

Rousseau's Natural Man as the Critic of Urbanised Society

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In his book *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes* (1755), often called the Second Discourse, Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote a speculative description of humanity before the birth of societies and its subsequent development all the way towards the urbanising and modernising societies of his time. Popularised or introductory texts on Rousseau's thinking often still have him drawing an idealised image of the original natural man (*l'homme naturel*), a solitary primitive being who is good and happy, and even making a clarion call for a 'return to nature'. These simplistic readings, which did still have some academic credence in the early twentieth century, have subsequently been largely discredited in Rousseau studies.

Already in 1923 Arthur O. Lovejoy in his essay 'The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*' pointed out that Rousseau did not idolise the life of the solitary natural men. Instead his ideal was the life of the so-called savages who live in traditional societies.¹ But even though few Rousseau scholars would still make such simplistic claims about idealised original humans, that notion continues to loom in the background. In his seminal work *Rousseau: An Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory*, N.J.H. Dent still felt it necessary to attack such 'traditionally identified »cruxes« in Rousseau's thought'.² Similarly, in his recent book, Jonathan Marks posits himself (alongside Dent) as a countering voice against those who 'almost unanimously' see Rousseau's depiction of the original natural men as primary.³ Although it is disputable if such a dominant reading is really alive in Rousseau studies, in this article I leave this general question aside. Suffice it here to say that Rousseau did not simply idolise the life of the natural man. But if he did not, what was the philosophical function of that depiction? This has been an important topic of debate in Rousseau studies in recent years.

In this article I propose that instead of one philosophical function of natural man there are many, indeed diverse conceptions of natural man and pure state of nature. Rousseau uses the speculative description in the early half of the Second Discourse as a

literary tool with which he is able to address many issues at once. I explore in detail one of these philosophical functions, namely how Rousseau employs the figure of natural man in his critique of contemporary societies. However, in order to do so I will first have to examine the structure of the Second Discourse, especially the relationship of Rousseau's depiction of the pure state of nature in the early parts of the book with the developmental narrative in the latter half of the book.

Rousseau's pure state of nature

In the first half of the Second Discourse Rousseau describes the life of the natural man in a condition that he calls the pure state of nature (*le pur état de Nature*).⁴ Like many other conceptions of state of nature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is at least on the textual surface posited as the origin of human development. What makes Rousseau's pure state of nature special is its extreme primitiveness. Natural men in the pure state of nature are solitary creatures who have no families or even lasting relationships. Humans live scattered among the animals, dispersed over the face of the Earth.⁵ Even a mother and a child cease to recognise each other as soon as their original union is broken. In much the same way a mother and a father meet only briefly for the act of procreation and part as soon as it is over.⁶ Natural men have no conception of human species or kinship. This assumption of solitude is not limited to a few descriptive passages. Rousseau employs it repeatedly in order to argue a point, for example, that life in the pure state of nature must have been peaceful or that the development of new skills and knowledge would have been improbable in it.⁷

The assumption of solitude is closely linked to the claim that natural men have no language of any kind. In a long textual digression on the birth of language, placed in the midst of the description of the pure state of nature, Rousseau intertwines lack of language and lack of relationships as a hopeless barrier against development. His assumption of solitude allows no familial or herd-like primary relationships, and the emergence of stable relationships would seem to require language. Yet on the other hand, the birth of language would seem to require prior relationships. Rousseau argues that in the pure state of nature there would be no need for either of them.⁸ He ends up with a veritable chicken-and-the-egg problem:

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 Problème, 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.⁹

The credibility of Rousseau's description is not so interesting as his reasons for ending up with such a primitive conception of natural man. Purifying natural man of almost all recognisable features of humanity creates that 'almost demonstrated impossibility'. In addition to denying language and human relationships Rousseau also claims that natural men do not use tools or have homes, nor do they even have foresight or memory.¹⁰ In one of his most evocative passages he recounts this purified depiction of natural man and his timeless state of existence:

[...] 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 [...] et chacune partant toujours du même point, les Siècles s'écouloient dans toute la grossièreté des premiers âges, l'espèce étoit déjà vieille, et l'homme restoit toujours enfant.¹¹

Because natural man in the pure state of nature is so primitive, to the point of absurdity, and because Rousseau has detached him from the possibilities of development, there has been a lot of debate over the philosophical function of the pure state of nature in the Second Discourse.

Point of origin or philosophical abstraction?

The exchange of views by Victor Gourevitch and Heinrich Meier in the journal *Interpretation* in 1988–1989, gives a good indication of the diverse interpretations of the pure state of nature. Gourevitch interprets the pure state of nature as a thought-experiment that is meant to extrapolate the limits and conditions of humanity instead of making any claims as to the concrete historical origins of humanity or even factual claims of any kind.¹² Meier takes an opposite view and interprets the pure state of nature as exploration into the historical roots of humanity and as an expression of the basic animality of humans.¹³ This exchange of views focuses on a crucial question: how should the Second Discourse be read? Are the early parts of the book meant to describe a historical point of origin, which would make them part of the historical narrative of the latter parts? Or is the pure state of nature truly detached from the historical narrative, and does it thus have a distinct philosophical function?

This is a long-standing debate, and all parties can find textual evidence for their views. The trouble is, however, that to make their interpretations work they have to

ignore a lot of textual material or dismiss it as irrelevant or non-philosophical. For example, Gourevitch interprets all of Rousseau's references to contemporary 'savages' as depictions of primitive societies. Literally they are of course just that, but Gourevitch ignores the fact that Rousseau also uses them to reinforce his depiction of the solitary savage.¹⁴ Meier on the other hand sees Rousseau as claiming continuity between humans and other animals and thus ignores textual evidence where Rousseau clearly distinguishes between humans and animals.

In much the same way Jonathan Marks works from the pre-assumption that he can find an essential, considered philosophical view within the Second Discourse and detach it from the 'merely rhetorical' material. He leans on a few textual fragments where Rousseau hints at developmental continuity between the pure state of nature and the historical development of humanity and questions whether Rousseau really has a conception of an ahistorical and purified natural man.¹⁵ N. J. H. Dent even questions whether the problematic historical narrative of the Second Discourse is important in itself at all, and instead he uses *Émile* as the yardstick and sees the Second Discourse as an immature version of the mature themes of Rousseau's later work.¹⁶

Rousseau surely did not make the situation easier. In the beginning of Part II of the Second Discourse, where Rousseau embarks on his historical narrative, he seems to use the pure state of nature as the starting point. Natural men are solitary creatures who lack language, but their development seems to begin simply in responses to external stimuli, and the developmental barriers mentioned earlier are absent. Instead of being detached from history by various obstacles, natural men embark on a course of natural learning:

Il apprit à surmonter les obstacles de la Nature, à combattre au besoin les autres animaux, à disputer sa subsistance aux hommes mêmes, ou à dédommager de ce qu'il falloit céder au plus fort.¹⁷

If one wants to read a consistent claim into this seeming incoherence, it is surely possible if a little textual violence is allowed. But such rational reconstruction does not answer the question why Rousseau, clearly a careful and skilful writer, created such incoherence in the Second Discourse.

Two figures of natural man

However, the tension between the early and latter parts of the book is not the only problem with the portrayal of the pure state of nature and the natural man. There is also vacillation within the depiction of the pure state of nature. Even though natural

man remains solitary and speechless, his characteristics change. Sometimes his life is pictured as harsh and demanding, whereas elsewhere it becomes peaceful.¹⁸ Rousseau also emphasises the ignorance of natural men and their lack of development, but there are times when he emphasises how cunning and resourceful they are.¹⁹

Within Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature we can thus differentiate two figures of natural man. The difference is not clear-cut, but we can use these figures as tentative reading aids in order to determine whether this is a case of differing perspectives on the same notion of natural man, or if the divergence can be understood better by a difference in philosophical functions.

Ignorant natural man lives fully in the animal realm of instincts and 'mechanical' cognition. He has only some simple original needs that stem from an inner natural impulsion, and he lacks foresight and productive imagination.²⁰ Due to his solitude and ignorance he is content with the simple life of original nature:

Son imagination ne lui peint rien; son coeur ne lui demande rien. Ses modiques besoins se trouvent si aisément sous sa main, et il est si loin du degré de connoissances nécessaire pour désirer d'en acquérir de plus grandes, qu'il ne peut avoir ni prévoyance, ni curiosité.²¹

And thus natural men live a peaceful and simple life:

D'où il suit que l'homme Sauvage ne desirant que les choses qu'il connoît et ne connoissant 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 esprit.²²

But there are instances where Rousseau describes a *capable natural man* who is not only stronger than civilised humans, but has also learned to overcome other animals with his cunning and use of tools (the use of which has been denied him elsewhere).²³ He also seems to be virtually exempt from illness.²⁴

If one does not want to discount these tensions or apparent contradictions as Rousseau's incoherence, a new interpretative perspective is needed. In my dissertation *Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'* I wanted to search for a reading that would not necessitate discarding the consistent structures of detachment and other recurrent features of the text such as the centrality of the assumption of solitude. The key to understanding these problems was that these changes in the description of the natural man seem to correspond with changes in the dominant motive of the text.²⁵

Rousseau's philosophical motives

Instead of taking sides in the debate over the philosophical status of the pure state of nature I have approached Rousseau's speculative story in the Second Discourse as a literary tool that allowed him to address many issues at once, to take part in many different discussions. I believe that the Second Discourse should not be read as containing any single systematic claim or «essential» philosophical strain. Despite the seemingly linear, if problematic, structure of the speculative narrative, we should not focus on its textual surface but on the dominant philosophical motives and their changes. Thus I propose a strategy of interpretation that approaches the Second Discourse from the perspective of four distinct philosophical motives: *philosophical critique*, *critique of contemporary society*, *philosophical anthropology* and *political philosophy*.

In this article I focus on the first half of the Second Discourse and the figures of natural man especially, and the first two motives are more relevant in this context. First I briefly examine how Rousseau's critique of other philosophers makes him so dependent on the purified and detached conception of natural man, which creates the problematic divide between ahistorical and historical. In the next section I show how this solitary and speechless creature, however, assumes another philosophical role, as Rousseau engages in a critique of contemporary society.

I propose that Rousseau uses the figure of *ignorant natural man* mainly in order to attack other conceptions of state of nature, especially attempts to legitimise social institutions by recourse to 'nature', in many senses of the word. In order to accomplish this Rousseau employs a technique of conceptual redefinition: by sticking with his carefully framed detached and solitary conception of the pure state of nature, he uses it as a yardstick to attack the views of other philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke. In other words, he defines 'nature' in the pure state of nature in a very specific way, juxtaposing it to sociability and developed reason. He then examines the views of others *as if* their conceptions of state of nature would fit such a definition. Even if this rhetorical strategy might seem somewhat dishonest or else evidence of Rousseau's misunderstanding of his objects of criticism, more important than the accuracy of the criticism is its goal, which clearly has more merit. Rousseau accuses others of projecting their own social bias onto nature:

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.²⁶

This critique of projection is repeated in several key sections of the Second Discourse.²⁷ Rousseau is also generally attacking the use of 'nature' in the philosophy of his time:

On commence par rechercher les règles 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 règles, sans autre preuve que le bien qu'on trouve qui résulteroit de leur pratique universelle. Voilà assurément une manière très-commode de composer des définitions, et d'expliquer la nature des choses par des convenances presque arbitraires.²⁸

In doing this Rousseau also points out the more general tendency to assume the naturalness – in this case, inherence and originality – of a diverse group of human faculties, habits and even social institutions. This critique of naturalness is joined in the latter half of the book by Rousseau's examination of the historical origins of most of that which is usually seen to be essentially human. Rousseau's insistence on the ignorance and solitude of natural men thus also frames his philosophical anthropology. Rousseau employs the figure of ignorant natural man in order to clear way for a historical and relational view of humanity, transferring questions of morality and the legitimation of society from the timeless and placeless realm of 'nature' into history. In effect Rousseau tries to redefine 'nature' as a historical and relational concept, instead of a universal and timeless foundation as it often was in natural right theories.²⁹ The dominance of philosophical critique in the early half of the book, and the dominance of philosophical anthropology in the latter, makes the problematic relationship between the pure state of nature and the historical narrative more understandable.

But as I noted earlier, that is not the only tension in the book. The tension between ignorant and capable natural man cannot be explained by the relationship of these two philosophical motives. The description of the solitary and speechless natural man oscillates between ignorance and cunning, peace and conflict, abundance and scarcity, and Spartan weeding out of the weaklings and natural health. Rousseau even at times seems to idolise natural man, and these poetic moments have kept up the primitivistic readings that were mentioned in the opening parts of this text. However, these sections are always tangential to the main current of the first half of the Second Discourse, which is dominated by the motive of philosophical critique.

In these sections Rousseau focuses on very different matters than in his critique of other philosophers, and upon close examination it becomes evident that he is not simply praising the solitary savage. These tangential sections correspond with the figure of capable natural man.

Critique of contemporary society

The figure of capable natural man corresponds to Rousseau's critique of contemporary urban societies, a theme which he had of course begun much earlier in *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* (1750) and in the long public debate over its implications. It is crucial to understand that even though Rousseau often levels his critique at 'society' (*société*), this should not be read as human society as such. If we examine the text closely, it becomes apparent that Rousseau criticises specific forms of society. In the following I examine closely three such instances.

First, in the first half of the Second Discourse Rousseau introduces perfectibility (*perfectibilité*) as the specifically human quality. Within the book the idea remains fairly obscure, but in general terms it refers to the developmental potential of humans.

[...] faculté qui, à l'aide des circonstances, développe successivement toutes les autres, et reside parmi nous tant dans l'espèce, que dans l'individu, au lieu qu'un animal est, au bout de quelques mois, ce qu'il sera toute sa vie, et son espèce, au bout de mille ans, ce qu'elle étoit la première année de ces mille ans.³⁰

The nature of perfectibility, and especially its changing descriptions between the Second Discourse and *Émile*, remains an interesting question for Rousseau scholarship, but its details are not crucial here.³¹ Let us focus on a frequently quoted passage where Rousseau seems to condemn this specific difference of humanity:

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 siècles ses lumières et ses erreurs, ses vices et ses vertus, le rend à longue le tyran de lui-même, et de la Nature.³²

Interpretations of expressions like 'Nature's Tyrant' (*le Tyran de la Nature*) are bound to be coloured by the later critique of enlightenment and progress, and especially by the modern environmental discourse. Yet in order to understand the meaning of this passage we must remember that Rousseau appended to it his ninth note, perhaps the most famous of his notes.

In the first paragraph of the note Rousseau states boldly: 'l'homme n'a guères de maux que ceux qu'il s'est donnés lui-même'.³³ 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 that 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 (whereas in those contexts where Rousseau focuses on philosophical critique, natural man is opposed to social life as such and its requirements, developed reason and language). Rousseau lists many large-scale cultural enterprises and asks the reader to examine their true advantages, suggesting that pride and vain self-admiration are the true impetus of such development, not true needs.³⁴ His next statement seems to be even more broadly sweeping:

Les hommes sont méchants; une triste et continuelle experience dispense de la preuve; cependant l'homme est naturellement bon, je crois l'avoir démontré; qu'est-ce donc qui peut l'avoir dépravé à ce point [...]³⁵

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, who is now described as a good being.³⁶ But who are 'men' in this context? If one looks at the text of the note closely, one can see that Rousseau is not referring to historically developing humans as such. The note is appended to the reference to Nature's Tyrant, the unhappy endpoint of development. In the quoted passage Rousseau speaks of constant everyday experience, and '*ce point*' refers to the world in which Rousseau and his contemporaries are living. 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 necessarily sets humans against each other as their interests clash.³⁷ It is 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.³⁸ Yet 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, and the countless ways in which death and destitution can be profited from.³⁹ This can be compared to Rousseau's more explicit depiction of the urbanising and modernising societies in the final pages of the book, where he claims that distinction in society is finally reduced to riches.⁴⁰ Rousseau is not depicting societies or socialised humans in general but *specific historical circumstances* that bring about a dominant way of life.

[...] 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.⁴¹

He is looking at a state of things, at the people he sees. Later he describes complex enterprises like the refinement of metals and construction and claims that human pop-

ulation dwindles during the establishment and *perfection* of societies.⁴² He meditates repeatedly on the precarious and unhealthy life in the cities, mentioning, for example, how the consequences of accidents and natural disasters are not simply natural but are mediated by that way of life – later he would comment on the Lisbon Earthquake in a similar way.⁴³

Rousseau divides the problems of societies into two classes, clearly indicating a divided society and talking continuously about 'us' (*nous*). Some are burdened by excessive labour and need, others are ruined by excess. He develops further his ideas on the growth and reification of needs, to which he has alluded earlier, and describes a drive for luxury and superfluities and the interplay of increased power and passions. At the end of this development there are subjects and slaves, social relations born out of enormous wealth.⁴⁴ Nature's Tyrant refers to this development of needs and superfluities that is spiralling out of control.

Second, Rousseau compares the solitary natural men favourably with contemporary familial institutions on two different occasions. In the 1782 addition to the ninth note he attacks paternal dominion, especially marriages formed to foster social status or to gain wealth.⁴⁵ The dominion of the fathers makes the talents of the children go to waste, and unions formed by interest cause torment and shame – Rousseau even goes as far as to claim fortunate those who are able to take their own life rather than live in despair or the shame caused by adultery. In the original text of the ninth note he speaks of families and procreation from another angle, condemning the social order that encourages people to consult their fortunes before having children – the target of criticism is, of course, the ever-present threat of poverty and want. Rousseau is attacking certain forms of the institution of family and using the solitary savages as a counterpoint.

When he is disputing with Locke in the twelfth note, 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*). Rousseau claims that contemporary civilised 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 *Émile* later addressed. '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.⁴⁶ Rousseau claims that these contemporary practices warp the development of children, as opposed to natural men. If these practices were abandoned, they might grow more like the robust children in the pure state of nature.⁴⁷ In order to criticise contemporary practices Rousseau emphasises the robustness and health of solitary

natural man, and in general living without the acquisitions of society. The figure of capable man comes to the fore.

Third, Rousseau claims that illnesses primarily afflict humans who live in society. Natural men seem to be almost exempt from them.⁴⁸ This would seem a strange and unnecessary addition to Rousseau's description of natural man, especially as earlier I mentioned the depictions of the Spartan nature that weeds out the weaklings. Yet again this emphasis is made understandable by the textual context. Here Rousseau is emphasizing the healthiness of natural life in order to point out the truly horrendous contemporary urban conditions of Europe.

After this declaration of natural health Rousseau wrote a passage of text that has no ties to the main current of the text. In it he criticises 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 the ninth note: idleness and luxury versus excess of toil, and the unhealthy effects of gluttony and the meagre diet of the poor.⁴⁹ The conclusion of this comparison between natural health and contemporary suffering is evocative:

Voilà les funestes garands que la plupart de nos maux sont notre propre ouvrage, et que nous les aurions presque tous évités, en conservant la manière 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.⁵⁰

He almost asserts this, but not quite. 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 – the object of his criticism is contemporary society. His appeal to the solitary existence is not a serious suggestion. Rousseau opposes the pure state of nature and the health and peace of the capable natural man with contemporary life in order to be able to point out important themes of his social critique.

It should be noted that critique of contemporary society is not restricted to these sections. Similar themes are addressed in the latter parts of the Second Discourse. For example, Rousseau uses his depiction of the primitive 'Youth of the World' (*jeunesse du Monde*) as a contrast image of contemporary woes.⁵¹ In this article, however, I restrict myself to the sections where Rousseau uses the imagery of natural man and pure state of nature, as many enduring debates of Rousseau studies focus on their problems.

Major themes of Rousseau's critique

This reading reveals the importance of textual context for Rousseau's central terms. The assumption of a central philosophical message, of Rousseau's »essential« substance, which is shared by many Rousseau scholars, tends to carry the secondary assumption that there is conceptual unity behind Rousseau's terms. That is, there is one central meaning for 'state of nature' or 'natural man', for example. I believe that these assumptions easily lead one to ignore important facets of Rousseau's thinking.

Even though Rousseau's critique of contemporary societies is sketchy and scattered throughout the text of the Second Discourse, he invokes many themes that he develops further especially in *Émile*. The main reasons why he attacks contemporary societies are: 1) The creation and establishment of new needs degrades the possibilities of autarchy; 2) Exacerbating material inequalities result not only in the absolute want of the poor and the avarice of the rich, but also in the growth of relative inequality and the suffering that is related to the inequalities of social status and power; 3) Intensified human action and spreading to new areas has tangible destructive consequences (the critique against urban life and intensive technologies), disrupts primitive societies (critique of missionaries and merchants) and creates vulnerabilities in the face of disasters.

As I mentioned, Rousseau uses both solitary and social savages as contrast images of contemporary societies. Through these figures he also points out a positive ideal, autarchy. The difference is that in the pure state of nature natural men live in absolute independence, whereas in the savage societies humans have relative independence. But as I have explained, the focus on solitude (and thus absolute independence) stems from other philosophical motives, and in the context of the criticism of contemporary society this difference is not important. The object of criticism is not dependency as such but certain social forms of dependence. Thus already in the Second Discourse the *bourgeois* emerges as the conflictual creature of an inherently selfish society: seemingly independent but always subject to the mechanisms of dependency.

1. Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*', in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I: Paradoxes and Interpretations*, ed. John T. Scott (London, 2006), p. 40–41. It should be noted, however, that Rousseau used the term *sauvage* to refer both to humans in the original state of nature and to the so-called primitive humans of his time, or in other words, both to pre-social and social humans.

2. N. J. H. Dent, *Rousseau: an Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory* (Oxford, 1988), p. 3–4.

3. Jonathan Marks, *Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (New York, 2005), p. 3–4.
4. He also uses the expressions ‘primitive state of nature’ (*état primitif de Nature*), ‘genuine state of nature’ (*véritable état de nature*) and ‘first state of nature’ (*premier état de Nature*), but the term pure state of nature is commonly used in Rousseau studies.
5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine, et les Fondements de l’Inégalité parmi les Hommes’, in *Œuvres complètes*, 3: du Contrat Social – Écrits politiques, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris, 1964), p. 135–36, 146–47.
6. Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine de l’Inégalité’, p. 147, 217.
7. Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine de l’Inégalité’, p. 144, 146, 157.
8. Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine de l’Inégalité’, p. 146.
9. Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine de l’Inégalité’, p. 151. ‘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?’ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ‘Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men or Second Discourse’, in *The Discourses and other early political writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, 2002), p. 149.
10. Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine de l’Inégalité’, p. 144–45.
11. Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine de l’Inégalité’, p. 159–60. ‘[...] 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 [...] 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.’ Rousseau, ‘Discourse on Inequality’, p. 157.
12. Victor Gourevitch, ‘Rousseau’s Pure State of Nature’, *Interpretation*, 16/1 (Fall 1988), p. 36–37, 43–44.
13. Heinrich Meier, ‘The Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men – On the Intention of Rousseau’s Most Philosophical Work’, *Interpretation*, 16/2 (Winter 1998–1999), p. 218.
14. Gourevitch, ‘Rousseau’s Pure State of Nature’, p. 36–37. Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine de l’Inégalité’, p. 136–37, 158.
15. Marks, *Perfection and Disharmony*, p. 22–23, 27–28, 163–64.
16. Dent, *Rousseau*, p. 15–16, 79–81.
17. Rousseau, ‘Discours sur l’Origine de l’Inégalité’, p. 165. ‘He learned to overcome the obstacles of nature, fight other animals when necessary, contend even with men for his subsistence, or make up for what had to be yielded to the stronger’, Rousseau, ‘Discourse on Inequality’, p. 162.

18. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 135, 137, 140, 142, 203.
19. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 136–37.
20. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 142–45.
21. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 144. '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.' Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 143.
22. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 214. '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.' Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 212.
23. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 136.
24. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 137.
25. Ville Lähde, *Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'* (Tampere, 2008).
26. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 132. '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.' Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 132.
27. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 145–46, 153, 202, 216–18.
28. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 125. '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.' Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 127.
29. Lähde, *Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'*, p. 164–68. The results of this redefinition are apparent in the way Rousseau changes the meaning of 'nature' in his discussion of natural inequality. Lähde, *Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'*, p. 161–64.
30. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 142. '[...] 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.' Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 142.
31. See more in Lähde, *Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'*, p. 107–109.
32. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 142. '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 cen-

turies, causing his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues to bloom, eventually makes him his own and Nature's Tyrant.' Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 141.

33. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 202. 'man suffers scarcely any evils but those he has brought on himself'; Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 197.

34. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 202.

35. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 202. '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 [...]'; Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 197.

36. Rousseau's rare references to natural goodness in the Second Discourses vary from descriptions of amorality, lack of moral relations, to vague references to goodness in a more positive tone.

37. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 202.

38. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 157.

39. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 202–203.

40. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 189.

41. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 203. '[...] what must be the state of things in which all men are forced both to flatter and to destroy one another, and in which they are born enemies by duty and knaves by interest'; Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 198.

42. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 205.

43. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 205. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Lettre à Voltaire', in *Œuvres complètes*, 4: *Émile, Éducation – Morale – Botanique*, ed. Henri Gouthier (Paris, 1969), p. 1059–75. This reference: p. 1062–63.

44. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 202–203.

45. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 205.

46. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 216–17. It should be noted that in the latter half of the Second Discourse Rousseau no longer sticks to the argument against the naturalness of family, which is further evidence to the layered nature of the book. Lähde, *Rousseau's Rhetoric of 'Nature'*, p. 182–85.

47. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 216–17.

48. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 137.

49. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 138.

50. Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 138. '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'; Rousseau, 'Discourse on Inequality', p. 138–39.

51. Its role is however not simple, as Rousseau describes it both in positive and negative terms; Rousseau, 'Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité', p. 170–71.

Rousseau's Natural Man as the Critic of Urbanised Society

Rousseau's description of the pure state of nature and the natural man in his *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes* (1755) has been a controversial topic in Rousseau studies. Natural man has no stable human relationships, language or developed reason, and does not recognise other humans as akin to him. How is it possible to reconcile Rousseau's views on the pure state of nature with his speculative history of humanity? How could mankind even begin to develop? Why did Rousseau create such a seemingly disharmonious and disagreeable construct? This article introduces a new strategy of interpretation. Instead of proposing a single interpretation of the pure state of nature, it proposes to view Rousseau's understanding of human nature as a literary device which allowed him to address many questions at once. His insistence on the solitude and ignorance of natural human beings is examined as a part of his critique of other philosophers. This, however, does not explain another tension within the depiction of the pure state of nature. Sometimes natural human beings are ignorant, incapable of learning or surpassing their instincts, but, at other times, they seem very smart and resourceful. This article shows that the latter sections of his work imply a critique of contemporary societies. In these sections, Rousseau introduces his analysis of urban life.

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