems to be impossible in the pure state of nature. Why does Rousseau so tantalizingly hint at an inborn tendency of development and then raise obstacles against it? In his philosophical anthropology Rousseau emphasizes the role of external factors in human development, both human and nonhuman – this becomes evident in *Part II*. In *Part I* Rousseau uses this opposition between inner nature and external impetus to amplify the importance of latter. This however in itself would not require such a strong distinction between nature and history. But the purification of man is linked to other concerns also, especially denying that humans have an inner drive for sociability, and Rousseau needs to work with this strong distinction that he uses for other ends. Thus by necessity the status of perfectibility is left undecided within the pure state of nature.

The limited mind and needs

After Rousseau has introduced perfectibility he immediately notes that natural man begins with "purely animal functions" (les fonctions purement animales) (DOI 142 [143]). In describing the animal state Rousseau returns to the theme of "mechanical" thought, which he

had brushed earlier. In the pure state of nature humans can only 'perceive' (appercevoir) and 'sense' (sentir) basically in the same way as other animals. (DOI 142 [143]) This is followed by a section of text where Rousseau begins musing about the general nature of 'the human understanding' (l'entendement humain). As we could see earlier, Rousseau used the term 'understanding' with a wide realm of signification, which covered also some aspects of that which he called physical or mechanical. 'Understanding' referred to cognition in general, both human and animal. Here Rousseau seems to use the term in a similarly extensive meaning, whereas 'reason' is a developed form of human understanding which the natural men lack (DOI 142–143 [143–144]). Rousseau however does not give any exact definitions for these terms here. The main function of this textual fragment is not to describe the development of reason and its workings, but to describe the limited state of natural man. Thus I do not explore the relationship of Rousseau's ideas to the general philosophical discussions of his time. Instead I focus on the way he uses the excursion on human understanding to highlight the ignorance of natural men.

Rousseau grafts a cycle of self-improvement, which in rough terms accounts for the development of reason. In rough terms indeed, because he focuses here on the role of passions and leaves understanding and reason merely as questions of 'knowledge' (connoissances) and 'ideas' (idées):

1) Development originates in 'needs' (besoins). But Rousseau divides needs into two kinds: those which are based on 'knowledge' (connoissances), and those which stem from "the simple impulsion of Nature" (la simple impulsion de la Nature). (DOI 142 [143]) 'Nature' again refers to instinct, a physical need in Rousseau's terms: "the Physically necessary, which Nature itself requires" (necessaire Physique, que la Nature même demande) (DOI 212 [214])[50].

2) From the needs originate passions. Here Rousseau uses the word 'passion' in a wide meaning, which includes any 'desires' (desirs) and 'fears' (craintes), even those of developed humans in more complex situations. (DOI 142 [143])

3) The motivation to 'know' (connoître) originates in passions, in the desires to enjoy or avoid something. As I mentioned before, Rousseau's ideas on knowing and understanding are here very simplistic. He is not looking at how something becomes known. (ibid.)

50 Note that the concepts of physical and moral do not follow the same division line than earlier. Here the focus is on the distinction between nature (as solitude) and society.

4) Growth of knowledge in turn leads to new needs, "for one can only desire or fear things in terms of the ideas one can have of them" (car on ne peut desirer ou craindre les choses, que sur les idées qu'on eu peut avoir) (ibid.).

The status of needs and passions is a bit ambiguous. In this section new ideas simply breed new needs, but in the accompanying *Note XI* Rousseau paints a more complex picture. He claims that most of human needs – not those of natural men – are needs 'by habit' (par l'habitude) prior to which they were not needs (DOI 212 [214]). Earlier in *Note IX* he has expressed a similar thought, describing how luxury develops into necessity as it degenerates human 'sensuality' (sensualite) (DOI 199 [204]). The reference to degeneration is linked to Rousseau's early concerns in *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, which still resonate in *Discourse on Inequality*. Like many others, Rousseau was looking for a workable distinction between true (or natural) and false needs as a normative yardstick to judge contemporary societies. This has also a more general dimension: for social humans, needs can become "true", felt as true, as they are naturalized or reified. In addition to habit these developed needs can be needs by desire, as "one does not desire what one is not in a position to know" (l'on ne desire point ce qu'on n'est pas en état de connoître) (DOI 212 [214])[51]. Thus passions also mediate between knowledge and needs. The idea of naturalization of needs is important for Rousseau's philosophical anthropology, as I show in Chapter 5.

In a nutshell, passions induce the growth of knowledge, which in turn (working through passions and habits) creates new needs. This is not an especially ingenious or original account. Of course Rousseau would write more, and much more profoundly, on such themes in *Emile*, for example. But in this textual context these issues remain marginal, as Rousseau is focusing on describing the distinctive features of natural man. The needs of natural man are true, natural in the sense of necessary. Rousseau purifies natural man in yet another way by limiting his mind and needs.

Rousseau claims that natural man is deprived of every sort of 'enlightenment' (lumiéres), which in this context refers to all knowledge which surpasses the uniform life in the pure state of nature. There "...his Desires do not exceed his Physical Needs" (Ses desirs ne passent pas ses besoins Physiques) (DOI 142 [143]). His knowledge is tied to the natural 'goods' (biens) and 'evils' (maux) of his simple experiential world.

51 Note the word 'état', which in the Discourse mostly refers to states of existence. Gourevitch's translation does not convey that.

> "Whence it follows that, since Savage man desires only the things he knows, and knows only the things the possession of which is in his power or easy to achieve, nothing must be so calm as his soul and nothing so limited as his mind." (DOI 212 [214])
>
> (D'où il suit que l'homme Sauvage ne desirant que les choses qu'il connoît et ne connoisant que celles dont la possession est en son pouvoir ou facile à acquerir, rien de doit être si tranquille que son ame et rien si borné que son espirit.)

Purely natural man is thus not part of the developmental cycle of the growing needs, passions and knowledge. Nor can the cycle, as Rousseau describes it, explain the origin of the growth of human understanding. On this account, nothing emerges spontaneously from the soil of natural needs. In the solitary and self-sufficient natural life nothing drives natural man towards development. (This is confirmed by the emphasis Rousseau later lays on communication, social relations and environmental relations in the development of reason.) Rousseau goes on to describe a closed circle which prevents purely natural man from stepping outside his simple existence:

> "His imagination depicts nothing for him; his heart asks nothing of him. His modest needs are so ready to hand, and he is so far from the degree of knowledge necessary to desire to acquire greater knowledge, that he can have neither foresight nor curiosity[52]." (DOI 143 [144])
>
> (Son imagination ne lui peint rien; son cœur ne lui demande rien. Ses modiques besoins se trouvent si aisément sous sa main, ei il est si loin du degré de connoissances nécessaire pour désirer d'en acquérir de plus grande, qu'il ne peut avoir ni prévoyance, ni curiosité.)

In the pure state of nature everything proceeds in a uniform and unchanging fashion: "Forever the same order, forever the same revolutions." (C'est toujours le même ordre, ce sont toujours les mêmes révolutions.) (ibid.)[53] It should be noted that in an intervening paragraph Rousseau once again goes off on a tangent about the effect of circumstances on human development. But since it would go against the current purification of man, he once again mellows the statement with conditionals: "If I had to do so, I could easily... But without resorting to the uncertain testimonies of History..." (Il me seroit aisé, si cela m'étoit nécessaire... Mais sans recourir aux témoignages incertains de l'Historie...) (DOI 142 [143–144])

52 Thus by implication Rousseau adds *imagination* and *sense of time* to the complex development of reason.

53 'Revolution' refers here to repeating cycles (seasons, celestial realms et cetera), not revolutions in the sense of profound changes.

Lack of communication

> "All knowledge requiring reflection, all Knowledge acquired only from chains of ideas and perfected only successively, seems to be altogether beyond the reach of Savage man for want of communication with his kind, that is to say for want of the instrument used in such communication, and of the needs that make it necessary." (DOI 194 [199])
>
> (Toutes les Connoissances qui demandet de la réflexion, toutes celles qui ne s'acquiérent que par l'enchaînement des idées et ne se perfectionnent que successivement, semblent être tout-à-fait hors de la portée de l'homme Sauvage, faute de communication avec ses semblables, c'est-à-dire, faute de l'instrument qui sert à cette communication, et des besoins qui la rendent nécessaire.)

As dictated by the assumption of solitude, natural men live dispersed and thus without need of communication. The instrument which they lack is of course language. In the famous Note X Rousseau emphasizes again that natural men lack 'speech' (parole), as do "species of Anthropomorphic animals" (espéces d'animaux Antropoformes) mentioned in travelers' reports[54] – those he surmises might be "genuine Savage men...still in the primitive state of Nature" (véritables hommes Sauvages... encore dans l'état primitif de Nature) (DOI 205–207 [208–210]). He denies that speech is a specific difference of human species. 'The organ of speech' (l'organe de parole) is natural – as in inborn and original – but speech itself is not. Speech is not needed in the chance encounters between males and females, and even the communication between mother and child in the fleeting period of dependence is restricted to temporary idioms created by the child (DOI 145–146 [147])[55].

To strengthen his claim he uses a similar rhetoric technique as he has earlier used regarding naturalist evidence: he seemingly accepts a supposition that is contrary to the description of natural men, that they indeed had a developed form of reason. The point of this mock-admission is to argue that even if it were so, all the acquired knowledge of these reasoning natural men would die with them due to the lack of language[56]. Of course this supposition is against Rousseau's conception of reason itself, linked as it is to stable human relationships

54 Basically great apes, although Rousseau's sources of course do not classify them in any consistent way, as they rely more on legends of "men of the woods", *orang-outangs* or *homo sylvestris*. (Gourevitch DOI, 375) Rousseau uses also the term 'orang-utan', which at the time referred generally to any great ape (Wokler 1995, 45).

55 The idea of language as the creation of the child comes from Condillac, to whom Rousseau refers fondly. Rousseau met him during his stay in Lyons in 1740, and later their relationship strengthened during Rousseau's first Paris period in 1742. But as can be seen, *in this context* Rousseau denies that childhood relationships could help explaining the origin of language. (Cranston 1991, 142, 156; Gourevitch DOI, 259; OC III 1323, 147/2,3)

56 See later Rousseau's accusation that others make natural men "philosophers before men". Here he explicitly states that even if he were to make the same mistake, it would not change anything.

and language. Rousseau also uses lack of language to support the assumption of solitude: the scattered savages would meet without recognizing and speaking to each other. (DOI 144 [146]) They would view each other scarcely differently as the other animals around them.

I return to the theme of language in section 4.3.2 when I discuss various *impossible transitions*. Rousseau seems to have created a problem for himself by supposing a speechless solitary being. But the real question is of course why and for what purposes did he make such a postulate.

Natural temperament and Savage cunning

In the early pages of *Part I* Rousseau compares the ideas of various preceptors – Hobbes, Montesquieu, Cumberland and Pufendorf – about the temperament of natural man. As opposed to his many later comments on these and other philosophers, Rousseau does not here accuse them of any fundamental mistakes regarding the realm of signification of 'natural man' (see more on *critique of projection* in 4.3.1.). That is, he reads them as genuinely discussing humans in the pure state of nature, and 'nature' referring to a point of origin – instead of, say, making claims about human *inborn* nature regardless of time and place, as opposed to nurture or education. But of course he discusses their views on the terms of his own description of solitary natural men, with the accompanying assumptions: lack of many abilities and a certain kind of environment, especially the lack of absolute scarcity.

It is questionable how fitting his readings are. Victor Gourevitch states that at least Pufendorf's description of the state of nature was quite similar to Rousseau's. If he is right, then the realm of signification of the (pure) state of nature of both thinkers is similar: original human abandoned to his own resources (Gourevitch DOI, 356–357). But it is questionable whether Rousseau refers to Hobbes in the proper context (more on this in 4.3.1.). Cranston notes that Rousseau most likely had only a scanty knowledge of Hobbes (Cranston DOI, 176). Rousseau claims that according to Hobbes man is naturally 'intrepid' (intrépide). Rousseau poses it in opposition with Cumberland's and Pufendorf's claims that natural man is 'timid' (timide): bravery versus cowardice, basically. (DOI 135 [136]) It is hard to know if Rousseau is referring to a specific text of Hobbes or just making an offhand remark based on second-hand knowledge, but if the earlier is true, the most likely source is *De Cive* (I, 4, 12), noted by Starobinski, Gourevitch and Granston in their annotations of the *Discourse*. It should be noted that in these passages Hobbes is talking about aggressiveness, a desire and will to hurt, which stem from passions and vainglory or vain esteem of oneself. (OC III 1308, 136/2; Gourevitch DOI, 356; Cranston DOI, 176) Rousseau mentions aggressiveness in passing, but in this context he focuses on the issue of bravery versus timidity and agrees with Hob-

bes's assessment[57] (DOI 136 [136–137]). Ironically, later in the case of natural aggressiveness he attacks Hobbes's views.

But in one sense Rousseau disagrees with all these thinkers, as he is subtly redefining the meaning of 'natural' in this case. Natural man does not have any basic temperament; rather his temperament is understood in relation to his environment and his knowledge of it. Even within the limits of his purification of man Rousseau does not look at humans in isolation, as entities abstracted from their world. He contends that natural man would indeed be timid when he met "objects he does not know" (les objets qu'il ne connoît pas) and could not differentiate between "the Physical good or evil" (le bien et le mal Physiques) they posed for him (DOI 136 [136])[58]. But in the pure state of nature, uniform and unchanging, such instances would be rare.

In *Limited mind and needs* I examined Rousseau's description of natural man who was closed out of the possibilities of development. For him the environment was uniform and unchanging, and he lacked the consciousness of time and the ability of foresight. The focus was on stability. In this context Rousseau claims that natural man will always 'measure' (mesurer) himself against the other animals and make 'comparison' (comparaison) as to his relative strength or weakness (ibid.). Note that both Montesquieu in *Spirit of Laws* (*Espirit des lois*) and Pufendorf in *Right of Nature and of Nations* (*Le Droit de la nature et des gens*), both works which Rousseau certainly read, argued on natural timidity on the basis of absolute natural weakness (OC III 1308, 136/3,5; Gourevitch DOI, 356–357). Rousseau is building his argument against such notions. He argues that natural man soon learns that he surpasses most animals in 'skill' (adresse) and has the 'choice' (choix) of fleeing when the comparison is unfavorable. (DOI 136 [136]) This is a recurrent pattern through *Part I*: when Rousseau needs to detach natural man from the historical narrative, he makes him as rudimentary as possible. But when Rousseau describes the concrete life of natural man, he affirms the possibilities of learning.

In the same way, when Rousseau uses so called savages as examples of natural man, he is always looking at them as individuals, not as members of primitive societies. Just like Montesquieu, Rousseau uses reports (or rather anecdotes) of contemporary 'Savages' (Sauvages)

57 Scott misreads this passage and sees Rousseau quarreling with Hobbes. He also claims that the previous *Note VI* is targeted against Hobbes, which makes no sense in this textual context. Scott however perceptively notes that Montesquieu criticized Hobbes in very much the same way as Rousseau on his views on human aggressiveness. (Scott 2006b, 237, 253, fn. 6)

58 The meaning of 'Physical' is again connected to the opposition solitude–social: natural man meets everyone and everything as "a thing", without any moral considerations or recognition of similarity. This issue is addressed more fully below in the subsection on *Amorality and Natural morality*.

to prove his point[59]. He mentions natural tools like sticks and rocks as examples of savage skill, which make them 'ferocious' (féroce) in the eyes of potential predators. Speaking of his favorite examples' the Caribs' (les Caraïbes) in a 1782 addition to the text he also mentions bows and arrows, clear products of artifice (DOI 136 [136–137]). This is a clear disjunction in the description of natural man. He is talking about precisely that kind of *natural learning*, 'natural weapons' (armes naturelles) and 'mechanical prudency' (prudence machinale), which he introduces much later in the historical narrative (DOI 161–162 [165]). But this takes place in the middle of the description of the unchanging pure state of nature that he distances from any possibilities of development.

Lack of time and memory

Natural man is the ultimate *carpe diem* creature, living constantly in the moment. He has no conception of time, past or future, nor the ability of foresight:

> "His soul, which nothing stirs, yields itself to the sole sentiment of its present existence, with no idea of the future, however near it may be, and his projects, as limited as his views, hardly extend to the close of the day." (DOI 143 [144])
>
> (Son ame, que rien n'agite, se livre au seul sentiment de son existence actuelle, sans aucune idée de l'avenir, quelque prochain qu'il puisse être, et ses projets bornés comme ses vûes, s'étendent à peine jusqu'à la fin de la journée.)

When he is talking about the difficulty or near impossibility for natural men to invent complicated arts like agriculture Rousseau again refers to their inability to 'foresee' (prévoir) (DOI 143–144 [144–145]). Earlier I noted how Rousseau denied enduring relationships between males and females on this basis. Even though the female stays with her child out of mutual need and habit, the male – fittingly enough – has no idea of the consequences of the hasty intercourse of pleasure. And if male and female happen to meet later, they will have no memory of each other. (DOI 215–216 [217])

Lacking sense of time and future inevitably means that natural men cannot conceive of their own death. Savage elders die of old age without anyone noticing that they are gone – well, they are solitary savages – and "almost without noticing it themselves" (et presque sans s'en appercevoir eux mêmes) (DOI 137 [137]). Rousseau claims that neither natural man nor any other animal knows death – and thus does not fear it. Gaining that knowledge is "one of man's first acquisitions on moving away from the animal condition" (une des premieres

59 Montesquieu spoke literally of "empirical confirmation" (Gourevitch DOI, 356).

acquisitions que l'homme ait faites, an s'éloignant de la condition animale) (DOI 142 [143]). These were common notions about animals in Rousseau's day, and in the public consciousness they persist even today. Starobinski notes that Rousseau is drawing from Buffon and Montesquieu in his writing about animal sense of time and death (OC III 1319–1320, 143/3, 1321, 144/3). Gourevitch states that "the sentiment of present existence" was a common expression, and Buffon proposed that also animals possessed it – but not 'consciousness' of one's existence (Gourevitch DOI, 358).

Interestingly enough, Rousseau does later refer to animal memory. But the context is different, as Rousseau is discussing understanding and language in general terms, in very much the same way as earlier (see *Limited mind and needs*). In the latter context Rousseau links memory to the faculty of 'imagination' (l'imagination). (DOI 148 [149–150]) This requires a few words. In the *Discourse* the word 'imagination' appears in a significant context only a few times. Earlier in *Limited Mind and Needs* we saw how the word described the ability to literally "picture" the future and was thus linked to foresight – according to Rousseau, natural man and thus animals have neither. Later in the book Rousseau twice denies the faculty of imagination from natural men. In both cases it has a similar meaning: imagining and anticipating future pleasures (DOI 155–156 [158]) and developing new kinds of pleasures and 'tastes' (goûts) (DOI 200 [204])[60] In *Part II* Rousseau classes imagination among 'developed' (développées) faculties, which clearly means this kind of productive imagination. But when Rousseau attributes imagination to animals and thus purely natural men in the discussion over memory, he is evidently discussing reproductive imagination, the ability to recollect and reproduce images of the world. Imagination is linked to memory and particular ideas.[61] (See 4.2.1, on the development of language.) It should be noted that in Rousseau's simplistic sensationalist account of animal cognition the *formation* of ideas is not linked to imagination in either sense.

Amorality and Natural morality

Rousseau's distinction between 'physical' and 'moral' has been addressed earlier, and I have shown that Rousseau places natural man firmly in the realm of the physical. But I also noted how Rousseau uses these terms in slightly different ways: first, as different aspects of a human being (e.g. natural man), and second, as different realms in which humans live. When he is discussing notions of natural goodness or wickedness in the latter half of *Part I*, Rousseau states that men in the pure state of nature did not have any 'moral relations' (relation morale) between them. They did not have any 'duties' (devoirs), 'vices' (vices) or 'virtues'

60 In the latter case Rousseau is talking about homosexuality.
61 Marks does not notice this clear divergence in the meanings of 'imagination' (Marks 2005, 101).

(vertus), and they were neither 'good' (bons) or 'wicked' (méchans) (DOI 150 [152]). From this one might surmise that Rousseau speaks of moral in the familiar sense of morality or in the sense of pertaining to *mores* (*Dictionnaire historique* 1992, 1271).

This however is not sufficient to understand the meaning of 'moral' and 'physical' in the *Discourse* in general. It should be noted that Rousseau calls the above mentioned meaning 'the ordinary sense' (sens ordinaire) (ibid.). Later Rousseau notes that natural man has 'sluggish passions' (passions si peu actives) and 'salutary curb' (un frein si saultaire) – natural man is literally reined in by instincts of self-preservation and is thus not likely to engage in futile conflicts. Even the humans living in the Spartan nature are not overtly aggressive. They are "fierce rather than wicked" (plûtôt farouches que méchans). (DOI 154 [157]) Earlier I mentioned how Rousseau denied any inborn natural temperament, and 'fierce' should be read with that in mind. Natural man is inherently neither aggressive nor timid, but fierce when the occasion calls. Rousseau connects this with the assumption of solitude:

> "...since they had no dealings of any kind with one another; since they therefore knew neither vanity, nor consideration, nor esteem, nor contempt; since they had not the slightest notion of thine and mine, or any genuine idea of justice; since they looked on any violence they might suffer as an easily repaired harm rather than as a punishable injury, and since they did not even dream of vengeance except perhaps mechanically and on the spot like the dog that bites the stone thrown at him..." (ibid.)
>
> (Comme ils n'avoient entre eux aucune espéce de commerce; qu'ils ne connoissoient par conséquent ni la vanité, ni la considération, ni l'estime, ni le mépris, qu'ils n'avoient pas la moindre notion du tien et du mien, ni aucune veritable idée de la justice; qu'ils regardoient les violences, qu'ils pouvoient essuyer, comme un mal facile à réparer, et non comme une injure qu'il faut punir, et qu'ils ne songeoient pas même à la vengeance, si ce n'est peut-être machinalement et sur le champ, comme le chien qui mord la pierre qu'on lui jette...)

Once again we have a densely packed passage of text. The *amorality* of natural man builds on the assumption of solitude and the resulting lack of any human relations. Natural men have no passions or sentiments, nor the corresponding relative ideas, which are founded on consideration, regarding other humans as humans. In *Part II* and in Rousseau's later writings, especially *Emile*, 'consideration' is a blanket term which describes certain relations in specifically human realm. Rousseau mentions often 'recognition' or uses similar verb forms, in a similar meaning. Recognition is an important theme especially in *Emile*, and it is important in his historical narrative, but within the purification of man Rousseau mostly refers to it as a feature which is missing in the life of natural men. In this context a tentative defi-

nition should suffice: recognition means seeing another human as a being like oneself, and the ability to form relationships is based on this – which inevitably involves both (all) parties recognizing each other. Without such human relations, natural men act mechanically, relating to everything as things[62]. The most important meanings of 'physical' and 'moral' in the *Discourse* are built on this distinction. The meaning of 'physical' is built within the purification of man, and beyond that it has little significance. 'Moral' is theoretically more important, but Rousseau explicates its meaning better in the historical narrative and the description of social humanity, humanity proper. For now it is defined through negation. In any case, these concepts of physical and moral are mutually exclusive, not different aspects of the same being.

Here Rousseau also mentions 'natural goodness' (bonté naturelle), perhaps the most famous catchall term by which his philosophy is described (DOI 154 [156]). In the *Discourse* the expression is used rarely, but in *Emile* it is central. There are different interpretations of the notion of natural goodness, but applying them to the text of the *Discourse* is problematic. I will first look at Rousseau's introduction of a sort of natural morality before I comment on this issue, as it is in itself another source of contestation.

In the *Preface* Rousseau speaks of two 'principles prior to reason' (principes antérieurs á la raison) and "the first and simplest operations of the human Soul" (les premiéres et plus simples opérations de l'Ame humaine) (DOI 127 [125–126]). These operations are natural (inborn) instincts of humanity and thus not subject to purification. The first of them interests humans in their 'well-being' (bien-être) and 'self-preservation' (la conservation...même), the second one inspires repugnance to seeing any 'sentient Being' (être sensible) suffer. (ibid.) Note that here Rousseau emphasizes that the latter instinct applies especially to similar beings as oneself, and he has denied natural men the ability to recognize such relations of similitude. But in this context Rousseau is talking in a general sense, not specifically about the pure state of nature (see more in 4.3.1). Later he calls the latter instinct "the internal impulsion of commiseration" (l'impulsion intérieure de la commisération) (DOI 127 [126]). It is only near the end of *Part I* that he returns to the issue, when he is describing the amoral state of natural men. In the attached *Note XV* he calls that stare 'primitive state' (état primitif) or 'the genuine state of nature' (le véritable état de nature) (DOI 218 [219]), and in the main text he links the description with other animals (DOI 152 [154]), emphasizing an opposi-

62 Thinglikeness is a constant and complex theme in *Emile*. In that text natural man is an analogue to a child in some ways, but the life of natural man is also a source of educational advice during a certain age and in a certain environment. But in the *Discourse* there is not a trace of such an association: natural man is a being whose characteristics are dependent on its specific environment and ways of life – and solitude is the key factor.

tion between natural man and social man. He introduces three key terms of his philosophy: '*amour propre*', '*amour de soi-même*' and '*pity*' (Pitié).

Especially the relationship between amour propre and amour de soi-même has been controversial. The mere divergence of translations is a good indicator of the various interpretations. Gourevitch translates them as 'vanity'[63] and 'self-love', though he sometimes uses the original terms (DOI 154 [156], 218 [218]). Cranston translates them as 'pride' and 'self-love' (Cranston DOI, 167). Cress uses 'egocentrism' and 'love of oneself' (Cress DOI 106). In the Masters & Kelly edition 'amour propre' is not translated, and 'amour de soi-même' is 'love of oneself' (Masters & Kelly DOI, 91). In his *A Rousseau Dictionary* Dent offers literal translations 'self-love' and 'love of oneself', but he chooses to use neither of them. He sticks to the original terms and criticizes the existing translations of 'amour propre', mentioning 'self-aggrandizement' in addition to the previous (Dent 1992, 31, 33–34). Rousseau uses both terms extensively also in *Emile*, which adds to the controversy as he speaks of them in a different way and sometimes adds qualifications to amour propre: it can be 'flattered' (flate), 'fomented' (fomenté) or 'extended' (etendons) (Emile 68 [289], 251 [544], 252 [547])[64]. Thus interpreters of Rousseau often speak of inflamed or petulant amour propre. As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, interpreters of Rousseau often lean more heavily on either the *Discourse* or *Emile* but extend their conclusions to Rousseau's philosophy in general. In this work I refrain from taking part in this discussion other than exploring how these terms figure in the *Discourse* and how my approach might explicate the role of some rather extreme statements by Rousseau.

Rousseau defines amour propre and amour de soi-même in *Note XV*. He calls them both 'passions' (passions), but as we have seen, his terminology tends to be a tad loose. They are very different in 'nature' and in their 'effects' (effets):

> "Self-love is a natural sentiment which inclines every animal to attend to its self-preservation and which, guided in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. Amour propre is only a relative sentiment, factitious, and born in society, which inclines every individual to set greater store by himself than by anyone else, inspires men with all the evils they do one another, and is the genuine source of honor." (DOI 218 [219])

63 An especially problematic choice, as Rousseau also speaks of 'vanity' (vanité).

64 Rousseau also writes about naturalized forms of amour propre, forms which people come to see as natural, as in original (Emile 215 [494]); about transformation of amour de soi-même into amour propre (Emile 235 [522–523]), and about the ambiguous nature of amour propre (Emile 244–245 [536–537]).

(L'Amour de soi-même est un sentiment naturel qui porte tout animal à veiller à sa propre conservation et qui, dirigé dans l'homme par la raison et modifié par la pitié, produit l'humanité et la vertu. L'Amour propre n'est qu'un sentiment rélatif, factice, et né dans la société, qui porte chaque individu à faire plus de cas de soi que de tout autre, qui inspire aux hommes tous le maux qu'ils se font mutuellement, et qui est la véritable source de l'honneur.)

Thus it seems that their difference in nature – here as in constitution, essence – is extreme. Amour de soi-même is indeed a principle prior to reason, common to all animal life. (Rousseau uses 'reason' here to refer to a developed form of human understanding which emerges in historical development.) Amour propre is created in society. Their effects are also separate. Amour de soi-même seems to be the instinctual drive to self-preservation, which later functions in a modified form in social man. Amour propre seems to come close to egocentrism. In a later passage Rousseau seems to echo these thoughts: "It is reason that engenders amour propre, and reflection that reinforces it." (C'est la raison qui engendre l'amour propre, et c'est la réflextion qui le fortifie.) (DOI 153 [156]) Again in that context reason is explicitly opposed to the pure state of nature.

Rousseau states that in the pure state of nature amour propre does not exist. It should be clear that he is talking about the solitary natural men who are without relationships, developed reason or stable communication. He expressly denies from that state the ability to make 'comparisons' (comparaisons) and to experience consideration. Natural men "are unable to appreciate one another or to compare themselves with one another" (ne savent ni s'apprecier ni se comparer) (DOI 218 [219]). A solitary being cannot desire esteem – not to mention deference, love or admiration – from anyone. On this basis Rousseau further elucidates the idea of amorality in the pure state of nature. Natural men view each other very much like they view other animals and the actions of other humans as 'natural occurrences' (évenemens naturels) (DOI 218 [219–220]). Thus we can see that this extreme division between amour de soi-même and amour propre is firmly lodged in Rousseau's purification of man and the conceptual opposition of solitude and society. The conceptual opposition of physical and moral rests on this same division line. The distinction between these two passions or sentiments, and especially the previous sections of text, has been important in the conflicts over interpreting the *Discourse*. Critique of amour propre has been seen as evidence of condemnation of social life per se, for example. The material in the *Discourse* must be examined in the context of Rousseau's divergent philosophical motives, before we can even begin to consider its role in answering such questions.[65]

65 The philosophical notion of some kind of self-love was of course nothing new. Helena Rosenblatt mentions such notions in the works of Hobbes and Pufendorf, and notes how the postulation of self-love (or egoism et cetera) was linked to the definitions of natural law (Rosenblat 1997, 91–93). In section 4.3.1 I explore how Rousseau used his notion of amorality to attack such views.

What about pity? It is the second one of those principles prior to reason, an instinctual tendency just like self-preservation. It has been "given to man in order under certain circumstances to soften the ferociousness of his amour propre or of the desire for self-preservation prior to the birth of amour propre" (donné à l'homme pour adoucir, en certaines circonstances, la férocité de son amour propre, ou le désir de se conserver avant la naissance de cet amour) (DOI 152 [154]). Rousseau names it 'Natural virtue' (vertu Naturelle), but it is not immediately clear what can be read into this use of 'nature' (ibid.). In humans it precedes the use of 'reflection' (réflexion) or developed reason, and Rousseau claims it is active in all animals, just like the instinct of self-preservation[66]. He also links pity to the care and selfless protection mothers show for their offspring. We should note that this differs significantly from his description of maternal relationships in the pure state of nature elsewhere in the book, where Rousseau sees maternal care to emerge from a need. But again the textual context is different. When Rousseau denied any familial relationships he was making a case for solitude in order to argue against natural development of language (see 4.2.1). Here he is arguing against the idea of natural aggressiveness or wickedness. He alludes to Mandeville with quite evident, even smug, satisfaction, claiming how even this "most extreme Detractor of human virtues" (le Detracteur le plus outré des vertus humaines) was forced to admit the principle of pity or commiseration (DOI 152–153 [154–155])[67].

Rousseau's depiction of humanity in the pure state of nature oscillates between emphasis on the amorality of physical relations and description of natural morality formed by these primordial instincts. What about his allusion to 'natural goodness' in this context? In its textual context the term refers clearly to pity that keeps the creatures of amour de soi-même from needless violence. In the state of nature it "takes the place of Laws, morals and virtue, with the advantage that no one is tempted to disobey its gentle voice" (tient lieu de Loix, de mœurs, et de vertu, avec cet avantage que nul n'est tenté de désobéir à sa douce voix). (DOI 154 [156]) Natural man seems to be quite a benign creature. As I showed earlier, elsewhere Rousseau described relatively peaceful relations in the pure state of nature by referring to solitude. There was no need of pity or any other form of natural morality. Now pity emerges as a more active restraint. Also, in this context the more violent aspects of the life of natural man fade to the background.

66 Rousseau however qualifies his statement by referring to 'evident signs' (signes sensibles) of pity in animals.

67 Rousseau follows Mandeville in stating that pity is not a virtue but an instinctual/pre-rational impulse (Masters & Kelly DOI, 181–182). After his particularly gory thought-experiment about devoured babies in prison cells Mandeville calls pity "clear'd and distinct from all other passions", more powerful than moral virtues (*An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools* from *The Fable of the Bees*, 1714 edition, quoted in Gourevitch DOI 361–362).

The tension between amorality and natural morality has been another source of conflict in Rousseau-research. Dent has proposed a powerful but controversial reading of Rousseau's conception of natural goodness and his use of the terms 'nature' and 'natural' in general, but he interprets them mainly through *Emile*. For him, Rousseau's central notion of naturalness is Aristotelian: it refers to features that further a good life, self-preservation and freedom from domination (Dent 1988, 16–17; Dent 1992, 174–176; Dent 2005, 97). As I have shown, Dent dismisses textual evidence that points to naturalness as something which is untouched by human hand (Dent 2005, 97) or especially natural as pre-social, connected to the pure state of nature (Dent 1988, 15). His aversion to such allusions seems to come from disagreement with views that see Rousseau championing natural goodness as an *ideal* of solitary life and idolizing the beneficence of immediacy and instinct (Dent 1992, 174). I agree that such a reading of the *Discourse* is extremely problematic or downright false, but Dent goes too far in dismissing much of the material in the *Discourse* as simply immature of nonessential. His Aristotelian reading is interesting, but I maintain that the Aristotelian conception of naturalness is not important in the *Discourse* – it may even be nonexistent. The meanings of 'nature' in the *Discourse* should be interpreted from the viewpoint of the plurality of motives of that work itself.

Dent's reaction is understandable in the light of many previous interpretations of Rousseau. Masters tries to refute the idea that Rousseau depicts the pure state of nature as amoral (or pre-moral). He is looking for Rousseau's system and thinks that such a notion of amorality would create incoherence between *Emile* and the *Discourse*. For Masters, pity becomes the basis of natural goodness in the pure state of nature, and consequently sentiment becomes the guide of humanity, and not reason. (Masters 1976, 153–157) Scott similarly equates Rousseau's words about the 'physicality' of natural men and the natural goodness of pity, seeing this as yet another proof how Rousseau tries to "justify" nature (Scott 2006b, 242–244). In the following I wish to show that amorality has a central role in the book, as it functions as a counterpoint to critique. Pity as natural goodness is marginal, and within Rousseau's historical narrative it has virtually no role at all.

❧ ❧ ❧

In the previous two sections I have given many examples of the conflicts in interpretation, which Rousseau's depiction of the pure state of nature has spawned. There is the tension between metaphysical free will and the instinctual existence of natural man, between lack of development and natural learning, and between the differing moral registers. I also pointed out how the text includes tangential sections where Rousseau discusses language, under-

standing and other themes in general terms, not limited to addressing the pure state of nature. If Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature is read as a unified construction, it seems to be incoherent and not always very interesting philosophically.

But if the description is not read as a unified construction, if instead the varying descriptions of the pure state of nature and natural man are read in their primary contexts, we can see that these differences correspond with changes in the dominant philosophical motive. The adjoining claim is that many issues in Rousseau-literature that I have referred to are quasi-problems brought on by faulty assumptions of conceptual continuity. In the next section I offer additional evidence for the claim that the purification of man is an intentional literary device by showing how Rousseau has detached the pure state of nature from possibilities of development, and how this allows him to limit its use into specific contexts. Repeated detachment of the pure state of nature also questions the structure of the *Discourse* as a narrative. In the latter part of this chapter I examine in detail the specific uses of the purification of man.

4.2. Detachment from History

If the various tensions in the preceding description of natural men in the pure state of nature were ignored, it could very well be interpreted as the point of origin in a historical narrative, even if the transition from solitary existence to history is inherently problematic. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, some interpreters have claimed that Rousseau supported transformist or even proto-evolutionary ideas, seeing his disclaimers about naturalist evidence only as defenses against religious persecution – which he would face later, but on different grounds. Even if this is denied, there are clear links from the pure state of nature to the developmental narrative in *Part II*, some of which have been mentioned before. One may focus on the theme of natural obstacles and natural learning, and perhaps interpret perfectibility as a developmental tendency, a potential faculty with the drive to actualization.

Rousseau however repeatedly detaches the pure state of nature from history, from possibilities of development. It seems to be impossible for the natural man to leave his vagabond solitude. These aspects of the *Discourse* must be examined and explained. When he is describing life in the pure state of nature in the early pages of *Part I,* Rousseau writes:

> "Finally, unless one assumes the singular and fortuitous concatenations of circumstances, of which I shall speak in the sequel [*Part II*], and *which could very well never have occurred*, it is for all intents and purposed clear that he who first made himself clothes[68] or a Dwelling thereby provided himself with things that are not very necessary..." (DOI 139 [140], emphasis mine)
>
> (Enfin, à moins de supposer ces concours singuliers et fortuits de circonstances, dont je parlerai dans la suite, *et qui pouvoient fort bien ne jamais arriver*, il est clair en tout état de cause, que le premier qui se fit des habits ou un Logement, se donna en cela des choses peu necessaires...)

He proclaims things that stand in the way of development: the lack of proper circumstances and the lack of need for development. In *Note X*, when he is talking about men of the woods, those 'genuine Savage men', Rousseau proposes that they do not lack the wit to use fire, but they do not need it. All animals, including humans, are 'naturally lazy' (naturellement paresseux) and avoid unnecessary work. (DOI 207–208 [211]) These remarks do not necessarily constitute detachment from history. Rousseau just states that the beginning of development was an improbable event; that something happened which offset the relative natural abundance. But there are other more powerful statements. When Rousseau is talking about the meager mental faculties of natural man he asks: "...who fails to see that everything seems to remove from Savage man the temptation as well as the means to cease being a savage?" (... qui ne voit que tout semble éloigner de l'homme Sauvage la tentation et les moyens de cesser de l'être?) (DOI 142–143 [144]) Let us now look at these more serious obstacles.

4.2.1. Impossible Transitions

Obstacles to the growth of knowledge

Earlier I discussed Rousseau's description of the limited mind of natural man and its 'mechanical' character. After that description Rousseau expressly states that the distance between 'pure sensations' (pures sensations) and 'the simplest knowledge' (plus simples connoissances) is so great that it is "impossible to conceive how a man could, by his own strength alone, without the help of communication, and without the goad of necessity, have crossed so great a divide" (impossible de concevoir comment un homme auroit pû par ses seules

68 A bit earlier Rousseau mentioned the ability of natural men to 'appropriate' (s'approprier) the skins of animals against the elements. It seems to be in slight discrepancy with this statement.

forces, sans le secours de la communication, et sans l'aiguillon de la nécessité, franchir un si grand intervale) (DOI 143 [144])[69].

Solitude, lack of communication and the security of relative abundance all keep natural men from the cycle of mental development described in section 4.1.3, *Limited mind and needs*. The first example is use of fire. Rousseau speculates that without communication this skill has been painstakingly learned countless times, with the aid of 'different chance occurrences' (de différens hazards), but it has always died with the inventor. (ibid.) Again we can see a tension between *Part I* and *Part II*. Chance occurrences, contingent environmental factors, are important in Rousseau's historical narrative in *Part II*, but there he does not even hint at such fundamental difficulties (see 5.1.)

Agriculture is the next and even more interesting example. First or all, Rousseau notes that such developed skills require much 'labor' (travail) and 'foresight' (prévoyance), both of which the natural man lacks. But most of all, such complex practices as agriculture are "dependent on other arts" (tient à d'autres arts), the development of which is itself problematical in the solitary natural state. (ibid.) Echoing again the themes of *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* Rousseau surmises that agriculture was born not to yield more food but to cater to grown needs due to new 'predilections' (préférences) and developed 'taste' (goût), both of which are absent in the pure state of nature[70]. (DOI 143 [144–145]) Rousseau is here of course drawing on the idea of relative natural abundance and the accompanying idea of rudimentary needs.

Still again he makes an assumption that is contrary to his own description. He asks the readers to suppose first, that all the instruments of agriculture had "dropped from Heaven" (tombés du Ciel) in the midst of natural men, without those other arts "which can quite obviously be pursued only in a society that has at least begun" (qui très évidemment n'est pratiquable que dans une société au moins commencée). Second, that they had overcome their natural laziness, their hatred of all 'sustained work' (travail continu). Third, they had learned to 'foresee' (prévoir) their future needs. And fourth, that they had somehow gained all the complex skills needed in agriculture[71]. To facilitate the need of agriculture he supposes that population growth has overcome the relative natural abundance, making 'natural produce' (productions naturelles) insufficient[72]. (DOI 143–144 [144–145])

---

69 Note that Rousseau uses the term 'knowledge' in a more specific sense than before, distinguishing the 'mechanical' formation and combination of ideas from it.

70 Rousseau denied such 'taste' (goût) of 'delicacy' (délicatesse) also earlier (DOI 140 [140]). He makes a similar remark in connection with 'physical love' (DOI 155 [158]).

71 In his poetic flourish Rousseau notes how Gods had to be invented in order to understand the acquisition of such skills.

72 Here 'nature' is defined in opposition to *culture* or *artifice*.

After all these suppositions which Rousseau rallies against his own purification of man, he raises yet another problem. Lack of social organization would make it terminally insecure for any human to rely on agriculture, as his produce could be 'despoiled' (dépouillé) by anyone. Agriculture cannot emerge when the land has not been 'divided' (partagée) among humans, when "the state of Nature is not abolished" (l'état de Nature ne sera point anéanti) (DOI 143–144 [145]). This quite obviously is not *pure* state of nature. The term 'nature' is defined here in opposition with the *convention* of property. Even though Rousseau is in this textual context claiming how difficult, even impossible, the development of new skills and reason is in the pure state of nature, we can see how he uses this opportunity to lay the foundations of his later ideas on property in *Part II* by momentarily changing the meaning of 'nature' in an assumption which is contrary to the current textual context.

The Impossible invention of language

For Rousseau the development of language is closely linked with the development of mind. In *Part I* he sometimes discusses 'speech' (parole) and 'language' (langage) and their relationship with 'Mind' (l'Espirit) from a general viewpoint, just like he earlier had described the general nature of human understanding. Much of what he says has again been adopted from Condillac, and Rousseau is not shy about this, to the contrary. He pays homage to his old friend, almost (he says) leaving the whole issue at quoting Condillac – but just almost. (DOI 145 [146]) Rousseau has issues with something Condillac says, and that critique is part of a wider critical array, which Rousseau builds in this book. This section on language is not especially ingenious as such, but it is an important part of his purification of man.

Rousseau sees communication or 'the use of speech' (l'usage de la parole) as a prerequisite of human relationships and especially the growth of human understanding. Starobinski calls language "the primordial instrument" which allows humans to acquire and conserve the other instruments (OC III, 1322, 146/2). Rousseau describes the central place of language in human development:

> "If one considers how many ideas we owe to the use of speech; How much Grammar exercises and facilitates the operations of the Mind; if one thinks about the inconceivable efforts and the infinite time the first invention of Languages must have cost; if one adds these reflections to those that preceded, then one can judge how many thousands of Centuries would have been required for the successive development in the human Mind of the Operations of which it was capable." (DOI 144 [146])

(Qu'on songe de combien d'idées nous sommes redevables à l'usage de la parole; Combien la Grammaire exerce, et facilite les operations de l'Espirit; et qu'on pense aux peines inconcevables, et au tems infini qu'a dû coûter la premiére invention des Langues; qu'on joigne ces réflexions aux précédentes, et l'on jugera combien il eût falu de milliers de Siécles, pour développer successivement dans l'Espirit humain les Opérations, dont il étoit capable.)

In this densely packed paragraph Rousseau combines the themes of language and his earlier musings on other arts[73]. The distance between the speechless solitary being and social humanity is immeasurable, and bridging it requires inconceivable efforts (or difficulties, even suffering – 'peines') and infinite time. This may very well be read just as a poetic expression and not as genuine detachment from history. But next Rousseau turns to the conundrum of the invention of language itself, where the detachment is much more pronounced.

Rousseau's problem with Condillac and many others is that they "assumed what I question, namely some sort of society already established among the inventors of language" (supposé ce que je mets en question, savoir une sorte de société déjà établie entre les inventeurs du langage) (DOI 145 [146], see more in 4.3.1, on *critique of projection*)[74]. Rousseau leans on his assumption of solitude and wonders how languages could have developed in a solitary condition. As we have seen, in Rousseau's pure state of nature even the "natural languages" between mother and child would be temporary idioms. If natural men had no 'relations' (correspondance), "one cannot conceive the necessity or the possibility of this invention if it was not indispensable" (on ne conçoit ni la nécessité de cette invention, ni sa possibilité, si elle ne fut pas indispensable) (ibid.) The first question is therefore: how language could have become necessary?

Once again Rousseau makes an assumption which is contrary to his description, that the gulf between the pure state of nature and the need of languages had been crossed, that languages had indeed become necessary (DOI 146 [147])[75]. Rousseau does not explicate on this assumed transition, as it clearly goes outside the purview of his purification of man and the timeless existence in the pure state of nature, but we can see some indications in his previous discussion on agriculture (growth of population and the end of abundance). But here that is not an issue, because even if that contrary assumption is accepted, Rousseau asks the reader

73 The phrase "those [reflections] that preceded" refers to the previous paragraph of the *Discourse* where Rousseau addressed the obstacles against developing new skills and knowledge.

74 In fact Condillac's "society" was pretty rudimentary. He imagined two isolated children who begin from natural signs and slowly form the conventions of meaning. (Gourevitch DOI, 359; Condillac's *l'Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines* (1746), quoted in OC III 1323, 146/3)

75 It is a good indication of Rousseau's awareness of the peculiarity of his style that he appended here *Note XIII* in which he anticipates critique against the *Discourse* and suspects that 'the lettered folk' (le peuple lettré) will not tolerate his 'supposed paradoxes' (prétendus paradoxes) (DOI 216 [218]).

to focus on a much more difficult problem: how might languages "have begun to get established" (purent commencer à s'établir) (DOI 146 [147])? He depicts the most powerful impossible transition in the book, a veritable chicken-and-the-egg -problem. In a nutshell, the establishment of language seems impossible on the basis of solitary speechless beings, "for if Men needed speech in order to learn how to think, they needed even more to know how to think in order to find the art of speech" (...car si les Hommes ont eu besoin de la parole pour apprendre à penser, ils ont eu bien plus besoin encore de savoir penser pour trouver l'art de la parole). (DOI 146 [147]) Rousseau refuses to make natural men "philosophers before men", a fallacy of which he accuses many preceptors and contemporaries (see 4.3.1). He has intentionally created a dilemma by assuming a speechless solitary being and by denying the development of human abilities in the pure state of nature. Nearly all of his musings on language in *Part I* converge to highlight this problem.

Rousseau points out two problems in the establishment or institution of language. First, how did "the sounds of the voice" (les sons de la voix) come to be taken for "the conventional interpreters of our ideas" (les interprétes conventionnels de nos idées)? And even if that were assumed – another contrary assumption – second, how was the art of conventional representation itself born? This problem is of course built on a simple conception of language as relationships between ideas and signs, and the mechanical understanding of the natural man: formation of ideas from sensations and their combination. With such simple minds and rudimentary ideas and no preceding concourse of humans it is indeed "scarcely possible to form tenable conjectures about the origin of this Art of communicating one's thoughts, and of establishing exchanges between Minds" (de sorte qu'à peine peut-on former des conjectures supportables sur la naissance de cet Art de communiquer ses pensées, et d'établir un commerce entre les Espirits) (DOI 146 [147–148]).

Despite these preliminary objections, Rousseau embarks on speculations about the origins of language. The first and the most universal language was 'the cry of Nature' (la cri de la Nature). Here 'nature' obviously refers to the instinctual, and Rousseau does not call this cry language in any serious sense. This natural language is tied to immediate situations and related passions such as fear and pain. Note that Rousseau mentions that one of its uses is to implore help, implying perhaps some sort of recognition of other humans as potential allies at least, a condition not met by his general description of the pure state of nature. It should be remembered however, that Rousseau is writing under a contrary assumption. On the other hand he does say that the cry of nature is wrested from natural men by 'a sort of instinct' (une sorte d'instinct) – so perhaps he is talking about a cry to the whole world, of

asking for aid in a poetic sense. (DOI 146 [148])[76] Be as it may, he claims that it was not very useful in "the ordinary course of life, where moderate sentiments prevail" (le cours ordinaire de la vie, où regnent des sentimens plus moderés) (ibid.) Rousseau refers to his peaceful and tranquil depictions of the pure state of nature, where violence and danger is rare. Once again it can be seen how Rousseau's depiction oscillates according to the context. When he wants to emphasize the lack of need for communicating one's passions, tranquility comes to the foreground.

Next Rousseau suddenly jumps forward to a time "[w]hen men's ideas began to extend and to multiply, and closer communication was established among them" (Quand les idées des hommes commencérent à s'étendre et à se multiplier, et qu'il s'établit entre eux une communication plus étroite) (ibid.). He clearly deviates from the dominant perspective of *Part I* and begins to write from a genealogical perspective. Some impossible transitions from solitary existence to mutual needs have taken place. He quickly looks into gestures and inflections of voice as rudimentary forms of communication, which are not dependent on 'prior agreement' (détermination antérieure) and have a mimetic relationship to ideas concerning objects and actions in the everyday environment of natural men. These however are somehow replaced by 'articulations of the voice' (les articulations de la voix) which lack the mimetic relationship to certain ideas but on the other hand are "better suited to represent them all" (plus propres à les représenter toutes) (DOI 147 [148]). But such representation would require 'common consent' (commun consentement) for them to become 'instituted signs' (signes institués). The natural men who have just begun communicating do not have the instruments – speech itself – to implement such a consensus, nor have they motivation for this qualitative leap. (DOI 147 [148–149]). Once again the speculation hits a wall.

In the following paragraphs Rousseau wishes to show additional difficulties facing humans even if they had breached this wall. These doubly speculative inventors of language still had a limited mind: "all particulars presented themselves to their mind in isolation, just as they are in the picture of Nature" (tous les individus se présentérent isolés à leur espirit, comme ils le sont dans le tableau de la Nature) (DOI 147 [149]). (Here 'nature' refers to the Creation or the environment as experienced by a human, without many of the connotations Rousseau usually attaches to the term.) Thus the vocabulary of these humans was cluttered with particular names and primitive verbs, and even adjectives were too 'abstract' (abstrait)

76 Starobinski refers to similar notions in *Emile*. (OC III, 1324, 148/1) But one should remember that in the *Discourse* Rousseau is talking about humans in the speculative pure state of nature, alone but robust, whereas in *Emile* he is looking at a concrete child who is born already among language and society, and he intends to say something about meeting a child in that environment. There 'the first condition of man' (le prémier état de l'homme) is want and weakness in absolute sense: childhood. (Emile 65 [286])

for them[77]. To create "common and generic designations" (dénominations communes, et génériques) for species or beings they would have had to be much more knowledgeable (DOI 147–148 [149]). Once again Rousseau refuses to make these humans "philosophers before man". To erect this barrier Rousseau radically intellectualizes many of the elements of developed languages: "Every general idea is purely intellectual" (Toute idée générale est purement intellectuelle) (DOI 148 [150])[78]. He also makes them dependent on speech. Thus the first substantives could have been only proper nouns, and the extension of human mind and the generalization of words happened "by means which I cannot conceive" (par des moyens que je ne conçois pas) (ibid.).

So we have humans who have transcended the barriers of the need for association, and the problem of institution of signs, and who have begun to extend their mental faculties. Still they were unable to get very far due to their 'ignorance' (l'ignorance) and lack of experience – their limited and simple way of life could not prepare them for the need of sufficient amount of tags for species of beings and their various aspects. Nor were they 'willing' (vouloient) to go through all the trouble to gain unnecessary knowledge (another reference to natural laziness). If they could find no "model of them in Nature" (modéle dans la Nature) (DOI 149 [151]), how could they grasp the most general notions? After erecting these layered obstacles to development Rousseau concludes:

> "As for myself, frightened by the increasing difficulties, and convinced of the almost demonstrated impossibility that Languages could have *arisen* and been *established* by *purely human means*, I leave to anyone who wishes to undertake it the discussion of this difficult Problem: which is the more necessary, an already united Society for the institution of Languages, or already invented Languages for the establishment of Society?" (DOI 149 [151], emphasis mine)
>
> (Quant à moi, effrayé des difficultés qui se multiplient, et convaincu de l'impossibilité presque démontrée que les Langues ayent pû naître, et s'établir par des moyens purement humains, je laisse à qui voudra l'entreprendre, la discussion de ce difficile Problême, lequel a été la plus nécessaire, de la Société déjà liée, à l'institution des Langues, ou des Langues déjà inventées, à l'établissement de la Société.)

77 Rousseau claims that abstractions are not 'natural' operations of the mind, by which he refers to the constitution of human understanding in the pure state of nature.

78 Starobinski claims that Rousseau intellectualized general ideas to the excess and consequently retarded the ideas available to natural man. He compares Rousseau to Condillac, who avoided many such problems by assuming certain abilities for natural man. But Starobinski does not ask why Rousseau created this conundrum. (OC III 1326, 149/7)

Of course Rousseau does not really let go. In *Part II* he approaches the issue of language and society in a very different way, and this problem of impossible transition virtually vanishes. But within the limits of the purification of man neither of these alternatives, society or language, are viable. There is no discernible path of development away from the solitary and rudimentary humanity of the pure state of nature. The birth of language is a mystery, as it seems to require a more developed mind, and its institution seems to require a speaking humanity capable of forging conventions. Natural man has been totally detached from history. There is surely one chance to explain this all, to which Rousseau alludes by his phrase "purely human means" – just like the speculative tools of agriculture, language could have dropped from the sky. If one reads only Rousseau's remarks on language in *Part I*, this divine intervention may seem to be the only chance.

4.2.2 No Return

The problematic status of the pure state of nature is complicated even further by another important feature in the *Discourse*, Rousseau's insistence that historical return is impossible. In Rousseau-literature this theme has been important, especially considering Rousseau's supposed primitivism (see Chapters 2 and 3). For those who have insisted that Rousseau demanded "a Return to Nature" and that he idolized the solitary vagabond life of the natural man, ignoring the remarks about the impossibility of return is an Achilles heel. Denial of return offers justification for attacking such interpretations, but it is equally hard to ignore Rousseau's recurrent adoring remarks of natural men. An added complication is that Rousseau sometimes seems to praise life in certain primitive stages of his historical narrative[79]. I will begin with the first instantiation of Rousseau's rhetoric of no return in the *Exordium*:

> "Discontented with your present state, for reasons that herald even greater discontents for your unhappy Posterity, you might perhaps wish to be able to go backward; And this sentiment must serve as the Praise of your earliest forbears, the criticism of your contemporaries, and the dread of those who will have the misfortune to live after you" (DOI, 133 [133])
>
> (Mécontent de ton état present, par des raisons qui annoncent à ta Postérité malheureuse de plus grands mécontentemens encore, peut-être voudrois tu pouvoir rétrograder; Et ce sentiment doit faire l'Eloge de tes premiers ayeux, la critique de tes contemporains, et l'effroi de ceux, qui auront le malheur de vivre après toi.)

79 I will examine this in Chapter 5.

This is indeed the whole *Discourse* in miniature, where Rousseau spreads his intentions wide open. The readers of the *Discourse* are living in troubled times which are likely to continue, so deep-set are the reasons of unhappiness. The earliest forbears whom Rousseau depicts lived indeed a happy life – happy because they lacked both content and discontent, as we have seen – but what can be offered them is only praise. On the basis of their natural life one can criticize the contemporary society, but to strive to such a forgone existence would be a recipe of terror. Rousseau both denies any "return to nature" and explains how speculations of the first times can function as wells of inspiration and as sabers of critique.

In *Note IX* Rousseau offers a much more substantial denial of return which also highlights the immense distance of natural man in the pure state of nature from any humans who have begun their development. He opposes the "perfected" societies of his time with the solitary life of the savage and asks whether a return should be preferable: "What, then? Must Societies be destroyed, thine and mine annihilated, and men return to live in forests with the Bears?" (Quoi donc? Faut-il détruire les Sociétés, anéantir le tien et le mien, et retourner vivre dans les forêts avec les Ours?) (DOI 203 [207])[80]. In fact, he makes a call of return to nature, to a life of innocence and peace, but it is fundamentally ironical. It should be noted that in the main text this note is linked to the opposition between the pure state of nature and contemporary societies, so here the denial of nature is not targeted at historical primitive societies. The context of this denial is determined by the purification of man, not a general debate over primitivism. Three aspects of the *Discourse* must be understood in order to fully appreciate the significance of this denial. First, Rousseau has thoroughly detached and purified natural man, which has created the immense distance of the pure state of nature from any recognizable human life. Second, this denial is textually linked primarily to Rousseau's critique of contemporary society (see more in section 4.3.2). And third, Rousseau's historical narrative describes the development of human societies as a mixture of things both good and bad. He describes a host of obstacles against return to the pure state of nature, which not only show the immense distance that separates it from history, but also depict what has been essential in the historical development of societies.

Rousseau speaks to imaginary people who are able to leave behind planning for the future, their 'fatal acquisitions' (funestes acquisitions) – developed needs and passions – and all those tastes and desires which civilized life has spawned. Perhaps they might be able to resume 'ancient and first innocence" (antique et premiére innocence) and 'original simplicity' (l'originelle simplicité). (ibid.) But others – everyone – are irrevocably tied to these new

80 Showing a talent for anticipation Rousseau claims that this would be "[a] conclusion in the style of my adversaries" (Conséquence à la maniére de mes adversaires) (ibid.), and indeed it was, as we saw in Chapter 3.

acquisitions and accustomed to living in social relationships. Humanity has changed to the core, irrevocably. This general anthropological remark is not everything Rousseau is saying, however. He hints at his aversion to contemporary ecclesial morality and makes a clarion call for enlightenment, for virtue as a choice rather than a forced precept. He vouches for "the sacred bonds of the Societies" (les sacrés liens des Sociétés), the necessity of finding solutions for contemporary problems within political societies. (DOI 203–204 [207–208]) Returning to innocence would mean losing all the enlightenment and vices, the good and the bad in history. But for real humans that is neither possible nor desirable. These are hardly the words of someone who would like his fellow men to walk on all fours and howl.

4.2.3 Conclusive Notes on Natural Man

It is evident that not only is the description of the pure state of nature intentionally detached from the historical narrative in *Part II*, it is also full of tensions and apparent contradictions. In the preceding sections I have explored many examples of such potential problems and referred to their handling in the existing literature. It can of course be asked whether my construction of the purification of man is itself problematic, whether it is credible to see it as an intentional creation at all. Before I move on to exploring how Rousseau employs the purification of man in various ways, I offer some additional textual evidence for claiming that Rousseau intended *Part I* of the *Discourse* to form a nearly self-contained whole. After the section on language Rousseau writes:

> "Whatever may be the case regarding these origins, it is at least clear, from how little care Nature has taken to bring Men together through mutual needs and to facilitate their use of speech, how little it prepared their Sociability, and how little of its own it has contributed to all that men have done to establish its [sociability's[81]] bonds. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine why, in that primitive state, a man would need another man any more than a monkey or a Wolf would need his kind, or, assuming this need, to imagine what motives could induce the other to attend to it, or even, if he did, how they might agree on terms." (DOI 149 [151])
>
> (Quoiqu'il en soit de ces origines, on voit du moins, au peu de soin qu'a pris la Nature de rapprocher les Hommes par des besoins mutuels, et de leur faciliter l'usage de la parole, combien elle a peu préparé leur Sociabilité, et combien elle a peu mis du sien dans tout ce qu'ils ont fait, pour en établir les liens. En effet, il est impossible d'imaginer pourquoi dans

81 Cranston: "to establish bonds among themselves" (Cranston DOI, 97). Cress: "to establish the bonds of society" (Cress DOI, 51). Masters & Kelly: "to establish Social bonds" (Masters & Kelly DOI, 33–34).

> cet état primitif un homme auroit plûtôt besoin d'un autre homme qu'un singe ou un Loup de son semblable, ni, ce besoin supposé, quel motif pourroit engager l'autre à y pourvoir, ni même, en ce dernier cas, comment ils pourroient convenir entr'eux des conditions.)

In this paragraph Rousseau pulls together various things that make leaving the pure state of nature impossible. He uses 'nature' now in a way which gathers together many aspects: the personified nature, acting both through given essences and the forces of the environment – mutual needs are formed by natural man's relationship to the environment. In the sense of human essence 'nature' has hardly contributed to the generation of those qualities thatt are often seen specifically human: language and society. Again we can see how Rousseau tries to add force to his argument by linking different meanings of 'nature' which elsewhere in the text are sometimes separate: nature as an actor, as the creation, as the essence of the individual. In the final sentence Rousseau repeats his *contrary assumptions* about the needs and the inclinations to leave the pure state of nature (which are or course inversely denials of such motives), and finally he repeats the most important obstacle, lack of speech. There's a similar passage of text near the end of *Part I* where Rousseau reiterates all those things which natural men lack:

> "...that wandering in the forests without industry, without speech, without settled abode, without war, and without tie, without any need of others of his kind and without any desire to harm them, perhaps even without recognizing any one of them individually, subject to few passions and self-sufficient..." (DOI 157 [159–160])

> (...qu'errant dans les forêts sans industrie, sans parole, sans domicile, sans guerre, et sans liaison[s], sans nul besoin de ses semblables, comme sans nul désir de leur nuire, peut-être même sans jamais en reconnoître aucun individuellement...sujet à peu de passions, et se suffisant à lui même...)

Rousseau goes on, limiting natural men to their 'true needs' (vrais besoins) and the corresponding lack of progress, and emphasizing the connection of language and recognition. In one of Rousseau's most evocative moments, natural man is truly shut out beyond history:

> "...and as each one of them always started at the same point, Centuries went by in all the crudeness of the first ages, the species had already grown old, and man remained ever a child." (DOI 157 [160])

> (...et chacune partant toujours du même point, les Siécles s'écouloient dans toute la grossiéreté des premiers âges, l'espéce étoit déjà vieille, et l'homme restoit toujours enfant.)

The pure state of nature is truly beyond anything that one would recognize as humanity proper; the realm Rousseau would explore in *Part II*. Purified natural man is defined by negation, leaving self-sufficiency and isolated peace as the only positive features. He is left outside the possibilities of development, but as we have seen, hints at development and inborn abilities have been scattered in *Part I*, both in the main text and the *Notes*. These however remain marginal in the perspective of the dominant philosophical motives of the text. In the next section I examine the philosophical functions of the description of the pure state of nature as a part of three different philosophical motives.

4.3. The Philosophical Functions of the Pure State of Nature

The evident tensions within Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature, and the overall tension between the two approaches of the *Discourse*, pose a complicated challenge. As I have shown, in the Rousseau-literature this challenge has been approached mainly by either-or alternatives. Either the pure state of nature is completely detached from the historical narrative, or it is part of that narrative, however problematic. Both approaches suffer from the defect that recurrent features of Rousseau's text have to be ignored. I have explicated some of these features: the continuous use of assumptions which run contrary to the mainstream of Rousseau's depiction of the pure state of nature; the seemingly unfounded reliance on the assumption of solitude; the changing descriptions of natural man; and the uneasy relationship between detachment and development. They permeate the text so thoroughly that they cannot be ignored.

If we look at the material this far with the heuristic tools that I introduced in Chapter 1, it seems that Rousseau is employing one concept of state of nature, but his conceptions change. The realm of signification is unchanged: solitary human existence. But the content changes between emphasis on violence and peace, necessity and abundance, ignorance and learning. The moral register oscillates between emphasis on amorality and natural goodness. On the other hand, as a historical point of origin and as detached from history, the realm of signification of the pure state of nature is differs, so there is conceptual divergence also. Thus far I have not investigated deeply how these changes relate to the textual context. I'll now turn to exploring Rousseau's changing philosophical motives, and the corresponding changes in the philosophical functions of the pure state of nature.

4.3.1. Philosophical Critique: Redefining 'nature' in natural right

> "If I have dwelt at such length on the assumption of this primitive condition, it is because, having ancient errors and inveterate prejudices to destroy, I believed I had to dig to the root, and to show in the depiction of the genuine state of Nature how far inequality, even natural inequality, is from having as much reality and influence in that state as our Writers claim." (DOI 157 [160])
>
> (Si je me suis étendu si longtems sur la supposition de cette condition primitive, c'est qu'ayant d'anciennes erreurs et des préjugés invétérés à détruire, j'ai cru devoir creuser jusqu'à la racine, et montrer dans le tableau du veritable état de Nature combien l'inégalité, même naturelle, est loin d'avoir dans cet état autant de réalité et d'influence que le prétendent nos Ecrivains.)

Nearing the end of *Part I* Rousseau discloses one of his motives for describing the pure state of nature in the way he did. He returns to the issue that was raised by the question of the Academy of Dijon: inequality. The question concerned two things, the origin of inequality and its possible legitimation or vindication by natural Law. For Rousseau the question itself was problematic, because it carried unquestioned assumptions about the meaning of 'natural law'. He wanted to criticize ancient and enduring ways of thinking about *natural law* and *natural right*, to which he alludes in the quote above. Already in the *Preface* he had described his attempt to explore the origins of inequality as 'conjectures' (conjectures), the motive of which was not so much in answering the question accurately than in "elucidating it and reducing it to its genuine state" (de l'éclaircir et de la reduire à son véritable état) (DOI 125 [123]). Thus the substantial issue of inequality was indubitably important but a part of a much more extensive critical project. Rousseau sets out to criticize the way 'nature' is understood in this context.

Rousseau wishes to take part in the discussion about 'natural right' (droit naturel), and agrees to the notion that "the idea of right...and still more that of natural right, are manifestly ideas relative to the Nature of man" (car l'idée du droit...et plus encore celle du droit naturel, sont manifestement des idées rélatives à la Nature de l'homme) (DOI, 125–126 [124]; see Gourevitch DOI, 353). But he claims that people are still ignorant as to the nature of man. So even though the preceding loose description of natural right may be common and justified, the conclusions regarding natural right are drawn from the wrong source. On the other hand, while Rousseau seemingly sets out from agreement with that loose description of natural right, he begins by looking into the wider differences of definitions, focusing on the meanings of 'nature' and 'law' in different conceptions of natural law. He builds on the distinction between 'Ancient Philosophers' (Anciens Philosophes) and 'the Moderns' (les Modernes).

Among the Ancients 'the Roman Jurists' (les Jurisconsultes Romains) saw natural law as an overarching principle of all reality, one which "Nature imposes upon itself, rather than that which it prescribes" (la Nature s'impose à elle même, que celle qu'elle prescrit). They understood the word 'Law' as an expression of 'general relations' (rapports généraux) established by nature. (DOI 126 [124]) Rousseau does not name these thinkers, and it is likely that he knew them mainly through the writings of Grotius and Pufendorf (Gourevitch DOI, 353). Strauss names Ulpian as a likely candidate (Strauss 1992, 266). It seems that Rousseau interpreted these ancient notions of natural law quite literally as necessary precepts of morality given to all humans, or even all animals. He does not distinguish between natural law and civil law in classics like Ulpian and emphasizes instead 'nature' as order of things. (Tuck 1981, 18, 34; Rommen 1998, 25–26) In Rousseau's reading these Ancients spoke of 'nature' as a normatively ordered whole, in which the same principles rule all 'animate beings' (les êtres animés) – this nature is everything and imposes the law "on itself" in that sense. This is nature in the sense of a cosmos, where fact and norm coincide (Cassirer 1979, 37–39).

Rousseau mentions this meaning of 'nature' to contradict it with other meanings, to show the vast distance to the ancient conceptions of natural law, but also to differentiate himself from contemporary conceptions. As we could see, he mentions a counterpoint to the cosmos-nature, a nature which *prescribes* laws. The meaning of this remark is not evidently clear, and I look at Rousseau's critique of the Moderns to explain it. For the Moderns, Rousseau's contemporaries or close predecessors, the word 'law' is restricted to refer to "a rule prescribed to a moral being, that is to say to a being that is intelligent, free and considered in its relations with other beings" (...une régle prescrite à un être moral, c'est-à-dire intelligent, libre, et considéré dans ses rapports avec d'autres êtres) (ibid.), that is, to a human being. At this early stage of the *Discourse* Rousseau has not yet engaged in the purification of man, but it is notable how in this description of contemporary conceptions of natural law he is laying out precisely those characteristics that his natural man lacks. In this loose description 'nature' means basically something universal, common to all. But as Rousseau notes, hardly anyone seems to be in agreement about the content of this universal precept.

Rousseau attacks both of these meanings of 'natural law', ruling out the ancient one by default and attacking the modern one more explicitly. Again Rousseau does not name any targets, but he is evidently referring to conceptions of natural law as based on "right reason", propagated for example by Grotius and Diderot. 'Natural law' refers to moral precepts which

are suitable and necessary for "a reasonable and Sociable Nature", as Grotius claimed (*The Right of War and Peace*, Barbeyrac's French translation, quoted in Gourevitch DOI, 353[82]). Humans are rational creatures, reason is their nature (essence), and right reason produces natural results. In his article "Natural Right" for the *Encyclopedia* Volume V Diderot argued for natural right precisely on the basis of reason as a specific human quality. Only reason could discover the inalienable natural rights of humanity. They were found in the common principles of right in the laws and social rules of all peoples, found by reason in the silence of the passions. (Diderot 1992, 136–138) Rousseau is addressing conceptions of natural law as universal moral precepts, which are given to reasoning humans or which stem from their essence. He does not mention the religious dimensions of contemporary natural right thinking, except fleetingly when he later speaks of the law which humans have 'received' (reçue) or which suits their constitution (DOI 127 [125]). The former alternative alludes to received or preordained moral precepts, and the latter to human essence as the basis of natural right. As we have seen, nature as human essence and as the agent (god) who determines that essence are often closely connected in philosophical texts. Natural law was not only determined by reason, it could also at the same time be given by the creator (e.g. on Pufendorf, see Korkman 2001, 40[83]).

But to understand natural law in this way is erroneous, claims Rousseau, because according to such conceptions "it is impossible to understand the Law of Nature[84] and hence to obey it without being a very great reasoner and a profound Metaphysician" (...il est impossible d'entendre la Loy de Nature et par consequent d'y obéir, sans être un très grand raisonneur et un profond Metaphisicien) (DOI 126 [125]). In the next paragraph he criticizes these conceptions of natural law further. In addition to being in conflict with each other, they are founded on knowledge and 'advantages' (avantages) which humans can have only "once they have left the state of Nature" (qu'après être sortis de l'Etat de Nature) (DOI 126–127 [125]).

It is important to note that a conceptual transition takes place here. Rousseau is criticizing conceptions of natural law that are based on meaning of 'nature' as universal. But when he

82 Gourevitch notes that "Sociable" is Barbeyrac's addition (ibid.) Helen Rosenblatt notes that sociability as a trait of human nature, and as a guarantee of certain precepts of natural law, was proposed already by Grotius. Pufendorf did not see sociability as an inborn trait; it was the result of self-interested calculation (one kind of self-love). Barbeyrac represents a turn towards a more optimistic view of human nature. (Rosenblatt 1997, 91–95)

83 As Korkman notes, there is however a difference in the universal validity of natural law and its applicability in the state of nature and in the state of society (ibid.).

84 Rousseau uses the expressions 'natural law' (loy naturelle) and 'law of nature' (la loy de nature), and sometimes these make distinctions. In this case however there is no reason to think that the change of terms signifies anything important.

says that such laws are derived from knowledge that humans do not have 'naturally' (naturellement), he is using a different concept of nature. He employs one traditional connotation of 'nature', originality, to argue that for a law to be truly natural, it must have been effective before the emergence of societies[85]. Rousseau is using this rhetorical strategy in order to dislodge the discussion conceptually. He intentionally confuses different concepts of nature in order to change the terms of the discussion over natural right. The prerequisite to natural law is that it must apply to people in the state of nature. In such a perspective it would be nonsensical to talk about the universal validity of natural law in the pure state of nature, if such a law is not operative[86]. But at this stage of the *Discourse* Rousseau has not yet introduced his purification of man, so the relevance of this conceptual translocation is not visible yet.

When Rousseau attacks conceptions of natural law that are based on the idea of right reason, he shows acute awareness of the rhetoric power of the use of 'nature':

> "One begins by looking for the rules about which it would be appropriate for men to agree among themselves for the sake of common utility; and then *gives the name natural Law* to the collection of these rules, with no further proof than the good which, in one's view, would result from universal compliance with them. That is certainly a very convenient way of framing definitions, and of explaining the nature of things by almost arbitrary conformities" (DOI 127 [125], emphasis mine)
>
> (On commence par rechercher les régles dont, pour l'utilité commune, il seroit à propos que les hommes convinssent entr'eux; et puis on donne le nom de Loi naturelle à la collection de ces régles, sans autre preuve que le bien qu'on trouve qui résulteroit de leur pratique universelle. Voilà assurément une maniére très-commode de composer des définitions, et d'expliquer la nature des choses par des convenances presque arbitraires.)

He is very conscious that often that which is called 'natural' and deemed universal is just a subjective view, and that 'nature' in its various guises is easily called in as an authority. Rousseau tries to attack this by claiming that one must start from 'the Nature of man', from human essence, as he had earlier said (see above). This is the nature that prescribes natural law. But Rousseau uses this rhetorical strategy of conceptual transition to deny that reason is this human essence. Discovering natural law is hopeless as long as we "do not know natural man" (ne connoîtrons...l'homme naturel) (ibid.).

---

85 Compare this to Diderot, who in "Natural Right" explicitly states that 'the nature of *natural right*' is always relative to the whole human species, not some condition of originality (Diderot 1992, 138).
86 Compare with Pufendorf earlier.

Starobinski claims that Rousseau bypasses the latter part of the Academy question: "whether inequality is authorized by natural law" (OC III, 1298, 125/2)[87]. Cranston makes a similar claim (Cranston DOI, 175–176). Although both of them make important points, this is not quite accurate. Immediately after the previous quote Rousseau makes an ambiguous definition of natural law. First, for it to be a law, it must be obeyed or resisted by a being with free will – and in that he clearly agrees with the modern definition of law which he described earlier. But for it to be natural it must "speak immediately with the voice of Nature" (parle immediatement par la voix de la Nature) (DOI 127 [125]). What does this mean?

In the next paragraph Rousseau introduces the two principles anterior to reason, *amour de soi-même* and *pity*, which I handled already in section 4.1.3. One might surmise that Rousseau is looking for the most basic passions or instincts as the basis of natural right, and that he is merely proposing a disjunction between passions as natural and reason as artificial. Masters interprets this section of the *Discourse* precisely like that, and he links it with a section of *Emile*, which handles conscience (Masters 1972, 79–80). As I have said earlier, Masters's reading of pity is determined by his attempt to look for Rousseau's "system". But this section of the *Discourse* must be read in the context of the whole book, or else the specific meanings of 'nature' are missed. When Rousseau is writing about natural man and the voice of nature here, he is situating both within the pure state of natureß and his purification of man. 'Nature' and 'natural' must be understood as both instinctual and original.

In effect, Rousseau creates a disjunction between two forms of natural right. In the first one 'nature' refers to instinctual tendencies of human nature, that "immediate" voice of human nature in the pure state of nature. From the instinctual tendencies of self-preservation and pity, and from their interplay, flow 'the rules of natural right' (les régles du droit naturel) (DOI 127 [126]). But they are rules only in a metaphorical sense: as we have seen, in the pure state of nature free will or self-determination has no real significance. I emphasize that Rousseau is not focusing here on philosophical anthropology: he is not making a strong claim about free will in nature. This section of text is determined by his critique of contemporary natural right thinking.

Rousseau continues by claiming that reason is forced to re-establish these rules on other 'foundations' (fondemens), "when by its successive developments it has succeeded in stifling Nature" (quand par ses développemens successifs elle est venue à bout d'étouffer la Nature) (DOI 127 [126]). Thus first, there is natural law or natural right in the sense of human behavior according to the original condition of humanity in the pure state of nature, without

87 He refers to Burgelin, who emphasizes the genesis of inequality, its "anthropology" in the *Discourse*.

any successive developments. Second, these developments stifle instinctual nature, that is, move humanity to a wholly different kind of existence where nature in the sense of instincts can no longer be an effective foundation. As I have shown, the conceptual opposition instinct–reason is central in the purification of man, and that is important to remember here. The "instinctual" natural right belongs to the pure state of nature, and it is detached from the social and reasoning humanity of the historical narrative. Later on I note how Rousseau downplays the significance of pity in social humanity. Even though he does not completely eradicate it from his historical narrative, its role is small. The focus of the text is to cast doubt on any kind of natural foundation of natural right. Rousseau focuses on the amoral and instinctual depiction of natural man to highlight this critical motive. He also hints at the anthropological necessity of basing moral claims on the concrete situation of humanity. I effect, in the *Discourse* Rousseau detaches his own depiction of natural right from its any possible philosophical applications.

Still it seems that there is some relationship between these two: the original rules of natural right can be re-established by approximating them and reconstructing them in the sphere of morality proper. Thus Rousseau is not speaking of nature as completely morally irrelevant, but in the *Discourse* this relationship is left vague, and it differs from many contemporary perspectives. It differs from a common conception of natural right as primal liberty to act as one's appetites direct, in opposition to positive law – the idea of civil or positive law as the restraint of wild inner nature (e.g. Tuck 1981, 111–112). Neither is it a case of natural law functioning as a model for civil law in the form of human universals (Kaitaro 1997, 188–189, 195). Rousseau seems to speak of nature in a positive moral register, but at the same time he attacks the notion that nature can be used as a source of human universals[88].

If natural right is left in the instinctual realm of the pure state of nature, why did Rousseau speak of free will as a faculty of natural man at all? If the instinctive natural law is "immediate" in natural man, what good does freedom to him? There is no great mystery here. Rousseau is still tied to the traditional perspective of human faculties and essence as eternal and universal, and he has to work from that soil. As I proposed in section 4.1.1, he is constructing a notion of changing essence, but the terms which he uses are laden with older meanings. Another reason is that Rousseau is distancing himself from (his reading of) the Ancients and the ecclesial moralists, especially the idea that humans are tied to an overarching normative order. Even if in their natural state humans act as animals, Rousseau vehemently denies

88 Kaitaro notes that for Diderot the state of nature was primarily a conceptual possibility, not intended to be a description of real humanity even in the case of the primitive societies which he examined. He also denies that Diderot was looking for substantial advice on morality in nature. As elsewhere, Rousseau is simplifying the image of his opponents. (Kaitaro 1997, 189–190, 193–194)

their fundamental animality on this account. This can be easily seen in his comments on animals and natural law:

> "For it is clear that, since they are deprived of enlightenment and of freedom, they cannot recognize that Law; but since they in some measure partake in our nature through the sentience with which they are endowed, it will be concluded that they must also participate in natural right, and that man is subject to some kind of duties toward them" (DOI 127–128 [126])
>
> (Car il est clair que, dépourvus de lumiéres et de liberté, ils ne peuvent reconnoître cette Loi; mais tenant en quelque chose à nôtre nature par la sensibilité dont ils sont doués, on jugera qu'ils doivent aussi participer au droit naturel, et que l'homme est assujetti envers eux à quelque espéce de devoirs.)

Rousseau returns to this issue when he is introducing freedom of will. He speaks of "the Rule prescribed" (la Regle qui...est préscrite) to an animal and says that it "chooses or reject by instinct" (choisit ou rejette par instinct) (DOI 140 [141]). Again we can see how he speaks of rules and choice in a loose sense. As I showed earlier, natural men also are pretty much equated with such instinctual life. But metaphysically (see 4.1.1) humans are free – although Rousseau smuggles in a caveat by beginning the next paragraph with reference to "the difficulties surrounding all these questions" (les difficultés qui environnent toutes ces questions) (DOI 141 [142]). As I said earlier, it is questionable how much these passages of text really tell us about Rousseau's ideas on animals. The focus is not on nonhuman nature but the meaning of 'nature' in natural right.

In the previous quote Rousseau seems to be using the terms 'natural law' and 'natural right' in a more specific sense. Natural law is a genuine rule of moral conduct, a precept which only developed humans can follow and recognize – a rule which is constructed in the properly human world. These rules form a system, natural right, which dictates duties also towards those who do not recognize morality. This link is forged by the vague connection between the two forms of natural right. The first, the description of life in the pure state of nature, is a loose analogue for Rousseau's normative claims about natural law in the latter sense. The duties towards animals are based on the natural fact that commiseration makes natural beings pity all 'sentient' (sensible)[89] beings. The shared sensibility makes animals partake in human nature. In this Rousseau agrees with many others in European history.

89 The word 'sentient' is nowadays often linked to self-awareness in discussion over animals and morality, but Rousseau's '*sensible*' covers a diverse area, including the instincts of self-preservation and commiseration.

But in order to understand natural right in the instinctual sense, we need to know more than the original instinctual tendencies: we need to know the world in which humans lived according to that natural right. That is, we must look at humanity in the pure state of nature. Depiction of that state is linked to the second part of Rousseau's critique.

Critique of projection

Rousseau agrees with many other philosophers who have "felt the necessity of going back as far as the state of Nature" (senti la nécessité de remonter jusqu'à l'état de Nature), by whom he means primarily Hobbes, Locke and Pufendorf. But he disagrees with their conclusions and claims that "none of them has reached it" (aucun d'eux n'y est arrivé). (DOI 132 [132]) In a famous paragraph of *Exordium* he lays the foundations for his *critique of projection*. In their depictions of the state of nature other thinkers have projected to it things that are essentially social: notions of justice, property, social domination, and needs and passions, which according to Rousseau belong only to developed men:

> "Finally, all of them, continually speaking of need, greed, oppression, desires, and pride transferred to the state of Nature ideas they had taken from society; They spoke of Savage Man and depicted Civil Man." (ibid.)
>
> (Enfin tous, parlant sans cesse de besoin, d'avidité, d'oppression, de desirs, et d'orgueil, ont transporté à l'état de Nature, des idées qu'ils avoient prises dans la société; Ils parloient de l'Homme Sauvage et ils peignoient l'homme Civil.)

Such accusations are present throughout the book. In the beginning of *Note IX* Rousseau accuses "A famous Author" (Un Auteur célébre), most likely de Maupertuis, of making generalized arguments about human life on the basis of "the constitution of Civil man" (la constitution de l'homme Civil) instead of going back to 'Natural man' (l'homme Naturel) (DOI 197 [202]). In the note Rousseau for example claims that many human needs are artificial and thus should not be projected into nature. Earlier I have explicated Rousseau's *contrary assumptions*, assumptions which transcend his depiction of the pure state of nature but which he at the same time uses to strengthen it, and especially to highlight the detachment from history and development. He also hides his critique of other conceptions of state of nature in these contrary assumptions. One example is connected to Rousseau's discussion of the birth of agriculture and the development of "other arts" (see earlier): "Even if we should wish to suppose a Savage man as skillful in the art of thinking as our Philosophers make him out to be; even if, following their example, we should make of him a Philosopher as well..." (Quand nous voudrions supposer un homme Sauvage aussi habile dans l'art de penser

que nous le font nos Philosophes; quand nous en ferions, à leur exemple, un Philosophe lui-même...) (DOI 144 [145]) I have earlier pointed out similar sections of text where Rousseau accuses others of making natural men "philosophers before men". Rousseau uses them to emphasize the detachment of natural men from development and to criticize the assumption of inherent human faculties. In this context the critique is more specific, as Rousseau at the same time comments on the social origin of said faculties and institutions, and accuses other thinkers of ignoring it.

In all these cases Rousseau's critique is based on his purification of man, the solitude and detachment of natural men. The pure state of nature functions as the norm for Rousseau's critique of other conceptions of state of nature. In effect Rousseau makes another conceptual transition. He seemingly agrees with other philosophers in that natural right, the foundations of society and the origin of inequality must be explored by examining the state of nature. But he opposes their descriptions of the state of nature and the conclusions they draw, for example ideas of natural egoism or inborn aggressiveness. By claiming that they "did not go far enough" Rousseau is not only criticizing these other thinkers, he is criticizing them *on his own terms*. He is using a distinct concept of pure state of nature and projecting it to the targets of his criticism. The realm of signification of 'state of nature' that Rousseau projects to the whole discussion is the original and primal state of humanity, the solitude before any sociality. For the purposes of this critical philosophical motive Rousseau must make the pure state of nature as rudimentary as possible, as the focus of his critique is to point out the social origin of things that are too easily called natural.

Helen Rosenblatt notes that Rousseau's critique was of course targeted at certain *use* of the natural law doctrines: arguing for the beneficence of commerce or for the obedience towards sovereign et cetera. (Rosenblatt 1997, 93) Rosenblatt sees the critique especially as an attack on the Genevan patrician regime (ibid., 164). However, she overstates her case somewhat, as her politically contextualizing viewpoint restricts her attention vis-à-vis the multiple threads of Rousseau's text. Thus she seems to take too seriously the idea that Rousseau considered natural man as a basis for natural right, and she overemphasizes Rousseau as a detractor of society. (ibid., 166–168)

It is clear that Rousseau's criticism did not meet many contemporary concepts of state of nature. Strauss notes how the state of nature was often a mere legal supposition, and the humans in the state of nature were explicitly meant to be humans as they currently were[90], only stripped of civil law. Strauss however mellows the adjoining charge that Rousseau mis-

90 Pufendorf said this explicitly. He was looking at humans as they were, irrespective of their origins. (see Rosenblatt 1997, 166)

understood this concept of state of nature and notes that the definition of natural right was always tied to the question of the original state of humanity. (Strauss 1992, 274–276) But it is important to note that Rousseau tries to change the terms of debate in a deeper sense: even if the state of nature is understood as a point of origin, he makes the purification of man a criterion. The dominant conceptual oppositions become solitary–social and instinct–reason, which clearly do not fit other concepts of the state of nature[91]. By using the conceptual tools, which I introduced in Chapter 1: this is not only a question of difference in conceptions. Not only is the original state of humanity different in its content, the whole humanity and its world are radically different, as the dominant conceptual oppositions change. Thus there is conceptual difference. Strauss focuses his attention on the difference between the juridical state of nature and the quasi-factual state of nature, between present humanity in a legal void and humanity of distant (or speculative) past (ibid.). Rousseau criticizes other conceptions of state of nature in both senses, but his critique of projection makes his insistence on the purification of man more understandable.

Intermission: Defense

The volley of critique in *Exordium* is joined by a famous passage of text where Rousseau emphasizes the conjectural nature of his description of the pure state of nature:

> "Let us therefore begin by setting aside all the facts, for they do not affect the question. The Inquiries that may be pursued regarding this Subject ought not to be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings; better suited to elucidate the Nature of things than to show their genuine origin, and comparable to those our Physicists daily make regarding the formation of the World." (DOI 132 [132–133])
>
> (Commençons donc par écarter tous les faits, car ils ne touchent point à la question. Il ne faut pas prendre les Recherches, dans lesquelles on peut entrer sur ce Sujet, pour des verités historiques, mais seulement pour des raisonnemens hypothétiques et conditionnels; plus propres à éclaircir la Nature des choses qu'a [en] montrer la véritable origine, et semblables à ceux que font tous les jours nos Physiciens sur la formation du Monde.)

Rousseau's techniques of detachment and the emphasis on 'the Nature of things' have convinced some interpreters that his pure state of nature is indeed pure speculation with no intended historical relevance (see Chapter 3). But this section of text is not relevant to this question, as examination of the close textual context shows. In the previous paragraph Rousseau denies on the basis of the Scriptures that the state of nature ever existed. He refers to

91 For example, see reference to Diderot's views on original herds in section 4.1.2, *Assumption of Solitude*.

the 'lights' (lumieres) and 'Precepts' (Preceptes) that humans indubitably received from God. The Scripture quite clearly shows that humans were not even before the Flood in the pure state of nature. (DOI 132 [132]) The passage that is quoted above follows immediately after this. Rousseau goes on: "Religion commands us to believe that since God himself drew Men out of the state of Nature [immediately after the creation[92]], they are unequal because he wanted them to be so" (La Religion nous ordonne de croire que Dieu lui-même ayant tiré les Hommes de l'état de Nature [immédiatement après la création], ils sont inégaux parce qu'il a voulu qu'ils le fussent) (DOI 132 [133]).

It is hard not to hear irony here. The final paragraph of the *Discourse* has a similar ironic reference to the divine justification of sovereigns (DOI 188 [193]). Perhaps it is Rousseau's later writings on religion which make it hard for many to accept the passage of *Exordium* on conjecturality as only defense against religious persecution. But just by reading *Emile* it should become clear that although Rousseau clearly believed in God, he spoke venomously against religious dogma – just like in the end of *Note IX* he jeers at the doctrine of original sin (DOI 203 [207]). And what indeed used to be the fate of those Physicists whom Rousseau mentions? Like Buffon, Rousseau was aware of the dangers of philosophy.

Projecting Language and Family

I described earlier how Rousseau refers favorably to Condillac's ideas on the birth of language, but also how he accuses Condillac of assuming a sort of society before the invention of language. Now it is possible to understand why he insists on that: his critical stance does not allow any assumption of primeval society. Explaining the birth of language on the basis of a natural (as in original) society, herd or family, would break the assumption of solitude and "would be to commit the fallacy of those who, in reasoning about the state of Nature, carry over into it ideas taken from Society" (seroit commetre la faute de ceux qui raisonnant sur l'Etat de Nature, y transportent les idées prises dans la Société) (DOI 145 [146]). Thus Rousseau denies the naturalness of family, as we saw before. Those who see family as natural tend to see it in contemporary eyes: living in a settled abode and maintaining intimate unions based on 'common interests' (d'intérêts communs) (ibid.). This critique of projecting the image of the bourgeois family into distant historical contexts is valid in itself, but it is only through the general critical motive that we can understand Rousseau's denial of family per se in the pure state of nature.

92 An addition for the 1782 edition.

Rousseau says that he is supplementing references to Condillac by his own reflections to avoid the mistake of projection, but also "to exhibit these same difficulties in the light best suited to my subject" (pour exposer les mêmes difficultés dans le jour qui convient à mon sujet) (ibid.) These "same difficulties" refer to the institution of signs, which Condillac himself saw problematic, as Starobinski notes (OC III, 1323–1324, 147/3). But Rousseau describes this problem as much more fundamental. His expression "my subject" is a reference to the purification of man, which he builds in *Part I*: the solitude and detachment of natural man. In that framework the institution of signs is problematic most of all because natural men lack the need and the motivation for it. This critical approach is complemented by the philosophical anthropology of *Part II*, where Rousseau looks at the co-evolution of society and language. But for the purposes of philosophical critique Rousseau resorts to the purification of man, and in that framework the origin of both society and language are inconceivable.

In *Note XII*, appended to this section of the main text. Rousseau examines Locke's ideas on family in *The Second Treatise of Government*[93]. Rousseau has just denied that natural men have families or any lasting relationships, and he wants to address 'an objection' (une objection) which Locke makes – as if Locke was participating in the same debate. Rousseau's Locke appeals to a system in nature, a rule dictated by the Creator, which states that "The end of society[94] between Male and Female" (La fin de la société entre le Mâle et la Femelle) is to secure the continuation of the species, thus the wellbeing of the child. (DOI 212 [214]). First, Locke uses other species as examples of how this natural rule demands the males to help in rearing the child. Second, he wants to prove that humans are 'obliged' (obligés)[95] to "a longer Society" (une Société plus longue). Because humans are not tied to cycles of procreation, the previous children still need assistance when new ones arrive. Finally, Locke praises the creator for the wisdom of giving humans foresight and ability to plan for the future, which coupled with the lasting "Society of man" (la Société de l'homme)[96] encourages their industry and serves their mutual interests better. (DOI 212–213 [214–215]) Rousseau does not remark on the textual context of this fragment, but in the beginning of that chapter Locke emphasizes the *absolute necessity* that drives humans to societies, and the God-given inclination they have for it. Nature both as environmental forces and as inner inclinations propels humans into society and keeps them there. (Locke 1993, 300)

93 Specifically Chapter 7, "Of Civil or Political Society", 79 & 80 (Locke 1993, 300–301). Gourevitch has translated Locke's text as Rousseau published it, as it deviates slightly from the French edition which Rousseau used. The differences between Rousseau's quotes and Locke's original text are significant. Often when Locke uses the term 'conjunction', Rousseau writes 'society'. While Locke uses a more neutral moral register concerning natural human relationships, Rousseau has him talk about obligations. (see also Gourevitch DOI, 376)

94 Locke's original: 'conjunction' (Locke 1993, 300)

95 Locke's original: "are tied to" (Locke 1993, 301)

96 Locke's original: "society of man and wife" (ibid.)

Thus Rousseau presents Locke as one of those who propose a sort of natural right as a universal rule of conduct and one which would seem to be of utility. As we saw, Rousseau is arguing against such natural right thinking. How does he answer Locke? First of all he claims that "moral proofs are without great force in the matters of Physics" (les preuves morales n'ont pas une grande force en matiére de Physique) (DOI 213 [215]). In other words he denies that the utility of certain behavior can be taken as a proof of its naturalness[97] – and at the same time he implicitly deviates from conceptions of nature as a well-ordered creation. He differentiates between functional and genealogical explanation: Locke may explicate reasons for 'existing facts' (faits existans) but not "the real existence of these facts" (l'existence réelle de ces faits). (ibid.) He disputes the validity of Locke's extrapolation from animals, but most of all he attacks Locke's description of natural man. Locke claims that in 'the pure state of nature' (dans le pur état de Nature) women would commonly give birth to a new child before the previous could fend for itself. Rousseau claims that this assumption is based on projection, on the idea that natural men (males and females) lived in stable unions. It is drawn from "[t]he continual cohabitation of Husband and Wife" (La cohabitation continuelle du Mari et de la Femme) observed in developed societies. (DOI 214–215 [216–217])

Leaning on his own description of solitary vagabonds Rousseau finally claims that "Mr. Locke obviously presupposes what is in question" (Mr. Locke suppose évidemment ce qui est en question) (DOI 215 [217]), that "all of that Philosopher's Dialectic has not protected him against the error Hobbes and others committed" (toute la Dialectique de ce Philosophe ne l'a pas garanti de la faute que Hobbes et d'autres ont commise) (DOI 216 [218]). Rousseau literally twists Locke into an interlocutor by claiming that Locke's concept of state of nature was similar to his concept, which obviously is far from clear. Rousseau explicitly states at the end of the note that Locke, Hobbes and others "had to explain a fact of the state of Nature, that is to say of a state where men lived isolated..." (Ils avoient à expliquer un fait de l'Etat de Nature, c'est-à-dire, d'un état où les hommes vivoient isolés..." (ibid.) It is clear that he uses definition of 'nature' as a rhetorical strategy to change the terms of the discussion.

Projections of misery and wickedness

After Rousseau has consolidated his description of the solitary natural men, he attacks the idea that 'miserable' (miserable) existence could have forced them into togetherness. In this Rousseau is most likely referring to Pufendorf and Hobbes[98]. He emphasizes that 'miserable'

97 Note that the term 'Physics' refers in Rousseau's use to all human relations beyond recognition and consideration. With the use of that term he limits the viewpoint within the purification of man once again.

98 Pufendorf's *Right of Nature and of Nations* II, I, 8, quoted by Starobinski (OC III, 1329, 151/4). Gourevitch notes the same passage and adds Burlamaqui's *Droit naturel* and Hobbes's *Leviathan* and *De*

denotes a state of deprivation, and thus the claim that life in the state of nature is miserable must refer to the need or even the necessity of leaving it. (DOI 149–150 [151–152]) Rousseau attacks this in two ways. First of all, he refers to the impossible transitions and obstacles to development which he has erected, questioning the desires and opportunities of leaving the pure state of nature[99]. Second, he attacks the notion that there was a need or a necessity of leaving the pure state of nature. Like I have earlier pointed out, in *Part I* Rousseau is trying to refute the idea of absolute scarcity or inherent violence as a catalyst of development. In this context he emphasizes the paradisiacal aspects of his depiction of the pure state of nature in order to deny "natural" causes of leaving it. He leans on the harmonious image of "a free being, whose heart is at peace, and body in health" (un être libre, dont le cœur est en paix, et le corps en santé) (DOI 150 [152]) We have seen earlier how in other contexts Rousseau points out the Spartan aspects of life in the pure state of nature and hints at obstacles which catalyze human development. But in this context he wants to emphasize that there is no teleological drive for the self-contained natural man to move into history and development.

Earlier when I was discussing natural temperament (section 4.1.2), I noted how Rousseau referred to Hobbes's ideas on human nature. In that context he criticized Hobbes indirectly, but not of any fundamental mistakes. In a later section of *Part I* he looks at Hobbes very differently. Rousseau employs his ideas of *natural amorality* and begs his readers not to "conclude with Hobbes that because he has no idea of goodness man is naturally wicked, that he is vicious because he does not know virtue" (conclure avec Hobbes que pour n'avoir aucune idée de la bonté, l'homme soit naturellement méchant, qu'il soit vicieux parce qu'il ne connoît pas la vertu) (DOI 151 [153])[100]. At first this seems like a continuation of the discussion on natural temperament, but Rousseau adds other accusations. Hobbes and others like him think that natural man is fundamentally egoistic, refusing all services to his fellows unless he owes them[101]. More importantly Rousseau accuses Hobbes of projecting all those socially formed needs and ever-expanding greed, which Rousseau claims are socially formed and endemic in modern life:

> "...or that by virtue of the right which he reasonably claims to the things he needs, he insanely imagines himself to be the sole owner of the entire Universe." (ibid.)[102]

Cive as other possible targets (Gourevitch DOI, 360).

99 It should be noted that here Rousseau qualifies his expression. Leaving the pure state of nature would have been possible "only after many Centuries" (qu'après bien des Siécles) (DOI 150 [152]).

100 Rousseau does not refer directly to any Hobbes's text, and as I noted before, he possibly did not read them. But one can surmise that the remarks of "warre of all against all" in *De Cive* are the source.

101 We can see how Rousseau uses objections which are not based on his own purified conception of natural man – Rousseau has denied any relations "to those of his kind" (ses semblebles), whether they are mediated by systems of social obligation or not.

102 Compare this with references to 'Nature's Tyrant' in the next section.

(...ni qu'en vertu du droit qu'il s'attribue avec raison aux choses dont il a besoin, il s'imagine follement être le seul propriétaire de tout l'Univers.)

Rousseau returns to the theme that was discussed in the first half of this section, the definition of natural right. He praises Hobbes for seeing "the defect of all modern definitions of Natural right" (le défaut de toutes les définitions modernes du droit Naturel) (ibid.). In this seemingly innocent phrase Rousseau first of all affirms the claim that natural right must be examined by looking at the original human nature, by returning to the state of nature. Rousseau also reiterates his opposition to those who see humans as naturally rational and social (see Gourevitch DOI, 360). Immediately after that he however claims that Hobbes erred in his conclusions in "reasoning on the basis of the principles he establishes" (raisonnant sur les principes qu'il établit) (ibid.).

This is yet again a case of conceptual transition. Rousseau projects his own concept of the pure state of nature on Hobbes and criticizes him for not following it. The meaning of Hobbes's state of nature, "the state of men without civill society" (*De Cive*, quoted in Gourevitch DOI, 361), has often been debated, and it is not at all clear if it was intended to depict a true point of origin, the first times, or if it depicted any state without civil society – anytime, anywhere. We can never be sure how Rousseau interpreted Hobbes and if he did intentional violence to his text. But it is clear that the realm of signification of Rousseau's 'state of nature' in this context is a state of existence without reason and without human intercourse apart from brief moments of violence and copulation, whereas Hobbes's 'state of nature' explicitly refers to the nature of human *relationships* in a pre-civil (or non-civil) state of existence. By using the heuristic tools which I introduced in Chapter 1 we can thus see that their concepts of state of nature are significantly different, and direct comparison of their content is thus problematic. Rousseau however employs this rhetoric strategy of conceptual redefinition to focus attention on own his concept of the pure state of nature, making Hobbes (and others) compare unfavorably on his terms. Thus for example Rousseau uses the purification of man to claim that amour propre is a historical and social creation, that it does not exist in the pure state of nature – and thus it cannot be used to explain the birth of societies. He does not mention Hobbes's references to egoism or vainglory directly, but it is clear that they are one target of his criticism.

Against Hobbes's depiction of necessity and want that inevitably cause conflict, Rousseau claims that the pure state of nature was "the most conductive to Peace and the best suited to Mankind" (le plus propre à la Paix, et le plus convenable au Genre-humain) (DOI 151 [153]). This is one of those Rousseau's poetic statements, which one is tempted to take out of context

and interpret as evidence for his call for "Back to Nature". But as I have shown, Rousseau uses such idolizing remarks of the pure state of nature as counterweights of critique, to argue against other views. If we look at Rousseau's depiction of the pure state of nature elsewhere, we can see that this positive moral register is countered by the recurrent descriptions of amorality – peace in nature which is gained through separation, isolation and utter ignorance – and depictions of constant violence.

Rousseau goes on and accuses Hobbes even more clearly of projecting social features into natural man: "the need to satisfy a multitude of passions that are the product of Society and have made Laws necessary" (le besoin de satisfaire une multitude de passions qui sont l'ouvrage de la Société, et qui ont rendu les Loix nécessaires) – anticipating his thoughts on the institution of society and his further critique of Hobbes in *Part II* (ibid.) In essence Rousseau accuses Hobbes of assuming that complicated relationships of dependence – competition, predation, domination – are natural (as in original) constants of human life, which lead inevitably to conflict. He attacks Hobbes's ideas of reason and society as a necessary bridle of violent human nature[103]. Against Hobbes, and any other thinker who argues on the basis of human nature – universal or original – he places his purified conception of natural man. But it is also evident that alongside this critique Rousseau is laying ground for his philosophical anthropology in *Part II*, especially for the historical and social construction of the previously mentioned relationships.

4.3.2. Critique of Contemporary Society

> "...to know accurately a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions in order accurately *to judge our present state*." (DOI 125 [123], emphasis mine)
>
> (...bien connoître un Etat qui n'existe plus, qui n'a peut-être point existé, qui probablement n'existera jamais, et dont il est pourtant necessaire d'avoir des Notions justes pour bien *juger de nôtre état présent*.)

Continuously through *Part I* Rousseau refers to 'us', 'the present', to 'contemporaries' in midst of his speculations and philosophical critique. Many times these are textually disconnected tangents, which might be deleted from the book without the text losing its coherence, or even gaining in it. But such editing would rid the book of some of the most beautiful and

103 Gourevitch cites a long relevant passage from *De Cive* (Gourevitch DOI 360–361).

inflammatory pieces of text in which 'nature' is opposed to 'civil society' or political societies[104].

When in the opening paragraphs of *Preface* Rousseau speaks of the Author's (God's) work, natural equality before the first changes, he opposes it to "the deformed contrast of passion that believes it reasons and the understanding that hallucinates" (le difforme contraste de la passion qui croit raisonner et de l'entendement en délire) (DOI 124 [122]). As I noted in section 4.1.1, this easily leads one to equate this natural equality with the pure state of nature, as similar comparisons are made throughout the *Part I* between the pure state of nature and contemporary societies. In the final paragraph of *Preface* Rousseau opposes 'original man' (l'homme originel) with societies: "Human society viewed with a calm and disinterested gaze seems at first to exhibit only the violence of powerful men and the oppression of the weak" (En considérant la société humaine d'un regard tranquile et desintéressé, elle ne semble montrer d'abord que la violence des hommes puissans et l'oppression des foibles) (DOI 128 [126–127]). Earlier I noted how Rousseau considered ideas of the pure state of nature as a fount of "criticism of your contemporaries" (see section 4.2.2).

As I have described in the previous chapters, such declamations against society have been interpreted as rejection of society as such. In the following I show how it becomes evident that such criticism of society seems to be targeted at society as such only because the counterweight of critique is the purification of man, a state without *any* society. But if one pays attention to how Rousseau describes the targets of his criticism, it is evident that he uses the purification of man to criticize certain kinds of societies, European societies of his own time.

Perfectibility and Development: The Famous Note

Immediately after he has introduced perfectibility, Rousseau flies off at a tangent in which he seems to condemn this specific difference of humanity:

> "It would be sad for us to be forced to agree that this distinctive and almost unlimited faculty, is the source of all of man's miseries; that it is the faculty which, by dint of time, draws him out of that original condition in which he would spend tranquil and innocent days; that it is the faculty which, over the centuries, causing his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues to bloom, eventually makes him his own and Nature's Tyrant." (DOI 141 [142])

104 As opposed to the various prepolitical societies depicted in *Part II*. More on this distinction in Chapter 5.

> (Il seroit triste pour nous d'être forcés de convenir, que cette faculté distinctive, et presque illimitée, est la source de tous les malheurs de l'homme; que c'est elle qui le tire, à force de tems, de cette condition originaire, dans laquelle il couleroit des jours tranquilles, et innocens; que c'est elle, qui faisant éclore avec les siécles ses lumiéres et ses erreurs, ses vices et ses vertus, le rend à longue le tiran de lui-même, et de la Nature.)

It is easy to see that this is not a wholesale condemnation. Rousseau describes development as a two-sided affair that gives birth both to negative and positive phenomena. In the end he however seems to claim that perfectibility drives humans to the verge of the abyss. How should this text be interpreted? Is it a condemnation of society as such? Especially his remark on 'Nature's Tyrant' colors the interpretation easily, if it is read through the experiences of modern conservationism and environmentalism. First of all, in the main text this is an isolated fragment. Rousseau does not continue in this vein. He goes on to describe the limited mind of natural man. However, he appended one of his longest notes, the famous *Note IX*, to this fragment. By examining that note we can see more clearly what Rousseau is talking about, especially what he means by 'Nature's Tyrant'.

The note itself begins with brazen statements: "man suffers scarcely any evils but those he has brought on himself" (l'homme n'a guéres de maux que ceux qu'il s'est donnés lui-même) (DOI 197 [202]). This too seems to be a generic condemnation of societal development. But if one examines the text of the note, it is not hard to see that the examples which Rousseau uses are drawn mostly from highly developed societies, and that most of them are linked to money and urbanisation. The conceptual opposition is between natural man and 'Civil man' (l'homme Civile), a human living in instituted political societies. Rousseau lists many large-scale cultural enterprises and asks the reader to examine their 'true advantages' (vrais avantages), suggesting that 'pride' (orgueil) and 'vain self-admiration' (vaine admiration de lui-même) are the true impetus of such development, not true needs. (ibid.) In this he echoes the rhetoric of *Discourse on Sciences and Arts*, the text which built his fame as an enemy of the Enlightenment, the fame against which he long battled in the following correspondence. Already before *Discourse on Inequality* Rousseau had expressly stated that he was describing a dual process of development (Observations 36 [40]; Grimm 56 [64]; Narcissus 103 [971–972]).

His next statement seems to be even more generic: "Men are wicked; a sad and constant experience makes proof unnecessary; yet man is naturally good, I believe I have proved it; what, then, can have depraved him to this point..." (Les hommes sont méchans; une triste et continuelle experience dispense de la preuve; cependant l'homme est naturellement bon, je crois l'avoir demontré; qu'est-ce donc qui peut l'avoir dépravé à ce point...) (DOI 197 [202]).

In Rousseau's terminology 'men' (les hommes) refers always to socially assembled men, and in this context 'man' (l'homme) refers to the purified natural man. I have shown how Rousseau's rare references to natural goodness oscillate between amorality and a more positive moral register, but generally speaking he refers here to the disjunction between natural solitude and social life, thus natural goodness in the sense of amorality. But who are 'men' here? If one looks at the text and the context of *Note IX* closely, one can see that Rousseau is not referring to historically developing humans as such. The note is appended to the words 'Nature's Tyrant', the unhappy endpoint of development. In the previous quote Rousseau speaks of constant everyday experience, and 'this point' refers to the world in which Rousseau and his contemporaries are living in. Natural goodness is not opposed to development as such but used as a counterweight to contemporary social critique.

Rousseau claims that despite its possible true advantages 'human Society' (la Société humaine) necessarily moves humans against each other as their interests clash (DOI 197–198 [202]). It his hardly surprising that he accuses social life to be the origin of conflict, as his depiction of the pure state of nature discounts any but temporary physical clashes. Yet again it is evident that Rousseau takes his examples from developed societies, especially human relations mediated by money: scheming after inheritance, racketeering with disasters on trade routes, financial competition and even competition between nations[105], and the countless ways in which death and destitution can be turned to profit. (DOI 198 [202–203]) Compare this with how Rousseau in the final pages of *Part II* claims that distinction in society is finally reduced into riches (DOI 183–184 [189]). Rousseau is not depicting societies or socialized humans in general but *specific historical circumstances*, which bring about a dominant way of life.

> "...what must be the state of things in which all men are forced both to flatter[106] and to destroy one another, and in which they are born enemies by duty and knaves by interest." (DOI 198 [203])
>
> (...que doit être un état de choses où tous les hommes sont forcés de se caresser et de se détruire mutuellement, et où ils naissent ennemis par devoir et fourbes par intérêt.)

He is looking at a state of things, at the people he sees. Later he describes complex enterprises like refinement of metals and construction and claims that human population dwindles (sic) due to "the establishment and the *perfection* of Societies" (l'établissement et la perfection

105 Rousseau's term is 'People' (Peuple), but he talks about 'neighbours' (voisins), thus implying settled nations of which he is speaking later in *Part II*.

106 Rousseau brings up the themes of display and appearances which are important in his philosophical anthropology in *Part II* and his latter writings on education and social critique.

des Sociétés) (DOI 201 [205], emphasis mine). He meditates repeatedly on the dangerous and unhealthy life in the cities, mentioning for example how the consequences of accidents and natural disasters are created by that way of life – later he would comment on the Lisbon Earthquake in a similar way. (ibid.; Voltaire 234–235 [1062–1063])

Rousseau divides the problems of societies into two classes, clearly indicating a divided society and talking continuously about 'us' (nous). Others are burdened by excessive 'labour' (travaux) and need, others are ruined by 'ecxess' (excés). (DOI 199 [203–204]) He develops further his ideas on the growth of 'needs' (besoins), the drive for luxury and superfluities and the interplay of increased power and passions. At the end of this development there are 'subjects' (sujets) and 'Slaves' (Esclaves), social relations born out of 'wealth' (richesses). (DOI 199 [203]) Even though Rousseau blames in a generic tone "established property and hence Society" (la propriété établie et par conséquent de la Société) for most of the human ills, it should be clear to what he is aiming at (DOI 200 [204]). His colorful expression 'his own and Nature's tyrant' refers to the development which is spiraling out of control.

Critique of Family

In an addition to *Note IX* which was published in the 1782 edition of the *Discourse*, Rousseau condemns paternal rights and marital relations of his time, or as he calls them: "bizarre unions formed by interest" (unions bizarres formées par l'intérêt) and "indissoluble bonds which the heart rejects and gold alone forged" (des liens indissolubles que le cœur repousse et que l'or seul a formés) (DOI 200–201 [205]). The dominion of the fathers makes talents of the children go to waste, and unions formed by interest[107] cause torment and shame – Rousseau even goes as far as claiming fortunate those who are able to take their own life rather than live in despair or adultery. In the original text of the note he speaks of families and procreation from another angle, condemning the social order due to which people "consulted their fortune" (consulté la fortune) before having children; Rousseau points out the ever-present threat of poverty and want.

The final lines of the addition are revealing: "If I have spoken only of the badly formed unions that are the product of our political condition..." (Se je n'ai parlé que des ces nœuds mal formés qui sont l'ouvrage de notre police...) (DOI 201 [205]). The difference in English translations shows how differently Rousseau's target of criticism has been interpreted. In the Masters & Kelly edition 'notre police' is translated as 'our Civilization' (Masters & Kelly DOI, 77). Cranston translates it similarly as 'our civilization' (Cranston DOI, 150). Cress on

107 In this note Rousseau often speaks of the ills of private interest, which is an important theme in his later political philosophy.

the other hand comes closer to Gourevitch's 'our political condition' in his translation 'our civil order' (Cress DOI 92). Speaking of 'civilization' usually refers to a wider framework of time, whereas Rousseau's 'notre police' clearly refers to the political condition he saw around him.

Rousseau's arguments against the naturalness of family are of course part of his purification of man, and he uses the solitary savages as the mirror of contemporary society. 'Nature' most often refers to that purified existence. But in the 1782 addition he uses 'nature' in a different sense, claiming that the dominant form of family is the product of an "order of [social][108] conditions forever in contradiction with the order of nature" (ordre des conditions toujours en contradiction avec celui de la nature) (DOI 200 [205]). This 'nature' refers to the sentiments of the heart, which Rousseau places in opposition with social or financial interest. Also, after his remark on suicides Rousseau apologizes to those whose sorrow he might deepen, but claims that such fates are a warning to anyone who violates the rights of nature "in the name of nature itself" (au nom même de la nature) (DOI 201 [205]). Once again he accuses others of proclaiming the naturalness of moral notions, for example paternal dominion, and hiding their opinion behind the facade of 'nature', but he also appeals to nature in a way which is alien to the purification of man.[109]

When he is struggling with Locke in *Note XII* Rousseau again goes off at a tangent of social critique, attacking certain practices of rearing children. The natural men who live without families are compared with settled family life, but the target of criticism is not family as such but children and families 'among us' (parmi nous). He claims that contemporary civilized life degenerates the constitution of the parents and that of their children, and he attacks concrete practices like swaddling, feeding animal milk to children, "too soft" upbringing – issues which *Emile* later made known. 'Original weakness' (La foiblesse originale), which many thinkers used as a basis for the naturalness of family, was according to Rousseau a product of society, education and environment. (DOI 214–215 [216–217]) But as we can see in Chapter 5, in the historical narrative Rousseau no longer sticks with the argument against naturalness of family. Its relevance is tied to the critical philosophical motives of *Part I*.

Rousseau claims that these contemporary childrearing practices thwart and delay "the first progress of Nature" (les premiers progrès de la Nature) (DOI 215 [217]). If children were allowed to live "as Nature seems to expect them to do" (que la Nature semble leur demander), they might grow more like the robust children in the pure state of nature (ibid.). This is a rare, perhaps the only, instance in the *Discourse* where Rousseau uses nature in the pure state

108 Gourevitch's addition.
109 See section 5.5 for similar use of 'nature'.

of nature as an ideal for education. This is not an issue of 'nature' as inborn tendencies which emerge if the child is "educated freely". 'Nature' does not refer to essence in the traditional sense but to the relationship of *humans and their environment* of which the Savage life is an idealized depiction.

Illness and health

We saw earlier how Rousseau claimed that illnesses afflict primarily 'man living in Society' (l'homme vivant en Société) (DOI 137 [137]). Natural men or Savages seem to be almost exempt from them. This would seem a strange and unnecessary addition to Rousseau's purification of man, especially as earlier I pointed out conflicting descriptions of the pure state of nature on this account. But the changes in emphasis in the descriptions of life in the pure state of nature follow changes in textual context. Here Rousseau is emphasizing the health of "natural" life in order to point out to the truly horrendous urban conditions of Europe in his time. (And on this account the point about the social origin of illnesses is quite insightful.) After this declaration of natural health Rousseau has written a passage of text which has no ties to the main text of *Part I*. In it he criticizes life in contemporary societies. He does not attack medicine as such, but he asks whether its advancement provides real benefits to humanity, offset as it is by the deteriorating quality of life. He goes through many of the themes that he later explored in *Note IX*: idleness and luxury versus excess of toil, and looks at the unhealthy effects of gluttony and the meager diet of the poor. (ibid.) The conclusion of this comparison between natural health and contemporary suffering is evocative:

> "Such are the fatal proofs that most of our ills are of our own making, and that we would have avoided almost all of them if we had retained that simple, uniform and solitary way of life prescribed to us by Nature. If it destined us to be healthy then, I almost assert, the state of reflection is a state against Nature, and the man who meditates is a depraved animal" (DOI 138–139 [138])
>
> (Voilà les funestes garands que la pluspart de nos maux sont notre propre ouvrage, et que nous les aurions presque tous évités, en conservant la maniére de vivre simple, uniforme, et solitaire qui nous étoit prescrite par la Nature. Si elle nous a destinés à être sains, j'ose presque assurer, que l'état de réflexion est un état contre Nature, et que l'homme qui médite est un animal dépravé.)

He almost asserts this, but not quite. This opposition between nature and reflection is one of the most quoted passages in support of the primitivist readings of Rousseau, which I mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3. The textual context and the dominant philosophical motive

should be acknowledged, however. Even though Rousseau proposes that the history of civil societies could be written as a history of illnesses, or vice versa – a suggestion taken up later by many thinkers – his object of criticism is contemporary society. His appeal to the solitary existence is not a serious suggestion. Rousseau opposes the pure state of nature and its health and peace with contemporary life, in order to be able to point out important themes of his social critique.

It should also be noted that once again Rousseau uses contemporary 'Savages' as examples of the healthy natural life, opposing them with 'civil Societies' (Sociétés civiles)[110] Later he does make some seriously critical remarks about medicine, but it should be remembered that in Rousseau's time medicine was hardly an empirical science and a fool-proof source of remedies. Like the critique of urban ills, this critique should be read in its historical context.

The Noble Savage and Cruel Men

Rousseau claims that pity is a natural inclination "which the most depraved morals still have difficulty destroying" (que les mœurs le plus dépravées ont encore peine à détruire) (DOI 152 [155]). Previously he has been talking about the amoral life of natural man and arguing against inborn morality, but now he changes his viewpoint and emphasizes the inherent force of pity. Note that Rousseau explicitly states that he does not need to fear contradiction in doing this (ibid.). He is aware of the change in perspective. It is notable that in the section on pity Rousseau focuses again on critique of contemporary society. In an offhand way he makes a cruel remark of the theatre-going peoples who are able to feel pity for the suffering character, but afterwards go back to the modern pursuits of ruining other people.

Rousseau engages briefly with definitions of 'commiseration' (commiseration) or pity, which he himself sees as an inborn tendency in all animal life. He refers to writers who see it as empathy, "a sentiment that puts us in the place of him who suffers" (un sentiment qui nous met à la place de celui qui souffre), which then would motivate one rather by relief of one's own suffering at the sight of other than by real compassion (DOI 153 [155])[111]. True to his own style, Rousseau again makes a contrary assumption and seemingly accepts this definition of pity but claims that it would change nothing, rather the opposite. It is notable that to achieve this he has to state that such 'identification' (identification) with a sufferer must have been closer in the state of nature than in 'the state of reasoning' (l'etat de raisonnement). (DOI

110 In this case 'civilised Societies' might be a more apt translation.

111 Rousseau does not seem to refer to Mandeville here. Gourevitch and Starobinski propose La Rouchefoucauld's *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales* as a source. Gourevitch adds Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, Artistotle's *Rhetoric* and Hobbes's *Leviathan* and *De Cive*. Starobinski adds La Bruyère's *Les Caractères*. (Gourevitch DOI, 362; OC III 1332, 155/1)

153 [155–156]) But this seems to go against the grain of his description of the solitary and isolated natural life, especially if we look at the following inflammatory statement:

> "It is reason that engenders amour propre, and reflection that reinforces it; reason that turns man back upon himself; reason that separates him from everything that troubles and afflicts him; It is Philosophy that isolates him..." (DOI 153 [156])
>
> (C'est la raison qui engenrdre l'amour propre, et c'est la réflexion qui le fortifie; C'est elle qui replie l'homme sur lui-même; c'est elle qui le sépare de tout ce qui la gêne et l'afflige; C'est la Philosophie qui l'isole...)

There is no trace of ambiguity in reason and development, and suddenly it is not the Savage who is isolated but the reasoning man, and the Savage seems to possess powerful empathy. But the last phrase is revealing. Rousseau is not speaking of Savages or natural men; his real target is all those civilized and learned people of contemporary societies who speak of compassion but cover their ears against screams heard in the night: "...he only has to put his hands over his ears and to argue with himself a little in order to prevent Nature, which rebels within him, from letting him identify with the man being assassinated" (...il n'a qu'à mettre ses mains sur ses oreilles et s'argumenter un peu, pour empêcher la Nature qui se revolte en lui, de l'identifier avec celui qu'on assassine) (ibid.) If the contemporary European is without compassion, 'the Savage', which in *Part I* refers to natural man, on the other hand is yielding always to this sentiment. Now Savage becomes an analogue to all the people who have not been "corrupted" by too much learning and reasoning: the rabble and the marketwomen who separate combatants in street-brawls while 'the prudent man' (l'homme prudent) walks away (DOI 153–154 [156]). In this context Rousseau speaks of nature as the inborn instinct of pity, which is slowly destroyed by progress and enlightenment. This nature has a clearly positive moral connotation, whereas in other contexts Rousseau talks about the amoral innocence of the pure state of nature. But again the change of textual context corresponds with the difference in the description.

In the previous section I showed how Rousseau attacks other philosophers on the account that they project their own values or their own social conditions into nature – whether understood as right reason, universal values or as the original condition of humanity. From the perspective of that philosophical motive, Rousseau had to highlight the extremely rudimentary and solitary existence of natural men, which inversely points to the social and historical origin of many human faculties – Rousseau's main topic in *Part II*. But when Rousseau is focusing on the critique of contemporary societies, he changes his emphasis or even contradicts himself. Natural man becomes a much more positive counterpoint to contemporary

existence; instead of purified primitiveness he is more actively cunning, healthy, peaceful, as the occasion requires. This oscillation in the description of the pure state of nature becomes understandable as we see how Rousseau uses these comparisons to identify those features of contemporary societies that cause human misery.

4.3.3. Political Philosophy

> "Yet these investigations so difficult to carry out, and to which so little thought has so far been devoted, are the only means we have left to resolve a host of difficulties that deprive us of the knowledge of the real foundations of human society" (DOI 125 [124])
>
> (Ces recherches si difficiles à faire, et auxquelles on a si peu songé jusqu'ici, sont pourtant les seuls moyens qui nous restent de lever une multitude de difficultés qui nous dérobent la connoissance des fondemens réels de la société humaine.)

Earlier we saw how Rousseau criticized various earlier and contemporary philosophers, and how he developed the foundations of his own moral and political philosophy from that basis. However, it still remained a bit vague as to where he was aiming at. He says clearly in *Exordium* that political philosophy is an important motive for writing the book:

> "What, then, precisely is at issue in this Discourse? To mark, in the progress of things, the moment when, Right replacing Violence, Nature was subjected to Law; to explain by what chain of wonders the strong could resolve to serve the weak, and the People to purchase an idea of repose at the price of real felicity"
> (DOI 131 [132])
>
> (De quoi s'agit il donc précisement dans ce Discours? De marquer dans le progrés des choses, le moment où le Droit succedant à la Violence, la Nature fut soumise à la Loi; d'expliquer par quel enchaînement de prodiges le fort put se resoudre à servir le foible, et le Peuple à acheter un repos en idée, au prix d'une félicité réelle.)

Rousseau poses the conceptual opposition between Nature and Law. In Chapter 3 I looked briefly at the various conceptual divisions in the *Discourse* and described the outlines of the historical narrative of *Part II*. "The progress of things" and the transition to civil society and the realm of law are part of that narrative, and construction of the pure state of nature does not seem to have much to do with it. But Rousseau employs the description of the pure state

of nature also in his positive political philosophy. As in other contexts, Rousseau changes the meaning of 'nature' for specific purposes.

Defining Inequality

> "Indeed it is easy to see that, among the differences that distinguish men, several are taken to be natural although they are exclusively the result of habit and of the different kinds of life men adopt in Society."
> (DOI 157 [160])
>
> (En effet, il est aisé de voir qu'entre les différences qui distinguent les hommes, plusieurs passent pour naturelles qui sont uniquement l'ouvrage de l'habitude et des divers genres de la vie que les hommes adoptent dans la Société.)

I have already inspected Rousseau's distinction between natural and moral inequality. In many instances Rousseau notes that inequality does not have much influence in the pure state of nature (see 4.1.1 and 4.3.1). It would seem that the constellation is simple: irrelevance of inequality in nature, and inequality in society. But it is not so simple, as there are two aspects in Rousseau's thinking about inequality: the absolute differences between humans in any state of existence, and the relative differences brought about by social organization. After the passage quoted above Rousseau opposes those human bodies and minds that have been affected by upbringing with their 'primitive constitution' (constitution primitive). He wants to emphasize the differences that grow out of unequal opportunities for education, different manners of education and culturing, stratification of society and the diversity of political societies, so as a counterpoint he describes the pure state of nature or 'animal and savage life' (la vie animale et sauvage) to be as simple and uniform as possible. In that he strays away from his depiction of the Spartan educator-nature:

> "...it will be evident how much smaller the difference between man and man must be in the state of Nature than in the state of society, and how much natural inequality in the human species must increase as a result of instituted inequality." (DOI 158 [161])
>
> (...on comprendra combien la différence d'homme à homme doit être moindre dans l'état de Nature que dans celui de société, et combien l'inégalité naturelle doit augmenter dans l'espéce humaine par l'inégalité d'institution.)

At first sight this passage of text seems odd, as it is hard to guess what growth of natural inequality might mean. The passage becomes more understandable as one notes that the meaning of 'natural' in natural inequality changes. In other contexts natural inequality has

referred to the pure state of nature and the natural differences in mental and physical characteristics of natural men *in that state*. Rousseau argues on the basis of the assumption of solitude that this natural inequality is not significant, as in the absence of enduring human relationships these differences do not determine the fate of humans. But in this context 'natural inequality' refers to mental and physical differences between humans *in any state*, whatever the origin of such differences. Thus 'nature' does not anymore refer to something which is original but to something personal: the changed essence of a being. Compare this to the definition of natural inequality in the opening pages of *Exordium*, where it was "established by Nature" (DOI 131 [131], see 4.1.1.). That connotation is absent in this context. Ironically, in *Exordium* Rousseau claims that the source of natural inequality can be found in "the simple definition of the word" (la simplé définition du mot) (ibid.)!

Now Rousseau compares the civil state against the pure state of nature by using the extent of *natural inequality in both of these states* as a yardstick. He tries to show how the environment, both cultural and non-cultural, effects the human constitution. There are differences between individuals in any environment – natural inequalities in that sense of the term – but the contemporary world results in growth of these differences, due to the unequal opportunities and differentiating ways of life. Gourevitch's translation "instituted inequality" muddles the issue needlessly. "Inequality of institutions" would reach the meaning of this passage much better.

In opposition to the deepening natural inequality of contemporary societies the purified natural man resides in an unchanging Neverwhere. Note how in this context Rousseau even describes natural men as uniform and undifferentiated, which as I mentioned is in conflict with his remarks elsewhere, but in this textual context the point is merely to emphasize the growth of mental and physical differences due to the inequality of institutions. When Rousseau is talking about concrete humans living in history, the primitive constitution of humanity becomes an empty notion. In concrete human life it is never realized.

It should be noted that until now I have not said much about moral or political inequality, and for good reason. For the most part it is absent from *Part I*. But in the paragraph following the previous quote Rousseau makes another contrary assumption and opens himself to the possibility that differences between humans may have been great in the pure state of nature (a possibility to which he was quite open in other contexts). Again he claims that this original natural inequality could not have had much influence in that state. Because natural men had no relations whatsoever, their life did not revolve around comparisons and notions of merit. Humans did not become inferior or superior due to the social status acquired by

comparison or the differences brought by property systems. (DOI 158 [161]) It is easy to see to what end Rousseau is using the purification of man: he is claiming that in any social conditions natural inequality (difference in human talents) does not function primarily immediately – for example in contests of strength – but as mediated by social relations of comparison and regard.

Rousseau attacks explicitly the idea that 'the Law of the stronger' (la Loi du plus fort) is significant in the pure state of nature, especially that it could be used to explain and legitimize the birth of societies. Among natural men there may be isolated occasions of violence and coercion, but these do not form enduring relationships. Rousseau clearly states what he considers to be the prime cause of moral inequality: "what would be the chains of dependence among men who possess nothing?" (quelles pourront être les chaînes de la dépendance parmi des hommes qui ne possédent rien?) (ibid.) The social institution of property is the prime origin of inequality. Rousseau returns to this theme in *Part II*. Rousseau also uses these notions to argue yet again that there is no natural warfare or scarcity which propels humanity into society.

4.4. Conclusions: Moving into History

Rousseau's description of the solitary natural men is indubitably peculiar if it is read through any one perspective. Not only is its relationship to the historical narrative problematic, the description of the pure state of nature varies within *Part I*. I have interpreted Rousseau's purification of man as a conscious literary device which allowed him to direct the discussion for the purposes of different philosophical motives, mainly philosophical and contemporary social critique, but also to lay basis for his philosophical anthropology and political philosophy. The critical and constructive motives of the book are linked by two approaches. First, Rousseau denies inherent human sociability and the naturalness of many other faculties, and wants to refute the idea that certain universal humanity is realized regardless of what kind of environment humans live in. Second, Rousseau claims that reason, language and sociability can be explained only as historical acquisitions.

But due to the spectrum of issues that Rousseau addresses in *Part I*, he has to go to extremes in purification. His critique against using 'nature' in various meanings as a criterion overdetermines his writing in *Part I* and causes apparent paradoxes. He has to go to great lengths to describe a purified humanity which in the end has little or no relevance to his constructive

views in the latter parts of the *Discourse*. I believe I have shown that Rousseau was both aware and open about these problems. Especially his continuous contrary assumptions imply that it is not the exact content of his description of the pure state of nature which is important, but the current philosophical motive. Thus the pure state of nature has several philosophical functions in the text, and due to the differences in emphasis Rousseau effectively employs several conceptions of pure state of nature.

In his critique Rousseau repeatedly employs the varied meanings of 'nature' and 'natural' to criticize his opponents and move the discussion to new areas. I have shown how Rousseau uses conceptual transition, moving imperceptibly from one concept of nature or state of nature to the next, as a rhetorical strategy in order to criticize other views on his own terms. He attacks concepts of nature as something universal (right reason, ordered creation) and concepts of nature as original or primal. In this multi-layered work Rousseau moves from one concept of nature to the next, using the terminological continuity and the prevalence of the word 'nature' in the philosophical discourse of the time and tradition.

There is however some continuation between the pure state of nature and Rousseau's historical narrative, as we have seen, but it is hidden by the dominant philosophical motives of *Part I* and sometimes by the defenses against religious persecution. I will now turn to Rousseau's historical narrative and the philosophical motives behind it. In the early parts of the next chapter I will also offer an answer to the old question: what is the status of the pure state of nature?

5. Emergence of Man

Part II of the *Discourse* is very different from the earlier parts of the book, even if one looks just at the textual surface. Whereas *Part I* is constantly pockmarked with interruptions of the description of the pure state of nature, such as excursions into general philosophical musings on human understanding, philosophical critique and contemporary critique, the early half of *Part II* forms a straightforward historical narrative. There are no tangential discussions, and historical key events follow each other in a more or less clear sequence. In the latter half of *Part II* the narrative is broken at times by generic notes on politics, but they remain fairly close to the substance of the narrative: for example, after having described the birth of political society, Rousseau engages other views on the matter. The description of the development of government and the growth of inequality however in general follows a narrative form.

The simpler structure of the text illustrates a change in the dominant philosophical motives of the text. In the previous chapter I examined how the problems of the early half of the *Discourse*[112] can be understood as resulting from the tension between different philosophical motives. The pure state of nature was described in different ways to answer a different set of questions. In Alan Garfinkel's terms, Rousseau was holding up several simultaneous contrast spaces. Despite that there were also some general trends. Rousseau's attention was focused on denying the naturalness of various human faculties or forms of behavior, in general denying that sociability is an inborn human trait. For the most part nature was refuted as a normative criterion on which to found claims on society and politics. In order to criticize other philosophical views, to ensure his footing vis-à-vis certain theological issues, and to show the peculiarity of contemporary societies, Rousseau had to go to the extreme in purifying natural man.

These tasks finished, Rousseau no longer has need for such complications. He has given the first part of his answer to the Academy question. He has tried to show that *effective* inequality, which determines human relations in a significant way, is not natural in the sense of original or presocial. As Rousseau has connected the issue of inequality to the opposition solitary–social, the latter part of the Academy question about the relationship of inequality to natural law becomes a moot point. (In order to achieve this, Rousseau had to change the meanings of 'nature' many times.) Now Rousseau can focus on depicting the development of

112 *Preface*, *Exordium* and *Part I*.

societies and the accompanying rise of moral or political inequality[113]. In *Part II* Rousseau writes a speculative history of humanity from presocial times to the birth of the first societies, right down to the development of complex political societies.

This does not mean that Rousseau's philosophical motives are clear-cut in *Part II*. First of all, he seems to be genuinely interested in questions of origin, for example the origin of languages, new productive systems and division of labor, and he investigates how the development of these practices changes humanity to the core. This I call Rousseau's *philosophical anthropology*. The relevant contrast space is formed by questions like: How do humans become the humans we know? How are our faculties related to our environment? How do external factors, human and nonhuman, effect our development? But some of these questions of origin are closely linked to another philosophical motive, Rousseau's *political philosophy*, especially the above mentioned theme of inequality, its social origins and development, and the possibility of different kinds of societies. As we can see in the final section of this chapter, the relevant contrast space includes questions of moral justification and legitimacy. *Critique of contemporary society* also continues, but this time with a different focus. As in *Part I*, descriptions of so called savages figure as examples or points of comparison, but the figure of 'the Savage' changes substantially as Rousseau moves on to the historical narrative.

For the purposes of this thesis the most important thing is the changing meaning of 'state of nature' and 'natural man'. In section 5.1 I examine the uneasy relationship of the historical narrative to the previous material, drawing together several problematic issues. It seems that regardless of Rousseau's techniques of detachment, natural man is not completely detached from history. I propose that the conception of natural man changes here. By using the heuristic devices that I introduced in Chapter 1, one can say that the concept of natural man remains fairly similar. It refers to a non-social state of existence. But the conception of natural man is very different, as Rousseau relaxes certain of his earlier limitations (solitude, limited mind). On the other hand, despite the conceptual similarity, the philosophical functions of natural man change radically, especially considering the relationship with historical development. From that viewpoint there is some conceptual discontinuity, as these two meanings of 'natural man' are not wholly commensurable. I finish this section with comparisons with several Rousseau-researchers regarding the debate over the status of pure state of nature in the *Discourse*.

In section 5.2 I examine Rousseau's historical narrative from the viewpoint of his philosophical anthropology and show how several problematic issues of *Part I* are no longer relevant

113 Or even the growth of natural inequality. As I showed earlier, Rousseau changes the meaning of 'nature' here subtly.

for him. I also examine how Rousseau introduces other concepts of state of nature, as he has left behind certain conceptual oppositions that were necessary in *Part I* (such as instinct–reason, solitary–social). Instead of an abstract picture of humanity, a humanity developing in historical relations emerges. In section 5.3 I examine how the changing meanings of 'nature' posit the end of state of nature in different ways. In section 5.4 I look briefly into how Rousseau employs the figure of the savage in *Part II*, and how that figure changes, as its exemplars are taken from social humans rather than being linked to the purification of man. In the final section 5.5 I take a look at the latter half of *Part II* and examine how Rousseau's use of 'nature' yet again changes as his dominant philosophical motive is altered.

5.1. Continuities and Disjunctions

In the final paragraphs of *Part I* Rousseau describes a transition in the perspective of the book. As we saw in section 4.3.3, Rousseau ended his description of the pure state of nature by denying the influence of natural inequality in it almost completely. To achieve that he relied on the central characteristics of his purification of man: lack of communication, relationships and reciprocal needs. In the pure state of nature the fleeting human encounters are determined by immediate use of force, but they do not solidify into permanent power relations. There are no mediated relationships of oppression or dependence (or cooperation, for that matter).

The ensuing tension in Rousseau's use of 'nature' is remarkable. In one sense he has equated nature with the condition of purified humanity, seeing natural man as an animal-like creature, who is faced by the pressures of the environment. But in another sense the role of natural forces is ambiguous. Even if certain differences are dealt by nature, either nature as the giver of essences or as the environmental forces that mould primeval humans, the meaning of 'nature' in pure state of nature is determined by its opposition with social existence. As I have pointed out, Rousseau was of course working against the background of accumulated meanings of 'nature': personified creator and dealer of essences, the Creation as a normative order, essence as inner nature and as the mirror of the Creation. This adds to the confusion of meanings. For example, when Rousseau is speaking about nature as human essence, he oscillates between ideas of original and inborn essence (given by nature/God) and one which is built by the influence of the environment. Earlier we saw how Rousseau assumed that the 'primitive constitution' (la constitution primitive) or the inborn essence of natural men is uniform – mainly because he was comparing it with social life – but he allowed for natural

disparity of talents in a contrary assumption (DOI 157–158 [160–161]). 'Nature' can be the original and inherent essence, and also those forces that mould human nature as essence[114]. But within the confines of *Part I*, all of this, despite the ambiguities, is opposed with humanity that is developing truly in history. Natural man, in any sense, is posited in the unchanging pure state of nature.

But as Rousseau changes his focus into the historical development of humanity, other kinds of problems emerge. What is the relationship of natural man with the later historical narrative? In the previous chapter I examined Rousseau's techniques of detachment, but next I look into references that seem to conflict them. Rousseau states out explicitly the transition of perspective near the end of *Part I*:

> "Having proved that Inequality is scarcely perceptible in the state of Nature[115] and that its influence there is almost nil, it remains for me to show its origin and its progress through the successive developments of the human Mind." (DOI 159 [162])
>
> (Après avoir prouvé que l'Inégalité est à peine sensible dans l'état de Nature, et que son influence y est presque nulle, il me reste à montrer son origine, et ses progrès dans les développemens successifs de l'Espirit humain.)

He claims that he has also shown that "*perfectibility*, the social virtues and the other faculties which natural man had received in potentiality could never develop by themselves" (... la *perfectibilité*, les vertus sociales, et les autres facultés que l'homme Naturel avoit reçues en puissance, ne pouvoient jamais se developper d'elles mêmes) (ibid., original emphasis). That is, even though he presupposes humans to have the faculty of perfectibility and various 'virtual faculties' (see section 4.1.3), he denies any teleological drive in their development or that of human nature in general[116]. Even though Rousseau has to struggle with certain traditional conceptions of human essence, as we have seen, he tries to get rid of any notion of inborn sociability, along with most inborn attributes, with only some "loose ends" like the force of pity remaining. This is not to say that the theme of pity is not relevant for Rousseau, but its

114 I also pointed out how researchers like Jonathan Marks have misinterpreted this ambiguity of 'nature'. Marks tends to assume a conceptual continuity that is not there.

115 Rousseau refers clearly to the pure state of nature. As we can see, he later uses this unqualified expression to refer to certain *historical* states.

116 As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Rousseau's ideas regarding perfectibility are somewhat different in *Emile*, either due to the different perspective of the book or development of Rousseau's thought – most likely both. In *Emile* the development of a human individual is followed through various critical ages of the individual, and certain innate developmental order ensues, even though in *Emile* too human development is always linked to environment. In the *Discourse* such a notion is visible only in one quote in *Part I*, where Rousseau claims that perfectibility "resides in us, in the species as well as the individual" (réside parmi nous tant dans l'espéce que dans l'individu) (DOI 141 [142]). However, this reference plays no important part in the text.

role remains problematic due to the rhetorical constraints of *Part I* – and he does not return to the issue in *Part II*. As we could see in the previous chapter, the lack of enduring human relationships and language stood in the way of development. In the purification of man these were of course interdependent, and linked to the closed circle of mental development. After seemingly giving ground in various contrary assumptions, Rousseau still pointed out the lack of *need* or *motivation* for development. The obstacles were multilayered.

Within purification of man it seemed as if the hand of God or the actions of *providential nature* were required to force natural men away from this ignorance and solitude. When Rousseau was discussing happiness and misery in the pure state of nature he thanked Providence both for the happy ignorance of nature and for subjecting humans to 'opportunities' (occasions) which develop their faculties only to the degree which suits their needs. For the purely natural men, instinct suffices. (DOI 150 [152]) In the final pages of *Part I* Rousseau returns to this issue, but without the explicitly providential tone:

> "...that in order to do so, they needed the fortuitous concatenation of several foreign causes *which might never have arisen* and without which he would eternally have remained in his primitive condition [1782: constitution]; it remains for me to consider and bring together the various contingencies that can have perfected human reason while deteriorating the species, made a being wicked by making it sociable, and from so remote a beginning finally bring man and the world to the point where we now find them." (DOI 159 [162], emphasis mine)

> (...qu'elles avoient besoin pour cela du concours fortuit de plusieurs causes étrangeres *qui pouvoient ne jamais naître*, et sans lesquelles il fût demeuré éternellement dans sa condition [1782: constitution] primitive; il me reste à considerer et à rapprocher les différens hazards qui ont pu perfectionner la raison humaine, en déteriorant l'espéce, rendre un être méchant en le rendant sociable, et d'un terme si éloigné amener enfin l'homme et le monde au point où nous les voyons.)

Such densely packed arguments should by now be familiar. Again Rousseau combines several threads of his work[117]. In the previous chapter we already saw Rousseau referring to 'circumstances' (circonstances) and 'contingencies' or 'occurrences' (hazards). In the first quote in the beginning of section 4.2 we saw Rousseau anticipating both the role of "singular and fortuitous concatenations of circumstances" (concours singuliers et fortuits de circonstances) and the non-teleological nature of development (DOI 139 [140]). In section 4.1.3, in the subsection on *Perfectibility*, we saw how Rousseau explicitly stated that perfectibility

117 It should also be clear that the opposition between perfection and deterioration, and the conjunction of sociability and wickedness should not be interpreted simplistically. They are linked to Rousseau's notion of amorality and his critique of contemporary society.

develops all other human faculties 'with the aid of circumstances' (à l'aide des circonstances) (DOI 141 [142]).

Later in the subsection on *Limited mind and needs* I noted Rousseau's tangent on the relationship between environmental conditions and mental development. He stated the old ideas that culture was born in the Egyptian delta and that it was refined in the hard conditions of Europe. (DOI 142 [143–144])[118] We should however remember the textual context. Rousseau wishes to use these 'facts' (les faits) as proof that natural man would be unlikely to leave the pure state of nature, lacking both 'the temptation' (la tentation) and 'the means' (les moyens) to do so – with the obvious attendant belief that purely natural men live in southern realms like his favorite examples the Caribs (DOI 142–143 [143–144]). He also talks mainly about 'Peoples' (Peuples) and 'Nations' (Nations), *social humans*, as being influenced by their circumstances. The meanings of 'nature' diverge here. When Rousseau was earlier describing the limited mind of natural men, he stated explicitly that they experience passions only by the impulsion of nature as instinct. But in this fragment on environmental determination 'nature' is both the dealer of original essences and a providential actor who balances the scales of fate. The nature we usually talk about, the environment, is referred to by the word 'circumstances', which is both opposed to nature and subsumed within nature. (ibid.)

Even though some of the references to circumstances and contingent events in *Part I* are ambiguous due to their textual context, Rousseau's recurring allusions to them might lead one to the conclusion that these environmental factors fill the gap between the stories in *Part I* and *Part II*. The ignorant savage is propelled to development by these stimuli. As Rousseau says in the final paragraph of *Part I*: "...how the lapse of time makes up for the slight likelihood of events; about the astonishing power of very slight causes when they act without cease..." (...la maniére dont le laps de tems compense le peu de vraisemblance des évenemens; sur la puissance surprenante des causes très-légeres lorsqu'elles agissent sans relâche...) (DOI 159 [162]) Of course, if the *Discourse* is read in this way, as a unified story, this transition is somewhat absurd (as is of course the isolated ignorance itself), and interpreters like Jonathan Marks are right to point out problems with the attendant nature–culture divide. However, the ambiguities of natural man, especially the uneasy relationship between inner nature and nature as the environment, are part of the purification of man which is required by the complex structure of *Part I*. When Rousseau moves to the historical narrative, the conception of natural man becomes much more uncomplicated. But before I turn to that, I look briefly at Rousseau's exposition of his method.

118 Starobinski points out Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* (*Espirit des lois*) as a likely inspiration (OC III 1320, 144/1).

"Two facts given as real"

In the final paragraph of *Exordium* Rousseau describes the *Discourse*: "Here is your history such as I believed I read it, not in the Books by your kind, who are liars, but in Nature, which never lies. Everything that will have come from it, will be true: Nothing will be false but what I will unintentionally have introduced of my own. The times of which I will speak are very remote..." (voici ton histoire telle que j'ai cru la lire, non dans les Livres de tes semblables qui sont menteurs, mais dans la Nature qui ne ment jamais. Tout ce qui sera d'elle, sera vrai: Il n'y aura de faux que ce que j'y aurai mêlé du mien sans le vouloir. Les tems dont je vais parler sont bien éloignés...) (DOI 133 [133]).

In this early paragraph of the book, addressed to any and all readers, Rousseau appeals to 'Nature' as opposed to the knowledge of his contemporaries, and in some respect even opposed to his own knowledge. He is setting his task for describing the natural man, for showing the distance between origin and present state. But in the final paragraphs of *Part I* he proposes a different task, to tell the story of the development of social humanity and, as he promised in the end of the *Preface*, "the hypothetical history of governments" (l'histoire hypotétique des gouvernemens) (DOI 128 [127]). Rousseau tries to explain his speculative historical method to his readers.

He admits that he is forced to base his story on 'conjectures' (conjectures), speculations on possible events that lead to the development of complex societies. He defends these conjectures however by claiming that they are so probable that they became 'reasons' (raisons), and by defending the ability of philosophy to fill in the blank spaces where historical knowledge fails to provide facts. (DOI 159–160 [162–163]) These claims are not so interesting in themselves but with regard to the whole material of *Part I*. Rousseau's defense of his conjectures or speculations lays on the claim that they are the most probable "that can be derived from the nature of things" (qu'on puisse tirer de la nature des choses), and that any conjectural account would be similar "on the principles I have just established" (sur les principes que je viens d'établir). He claims that the issue is the relationship of "two facts given as real" (deux faits étant donnés comme réels). (DOI 159 [162]) Rousseau is explicitly referring to his construction of the pure state of nature and the solitary natural man; the principles he mentions are the limits to arguing on the basis of original human nature, the limits of solitude and ignorance, which he himself has drawn[119]. This is yet another instance where Rousseau is not hiding his intentions – quite to the contrary. He states openly that he is interested in two facts "given as real" – a qualification which should not be ignored – namely his critical con-

119 In the end, this is the nature which "never lies".

struction of the pure state of nature and the contemporary situation, the troubles of which he is attacking.

Earlier I have looked at instances where Rousseau spoke of speculation or conjectures in order to construct a defense against religious accusations. In this instance it seems that Rousseau's words can be taken at face value. Even though his historical narrative is necessarily speculative, it is meant to be an investigation into human history, not an abstraction serving other functions.

Natural learning

After his much quoted opening of *Part II*, the evocative description of the birth of property, Rousseau returns to his description of natural men in pretty much the same terms as in *Part I*: they live solitary lives in a relatively abundant environment – where their needs and natural produce are in equilibrium: "The Earth's products provided him with all necessary support, instinct moved him to use them." (Les productions de la Terre lui fournissoient tous les secours nécessaires, l'instinct le porta à en faire usage) (DOI 161 [164]). Echoing his earlier remarks on animal existence, Rousseau sees these humans as part of a preordained natural system. This equilibrium is reflected also in the limited mind of this 'nascent man':

> "Such was the condition of nascent man; such was the life of an animal at first restricted to pure sensations, and scarcely profiting from the gifts Nature offered him, let alone dreaming of wresting anything from it..." (DOI 161 [164–165])
>
> (Telle fut la condition de l'homme naissant; telle fut la vie d'un animal borné d'abord aux pures sensations, et profitant à peine des dons que lui offroit la Nature, loin de songer à lui rien arracher...)

The conjunction of 'nature' as the dealer of essences, as the yet untapped potentials (perfectibility) and as the potential resources in the environment is perhaps the strongest in the whole book. Concepts of nature that are elsewhere distinct merge here. This is also the high-point and the endpoint in the hermetic life of the pure state of nature, ways out of which Rousseau has earlier blocked almost completely. As he claimed earlier, all inventions made by chance would perish in solitude, and no development was possible. But as I mentioned in the previous chapter, he also openly stated that he had dwelt so long on that 'assumption' (la supposition) for specific purposes, to criticize certain ways of thinking. (DOI 157 [160]) That task completed, he now begins to describe a process of *natural learning*. Rousseau moves

away from the purified natural life without bothering with the previous conundrums of closed circles. Natural man is no longer hopelessly ignorant and beyond development.

It is precisely because of this conceptual change that Rousseau's move towards development seems so clumsy. The transition is caused by difficulties or 'the obstacles of Nature' (les obstacles de la Nature), which 'soon' (bientôt) present themselves and force natural men to learn (DOI 161 [165]). Rousseau has mentioned such obstacles before, when he has been describing life in the pure state of nature. The tension between the Spartan and the paradisiacal nature could be seen in *Part I*, and I have already noted the tension between the unchanging natural man and the one capable of learning and understanding his special place. Still the isolated and unchanging existence took precedence in *Part I*, for reasons already explained.

As Rousseau begins his historical narrative, he is forced to postulate a *genuine* point of origin, an animal-like state, which however has no duration. Although he says that development begins "soon", there is no role for the animal state before it. The pure state of nature fades away. Natural man is always faced with those obstacles Rousseau describes: height of trees, competition from other animals, beasts of prey, other natural men. (DOI 161–162 [165]) Learning to overcome these obstacles is now an almost automatic process. Difficulties or obstacles catalyze development, and there is no longer any question of the lack of means or motive. In his annotations to this section of the *Discourse* Jean Starobinski emphasizes the transition from immediate life to the mediating powers of reason, to transforming and 'subduing' (soumettre) nature as the environment (OC III, 1340, 165/1). As in many other instances, such an interpretation subsumes the whole book under one conceptual opposition and ignores the changing meanings of Rousseau's terms. I claim that in Rousseau's philosophical anthropology in the *Discourse* that "immediate" existence is irrelevant. [120]

There is another textual clue to the change in perspective. In the beginning of *Part II* where Rousseau describes the purely natural life, he mentions how hunger and other 'appetites' (appetits) of natural men – before their development– drive them to experience different ways of life (DOI 161 [164]). As opposed to that, in the final pages of *Part I* he had just emphasized how natural men "all eat the same foods, live in the same fashion, and do exactly the same things" (tous se nourrissent des mêmes alimens, vivent de la même maniére, et font exactement les mêmes choses) (DOI 158 [160–161]). In that context he was focusing on the lack of influence of natural inequality, which in turn forced him to depict the uniformity of

120 One implication of my interpretation is that while in the context of *Part I* the distinction between the mimetic ability and perfectibility is important, in the historical narrative of *Part II* it loses its significance. For example in *Part I* Rousseau mentions that purely natural men learn to use the skins of other beasts, but now it is described as a feature of natural learning "after" the pure state of nature. (DOI 139 [140], 162 [165])

life in nature. Having left that discussion behind, he can picture natural man as a more active and versatile creature, even before the onset of perfectibility[121]. Also in this perspective of philosophical anthropology Rousseau is much freer to admit natural inequalities, although he would still deny their relevance. We can see later that inequality becomes a powerful force only in stable human relationships.

The role of the assumption of solitude is also a bit ambiguous. Rousseau describes the spreading of humankind to different terrains and climates, which force humans to adopt different ways of living (see above). He repeats the notion mentioned earlier, that harsher climes have amplified human industry – and speaks of the development of fishermen, hunters and warriors, invention of sophisticated instruments, and notably learning the use of fire. (DOI 162 [165]) It was precisely this latter innovation whose spreading Rousseau had denied in the solitary existence. On the other hand, in these opening paragraphs of *Part II* Rousseau also talks about these learning and developing natural men still as solitary beings, albeit ones that are learning to look to their fellows in a new way.

Status of the pure state of nature?

It is now possible to shed some light on the question handled in section 3.3: is state of nature a pure fiction, an abstraction or a conjectural historical description? Although Rousseau uses 'state of nature' in several meanings, the conflict of interpretation has mostly been over the status of the pure state of nature. Due to the conceptual disjunction which I have described there is no satisfactory singular answer to this question. When Rousseau focuses on philosophical critique and contemporary critique and is creating insurmountable obstacles to development, the pure state of nature is detached from all history and it becomes imaginary, intended to be pure fiction. In that I partly agree with Gourevitch, who sees the pure state of nature as a thought-experiment, which is meant to extrapolate the limits and conditions of humanity, and which is especially targeted against other thinkers. According to him it is not an attempt to "establish fact". But Gourevitch fails to notice the changes in the meaning of 'the pure state of nature', that it is at the same time part of the historical narrative and beyond it. For Gourevitch, the first *historical* state is factually – even if conjecturally – that of nomadic bands or troops, the social state of nature which I describe in the next section. The pure state of nature recedes beyond any historical significance. According to Gourevitch, Rousseau "never claims to have any facts regarding such a state or stage". Thus he interprets

121 I repeat: from the perspective of the purification of man, the gulf between ignorance and perfectibility is a qualitative leap, but from the perspective of Rousseau's philosophical anthropology that division is not so relevant anymore. The important thing is that perfectibility is *always* relative to human circumstances.

all Rousseau's examples of contemporary savages as referring to various historical stages of development. The first "fact given as real" is for him *the social savage*, never the solitary savage. (Gourevitch 1988, 36–37) One problem is of course that the division of meanings of 'the pure state of nature' does not fall neatly on the break between two parts of the *Discourse*. The two conceptions of the pure state of nature exist at times side by side. From one perspective the pure state of nature is the first stage of the historical narrative, from the other it is not.

Heinrich Meier's reading on the same issue is similarly one-sided. According to him "Rousseau for the first time expressly reconstructs the state of nature of the human species as a bestial state...Man is part of nature" (Meier 1988–89, 218). Meier clearly reads the *Discourse* as a precursor to evolutionary thinking and modern anthropology and affirms that philosophical motive which Gourevitch denies on this account. (See: Gourevitch 1988, 43–44) But not only does Meier lean on an uncritical concept of nature, he ignores any textual evidence in *Part I* where Rousseau clearly separates humanity from animality. Both of these interpreters, who were actually engaged in a critical dialogue in the journal *Interpretation*, make valid points on Rousseau's book but approach it from an either-or-position, thus ignoring Rousseau's characteristic style of writing.

Paul de Man's essay "Theory of Metaphor in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*", published 15 years earlier, makes no explicit mention of *pure* state of nature, but the same issues resonate in the text. De Man ponders whether (pure) state of nature is merely a fiction. Although in the end he denies this, the way he builds the question is revealing. He does not differentiate between the pure state of nature and other states of the historical narrative, but asks whether they (together called 'state of nature') are fictional. It is notable that de Man uses Rousseau's religious defenses as possible proof of this. (de Man 2006, 111) He also makes no difference between the two kinds of fiction like I have made. In his reading pure speculation and conjecture due to lack of proof are both a possible Achilles heel for Rousseau (ibid., 112). De Man however denies that there is a gulf between the first and the second part of the *Discourse*. He does this by emphasizing pity, freedom and perfectibility as dynamic features of the state of nature, which connect it with concrete history. (It seems that de Man's motive is to defend Rousseau against accusations that he fled into the realm of literature from the realm of politics – he cites Althusser as making such a claim.) (ibid., 113) In the end his reading of Rousseau's narrative constructs a nature–society divide, which focuses on language and conceptual thought. There is some merit to that, but at the same time he bypasses the intricacies of Rousseau's philosophical anthropology. (ibid., 124)

I have already addressed Jonathan Marks's interpretation of this problem, but some conclusive notes might be in order. In general Marks's intention is to explain away any hint of ahistoricity in Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature as contradiction or mere polemics, and to portray the historical narrative as the "considered" part of the book. I absolutely agree with Marks in that the conceptual opposition nature–history is not central in Rousseau's philosophical anthropology – or one might say that such a strict division is against its spirit. (Marks 2005, 26) But his choice of evidence bypasses textual context repeatedly. For example he takes Rousseau's references to the Spartan nature which weeds out the weaklings as unambiguous evidence that natural man is already developing in environmental pressures – a valid reading from the viewpoint of philosophical anthropology. But the quote on which he rests is also connected to the critique of contemporary society and the indiscriminate burdens of poverty. (ibid.; DOI 135 [135]) Because Marks approaches the text as a continuous narrative and is looking primarily for consistency on that account, he is constantly engaged with supposed paradoxes, which disappear if the textual context is thoroughly investigated (e.g. Marks 2005, 29–30). If Marks is willing to discount many elements of the book as mere rhetoric[122], he faces the problem of making arbitrary choices as to how to interpret individual passages of text.

N.J.H. Dent is explicit in the perspective he adopts on the *Discourse* in his 1988 book *Rousseau, An Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory*, which I have already addressed a few times. For Dent the *Discourse* is a deeply problematic and immature work, precisely when one looks at the relationship of the pure state of nature and historical development. Dent explores the themes of amour de soi-même and amour propre, but the issue is principally the same as above. The problem is that in the *Discourse* Rousseau offers "one finished structure which, then, somehow is elaborated and extended" – that is, Dent attacks the problematic tension between the original drives of natural man and development *in a world*. (Dent 1988, 104) For him *Emile* is the mature work in which Rousseau has done away with that problem and "the abrupt transitions worked by extraneous factors which mar the discussion in the second *Discourse*." (ibid., 109) *Emile* is in many ways a more accomplished work, and Dent's interpretation of it is impressive, but the problem is that he assumes the two works as having been written from the same philosophical motive, to address the same set of questions. First of all, the "finished structure" of the purification of man was created for specific purposes, and its problems in relation to the historical narrative result from the tension between philosophical motives. Second, Dent does not seem willing to admit the motive of philosophical anthropology, specifically the exploration of genesis of societies, as valid for Rousseau – thus the pejorative jab about "marring". Surely in the speculative story

122 As I mentioned earlier, Marks's concept of rhetoric is basically opposed to philosophy.

of Emile's life an appeal to large-scale contingencies would have been out of place. But for Rousseau they are an important part of the development of social humanity.

The relationship between the pure state of nature and the historical narrative is ambiguous to say the least. I have identified some of the critical functions of the pure state of nature. But I propose that it does not suffice to say that the *Discourse* poses a critical image of the pure state of nature, which is washed away as Rousseau moves to history. The opposition itself functions to highlight the central messages of the later parts of the book. By opposing the static pure state of nature and the historical narrative Rousseau was emphasizing that humanity is inevitably historical, developing in deep relationships with its environment (social or not). Any understanding of humanity has to work with that human reality. (See Rapazcynski 1987, 263) In the *Discourse* elements like pity and perfectibility, which are conceptualized in *Part I* as inherent human faculties, are left in the background as Rousseau moves into history, precisely because he is describing human development through relations. This is a literary act, an attempt to change the terms of the discussion – thus the overkill in denying any inherent human nature. But just because the text becomes part of such an act, it is also simplistic to claim that nature as human essence has no relevance in history (see Cooper 1999, 6–7).

Another important feature of the historical narrative is that Rousseau is describing how the condition of European societies of his time has emerged. Here philosophical anthropology and contemporary critique converge. But philosophical anthropology is not reduced into a tool of criticism. Rousseau is at the same time describing humanity in general, drawing up the sphere of human possibilities. The normative and the genealogical approach are coexistent, but they do not merge completely.

5.2. Development through Relations

Within the confines of his purification of man, Rousseau in the end writes very little about humanity as he knew it, or as we do. Substantial claims about humanity proper are rare, and like the theme of pity they are colored by other philosophical motives such as contemporary criticism. Apart from some generic and mostly unoriginal philosophical musings on knowledge, needs and passions, the specifically human features are handled mostly by negation, by the virtue of their absence: reason, recognition, comparison, language, consideration. As I proposed in the previous chapter, Rousseau's ideas on themes like reason in *Part I* are not especially enlightening, as they are dominated by powerful conceptual oppositions like instinct–reason and solitary–social. That is, they are part of an interesting critical array, but little of substance is said of reason per se, from the viewpoint of philosophical anthropology for example (not to mention epistemology). *Note XV* where Rousseau compares amour propre and amour de soi-même is a rare exception: even though Rousseau focuses on *absence* of amour propre in the pure state of nature, he at the same time raises key themes of his philosophical anthropology (DOI 218 [219–220]). He does not mention reason as such, but the implication of the passage is that the development of reason is tied to constant human relationships. But this is a small fragment, the content of which becomes clear only in the light of the material in *Part II*. Thus the most one can say about reason on the basis of the early parts of the *Discourse* is that it is not original in human nature, that it is tied to language and recognition. But in *Part II* Rousseau does not delve deeply in generic philosophical issues like the nature of reason or language. He is concerned with the genesis of various human practices and institutions and the accompanying human development. The idea of development through relations is at the heart of Rousseau's philosophical anthropology.

I turn now to Rousseau's description of the development of natural men towards humanity proper. The basic outlines of this narrative were drawn in Chapter 3. In this section I explore Rousseau's ideas on the birth of prepolitical societies, life in the prepolitical state of nature.

Learning the world

Natural obstacles and new environments force humans to adopt new kinds of industry. Rousseau argues that this repeated interaction with other beings "engendered in man's mind perceptions of certain relations" (engendrer dans l'espirit de l'homme les perceptions de certains raports) such as size, relative strength and "other such ideas" (d'autres idées pareilles) (DOI 162 [165]). This seems to be an important change from *Part I*, where Rousseau spoke of the development of language. There he claimed that human thought begins from ideas of

particular objects, and all general ideas require the development of language and propositions (DOI 147–148 [149–150]). But in that context he was trying as much as he could to draw a firm line of division between mechanical thought and reason proper, thus situating purely natural men in the mechanical, physical or animal realm. In this context of natural learning, such relations are understood 'naturally' (naturellement) through practical experience, that is, without requiring any external explaining factor.[123]

But on closer examination Rousseau's language is very measured here. He is careful to avoid claiming that genuine ideas of these relations precede language. He says that we, that is, social humans, express ideas of such relations with words, whereas for the natural man the continuous perception of relations "finally produced in him some sort of reflection, or rather a mechanical prudence that suggested to him the precautions most necessary for his safety" (produisirent enfin chez lui quelque sorte de réflexion, ou plûtôt une prudence machinale qui lui indiquoit les précautions les plus nécessaires à sa sûreté) (DOI 162 [165]). Although in *Part II* Rousseau does not pay so much attention on demarcating different orders of cognition, he is clearly thinking about a slow and gradual process of development, where language and social life fully develop reason. Thus reason is no longer a closed category, part of a dualistic pair. But developed reason, reason proper, is possible only in stable human relationships.

This 'new enlightenment' (nouvelles lumieres) has important outcomes. Already in *Part I* Rousseau described how natural man had to measure and compare himself against other animals, learning his superiority over most of them (DOI 136 [136]). Now humans are able to increase their superiority by developing new instruments to trap and hunt other animals and to defend against attackers[124]. But a much more important outcome is the changing relationship with other humans. Rousseau sets out from the assumption of solitude, claiming that these humans had scarcely more dealings with others of their kind than with other animals. In *Part I* the purified natural men did not develop a sense of human species, nor did they even recognize their erstwhile mates. Now the developing human however perceives 'conformities' (conformités) between others of his kind, his female[125] and himself. This leads

123 Marks uses this material to claim that natural man is already "divided", never in an "immediate" existence. He emphasizes the importance of relationships of comparison and the ability to grasp the subject–object divide even in natural life. From the perspective of Rousseau's philosophical anthropology this is credible, but again Marks ignores the dominant tones of *Part I* as nonessential text. (Marks 2005, 6–7)

124 Of course, considering the structure of the *Discourse* which I have explicated, it is of course questionable if it is relevant to talk about "before" and "after" at all. Rather, the text in *Part I* has some sections with developmental tones, where Rousseau relaxes the limitations of detachment from history.

125 This is one of the cases where Rousseau's 'l'homme' clearly refers to men. But on the other hand he is addressing the development of humanity in very general terms, so this bias should not perhaps be overemphasized.

him to understand that other humans behave, think and feel generally in the same way, paving the way for the possibility of cooperation.

Birth of cooperation

Rousseau's description of the transition towards human cooperation breaks with his earlier strict conceptual divisions. Now solitude and lack of language no longer form a barrier against development rather than a stage from which humans move on. Although, as Rousseau says, "others of his kind were not for him [the developing human] what they are for us" (ses semblables ne fussent pas pour lui ce qu'ils sont pour nous) (DOI 162 [166]), meaning that these developing humans had no stable human relations and no stable recognition of others, they begin to understand their similarity with others. This makes it possible to predict and understand the behavior of others at least in a rudimentary way. The new understanding of other humans makes the developing human "follow, by a premonition as sure as Dialectics and more rapid, the best rules of conduct to observe with them for his advantage and safety" (suivre, par un pressentiment aussi sûr et plus prompt que la Dialectique, les meilleures régles de conduite que pour son avantage et sa sureté il lui convînt de garder avec eux) (DOI 163 [166]).

In section 4.3.1 I explained how Rousseau earlier distinguished two kinds of rules, those followed by instinctual creatures and those constructed by reasoning creatures. This was a strong conceptual distinction between nature and right. But now when he is talking about genealogy, not definitions of law and morality, the difference becomes one of degrees. Even though the developing humans follow these rules by premonition or presentiment, the rules themselves have been understood through experience, and following them requires that humans compare and distinguish between situations when cooperation might be fruitful and when it would not (ibid.). Like Rousseau's definition of natural right stated, these learned rules are based on human nature – in this case the experience that "love of well-being is the sole spring of human actions" (l'amour du bien-être est le seul mobile des actions humaines) (ibid.). That is, these developing humans understand this constant as a common factor between them and their kin[126]. It is notable that pity does not figure here at all: the love of well-being or amour de soi-même is the first mover in the formation of human societies, not any principle of empathy or sociability. But it would be a mistake to interpret this as a declaration of fundamental human egoism: Rousseau is describing how the developing humans *experience others* as they meet without prior attachments. Amour de soi-même is a natural drive for

126 Note also that as Rousseau does not have to contend with other conceptions of natural right anymore, he does not have to emphasize the difference between instinct and free will.

self-preservation, and it does not rule out other drives. But for these humans who are slowly leaving their solitude it is the most visible one.

The first associations are based on temporary common interests, in situations where the benefits of cooperation are evident – Rousseau's example is hunting. They are temporary to the extreme, as Rousseau's conception of these developing humans still builds on his description of purely natural men: they lack foresight and even awareness of future. Thus cooperation is linked only to "present and perceptible interest" (l'intérêt présent et sensible) (ibid.), and it can be easily broken for example by the appearance of an alternative prey[127].

Families and languages

The next stage in Rousseau's historical narrative is the 'first revolution' (premiére revolution) mentioned in Chapter 3. The supposedly solitary humans begin to make permanent or semi-permanent dwellings. Rousseau describes this transition very loosely as a period of growing enlightenment and new industry, and development of new skills and instruments. He is very open about the conjectural nature of the story: "I cover multitudes of Centuries in a flash, forced by time running out, the abundance of things I have to say, and the almost imperceptible progress of the beginnings; for the more slowly events succeeded one another, the more quickly can they be described" (Je parcours comme un trait des multitudes de Siécles, forcé par le tems qui s'écoule, par l'abondance des choses que j'ai à dire, et par le progrès presque insensible des commencemens; car plus les événemens étoient lents à se succeder, plus ils sont prompts à décrire) (DOI 163–164 [167])[128].

In these permanent dwellings families are established and differentiated, becoming stable communities instead of those temporary conjunctions that Rousseau earlier described. Settling also introduces 'a sort of property' (une sorte de propriété) (DOI 164 [167]). Rousseau does not explicate on that, as he does not describe the livelihood of these humans. He mentions fishing and hunting, and later proposes that small-scale horticulture was born among such humans (DOI 167 [171], 168 [172–173]) In *Essay on the Origin of Languages* he proposes a different order of things, claiming that the first humans moved from hunting to pastoral economies, and most likely the first dwellings were those of nomads (EOL 269 [93–94], 271–272 [97–98]). In any case 'a sort of property' refers to instruments, clothes, animals and

127 Rousseau's conception of the original herds is very different from Diderot's views, for example. In an open letter written in 1752 as a defense of the abbé de Prades, Diderot argued that the first men formed herds by an instinct, just like other social animals. Note also that in the letter Diderot openly distinguishes the Adamic state after the creation, an object of faith, and the primal state of nature, an object of philosophical speculation – Rousseau's theological defense in the early parts of the *Discourse* is very similar (see section 4.1.1). (Quoted in Gourevitch 1988, 29–30)

128 To which Voltaire would reply: "Ridiculous" (OC III, 1342, 167/5)

allotments held in possession by the families. Rousseau does not explicate on the meaning of 'a sort of', but it can be derived from what he elsewhere says on property. Property in the proper sense of the term is a social convention which extends over many families, exists in a community, and is dependent on mutual recognition of property rights – though not always respect of them. In this primitive state, different families would not recognize the properties of other families. Rousseau indeed notes that it may have increased quarrels and fights. Still that period of dispersion was relatively peaceful. (DOI 164 [167])

In *Part I* Rousseau proposed that the birth of language was a nearly unsolvable conundrum. Now he returns to the theme of languages, but for the most part such difficulties are bypassed. He begins by describing communication among the temporary alliances of humans, the 'troops' or 'herds' (troupeau) mentioned earlier. Their language comprises of inarticulate cries, gestures and imitative noises, which make up 'the universal Language' (la Langue universelle). (DOI 163 [167]) Here the term 'universal' means only that such communication could emerge spontaneously without stable consent due to the immediate and imitative nature of the signs. This kind of a language could thus in theory be born anywhere in pretty much the same way, and be universal in that sense too. Rousseau had already made a similar claim in *Part I* when he was pondering the problem of the institution of signs (DOI 146–147 [148]). Now however he assumes that these crude proto-languages are complemented by "a few articulated and conventional sounds" (quelques sons articulés, et conventionnels) (DOI 163 [167]). He alludes back to *Part I* and reminds the reader that the institution of such conventions is hard to explain, but still he describes the birth of these 'particular languages' (langues particuliéres) before the birth of stable recognition, reason and society.

This is an excellent example of how the change in Rousseau's dominant philosophical motive makes some earlier material less important: the chicken-and-the-egg problem of speech and society fades to the background. The temporary associations become a sort of society, which makes possible the first rudimentary conventions. Earlier Rousseau defined convention and society in a specific way, which made their development seem almost impossible. Now they become products of slow and gradual development. Rousseau is just content to describe how "the use of speech is imperceptibly established or perfected in the bosom of each family" (l'usage de la parole s'établit ou se perfectionne insensiblement dans le sein de chaque famille) (DOI 165 [168]). Constant practical conjunction and birth of moral love[129] create the need and motivation for language, lack of which was in *Part I* the greatest obstacle to development. Rousseau adds to this a conjectural story of the birth of the first proper languages: floods or earthquakes force families into close proximity with others, making communica-

129 As opposed to the physical love in the pure state of nature.

tion between groups necessary[130]. Again Rousseau sees contingent environmental factors as catalysts for change. He proposes that both language and society developed in these newly formed islands, in forced proximity, and not on the mainland. (DOI 165 [168–169]) Nature as the environment provided the motive, not any tendency of inner essence-nature.

As I noted already in Chapter 3, there are similarities and differences on this account between the *Discourse* and *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. The latter text was never published in Rousseau's lifetime. Some elements of the text are virtually identical with passages of the *Discourse*, and Rousseau seems to have at least begun writing the two texts at the same time. In a later draft he claimed that the *Essay* was intended as a part of the *Discourse*, but he left it out because it was too long and out of place. The published form of the text may have been more or less finished around 1760. (Dent 1992, 181; Gourevitch DOI, 393) Much of the material in the *Essay* is written from a very different angle, dealing with differences between contemporary languages, music et cetera. But there are sections where Rousseau speculates on the birth of languages in a very similar vein as in the *Discourse*. For example, the idea that human associations are "the work of accidents of nature" (l'ouvrage des accidens de la nature) is repeated, except that instead of the island hypothesis Rousseau postulates that natural disasters fomented insecurity and motivated human association as a safeguard against losses (EOL 274 [101])[131]. The greatest difference relevant to us between the two works is the absence of the assumption of solitude: "In the first times men scattered over the face of the earth had no society other than that of the family" (Dans les prémiers tems les hommes épars sur la face de la terre n'avoient da société que celle de la famille) (EOL 267 [91]). Family becomes now the point of origin, not isolated humans. Rousseau even claims that in these first times families procreated among themselves, and he is clearly not talking about any extended family or tribe (EOL 278 [107]).

There are additional differences regarding pity, the passions and the natural diet of humans, and constant references to and affirmation of the tale of the Flood and Noah. In the *Essay* Rousseau does not build a similar sophisticated rhetoric defense as in the *Discourse*. He claims that his narrative fits the Biblical account: "Adam spoke; Noah spoke; granted. Adam had been taught by God himself. When they separated, the children of Noah gave up agriculture, and the common language perished together with the first society." (Adam parloit; Nöé parloit; soit. Adam avoit été instruit par Dieu-même. En se divisant les enfans de Noé abandonnérent l'agriculture, et la langue commune perit avec la prémiére societé.) (DOI 270–271 [96]) The point of origin in the *Essay* is the human dispersion that resulted from

130 But note that earlier he seemed to admit some development already in the temporary associations.
131 In the *Essay* Rousseau speaks of these natural events explicitly as acts of Providence. He even proposes that after the onset of societies such calamities would become rarer. (ibid.)

the Flood, whereas in the *Discourse* Rousseau pushes the Biblical account much further to the background, as I showed in section 4.1.1. In addition to that, in the *Essay* Rousseau is exploring the genealogy of languages without a similar multitude of philosophical motives. He can thus begin his exposition from *within language*, abstracting the problem of origin.

Psychological developments

Life in the family, 'a small Society' (une petite Société), brings great changes to the psychology of primitive humans. First of them is the transition from physical to moral love. Rousseau pointed out its causes already in *Part I*: continuous attachment to a singular object and new practices of life (DOI 155 [157–158]). Again we can see that within the historical narrative the distinction between physical and moral is gradual: human development is intimately woven into relationships and practice. Conjugal and paternal love (maternal is not mentioned) become the bonds of this first society. Another change is division of labor between the sexes. Up until now, although Rousseau has been talking about 'men' (l'homme), there have not been significant differences between the sexes in this regard, and 'man' may as well have been interpreted as human. According to Rousseau family life spawns the first division of labor, between females looking after the dwelling and the children, and the males taking care of common subsistence. (DOI 164 [168])

The third and perhaps the most important change is that this 'new state' (nouvel état) allows for 'leisure' (loisir) for the first time. Humans are thus able to acquire 'conveniences' (commodités) unknown in the pure state of nature. (ibid.) The accuracy or inaccuracy of such a historical analysis is not very interesting here, especially as it is a bit unclear what kind of economy Rousseau is describing here. The emergence of leisure is posited against the description of natural harmony in the pure state of nature, the happy and ignorant balance of the fruits of the earth and the modest needs of purely natural men. Rousseau continues by claiming that leisure and conveniences were "the first yoke which, without thinking of it, they imposed on themselves, and the first source of evils they prepared for their Descendants" (le premier joug qu'ils s'imposérent sans y songer, et la premiere source de maux qu'ils préparérent à leurs Descendans) (DOI 164–165 [168]). As I have noted, such declamations have been taken out of context and interpreted as condemnation of society as such. But in the context of the whole book and its philosophical motives, this passage does not seem so simplistic. Description of conveniences as the first yoke is linked to Rousseau's critique of contemporary society and especially the consequences of luxury, which he handled earlier in the famous *Note IX*. Earlier this critique has been posited on the conceptual constellation nature–civil, as I pointed out in section 4.3.2. The pejorative tone here is an echo of

that critique. But as we can below see, Rousseau soon draws a new picture of the savage as a counterpoint to contemporary critique, and the loss of natural independence is no longer described in so dark terms.

In this section Rousseau is explicating the social origin of many human needs. A word of caution is in order regarding Rousseau's terminology. In the case of purely natural men Rousseau spoke of 'true needs' (vrais besoins) as a normative criterion, a point of comparison with contemporary humans. In that context True was something which was based on the natural condition, on the original instinct-nature, and Rousseau used it to criticize "artificial" needs. Now his viewpoint is different, but he uses similar terminology in claiming that conveniences "had degenerated into true needs" (dégénérées en vrais besoins) (DOI 165 [168]). This 'true' is no longer a normative criterion. Rousseau is saying that these new needs become *true for* the developing humans – they can no longer make do without them. In effect, Rousseau is talking about reification or naturalization. Humans have now entered the developmental spiral of knowledge, passions and needs that was closed for the purely natural man. Not in so many words, Rousseau is describing how living in a social environment becomes second nature. These two perspectives should not be conflated. In the latter part of the *Discourse* Rousseau is not hanging on to a notion of (normatively) natural needs; he is not advocating a return to nature in this sense. Andrzej Rapaczynski makes precisely this kind of undue connection with the notion of natural needs and Rousseau's later search for autarchy (Rapaczynski 1987, 274).

Birth of nascent society and social savage

Rousseau describes how families of humans begin to live in close proximity with each other. He has earlier hinted at the possibility that natural disasters catalyze such development, but eventually humans everywhere will come to live in close proximity and form 'a particular Nation' (une Nation particuliére). (DOI 165 [169]) Rousseau is very careful to distinguish such nations from political societies: distinction between nature and civil remains, but 'nature' has a wider realm of significance, encompassing also life in primitive societies – Rousseau still calls this stage of history 'the state of nature', as we can later see.

In describing the development of these first societies Rousseau notes the impact of similar lifestyles and environments. Already in *Note X* he had noted "the powerful effects of differences in Climates, air, foods, ways of life, habits in general and, above all, of the astonishing force of uniform[132] causes acting continuously on long successions of generations" (les

132 Gourevitch's translation of 'mêmes' into 'uniform' is a bit strange. Most translation simply use 'same'.

puissans effets de la diversité des Climats, de l'air, des alimens, de la maniére de vivre, des habitudes en général, et sur-tout la force étonnante des mêmes causes, quand elles agissent continuellement sur de longues suites de générations) (DOI 204–205 [208])[133]. He makes a case for quite strong environmental determinism, following in the footsteps of Montesquieu. He claims that nations gain their distinctive 'morals' (moeurs) and character from these environmental relations (DOI 165 [169]).

In these emerging societies human psychology undergoes even more substantial changes. Physical love transmutes completely into moral love, as familial relationships are complemented by relationships between members of the hatching society. As I described briefly in the previous chapter, Rousseau's distinction between physical and moral is built on the notions of recognition, comparison and esteem. Physical love is dictated by nature as instinct, whereas moral love is built on relative ideas such as merit and beauty: "They grow accustomed to attend to different objects and to make comparisons; imperceptibly they acquire ideas of merit and of beauty which produce sentiments of preference." (On s'accoûtume à considérer differens objets, et à faire des comparaisons; on acquiert insensiblement des idées de mérite et de beauté qui produisent des sentimens de préférence.) (DOI 165 [169])

Similar changes take place in a wider sense. Rousseau describes the birth of social rituals made possible by leisure. Constant comparisons between people give birth to *amour propre*. Looking good, beautiful, adroit or strong in the eyes of others becomes important, as does constant measuring of others on this account. 'Public esteem' (l'estime publique) or 'the idea of consideration' (l'idée de la considération) become a constant feature of life. In Rousseau's thinking this has two dimensions. Comparison and consideration are a necessary part of any kind of social life, part of the psychology of proper humanity, as opposed to the primitive humanity of the pure state of nature. But in the *Discourse* Rousseau seems to describe them mostly as negative developments, which has fed the primitivist readings mentioned in Chapter 2. Again his colorful text should be read with caution. Rousseau claims that the new developments are "the first step at once toward inequality and vice" (le premier pas vers l'inégalité, et vers le vice en même tems) (DOI 166 [169–170]). This statement and the following paragraphs of the *Discourse* are among the most contested in the whole book. Rousseau seems to both condemn and praise this stage of development at the same time. To understand this statement we have to remember how Rousseau handled the distinction between natural (physical) and moral inequality. Some of the attributes that humans now

133 In *Note X* Rousseau claims that people of his time only know Europeans and lack knowledge of the human diversity. He proposes a science of exploring that diversity of humanity by people unburdened by religious or mercenary motives. His proposal was later taken up by champions of ethnology (see Chapter 2).

begin to compare are natural in the sense that they are inborn, but as we have seen, Rousseau widens the meaning of the term 'natural' and speaks of any personal bodily characteristics that may also have been influenced by environment (including the human elements of the environment). They become moral when they acquire importance in relationships of comparison. "The first step" into inequality and vice is simply the first step into the moral realm, where such considerations become possible. Certain detrimental sentiments do owe their origin to comparison and consideration: 'vanity' (la vanité), 'contempt' (le mépris), 'shame' (la honte) and 'envy' (l'envie). (DOI 166 [170]) But it is important to understand that this transition does not represent any kind of fall from grace that Rousseau truly regrets.

Along with these new sentiments the new situation seems to make life more violent, at least on a surface reading: "vengeances became terrible, and men bloodthirsty and cruel" (les vengeances devinrent terribles, et les hommes sanguinaires et cruels) (ibid.). But this description is coupled with the remark that "the first duties of civility" (les premiers devoirs de la civilité) have been introduced into the life of these savages. This also is understandable when it is compared with previous material. As I described earlier, in what Rousseau calls the 'physical' realm of the pure state of nature insults or injuries were not experienced as acts of other subjects – natural men experienced them as things, as natural events. Now that humans can experience consideration and esteem, they begin to claim it as a sort of right. In Rousseau's philosophical anthropology, this is the core notion of *amour propre*, need for self-esteem as a part of all social life. Lack of esteem is experienced as 'affront' (outrage) (ibid.). This breeds new kinds of violence, just like moral forms of love and its attendant sentiment 'jealousy' (la jalousie) cause discord according to Rousseau (DOI 165 [169]).

Rousseau's focus on the violence of this state is linked to the textual context. Here he directs another attack at other conceptions of human nature and state of nature. He claims that most of the savages known at the time are at this violent stage[134]. But he criticizes others for confusing that savage state of existence with 'the first state of nature' (premier état de Nature) and claiming on that ground that humans are naturally cruel. These others claim that humans need 'political order' (police) to make them gentler. Hobbes is not named, but he must be one of Rousseau's targets. Now Rousseau invokes his previous conception of the pure state of nature and uses it to refute this notion of natural cruelty:

134 It is symptomatic of Rousseau's style in the *Discourse* that earlier in *Part I* he had assured his readers of the lack of brutality of the contemporary savages. (DOI 156 [158])

> "...nothing is as gentle as he is in his primitive state when, placed by Nature at equal distance from the stupidity of the brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man, and restricted by instinct and by reason alike to protecting himself against the harm that threatens him, he is restrained by Natural pity from doing anyone harm, without being moved to it by anything, even after it has been done to him." (DOI 166 [170])
>
> (...que rien n'est si doux que lui dans son état primitif, lorsque placé par la nature à des distances égales de la stupidité des brutes et des lumiéres funestes de l'homme civil, et borné également par l'instinct et par la raison à se garantir du mal qui le menace, il est retenu par la pitié Naturelle de faire lui-même du mal à personne, sans y être porté par rien, même après en avoir reçu.)

He is speaking of the pure state of nature in order to point out that any savages that can be met in his time are already developed humans. 'Brutes' refers to animals, whereas 'civil man' to developing humans. This careless use of 'civil' is confusing and might lead one to think that Rousseau is referring to some other phase of the historical development. The reference to reason is also confusing, as is the fact that soon he will refer to the early societies as 'a golden mean'. But he is clearly referring to the physical existence where harm from others is not experienced as an affront. Also the textual context makes this reading the only sensible one: with it Rousseau is attacking other conceptions of natural (original) humanity. Another role of this fragment is to emphasize Rousseau's claim that violence is mainly a social creation, and above all linked to property – the passage of text ends by a quote from Locke, which poetically links injury with property. (DOI 167 [170]) One might ask of course why Rousseau would be so careless with his words (reference to reason, use of 'civil'). But as I have shown, there were repeated instances in *Part I* where Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature oscillated as he put it to different uses. Also Rousseau is now speaking in the framework of his historical narrative, and he has relaxed the limits of his description of natural man. In any case, it is important to realize that this reference to the primitive state (the pure state of nature) has no other relevance than its function as a vehicle of critique. It is not a moral ideal.

Rousseau thus distances 'beginning Society' (la Société commencée) or 'nascent Society' (la Société naissante) clearly from the pure state of nature. Humans are entering the sphere of morality, and thus the natural goodness of the solitary natural men no longer applies (DOI 167 [170]). As we have seen, in the context of *Part I* natural goodness was an amoral concept that was intimately linked to the purification of man. Purely natural men were good because

they lacked the recognition of insult or injury. This is of course no longer possible. In the new situation, and in the absence of 'Laws' (le Loix), the constant threat of vengeance would serve as a restraint to violent behavior[135]. Rousseau also notes that at this stage the influence of pity has diminished. In this state vengeances and punishments are terrible. But just like Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature was a mix of violence and tranquility, so is this description of violent savage life ambiguous. It is also the happiest epoch of human history.

The Genuine Youth of World

Even though Rousseau has just described the violence of nascent society, he also claims that it has been ideal for humans: "...this period in the development of human faculties, occupying a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our amour propre, must have been the happiest and the most lasting epoch. The more one reflects on it, the more one finds that this state was the least subject to revolutions, and the best for man..." (...ce période du développement des facultés humaines, tenant un juste milieu entre l'indolence de l'état primitif et la pétulante activité de nôtre amour propre, dut être l'époque la plus heureuse, et la plus durable. Plus on y réflechit, plus on trouve que cet état étoit le moins sujet aux révolutions, le meilleur à l'homme...) (DOI 167 [171])

Once again Rousseau claims many things in a densely packed passage of text, one which is easy to interpret as an expression of primitivism. First of all this state, "the genuine youth of the World" (la véritable jeunesse du Monde) (ibid.), is posited at an equal distance between the two facts given as real – Rousseau's descriptions of the pure state of nature and the contemporary societies. 'Just mean' is of course also an old expression that carries moral tones. In Masters & Kelly and Cranston editions it is translated as 'golden mean', as a direct allusion to the Greek origins (Masters & Kelly DOI, 48; Cranston DOI, 115). Rousseau refers to contemporary societies by a derivation of the concept of *amour propre*. He focuses on 'petulant' forms of amour propre, not amour propre as such (see 4.1.3, *Amorality and Natural morality*). Of course the word 'our' focuses this critique explicitly on contemporary societies. This is the only time in the *Discourse* when Rousseau refers to a specific form of amour propre, however, so the significance of this fragment should not be exaggerated.

Rousseau also postulates that such an epoch would have lasted a long time and would have been extremely stable. This is similar to his earlier description of the pure state of nature, a state which also "must have lasted" an immeasurably long time. Both descriptions of savage

135 The distinction between Violence and Right, Nature and Law, is important here. Even though these social savages no longer live in the pure state of nature, in the terminology of Rousseau's *political philosophy* they are of 'nature'. This perspective does not allow for traditions et cetera as alternatives for laws. For Rousseau, primitive societies are built on the ever-present threat of force or violence.

life are posited as points of origin, this time as a harmonious (but not very peaceful) state, which precedes a development spiraling out of control. Rousseau uses contemporary savages as proof of the existence such a state, claiming that all of them have remained in it (DOI 167 [171]). Note that earlier he claimed how contemporary savages were all in the violent and cruel stage. The violence and the stability are twin sides of the same coin. Rousseau uses this social state of nature to argue that humans were not destined to form political societies[136].

Rousseau's claim that this state was the happiest and best for man recalls to mind his words in *Exordium*, where he anticipated that his readers might look for an age where they wish that their species had stopped. Such a sentiment would serve as "the Praise of your earliest forbears" (l'Elogede de tes premiers ayeux) (DOI 133 [133])[137]. But how does Rousseau justify his claim that this is such a happy epoch, especially as he has just described it in so stark colors, talking about vengeance and bloodshed? The prime reason is that humans are relatively independent and autarkic. This is of course different from the pure state of nature where natural men were absolutely independent and self-sufficient. Now humans can enjoy the fruits of cooperation, leisure and the new sweet sentiments, but their relationships do not lead to absolute dependence. Rousseau claims that humans in nascent society are mostly self-sufficient, as their economy does not require division of labor (except the division within the family) (DOI 167 [171]). As I described earlier, the seeds of inequality have been sown, but in these material and social relations moral inequality does not grow into a disruptive force. Rousseau again uses the term 'nature' to underpin his claim: "they lived free, healthy, good, and happy as far as they could by their Nature be" (ils vécurent libres, sains, bons, et heureux autant qu'ils pouvoient l'être par leur Nature) (ibid.). This 'Nature' is nature as human essence, but human essence as a historically changing condition in a new situation.

Why such a claim, and why immediately after the description of violence? This tension is linked to Rousseau's multiple philosophical motives. The description of pre-political morality and violence is linked both to his philosophical anthropology and his political philosophy. He describes the basic features of life in society, and the true origin of inequality proper. He is crafting an answer to the Academy of Dijon, and one part of it is to situate inequality and conflict firmly in the social realm. The idealized description of nascent society on the other hand is linked to his critique of contemporary societies. This is evident in his description: "all subsequent progress has been so many steps in appearance toward the perfection of the individual, and in effect toward the decrepitude of the species" (tous les progrès ulterieurs

136 Just like the great apes were used to prove that humanity was not destined to leave the pure state of nature – although due to the ambiguous role of that description it is questionable how serious that claim was.

137 Although as we have seen, he warned his readers of the wish to go backward (ibid.).

ont été en apparence autant de pas vers la perfection de l'indiviudu, et en effet vers la décrépitude de l'espéce) (ibid.) Rousseau highlights the dual nature of progress, the mixed blessing of perfectibility – a theme which he had already introduced in *Discourse on Sciences and Arts*. I will look into this critique closer in section 5.4.

Rousseau considers this to be the state least subject to revolutions – qualitative shifts in the human condition. The relative autarchy of nascent society results in a new kind of harmony. There is no teleological drive to leave this state. Rousseau proposes that only "some fatal accident" (quelque funeste hazard) could have caused humanity to leave it (DOI 167 [171]). What is this fatal accident, and what does this transition mean for Rousseau? This is an important watershed in the historical narrative, where Rousseau uses the term 'state of nature' in new meanings in order to focus on specific issues: the birth and nature of property, and the establishment of civil societies.

5.3. Ends of State of Nature

It has by now become clear that the expression 'state of nature' is ambiguous in the *Discourse*. Often Rousseau qualifies the expression with adjectives when he is referring explicitly to the pure state of nature, but not always. Thus in *Part I*, when he is addressing the instinct of pity, Rousseau opposes 'Savage man' (l'homme Sauvage) and 'Civil man' (l'homme Civil), and accordingly 'the state of nature' (l'état de Nature) and 'the state of reasoning' (l'état de raisonnement) (DOI 153 [155–156]). Here 'nature' is placed in a conceptual constellation nature–reason, and the realm of signification of 'nature' is instinctual behavior. The textual context is again important. As I explained in the previous chapter, Rousseau is criticizing the lack of pity and compassion in contemporary society, especially its most reasoning cadres. 'Civil' thus refers to the societies of Rousseau's time, not society as such. In this meaning of 'state of nature' the end of nature is the birth of reason. But if we look at the description of the pure state of nature more generally, its end would come with the onset of language and human relationships.

Elsewhere Rousseau speaks explicitly about the end of the state of nature, but in a completely different sense. *Part II* opens with the famous description of the imaginary inventor of property, who was "the true founder of civil society" (le vrai fondateur de la société civile) (DOI 161 [164]). The description has become a commonplace crystallization of Rousseau's views: if only other people had destroyed the enclosures of this usurper of land, humanity would

have been spared many evils. Detached from its context it sounds like a declaration of extreme primitivism. But the description is immediately followed by an important statement, which is vital to reading *Part II*:

> "But in all likelihood things had by then reached a point where they could not continue as they were; for this idea of property, depending as it does on many prior ideas which could only arise successively, did not take shape all at once in man's mind: Much progress had to have been made, industry and enlightenment acquired, transmitted, and increased from one age to the next, before this last stage of the state of Nature was reached." (ibid.)
>
> (Mais il y a grande apparence, qu'alors les choses en étoient déjà venües au point de ne pouvoir plus durer comme elles étoient; car cette idée de propriété, dependant de beaucoup d'idées antérieures qui n'ont pû naître que successivement, ne se forma pas tout d'un coup dans l'espirit humain: Il falut faire bien des progrès, acquerir bien de l'industrie et des lumières, les transmettre et les augmenter d'âge en âge, avant que d'arriver à ce dernier terme de l'état de Nature.)

Birth of property was not a sudden transformation but a slow historical process, the latter stages of which necessarily built on earlier ones. But what does Rousseau mean by 'idea of property'? A hint can be found in the description of the inventor of property: "to whom it occurred to say *this is mine*, and found people sufficiently simple to believe him" (s'avisa dédire, *ceci est à moi*, et trouva des gens assés simples pour le croire) (ibid., Rousseau's emphasis). Creation of property is not just in the act of enclosure, for example, but in the fact that someone recognizes property as such. This is why Rousseau speaks of property "of a sort" in the stage of primitive families – humans lack such relationships beyond the family unit. Property in a true sense of the word requires the emergence of a wider community.

Birth of property as a *social relationship* is at issue here. Rousseau refers to the "last stage in the state of Nature", to accumulation of ideas and practices, which made property possible. He explicitly places the birth of property after the nascent society, the youth of the world described earlier. Property is born after 'the fatal accident'. (DOI 167 [171]) Here the dominant realm of signification of 'nature' in 'state of nature' changes: now all developmental history before the creation of property is in the state of nature. Next I will examine Rousseau's description of this transition.

Division of Labor

While nascent society was characterized by autarchy, its end is signaled by dependence. In Rousseau's historical narrative this is the second great revolution, which brings about division of labour. (DOI 167–168 [171]) Metallurgy and agriculture are its harbingers. But Rousseau does not see their effects as predetermined – quite to the contrary. The mere existence of these new skills does not bring about division of labour. Rousseau refers to 'the Savages of America' (Sauvages de l'Amérique) who lack both and have thus remained savage[138], and to 'Barbarians' (Barbares) who have remained in the savage state while only practicing one of them (DOI 168 [172]). So it seems that the convergence of these two technologies propels development.

Rousseau describes the invention of both of these new technologies and their accompanying skills as imitation of natural phenomena. But there are significant differences as to the nature of the phenomena which are imitated, and thus the likelihood of learning differs. We have to remember that Rousseau is of course trying to tell a coherent developmental story, or as he put it in the beginning of *Part II*: "try to fit this slow succession of events and of knowledge together from a single point of view, and in their most natural order" (tâchons de rassembler sous un seul point de vue cette lente succession d'évenemens et de connoissances, dans leur ordre le plus naturel) (DOI 161 [164]). For the purposes of this work it is not the most important thing to judge how believable the description is. In order to understand Rousseau's philosophical motives I focus on how he structures the story, and what those structures can tell us.

Rousseau proposes that the use of metals – he talks about iron – is learned through 'some extraordinary event' (la circonstance extraordinaire) such as a volcanic eruption which brings forth molten metals. Primitive humans observe an 'operation of Nature' (opération de la Nature) and learn to mimic it. But here Rousseau employs a familiar rhetoric technique, a contrary assumption. Even if such a contingency gave humans the possibility of learning, learning itself would have required the kind of foresight and understanding, which such humans according to Rousseau were unlikely to have. (DOI 168 [172])[139] Like the pure state of nature earlier, now nascent society has become a new point of origin that is inherently stable

138 It is obvious that Rousseau referred to nomadic North American Indians. He ignored or was ignorant of Indian cultures that practiced agri*culture*. But otherwise his views were not so simplistic as might seem, so it is better to postpone judgment for a while.

139 In *Part I* Rousseau already claimed that in the pure state of nature the use of fire had been learned countless times with the aid of "different chance occurrences" (de différens hazards) (DOI 143 [144]). It was part of a contrary assumption that was intended to underline the impossibility of development in the pure state of nature. Still, it is yet another case where developmental tones are present already in the description of the pure state of nature.

and distanced from possibilities of further development. For Rousseau, the past lasts a long time. But the difference with the pure state of nature is of course that Rousseau is describing a development that *has taken place*, from origins that he believes can still be found in contemporary savage societies. In this context Rousseau is not so much denying the possibility of development rather than noting the difference between learned techniques and established technologies. Developing humans learn the skills of using metals again and again, but they are not established.

The principles of agriculture, growing things, are on the other hand learned early on. Rousseau describes humans in earlier stages of history as being engaged in foraging and perceiving the basic operations of nature (as the environment or the Creation). Still he believes that humans have turned to agriculture relatively late. One reason for this is the stable subsistence offered by the autarkic economy of nascent society: hunting, fishing and foraging[140]. He also points out other obstacles: lack of motivation, tools and foresight, and especially the lack of security against pillagers. However, Rousseau distinguishes between small-scale horticulture and large-scale cultivation, agri*culture* proper. Small-scale horticulture is a source of additional subsistence, not a full-time occupation, and it is done with the simplest of implements. The latter signifies a complete change in way of life, where one lives and works for a future crop and is tied to the land. Rousseau argues that this would have been totally alien to the savage mindset. (DOI 168–169 [172–173])

Thus neither of the new skills in itself causes an abrupt cultural change. In Rousseau's description it is conceivable that for a long time the savages complemented their life with small-scale horticulture and even used simple metal tools. As Rousseau claimed earlier, 'other arts' (autres arts) are needed to literally force humans into agriculture and the accompanying division of labor. The important point is *specialization*, emergence of social classes engaged in other pursuits than subsistence. When metallurgy becomes a full-fledged technology with miners, founders and smiths, rather than a simple technique that is relearned constantly, the autarchy of the nascent society is broken. (DOI 169 [173]) People no longer "applied themselves only to tasks a single individual could perform, and to arts that did not require the collaboration of several hands" (s'appliquérent qu'à des ouvrages qu'un seul pouvoit faire, et qu'à des arts qui n'avoient pas besoin du concours de plusieurs mains) (DOI 167 [171]). Specialization makes agriculture necessary[141], and in turn new applications of metallurgy make agriculture more efficient. Both technologies develop hand in hand (DOI 169 [173]). As

140 Again, pastoral economy is not mentioned.

141 Rousseau does not explicitly mention changes that catalyze social specialization into metalworking. His story does not follow the traditional order where agriculture makes specialization possible due to surplus production. People are already supplementing their diet with horticulture, but wheat-growing and significant surplus follow specialization, not vice versa. One reason for this is his wish

Rousseau puts it, iron and wheat 'civilized' (civilisé) humans. From the viewpoint of Rousseau's philosophical anthropology, this is a great transformation. The fatal accident is not a single event but the intertwinement of natural resources, contingency, learning and formation of new social constellations.

Division of Land and Birth of Property

Rousseau's narrative has now arrived at the stage, which he described in the opening lines of *Part II*. It is now easy to see how the initial poetic depiction of the inventor of property has transformed into a historical situation where the emergence of property is dictated by existing social relationships. Specialization has created relationships of exchange, and agriculture has resulted in the 'division' (partage) of land (ibid.). This is the foundation of property in the proper sense of the word. As I mentioned earlier, for Rousseau property must be 'recognized' (reconnüe) as such, and he is explicit about it here. Not only do people possess their instruments of subsistence and their lodgings, they also understand the need of affirming the possessions of others: "for in order to render to each his own, each must be able to have something" (car pour rendre à chacun le sien, il faut que chacun puisse avoir quelque chose) (ibid.).

In Rousseau's terminology, property is linked to "the first rules of justice" (les premiéres régles de justice). If we look at the central conceptual constellations of the *Discourse*, it is now understandable why Rousseau called birth of property the end of state of nature. It signifies a move to the realm of 'right' (droit) from previous relationships that were based on the ever-present threat of force or violence. It produced "the right of property different from that which follows from natural Law" (le droit de propriété différent de celui qui resulte de la Loi naturelle) (DOI 169 [174]) Here Rousseau again uses conceptual transition to criticize other conceptions of property. His expression 'natural Law' refers to humans in the state of nature – and here the differences between the pure state of nature and social state of nature (nascent society) fade away. Rousseau in effect says that there is no natural right of property, but he at the same time redefines natural right or natural law, according to his purification of man. As we have seen before, this is law or right in a metaphorical sense only. It is a relative balance of forces, which remains only due to the primitive forms of economy. But the birth of property and the pressures brought by new economic forms give birth to 'a new kind of right' (une nouvelle sorte de droit), a social relationship based on mutual recognition and the fear of justified reprisal. To recapitulate: Rousseau's historical narrative does not include the abstract perspective of natural right as a universal moral precept. Everything relates to gene-

to preclude long-term planning and toil from the savage mindset. Development of technologies is not a natural constant that is realized as soon as excess food and time is available.

alogy. It makes no sense to talk about justification of property without the social institution of property.

It is interesting to note that even though Rousseau is in the *Discourse* opposing ideas of natural right as a universal moral precept, in this occasion he addresses a very Lockean conception of the right of property. But the passage must be interpreted in its proper context. Rousseau is looking at how the notion of property was born, how the people of these societies *conceived* it. 'Labour' (travail) is according to him the only conceivable foundation, which is basically just what Locke claimed. But the difference lies in the general philosophical perspective. For Locke it is true universally that when humans mix their labor with objects in 'state of nature', they remove them from nature and thus appropriate them as their own property (Locke 1993, 274). Rousseau sees recognition of that right, and thus the right itself, as a social phenomenon, which can be born only after the division of land. (DOI 169 [172–172]) The difference in the meanings of 'state of nature' illustrates this. Locke uses it to distinguish the commons and private property, whereas Rousseau uses it to distinguish different kinds of societies (Locke 1993, 273–275). Thus in this context for Locke state of nature is an existential condition of an object (prior to the mixing of labor), or in other words state of nature is a juridical concept which states that the object has not been appropriated into the realm of right. For Rousseau state of nature is a state of existence between humans, in this context the absence of right. Rousseau simply does not have a Lockean viewpoint of work as a universal human act which carries its own legitimation.[142]

Inequality and Perfection of Humanity

If earlier historical transformations had been always connected to environmental circumstances and contingent events, Rousseau describes the next phase as virtually inevitable. Bodily and mental differences between individuals make life in this new state more difficult for some, easier for some. This is accompanied by unequal patterns of consumption, as some classes of society are burdened with more work than others. (DOI 169–170) [174]) In effect, the new social organization allows natural inequalities of talents to gain even more moral relevance. The result is the consummation of moral inequality:

> "This is how natural inequality imperceptibly unfolds together with unequal associations, and the differences between men, developed by their different circumstances, become more perceptible, more permanent in their effects, and begin to exercise a corresponding influence on the fate of individuals" (DOI 170 [174])

142 Also terminologically 'labour' (travail) is not an anthropological constant; Rousseau reserves the term only for work in developed societies.

(C'est ainsi que l'inégalité naturelle se déploye insensiblement avec celle de combinaison et que les différences des hommes, developpées par celles des circonstances, se rendent plus sensibles, plus permanentes dans leurs effets, et commencent à inflüer dans la même proportion sur le sort des particuliers.)

At this stage humanity is "perfected". All the central faculties of social humanity have developed, and humanity as Rousseau knew it is born. In the final pages of *Part I* Rousseau collected his ideas on purely natural men into an evocative description, which was partly quoted in section 4.2.3. Now he makes a corresponding illustration where he lists the qualities of social humanity. First, he names all those qualities which have been fully developed by the preceding history: memory, imagination, amour propre and reason. Second, he notes how the whole range of human attributes from strength to beauty and possessions have become objects of consideration and comparison. Ranks and fates of humans are not stratified anymore by direct application of force, but also by attracting consideration and esteem. This also makes dissembling a road to ascendancy: "To be and to appear become two entirely different things, and from this distinction arose ostentatious display, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their wake" (Etre et paroître devinrent deux choses tout à fait différentes, et de cette distinction sortirent le faste imposant, la ruse trompeuse, et tous le vices qui en sont le cortége) (ibid.).

The earlier autarkic independence has turned into absolute dependence on other people and on all those new needs that were mentioned earlier. As Rousseau puts it, the new needs subjugate humans "to the whole of Nature" (à toute la Nature) (DOI 170 [175]). One is reminded of his expression 'Nature's Tyrant' (see 4.2.3) in *Part I*, by which he described the expanding cycle of needs and industry. The Tyrant is at the same time subjugated, as he becomes fatefully dependent on an ever-expanding range of resources. In this poetic expression Rousseau depicts a fundamental change in human relations. The consummation of moral inequality is accompanied by new kinds of social relationships, domination and servitude. In a short passage Rousseau manages to condense an important idea of *mutual dependence*. Domination is no longer a question of direct coercion, of force or violence. 'The rich' (les riches) are dependent on the services of 'the poor' (les pauvres), who on the other hand become dependent on their help. (DOI 170 [175]) The division of society into productive and non-productive classes however makes the rich eventually more dependent. To maintain their position they must either convince the others of their usefulness or benevolence or make them cooperate out of fear. (DOI 170–171 [175]) Rousseau also briefly looks into the theme of *relative richness and poverty*: being poor is dictated not only by the absolute quantity of goods but by the encroaching properties of others.

The whole passage is written in Rousseau's intellectual shorthand, and he does not elaborate on these themes later on in *Part II*. For Rousseau's philosophy it is however important, for many reasons. He introduces the theme of seeming or appearing, which is very important in his later works, especially *Emile*. Within the *Discourse* itself, this is another important "endpoint". This picture of perfected humanity forms the basis of his contemporary critique. As Starobinski notes, in Rousseau's critique social inequality, the attendant conditions of oppression and moral vices are interconnected (OC III 1349, 174/1). This is complemented by his denial of any kind of 'natural' origins of these phenomena. Together these dimensions form a general political statement of the nature of society in Rousseau's time. From this viewpoint *perfectibility* is indeed a poisonous gift.

But the description of perfected humanity does not only refer to the human condition of Rousseau's time; it is also the endpoint of Rousseau's philosophical anthropology. If the latter part of the description focuses on the evils of developed societies, the earlier part reminds the reader that most of the qualities, which are thought to be specifically human, are historical creations – or as Dent says, how much in humanity derives from intercourse with others (Dent 1992, 234). These two philosophical motives are never wholly distinct in the *Discourse*, but for the purpose of understanding Rousseau's motives it is useful to look at them separately. As I proposed in section 4.2.2, Rousseau's claim of No Return should be taken seriously. Even though his description of social humanity is sometimes so bleak that it is hard to distinguish society as such and the societies of Rousseau's time – and many readers of course have denied the validity of such a distinction – Rousseau is consistent in his insistence that the historical acquisitions of humanity are irrevocable.[143]

Birth of property, division of labor and the consummation of moral inequality form a historical process, which propels human development into humanity proper. This is the first important end of the state of nature. The historical narrative does not however stop at this juncture. The humans of the narrative do not yet live in a political society. In an important sense of 'nature', the state of nature has not yet been abolished. Humans have moved from the realm of nature as immediate force into the realm of right as recognized relations, but not yet into right as instituted laws. In the latter part of Chapter 4 I showed how the conceptual opposition nature–law is important for Rousseau's political philosophy. Next I examine how the transition into right or law takes place in the historical narrative. Even though

143 I agree with Dent that the interpretation of Rousseau's view as a transition from good nature to miserable society is false. Dent claims that the *Discourse* includes such views but that they are immature. (Dent 1992, 234) I claim that such tones in the *Discourse* were intended as critique of contemporary society, and not as generic moral claims.

humanity has been "perfected", the social environment in which these humans live is still extremely fragile.

State of War and the Social Compact

In the beginning stages of the historical narrative Rousseau described how proximity of human groups became a catalyst for change. Now he uses a similar description to move the situation forward. Property has developed, along with new kinds of social relations, but society does not end up by itself to the bleak condition which ended the previous description of social humanity: "competition and rivalry on the one hand, conflict of interests on the other, and always the hidden desire to profit at another's expense" (concurrence et rivalité d'une part, de l'autre opposition d'intérêts, et toujours le désir caché de faire son profit aux depends d'autrui) (DOI 171 [175]). The transition is completed when there is no more pristine land, when properties and estates cover all of the society, with no conceivable outside to flee to or offer pristine property. Becoming richer is only possible at the expense of others.

Absence of laws leads to terminal insecurity for all. Psychological development of humanity has made mutual dependence possible, but resorting to violence is always a possibility, both for the masters to maintain or widen their domination and for the servants to gain subsistence without service. (ibid.) Rousseau describes this new situation as a conflict between two kinds of right, 'the right of the stronger' (le droit du plus fort) and 'the right of the first occupant' (le droit du premier occupant) (DOI 171–172 [176]). This can be understood against the background of Rousseau's critique of natural law. Rousseau does not look at these two rights as precepts of natural law in the traditional sense: he is not making a judgment as to their universal validity. They are claims for legitimation of different groups of people within that fragile and violent state. Rousseau explicitly describes how the rich and the poor, the powerful and the miserable "claimed...a kind of right" (se faisant...une sorte de droit) (ibid.) over the possessions of others. These are *perceptions of right* in this situation – and of course at the same time Rousseau is making a case for the weakness of universal claims of rights without any kind of institutions and human relationships to back them up.

In the end Rousseau claims, that "Nascent Society gave way to the most horrible state of war" (La Société naissante fit place au plus horrible état de guerre) (DOI 172 [176]). This is an evident allusion to Hobbes. Starobinski rightly points out some differences and similarities in the conceptions of state of war of these two thinkers. For both of them the war of all against all is an intolerable state, which makes a social contract necessary. (OC III, 1349–50, 176/1) Rousseau however sees the state of war as a historical creation in the strongest sense of the word, the depth of which Starobinski does not reach. According to Starobinski, Rous-

seau situates the state of war at the termination of the state of nature, when 'the technical acquisitions' (les acquisitions techniques) of nascent society are at odds with the primitive nature of humans. Property and factitious relations have 'denatured' (dénaturé) humanity. (ibid.) Starobinski takes at face value Rousseau's allusion to 'Nascent Society' in the previous quote and reads the expression 'state of nature' simplistically, not seeing that the realm of signification of both terms oscillates in Rousseau's text. Later I will describe how *in one sense* this is indeed the final stage of the state of nature. But as we have seen, in another sense the state of nature has been abolished already – the primitive nature of humans has been already eradicated.

Let us look at *Note XVII* that Rousseau appended to this section of the main text. Rousseau counters the possible objection that humans in such a state of existence would have rather dispersed than engaged in constant warfare. This is not possible for three reasons. First, as he mentioned in the main text, "the end of land" forced people to remain in close proximity. Second, humans would have grown into relations of servitude, knowing little else. Third, they were accustomed to the new reified needs, satisfaction of which required assemblages of humans. (DOI 221 [221–222]) These are hardly just technical acquisitions; they represent a thoroughgoing change in human nature. This is basically a repetition of the denial of return, and as its antipode Rousseau presents humans 'in the first times' (dans le premiers tems), who could have dispersed due to their independence. 'Denaturing' is in the *Discourse* a continuous process without a precisely set point of origin[144]. Starobinski merges two meanings of 'state of nature', the cultural transformation from primitive to "perfected" humanity, and the juridical transformation into social institutions. Jonathan Marks reads this note in a very different way, as an expression of Rousseau's individualism. In his reading Rousseau claims that these prepolitical humans "prefer" war to solitude and independence, and "value" their acquisitions more than their independence. (Marks 2005, 104) He fails to see Rousseau's emphasis on the thoroughgoing construction of a social personality – that dependence becomes part and parcel of humanity.

In this fundamental sense the state of war is a product of historical development with no basis in nature as the original human essence. From the viewpoint of philosophical anthropology the state of war is born in the state of society, albeit a society which is terminally insecure. It leads to another historical transformation, the birth of instituted society or *civil society*. Rousseau describes the transformation from the viewpoint of the rich, who have the most to lose. They realize that despite their guile and dissembling, their domination is always

144 The term 'denature' does not occur in *Discourse on Inequality* a single time. It has an important role in the *Emile*.

threatened by the use of force, as it is based only on "a precarious and abusive right" (un droit précaire et abusif) (DOI 172 [176]), as I described earlier. Beyond the clashes of different "rights" (basically private interests) there is no basis of appeal to a shared right. Thus the rich man needs a basis of legitimation for his power, he needs to instill in others "other maxims and to give them different institutions, as favorable to himself as natural Right was contrary to him" (d'autres maximes, et de leur donner d'autres institutions qui lui fussent aussi favorables que le Droit naturel lui étoit contraire) (DOI 172–173 [177]). 'Natural Right' in this case refers to the *effective* rights of that violent situation, force or violence as a basis of human relations. Natural right is a descriptive, not a normative concept in this context.

Rousseau then describes *a social compact* as a sort of devious plan of the rich. To get out of this threatened situation they propose a way out of it that would seemingly benefit all. This original compact is an act of union which institutes the rule of law and mutual duties. (DOI 173 [177]) Rousseau does not use the term 'social contract' here, it does not actually appear in the whole *Discourse*: to distinguish it from his famous book with the same name, I call this act of union the social compact. Rousseau's description is also very different from other conceptions of an original contract of society, such as that of Hobbes. The nature of the compact is determined by the existing relationships of property, inequality and power, and thus it "forever fixed the Law of property and inequality, transformed a skillful usurpation into an irrevocable right" (fixérent pour jamais la Loi de la propriété et de l'inégalité, d'une adroite usurpation firent un droit irrévocable) (DOI 173 [178]). In other words it constitutes the institutionalization of existing property relations. Such a conception of the original compact can hardly be used as a point of legitimation in political philosophy. Rousseau does indeed call this "the origin of Society and of Laws" (l'origine de la Société et des Loix), but the mere existence of laws as a social phenomenon does not guarantee any moral legitimacy. (Rapaczynski 1987, 254[145]; Rosenblatt 1997, 168–169)

This is the final conceptual opposition of the historical narrative: nature–law. As a counterpoint to law, life in an instituted society, 'nature' refers to immediate relations of force or the threat of force as a basis of order. From this viewpoint the preceding refined historical narrative fades to the background, as in all its diverse forms the earlier human history becomes the state of nature. This conceptual constellation is important in Rousseau's political phi-

145 Rapaczynski rightly distinguishes society in general and political society, especially from the viewpoint of legitimacy, in the *Discourse*. However, he seems to take Rousseau's descriptions of the pure state of nature unquestioningly as part of the historical narrative (Rapaczynski 1987, 254)

losophy. But what remains is that Rousseau is never talking about universal human nature. The humans in his political philosophy are beings who have developed and grown *in a world*. This historical basis of political philosophy and philosophical anthropology is one of the key contributions of the whole book.

5.4 Contemporary Critique: the Savage versus the European

I have described how the figure of the savage changes from the solitary natural man into the conjectural inhabitant of the idealized nascent society. Rousseau uses both figures to criticize contemporary society, but in *Part II* his critique becomes more refined. Through the figure of the autarkic social savage, already a recognizable human being, he is able to focus on certain key elements of human life in developed societies. Exploration of this critique makes it even clearer that despite his sometimes careless terminology the object of Rousseau's criticism is not society as such.

In *Note XVI* that is linked to the description of 'the genuine youth of the World', Rousseau compares so called savages of his time with Europeans. He remarks on the troubles of converting savages to the European way of life and concludes that they are due to differences in ideas and 'the frame of mind' (la disposition d'espirit) of people, which result from radical differences in their living environments (mainly the social forces which mould Europeans). His depictions of the veritable impossibility of converting savages and the lure of primitive life to Europeans are of course very romantic, but by using the savage as a mirror Rousseau can describe how the European way of life might look like from the outside:

> "Indeed, after a few observations they can readily see that all our labours are directed at only two objects: namely, the comforts of life for oneself, and consideration from others." (DOI 219 [220])
>
> (En effet, après quelques observations il leur est aisé de voir que tous nos travaux se dirigent sur deux seuls objets; savoir, pour soi les commodités de la vie, et la considération parmi les autres.)

Such a way of life would be totally alien to the savage whom Rousseau has constructed. Still, despite the sometimes romanticized depiction of savage life, the core idea is important, and Rousseau returns to it in the final pages of the *Discourse*: "the Mankind of one age is not the Mankind of another age" (le Genre-humain d'un âge n'étant pas le Genre-humain d'un au-

tre âge) (DOI 186 [192])[146]. Humanity is not a constant, and thus comparing societies on the basis of an abstract criterion of progress or enlightenment is futile. Note that even though Rousseau is speaking of 'ages' here, the idea applies to contemporary savages. Culturally they live in another age and a different world.

Here Rousseau opposes 'Savage man' (l'homme Sauvage) and 'civilised man' (l'homme policé). The example of the previous is the familiar Carib, whereas the latter is exemplified by the European Statesman or 'the Citizen' (le Citoyen), whose life he describes in dismal terms: "...he works to death, even rushes toward it in order to be in a position to live, or renounces life in order to acquire immortality. He courts the great whom he hates, and the rich whom he despises" (il travaille jusqu'à la mort, il y court même pour se mettre en état de vivre, ou renonce à la vie pour acquerir l'immortalité. Il fait sa cour aux grands qu'il hait et aux riches qu'il méprise) (DOI 187 [192]). Rousseau claims that understanding and craving for such a life would require that the savage grasped social notions that are alien to him. The description of the savage is again idealized, but the mirrored contemporary humanity is the focus of the text: "the Savage lives within himself; sociable man, always outside himself, is capable of living only in the opinion of others... everything being reduced to appearances, everything becomes factitious and play-acting" (le Sauvage vit en lui-même; l'homme sociable toûjours hors de lui ne sait vivre que dans l'opinion des autres... tout se réduisant aux apparences, tout devient factice et joüé) (DOI 187 [193]).

Rousseau recognizes that a profound investigation of this civilized humanity would require another work than the *Discourse*, and he readily admits that (DOI 184 [189–190], 187 [193]). His contemporary critique in the *Discourse* is more a series of political and cultural statements than a treatise on modern subjectivity, but he is laying foundations for later work. For now it suffices for him to prove that present trials and tribulations are not the result of original human nature but a historical creation.

146 Scott uses this quote to emphasize Rousseau's historicity, the insistence on humans as historical beings, and the accompanying critique of contractarian political thought. (Scott 2006b, 227)

5.5. Remarks on 'Nature' in Rousseau's Political Philosophy

After he has described the original social compact, Rousseau begins to examine the development of civil society – the developmental history of laws and governments. Roughly the text continues a historical narrative, but Rousseau's perspective becomes more complicated. Here is yet another textual hinge of the book. The transformation into civil society is irrevocable. It "irreversibly destroyed natural freedom" (détruisirent sans retour la liberté naturelle) (DOI 173 [178]). Here Rousseau is basically saying the same thing as he said in *Note IX*. Development of society not only creates the sphere of law, it destroys the possibility of returning to nature in any sense (see 4.2.2). Rousseau also describes this transition in very dark tones, describing a humanity that is forever tied into labor, servitude and misery (ibid.). As an isolated fragment this sounds like a wholesale condemnation of society as such. But in the context of the book the essential message is that the birth of civil society does not offer grounds of legitimation, and that it is yet another revolution which changes everything.

In the following pages Rousseau talks much about governments, laws and states, but from different philosophical perspectives. As he promises, he offers a historical narrative which spans the multiplication and expansion of political societies, the generation and evolution of government, inevitable abuses and failings of government, institution of religious authority, birth of hereditary and absolute rule, clienteles and inherited social classes. But at the same time he criticizes other views on the origin and legitimacy of power, and in general looks at civil society not only from a genealogical but also from a normative point of view. This change in philosophical motives makes it necessary for Rousseau to change his conceptual apparatus somewhat, and to deviate from his carefully constructed critical apparatus. As I have shown, in the earlier sections of the *Discourse* Rousseau has distanced himself from making moral or juridical claims on the basis of 'nature' in practically any sense of the word, and he has attacked many formulations of natural law or natural right. Now he has to adopt different meanings of 'nature'. For example, he even applies precisely that concept of natural right which he has criticized, when he attacks Pufendorf on the possibility of slavery and alienating one's freedom (DOI 179 [183–184]).

Rousseau attacks several philosophical conceptions of the origins of power, because he rightly sees such stories as tools of legitimation. That is why he yet again emphasizes that the humans who form the first civil societies are already *socialized* and already prone to subjection (DOI 177 [181–182])[147]. Rousseau tells the story of the beginnings, but he also wants to refute the

147 It is notable that the savage is again the counterpoint.

notion that voluntary subjection could have been original or natural. Instead he describes a historical process of mistakes, abuses of power, and above all the influence of inequality on the development of societies (DOI 183–184 [188–189]). An important point is that both inequality and social domination are historical acquisitions, not original or natural.

Exploring this material at sufficient depth is beyond this work. The object of this study is to understand why Rousseau created such an apparently contradictory narrative structure the *Discourse*, and what we can learn by exploring his use of 'nature'. Rousseau's political notes at the end of *Part II* are somewhat distinct from that question, and in any case proper study of them would require researching many of his later works rather more than the rest of the *Discourse*. Thus I will restrict my attention to a few selected passages of the text where Rousseau employs the term 'nature', and I will compare them to the results of the study so far.

When he is describing the multiplication and expansion of political societies, Rousseau employs the conceptual constellation Nature–Law, where 'nature' refers to the absence of law and rule by force. Within civil societies humans live under 'Civil right' (le droit civil), but 'the Law of Nature' (la Loy de Nature) obtains in the relationships between societies. In other terms, in their relations with each other civil societies remain in 'the state of nature'. (DOI 174 [178]) This is perhaps the only instance in the book where Rousseau's use of the term 'state of nature' approaches the conventional meaning in political philosophy: a state of things without political institution (see 3.0) 'Law of Nature' means nothing else than the absence of proper laws, and force as the only viable judge of conflicts. Rousseau uses this juridical concept of state of nature to fly off at a tangent and describe in a poetic tone the consequences of competition between nations – countless wars and slaughter of thousands. He contrasts this with 'state of Nature', which in this case refers to all times prior to the establishment of civil society – he uses the concept of prepolitical state of nature (ibid.). Rousseau is employing a juridical concept of state of nature, but he takes advantage of the terminological continuity to compare this "developed state of nature" with his conjectural state of nature.

Rousseau uses a similar conceptual transition elsewhere too. When he ponders the possibility of the dissolution of legitimacy of government and the possibility of revoking the government, he says that after the dissolution everyone would revert to their 'Natural freedom' (liberté Naturelle). (DOI 180 [185]) This is of course not natural freedom in the sense of absolute independence – it is irrevocable, as we saw. Here 'nature' refers to the absence of law or legitimacy. Rousseau is writing from a juridical perspective, and his historical speculations are not relevant in this context. *Discourse on Political Economy* (Discours sur l'Économie

Politique) offers a good point of comparison. The text was published originally in 1755 as an article in Diderot's *Encyclopedia* and separately in 1758, so its time of writing is very close to the *Discourse*. In that text Rousseau is writing more expressly from a juridical and normative perspective when he handles the issue of law. Using a very traditional formulation he claims that when someone "lays claim to subjecting another to his private will independently of the laws, he instantly leaves the civil state and places himself in relation to him in the pure state of nature" (...indépendamment des lois, un homme en prétend soûmettre un autre à sa volonté privée, il sort à l'instant de l'état civil, et se met vis-à-vis de lui dans le pur état de nature) (DPE 10 [249]) This concept of state of nature has obviously very little to do with the one used in *Part I* of the *Discourse*. Jonathan Marks again merges the two concepts and Rousseau's different philosophical motives when he examines *Social Contract* in the light of the material of the *Discourse*. He takes references to natural man in *Social Contract* too literally as references to an instinctual being. (Marks 2005, 141) He does not notice that these are two distinct concepts of natural man, which are linked to very different contrast spaces.

As I already mentioned, regarding the question of slavery and alienating one's freedom Rousseau seems to slip into traditional rhetoric of natural right that he has criticized. He calls life and liberty "the essential Gifts of Nature" (des Dons essentiels de la Nature), and claims that depriving oneself of them would be "an offence [to offend] against both Nature and reason" (offenser à la fois la Nature et la raison) (DOI 179 [184]). This indeed sounds very similar to the ideas of natural right based on right reason, nature as original human essence or even nature as a normative order. This nature is an incontrovertible criterion which slavery offends. To perpetuate slavery is to alter nature, to divest future slave generations of the gifts of nature. Elsewhere in the book such talk of altering or changing nature would refer concretely to humanity as a changing species, but here nature is a constant universal.

As opposed to that, in another passage Rousseau criticizes the idea that the legitimacy of authority, especially absolute rule, could be founded on paternal authority. He tries to refute this by referring again to 'the Law of Nature', but this time the realm of signification of 'nature' is different from the previous quote. Instead of referring to a universal criterion Rousseau implicitly refers to his own description of family in the pure state of nature, and uses it to judge claims of legitimacy. Humans do not live in the pure state of nature, but life in the pure state of nature affords a yardstick. This is evident in the way that Rousseau denies the natural origins of paternal authority and claims that it could only have been born in society as a recognized right. (DOI 177 [182]) The targets of his criticism of course do not understand 'nature' in this sense, but Rousseau uses conceptual transition to attack their views.

When Rousseau later ponders a future work which would examine different forms of government "relative to the Rights of the state of Nature" (rélativement aux Droits de l'Etat de Nature), he expresses the same idea of state of nature as an ideal of political philosophy, but does not elaborate (DOI 184 [189]). Similar allusions can be found in a passage of text where Rousseau proposes that the institution of different forms of government is linked to the constitution of the society in question: the formation of social classes mainly. He proposes that in societies where fortunes and talents are less disparate, where in other words inequality is relatively low, democracy would be likely to form. According to Rousseau such societies "had moved least far from the state of Nature" (s'étoient le moins éloignés de l'Etat de Nature) (DOI 181 [186]). This 'state of nature' is hardly a concrete reference to the pure state of nature but is more likely a loose reference to the condition of autarchy.

The last occurrence of the term 'state of nature' is also one of the most interesting and problematic ones. In the final pages of the *Discourse* Rousseau describes degeneration into tyranny, the final dissolution of the sphere of law:

> "Here everything reverts to the sole Law of the stronger and consequently to a new State of Nature, different from that with which we began in that the first was the state of Nature in its purity, whereas this last is the fruit of an excess of corruption." (DOI 186 [191])
>
> (C'est ici que tout se ramene à la seule Loi du plus fort, et par conséquent à un nouvel Etat de Nature différent de celui par lequel nous avons commencé, en ce que l'un étoit l'Etat de Nature dans sa pureté, et que ce dernier est le fruit d'un excès de corruption.)

He explicitly refers to his conception of the pure state of nature in *Part I*, but what is the point of this comparison? He talks about closing a circle and ending up where his description started. The point of the comparison is *solitude*. The pure state of nature was of course existence in solitude, as we have seen. But in what sense is tyranny solitude? One needs to examine the textual context closer. Rousseau is not talking about tyranny and legitimacy in a formal juridical sense. He claims that in the final dissolution of government all recourse to morals or virtue becomes void, as the possibility of moral community is destroyed. In this state "all private individuals again become equal because they are nothing" (tous les particuliers redeviennent égaux parce qu'ils ne sont rien) (DOI 185 [191]). The difference between these two states of solitary nature is of course that in the latter world nobody can flee into the woods and live in concrete solitude. These humans are already "perfected", but their relationships have been demolished.

It is notable that Rousseau links this depiction to a deeper social insight about contemporary societies. He is referring to the lack of any other human relations than predation and competition in those societies whose degeneration he describes[148]. In his description of the ever-present threat of falling into nature as lawlessness Rousseau is fairly close to Hobbes – but he is much more sensitive to the fact that this threat itself is a historical creation.

Even though the turn into a normative perspective is understandable in the context of the book, it still seems that Rousseau's use of 'nature' is more diverse and even haphazard in the final stages of the book. I claim however that we should take seriously Rousseau's claim that a profound exploration of contemporary humanity and of the nature of government was beyond the scope of *Discourse on Inequality* and it would require separate works. It was, and it did. The *Discourse* was not created for these philosophical motives, and its central rhetoric strategies of conceptual redefinition were created for specific uses which I have explored. Also, in the final parts of the book Rousseau was addressing burning contemporary political issues. It was important for him to say his piece, even though some of his normative claims were left somewhat shallow. I repeat my claim that the *Discourse* was not only a working out of Rousseau's anthropology and political philosophy, it was also part of social and political action. In the final sentences of the book Rousseau relinquished his grip on the critical reins and at the same time showed how very well aware he was of the rhetoric power of 'nature'. Rousseau knew that the meaning of 'nature' was contested in philosophical use. But whatever meanings were given to the word, the conclusions should be clear:

> "...since it is manifestly against the Law of Nature, *however defined*, that a child command an old man, an imbecile lead a wise man, and a handful of people abound in superfluities while the starving multitude lacks in necessities." (DOI 188 [194], emphasis mine)
>
> (...puisqu'il est manifestement contre la Loi de Nature, *de quelque maniére qu'on la définisse*, qu'un enfant commande à un vieillard, qu'un imbécille conduise un homme sage, et qu'une poignée de gens regorge de superfluités, tandis que la multitude affamée manque du nécessaire.)

148 This is of course an important theme in his later philosophical work.

6. Conclusions

In the opening chapters of this study I gave myself many research goals. This is a study in conceptual history and an interpretation of Rousseau's work, but it aims beyond that subject matter. The primary motivation of this work was to develop tools for understanding the use of 'nature' and various conceptual transitions as intentional rhetorical strategies. I used Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* as a case that would both help me to develop these tools and to illuminate their usefulness in exploring similar contexts. These tools are the primary result of this work, and I believe that they can be used both in the study of historical cases and, most of all, to make sense of many contemporary discussions where conflicting meanings of 'nature' are at work. Still, even though this work was subject to these general practical concerns, I believe that I have also offered a contribution to Rousseau-research.

As everything boils down to the conceptual tools and the rhetoric techniques that I was able to construct with them, I will first restate these results in general terms, after which I describe their application in the multiple research tasks which I posed for myself. In Chapter 1 I posed the heuristic division between *word*, *concept* and *conception*. This division was not meant as a framework for a typology of meanings – quite to the contrary, as I described a host of problems in categorizing meanings of 'nature'. As I proposed in section 1.8, we need to understand the transitions and connections of meaning within a context of use, not colored be pre-existing conceptual schema. But even though the distinction between word and concept is an obvious one, the distinction of concept and conception was described in quite generic terms. This was inevitable, as I am convinced that meaningful distinctions of, say, concepts and conceptions of nature cannot be made without a tangible context of use. The use of these heuristic tools gives them meaning.

I also introduced auxiliary tools that can be used to make meaningful distinctions between meanings of 'nature', to examine whether there are differences in concepts and conceptions in a given context: realm of signification, conceptual oppositions, moral register and content. Their relationship to the previous division was also described in general terms. Let us now reexamine how these tools have helped us understand Rousseau's use of 'nature'.

In the *Discourse* Rousseau employed two kinds of transitions of meaning: *conceptual transitions* and *conceptional changes*. I have charted his use of various techniques such as the purification of man and contrary assumptions, and shown how they correspond with the changes in the dominant philosophical motives of the text, which I believe is strong evidence in fa-

vor of seeing these transitions as intentional rhetorical strategies. The latter techniques are context-specific and do not offer much beyond the scope of Rousseau-study, but the main transitions can be generalized and used to shed light on other cases too.

Conceptual transition

Rousseau employed conceptual transition especially in his critique of other philosophers. He took advantage of the terminological continuity in several established philosophical (and theological, juridical...) terms like 'state of nature', 'natural right' and 'natural law', and their theoretical ladenness in tradition. In other words he took advantage of the potential assumptions of conceptual continuity or unity by his readers. He defined state of nature in a specific way, for example as the pure state of nature, by using auxiliary techniques like the assumption of solitude and critique of projection. Then in turn he used this concept of state of nature as a weapon of criticism against other concepts of state of nature – he criticized them on his own terms. In *Part II* Rousseau used conceptual transitions for a different purpose: he placed state of nature at different conceptual oppositions in order to emphasize different subject matters: the psychological perfection of humanity, the birth of property, and finally the institution of civil societies. I also briefly examined such transitions in his later political notes of the *Discourse*.

Conceptual transition is a radical change in the meaning of the word where its whole field of application is changed. When Rousseau was attacking other meanings of 'state of nature', he was at the same time attacking the contrast spaces that determined their use. For example, he refused to address natural right as a god-given or nature-given moral precept that can be abstracted from time and place. He did this by changing the realm of signification of state of nature, and the conceptual oppositions which it was part of. Thus he did not only forcefully interpret the pure state of nature as a historical point of origin, he also made it part of the conceptual divisions solitary–social, instinctive–free and mechanical–rational.

Conceptional change

Even though for the most part Rousseau enforced the limitations that he placed for his concept of the pure state of nature, especially the assumption of solitude, we could see that within *Part I* the description of humanity in the pure state of nature oscillated, as he used the pure state of nature to criticize contemporary societies, for example. The pure state of nature was still the point of origin, and natural men were still solitary creatures, but they were not always ignorant, unchanging or even pushed into the amoral realm. The concept of pure state of nature remained similar, but Rousseau used different conceptions of pure state of

nature. There were similar oscillations in his description of the social state of nature (nascent society). When he emphasized the lack of stable institutions, it became violent and brutal, but in comparison with the European society it was the Youth of the World.

In a conceptional change the realm of signification and the primary conceptual oppositions remain the same. As I said in Chapter 1, there are of course no indisputable criteria for judging this, as the division of concepts and conceptions is not meant to be an exclusive division. They are tools which allow us to distinguish degrees of difference and similitude. If we look at how Rousseau discussed the temperament of natural man, we can see that he criticized some conceptions of state of nature (as the historical origin of humanity) without projecting his own conception of pure state of nature forcefully on them. He was not attacking the validity of the realm of signification of 'state of nature' by others, he was criticizing the *content* of their descriptions. Even though we can still question Rousseau's readings of Montesquieu, Cumberland et cetera, in this context it seems meaningful to compare their views of the state of nature – there seems to be a sufficient degree of conceptual similitude. But we can see that Rousseau challenged these conceptions of state of nature.

Thus in conceptional change the concepts stay similar, but there can be change in content, in moral registers, and even in some conceptual oppositions. For example, Rousseau might stick with the conceptual oppositions solitary–social, which is central to his concept of pure state of nature, but in some contexts he might leave behind the opposition mechanical–rational. In conclusion: conceptual transition can challenge the very contrast space surrounding an issue, whereas conceptional change allows one to challenge other descriptions of the contested phenomena.

6.1. Relevance for research on Rousseau

The first and most important result for research on Rousseau is that his divergent use of 'nature' is intentional, and even more, an integral part of the structure of the whole *Discourse*. The question by the Academy of Dijon, especially the reference to the authorization of natural law, offered a restricted contrast space in the dominant conceptual framework of the time. Rousseau refused to succumb to it, he refused to address the question of inequality in the terms of abstract and universal morality, and instead he used the *Discourse* to challenge that contrast space and move the issue into the realm of genealogy and to highlight the specific

nature of the inequalities of the European society of the time. His use of 'nature' allowed him to criticize other views on the issue of inequality and to construct his own approach.

Thus the fact that the meanings of 'nature' are not consistent or coherent in the *Discourse* is not evidence of Rousseau being a bad philosopher. His conceptual transitions and changes in conceptions were philosophically relevant in that context, as they facilitated the challenges that he made against existing views. If some philosophical, theological, scientific, artistic or other contrast space is reified, if the viable alternatives of addressing key issues are restricted to a pre-existing set of concepts, it will inhibit novel thought. Conceptual challenge can be an effective way to break such reified structures. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, reified concepts do not exist only as arguments in debates. They can be recreated in textbooks, dictionaries, introductory courses and many other forms. Conceptual critique can challenge such forms of power, as Rousseau very well knew.

This means that the text of the *Discourse* should not be interpreted with assumptions of conceptual unity. Such assumptions, for example regarding the status of the pure state of the nature, do violence to the text. If the text of the *Discourse* is so stratified, it makes no sense to try to find a dominant concept of nature and force the text into a coherent argument. This study can of course make no ruling on such issues about Rousseau's work in general, but I claim that if offers strong reservations against any projects of reconstructing a Rousseauian concept of nature. Many sections of the *Discourse* that have been traditionally used in the old either-or-debates over "what is natural for Rousseau", simply do not seem to be relevant anymore. I have identified dozens of such sections of the text in the preceding chapters. This suggests that we may need new and more sensitive readings of other works where the role of 'nature' is central.

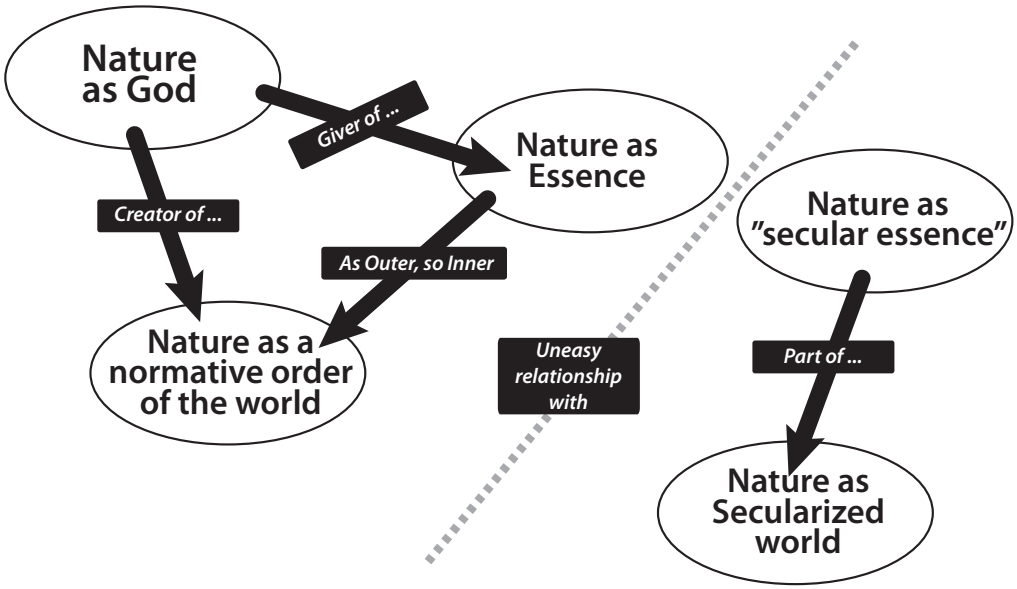
This study was not primarily an interpretation of Rousseau's constructive contributions, but I believe that this reading helps us to appreciate that at the time of the *Discourse* he focused on two areas. First of all, he was one of the pioneers of a relational and historical view of human nature. Conceptually, he challenged the idea of human nature or essence as a universal baseline, and instead he insisted on seeing humanity as a result of the interplay of inner potentials and external forces – both nonhuman and human. But this study also shows that we have to be extremely careful in interpreting Rousseau's general views on these issues from the text of the *Discourse*, as his critical array and the accompanying techniques of purification and detachment forced him to place emphasis on the external factors of development. For the *Discourse* to offer any proper answers to questions which are built in the contrast space natural–external, it would have to be written with a unified philosophical motive,

with stable concepts. It was not, so as a general question "natural or not?" will not get any good answers, and very easily one will look for them in the wrong places. Second, in the *Discourse* Rousseau also focused on the critique of contemporary societies, which is another source of potential mistakes. As I have shown, both halves of the *Discourse* work as mirrors for contemporary maladies and evils, and many of the most bipolar sections of the text are linked to that motive.

The claim that Rousseau challenged the concept of universal human essence and "discovered history" is of course not new, and as Laurence D. Cooper notes, Rousseau surely was not alone in this. In fact such claims have been part and parcel of the old debates over the *Discourse* and Rousseau's general views on humanity, as Cooper's own reception of the idea beautifully illustrates. (Cooper 1999, 40–41) But this reading helps us to get rid of many quasi-problems and to appreciate how hard it was to propose such views in the conceptual landscape of Rousseau's time. Neither should we read him with the historical acquisitions and deadlocks of later scientific division of labor in mind.

6.2. Relevance for understanding 'nature'

I claimed in Chapter 1 that typologies of concepts of nature are often distracting, and at best limited in their usefulness. If we look at the results of this study, we can surely distinguish a group of objectified concepts of nature that Rousseau had to work with, and which appear in the *Discourse*:



This chart pictures not only these meanings of 'nature', it also shows how certain connotations between different meanings were likely to occur. Throughout the work Rousseau used 'nature' in a way that hinted at a very traditional theological view of the world, where nature became at the same time the creator, the Creation and the creature, with strong conceptual ties between these meanings. Sometimes he however distanced himself from these views, and began looking at nature in a much more secularized way, as the environment, and as the essence of a being who was part of that environment and transformed by its forces.

This kind of conceptual charting would however be blind to the transitions of meaning that I have explored, and to their various uses. Any conceptual typology has to lean on the assumption that the conceptual boundaries are clear. However, philosophically the most important instantiations of 'nature' in the *Discourse* do not follow these distinctions but actively challenge them. State of nature in the *Discourse* is evidently not a distinct philosophical concept that can be defined in a satisfactory way outside the context of use. 'State of nature' refers to different concepts, and within those conceptual areas there are further differences. It would however be a futile exercise to try to place these meanings on a unified chart, as the contrast spaces to which they are linked were radically different. Rousseau recreated 'state of nature' to answer to different sets of questions.

In philosophy we have a tendency to strive for clear concepts, to explicit dictionary definitions, which offer us the relevant field of application. Such definitions rest on the assumption that conceptual coherence exists or can be constructed. This study however shows how differences of meaning can be used to further understanding, to open up new contrast spaces, especially in situations when there is no agreed understanding of the subject itself. I claim that it was precisely the malleability and confusion in the meanings of 'nature' which made the word and its derivatives (natural right, natural law, state of nature...) so useful in the philosophy of Rousseau's time. Challenging conceptual unity was a way to novel ideas.

The assumption of conceptual coherence carries unspoken assumptions about the nature of philosophy. This study is not a wholesale argument against conceptual consistency. There is a word to be said for clarity of communication, even in the midst of heated disagreement or enmity. But in reading philosophical texts, especially in areas where there is no established and clear contrast space, we should not assume that clear and distinct concepts exist. We should be able to understand conceptual transitions and their role in philosophical work, not merely as errors, mere polemic or bad philosophy.

6.3. Relevance today: there is no natural nature

Today we are struggling with a plethora of issues where 'nature' is used as a central argument. Nature denies and allows, facilitates and opposes, offers moral criteria or submits to human definition. What is natural and what is not continues to be an almost instinctive recourse. This study offers an example how such controversy has been inherent in some of the most important terms of political philosophy in recent history. It shows that debates over nature are often debates over the identity of nature. But the familiarity of the word, and the tendency to drift towards dominant concepts like nature as the environment, impede our understanding of these debates. It is too easy for contemporary debates over issues like gene manipulation to end up in deadlocks, when participants stick to their concepts of nature and ignore or refuse to see that they are talking about different things.

For example, appeals of environmental protection are often attacked by the claim that the area in question is not natural. Or critique of gene manipulation can be criticized by noting that traditional breeding did not yield natural results either. Such critique, intentionally or not, projects a simplistic concept of nature as a moral criterion to the discussion and takes advantage of it by denying the naturalness of the object in question. In the last two decades there have been many projects, which have questioned the viability of the nature–culture boundary in understanding such issues. I have had the pleasure of participating in dozens of workshops and seminars, which have focused on this issue, and I was fortunate to benefit from the company of talented people in the project "How Does Nature Speak?" in the University of Tampere[149]. Important critical and constructive contributions have been made, but especially in environmental philosophy such attempts tend to include a rather naive attitude to the use of words. There is an implicit belief that if only we manage to graft good arguments against nature–culture dualism and to invent new concepts, we are done. The central role of 'nature' and the power of transitions of meaning however means that the substantive critique of dualism is merely the first stage. One must take seriously the complex constellations of words, concepts and conceptions, that symbolic space where we all must make our way.

I believe that cases like Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* can help us learn to act meaningfully in situations where conceptual challenge is needed, but the existing conceptual landscape tends to overdetermine the discussion. I believe that these heuristic tools can help us to recognize situations when the contrast space for addressing an important issue is limited by dominant conceptualizations. This awareness can in turn be used to make conceptual

149 See Haila & Dyke, 2006.

interventions. Let us return to Hurricane Katrina, which I used as an example in Chapter 1. For obvious reasons Katrina was immediately drawn into the debates over climate change, about the naturalness and unnaturalness of specific climate phenomena and the accuracy of climate models. The Boxing Day tsunami in the Indian Ocean on the other hand seemed to remain distant from such concerns, because the movements of tectonic plates were obviously distant from climate concerns. Nature in these two events was identified in very different ways. In the case of Katrina it focused on the conceptual border nonhuman–human, as human influence in the causes of the event was debated. With the Boxing Day tsunami, nature receded beyond such considerations and became the almost god-like nature who works in mysterious ways. But in both of these cases the consequences of the disaster shared similarities, especially regarding social and economic inequalities and the security of livelihood. This convergence offers a window of opportunity where the meaningfulness of these conceptual distinctions can be questioned by focusing on human vulnerability in the face of natural disasters – regardless of whether they are natural in the other sense of the word. Such rhetorical strategy would also open a way for questioning the overemphasis on the futile debates over the degree of human agency in the case of climate change, for example, and for focusing on the necessity of reacting to its consequences.

The divergence of 'nature' will stay with us, however. Environmental philosophy tends to suffer from a slight hubris about conceptual redefinition. Questioning conceptual constellations that inhibit new thinking is an ongoing process. The only viable way to move forward is to use tools like these in action, to learn skills of conceptual critique and intervention. Outside that context of use these tools, or anything like them, are irrelevant. And of course in the end redefinition alone does very little, even if it is successful. It can open up spaces for new ways of thinking and new venues of communication, but they have to be used for any of it to mean something. But that is, as they say, a whole another game.

References

Works by Rousseau:
Key: Abbreviation, original year of publication, references to translation and the French edition.

[DSA] "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts *or* First Discourse" in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Discourses and other early political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. pp. 1–28.
French Edition: "Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social – Écrits politiques*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1964. Text edited by Francois Bouchardy. pp. 1–30.

[DOI] "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men *or* Second Discourse" in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Discourses and other early political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. pp. 111–222.
French Edition: "Discours sur l'Origine, et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social – Écrits politiques*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1964. Text edited by Jean Starobinski. pp. 108–223

Other English translations:
[Masters & Kelly DOI] "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men (Second Discourse)" in Masters, Roger D. and Kelly, Christopher (eds.): Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse), Polemics, and Political Economy, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1992. Translated by Judith R. Bush, Christopher Kelly and Roger D. Masters. pp. 1–95.
[Cranston DOI] *A Discourse on Inequality*, Penguin Books, London, 1984. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Maurice Cranston.
[Cress DOI] "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" in Cress, Donald A. (trans. & ed.): *Basic Political Writings*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1987. pp. 25–110.

[DPE] "Discourse on Political Economy" in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Social Contract and other later political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003. pp. 3–38.

French Edition: "Discours sur l'Économique Politique" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social – Écrits politiques*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1964. pp. 239–278.

[EOL] "Essay on the Origin of Languages" in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Discourses and other early political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. pp. 247–299.
French Edition: *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, Éditions Gallimard, Collection Folio/Essais, Paris, 1990. Text edited by Jean Starobinski.

[Emile] *Emile or On Education*, Basic Books (HarperCollins*Publishers*), New York, 1979.
French Edition: "Émile ou de l'Éducation" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres completès IV: Émile, Éducation – Morale – Botanique*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1969. Text edited by Charles Wirz. pp. 239–877.

[LeRoy] "Reply to Charles-Georges Le Roy" in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Discourses and other early political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. pp. 229–231.
French Edition: "Réponse a un Naturaliste" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social – Écrits politiques*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1964. Text edited by Jean Starobinski. p. 237.

[Observations] "Observations [to Stanislas, King of Poland]" in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Discourses and other early political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. pp. 32–51.
French Edition: "Observations" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social – Écrits politiques*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1964. Text edited by Francois Bouchardy. pp. 35–57.

[Grimm] "Letter to Grimm" in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Discourses and other early political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. pp. 52–61.
French Edition: "Lettre à Grimm" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres complètes III: Du Contrat Social – Écrits politiques*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1964. Text edited by Francois Bouchardy. pp. 59–70.

[Narcissus] "Preface to *Narcissus*" in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Discourses and other early political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. pp. 92–106.

French Edition: "Preface" in in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres complètes II: La Nouvelle Héloïse – Théâtre – Poésies – Essais Littéraires*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1964. Text edited by Jacques Scherer. pp. 959–974.

[Voltaire] "Letter to Voltaire" " in Gourevitch, Victor (trans. & ed.): *The Discourses and other early political writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. pp. 232–246.
French Edition: "Lettre à Voltaire" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres completès IV: Émile, Éducation – Morale – Botanique*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1969. Text edited by Henri Gouhier. pp. 1059–1075.

[LB, 1763] "Letter to Beaumont" in Kelly, Christopher and Grace, Eve (eds.): *Letter to Beaumont, Letters Written from the Mountain, and Related Writings – The Collected Writings of Rousseau Vol. 9*, University Press of New England, Hanover 2001. Translated by Christopher Kelly and Judith R. Bush. pp. 17–83.
French Edition: "Lettre á Christophe de Beaumont" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres completès IV: Émile, Éducation – Morale – Botanique*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1969. Text edited by Henri Gouhier. pp. 925–1007.

[RJJ, 1782] Masters, Roger D. and Kelly, Christopher (eds.): *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues – The Collected Writings of Rousseau Vol. I*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1990. Translated by Judith R. Bush, Christopher Kelly and Roger D. Masters.
French edition: "Rousseau, Juge de Jean Jaques: Dialogues" in Gagnebin, Bernard and Raymond, Marcel (eds.): *Œuvres completès I: Les Confessions, autres textes autobiogrphiques*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1959. Text edited by Robert Osmont. pp. 667–989.

Other references:

Cassirer, Ernst: *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1956. Translated by Peter Gay.

Cassirer, Ernst: *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979

Collingwood, R. G.: *The Idea of Nature*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1960.

Connolly, William E.: "Voices from the Whirlwind", in Bennet, Jane and Chaloupka, William (eds.): *In the Nature of Things*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993. pp. 197–219.

Cooper, Laurence D.: *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 1999.

Cranston, Maurice: *Jean-Jacques, The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712–1754*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1983.

Cranston, Maurice: *The Noble Savage, Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1754–1762*, The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Dent, N.J.H.: *Rousseau, An Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory*, Basil Blackwell Limited, Oxford, 1988.

Dent, N.J.H.: *A Rousseau Dictionary*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.

Dent, Nicholas: *Rousseau*, Routledge, London, 2005.

Descola, Philippe: "Constructing natures, Symbolic ecology and social practice", in Descola, Philippe and Pálsson, Gísli (eds.): *Nature and Society, Anthropological Perspectives*, Routledge, London, 1996. pp. 82–102.

– : *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française, Tome 2 (M-Z)*, Dictionnaires Le Robert, Paris, 1992.

Diderot, Dennis: "Natural Right" in Masters, Roger D. and Kelly, Christopher (eds.): *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse), Polemics, and Political Economy – The Collected Writings of Rousseau, Volume 3*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1992. pp. 135–139.

Garfinkel, Alan: *Forms of Explanation: Rethinking the Questions in Social Theory*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981.

Gay, Peter: "Introduction" in Cassirer, Ernst: *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1956. pp. 3–32.

Glacken, Clarence: *Traces on a Rhodian Shore, Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967.

Gourevitch, Victor: "Rousseau's Pure State of Nature", *Interpretation*, Volume 16/1, Fall 1988. pp. 23–59.

Haack, Susan: *Evidence and Inquiry, Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001.

Haila, Yrjö and Dyke, Chuck: "What to Say about Nature's 'Speech'", in Haila & Dyke (eds.): *How Nature Speaks, The Dynamics of the Human Ecological Condition*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006. pp. 1–48.

Horowitz, Asher: *Rousseau, Nature, and History*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1987.

Ingold, Tim: "Globes and Spheres, The topology of environmentalism", in Milton, Kay (ed.): *Environmentalism, The View from Anthropology*, Routledge, London, 1993. pp. 31–42.

Kaitaro, Timo: *Diderot's Holism, Philosophical Anti-Reductionism and Its Medical Background*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt an Main, 1997.

Korkman, Petter: *Barbeyrac and Natural Law*, Åbo Akademi University, Helsinki 2001

Lanson, Gustave: "The Unity of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Thought" in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Volume I: Paradoxes and Interpretations*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 11–28.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude: "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Founder of the Sciences of Man" in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Volume I: Paradoxes and Interpretations*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 198–206.

Locke, John: "The Second Treatise of Government" in *John Locke: Political Writings*, edited by David Wootton, Penguin Books, London, 1993. pp. 261–387.

Lovejoy, Arthur O.: "The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*" in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, *Volume I: Paradoxes and Interpretations*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 29–47.

Lähde, Ville: "Gardens, Climate Changes, and Cultures: An Exploration into the Historical Nature of the Environmental Problems", in Haila & Dyke (eds.): *How Nature Speaks, The Dynamics of the Human Ecological Condition*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006. pp. 78–105.

de Man, Paul, "Theory of Metaphor in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*" in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, *Volume II: Human Nature and History*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 110–130.

Marks, Jonathan: *Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2005.

Masters, Roger D.: "Structure of Rousseau's Political Thought" in Cranston & Peters (eds.): *Hobbes and Rousseau, A Collection of Critical Essays*, Anchor Books, New York, 1972. pp. 401–436.

Masters, Roger D.: *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1976.

Meek, Ronald L.: *Social science and the ignoble savage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976.

Meier, Heinrich: "*The Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men* – On the Intention of Rousseau's Most Philosophical Work", Interpretation, Volume 16/2, Winter 1988–9. pp. 211-227.

O'Hagan, Timothy: *Rousseau*, Routledge, London, 2003.

Passmore, John: *The Perfectibility of Man*, Duckworth, London, 1970.

Plattner, Marc F.: *Rousseau's State of Nature, An Interpretation of the Discourse on Inequality*, Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb, 1979.

Plumwood, Val: *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, London, 1993.

Rapaczynski, Andrej: *Nature and Politics, Liberalism in the Philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1987.

Roche, Kennedy F.: *Rousseau, Stoic & Romantic*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1974.

Rommen, Heinrich A.: *The Natural Law, A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1998.

Rosenblatt, Helena: *Rousseau and Geneva – From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749–1762*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

Scott, John T.: "General Introduction" in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, *Volume I: Paradoxes and Interpretations*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 1–7. (Scott 2006a)

Scott, John T.: "The Theodicy of the *Second Discourse*: The 'Pure State of Nature' and Rousseau's Political Thought" in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, *Volume II: Human Nature and History*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 225–256. (Scott 2006b)

Shklar, Judith: "Rousseau's Two Models: Sparta and the Age of Gold", in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, *Volume I: Paradoxes and Interpretations*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 224–245.

Siep, Ludwig: "Rousseau's Normative Idea of Nature", in *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought 2000*, Vol. 4, SoPhi, University of Jyväskylä, 2000. pp. 53–72.

Starobinski, Jean: *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Transparency and Obstruction*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer.

Strauss, Leo: *Natural Right and History*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.

Tuck, Richard: *Natural rights theory, Their origin and development*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.

Wahl, Jean: "Rousseau's Bipolarity", in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, *Volume I: Paradoxes and Interpretations*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 193–197.

Weil, Eric: “Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his Politics” in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, *Volume I: Paradoxes and Interpretations*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 141–163.

Williams, Raymond: ”Ideas of Nature” in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, Verso, London, 1980. pp. 67–85.

Williams, Raymond: ”Nature” in *Keywords, A vocabulary of culture and society*, Fontana Press, London, 1988. pp. 219–224

Wokler, Robert: ”Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures: Rousseau’s Anthropology Revisited”, *Daedalus*, Summer 1978. pp. 107–34.

Wokler, Robert: *Rousseau* (Past Masters –series), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995.