

***DISCOURSE ON THE ARTS AND SCIENCES
DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN AND BASIS
OF INEQUALITY AMONG MEN
DISCOURSE ON POLITICAL ECONOMY
ÉMILE, OR ON EDUCATION
THE SOCIAL CONTRACT OR PRINCIPLES
OF POLITICAL RIGHT
CONSTITUTIONAL PROJECT FOR
CORSICA
CONSIDERATIONS ON THE
GOVERNMENT OF POLAND
REVERIES OF A SOLITARY WALKER
THE CONFESSIONS OF JEAN-JACQUES
ROUSSEAU***

**THE COLLECTED WORKS OF
JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU:
The Confessions of Jean-Jacques
Rousseau; The Social Contract, or
Principles of Political Right; Emile,
or On Education; Discourse on the
Origin and Basis of Inequality
Among Men
and others
Illustrated**

The Books

DISCOURSE ON THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Translated by G. D. H. Cole

**A DISCOURSE
WHICH WON THE PRIZE AT THE ACADEMY
OF DIJON IN 1750, ON THIS QUESTION
PROPOSED BY THE ACADEMY:
HAS THE RESTORATION OF THE ARTS AND
SCIENCES HAD A PURIFYING EFFECT UPON
MORALS?**

Barbaras his ego sum, qui non
intelligor illis. — OVID.

PREFACE

The following pages contain a discussion of one of the most sublime and interesting of all moral questions. It is not concerned, however, with those metaphysical subtleties, which of late have found their way into every department of literature, and from which even our academic curricula are not always free.

We have now to do with one of those truths on which the happiness of mankind depends.

I foresee that I shall not readily be forgiven for having taken up the position I have adopted. Setting myself up against all that is nowadays most admired, I can expect no less than a universal outcry against me: nor is the approbation of a few sensible men enough to make me count on that of the public. But I have taken my stand, and I shall be at no pains to please either intellectuals or men of the world. There are in all ages men born to be in bondage to the opinions of the society in which they live. There are not a few, who to-day play the free-thinker and the philosopher, who would, if they had lived in the time of the League, have been no more than fanatics. No author, who has a mind to outlive his own age, should write for such readers.

A word more and I have done. As I did not expect the honour conferred on me, I had, since sending in my Discourse, so altered and enlarged it as almost to make it a new work; but in the circumstances I have felt bound to publish it just as it was when it received the prize. I have only added a few notes, and left two alterations which are easily recognisable, of which the Academy possibly might not have approved. The respect, gratitude and even justice I owe to that body seemed to me to demand this acknowledgment.



Here I am, a barbarian, because men understand me not.

MORAL EFFECTS OF THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Decipimur specie recti. — HORACE.

The question before me is, “Whether the Restoration of the arts and sciences has had the effect of purifying or corrupting morals.” Which side am I to take? That, gentlemen, which becomes an honest man, who is sensible of his own ignorance, and thinks

himself none the worse for it.

I feel the difficulty of treating this subject fittingly, before the tribunal which is to judge of what I advance. How can I presume to belittle the sciences before one of the most learned assemblies in Europe, to commend ignorance in a famous Academy, and reconcile my contempt for study with the respect due to the truly learned?

I was aware of these inconsistencies, but not discouraged by them. It is not science, I said to myself, that I am attacking; it is virtue that I am defending, and that before virtuous men — and goodness is even dearer to the good than learning to the learned.

What then have I to fear? The sagacity of the assembly before which I am pleading? That, I acknowledge, is to be feared; but rather on account of faults of construction than of the views I hold. Just sovereigns have never hesitated to decide against themselves in doubtful cases; and indeed the most advantageous situation in which a just claim can be, is that of being laid before a just and enlightened arbitrator, who is judge in his own case.

To this motive, which encouraged me, I may add another which finally decided me. And this is, that as I have upheld the cause of truth to the best of my natural abilities, whatever my apparent success, there is one reward which cannot fail me. That reward I shall find in the bottom of my heart.

THE FIRST PART

It is a noble and beautiful spectacle to see man raising himself, so to speak, from nothing by his own exertions; dissipating, by the light of reason, all the thick clouds in which he was by nature enveloped; mounting above himself; soaring in thought even to the celestial regions; like the sun, encompassing with giant strides the vast extent of the universe; and, what is still grander and more wonderful, going back into himself, there to study man and get to know his own nature, his duties and his end. All these miracles we have seen renewed within the last few generations.

Europe had relapsed into the barbarism of the earliest ages; the inhabitants of this part of the world, which is at present so highly enlightened, were plunged, some centuries ago, in a state still-worse than ignorance. A scientific jargon, more despicable than mere ignorance, had usurped the name of knowledge, and opposed an almost invincible obstacle to its restoration.

Things had come to such a pass, that it required a complete revolution to bring men back to common sense. This came at last from the quarter from which it was least to be expected. It was the stupid Mussulman, the eternal scourge of letters, who was the immediate cause of their revival among us. The fall of the throne of Constantine brought to Italy the relics of ancient

Greece; and with these precious spoils France in turn was enriched. The sciences soon followed literature, and the art of thinking joined that of writing: an order which may seem strange, but is perhaps only too natural. The world now began to perceive the principal advantage of an intercourse with the Muses, that of rendering mankind more sociable by inspiring them with the desire to please one another with performances worthy of their mutual approbation.

The mind, as well as the body, has its needs: those of the body are the basis of society, those of the mind its ornaments.

So long as government and law provide for the security and well-being of men in their common life, the arts, literature and the sciences, less despotic though perhaps more powerful, fling garlands of flowers over the chains which weigh them down. They stifle in men's breasts that sense of original liberty, for which they seem to have been born; cause them to love their own slavery, and so make of them what is called a civilised people.

Necessity raised up thrones; the arts and sciences have made them strong. Powers of the earth, cherish all talents and protect those who cultivate them. Civilised peoples, cultivate such pursuits: to them, happy slaves, you owe that delicacy and exquisiteness of taste, which is so much your boast, that sweetness of disposition and urbanity of manners which make intercourse so easy

and agreeable among you — in a word, the appearance of all the virtues, without being in possession of one of them.

It was for this sort of accomplishment, which is by so much the more captivating as it seems less affected, that Athens and Rome were so much distinguished in the boasted times of their splendour and magnificence: and it is doubtless in the same respect that our own age and nation will excel all periods and peoples. An air of philosophy without pedantry; an address at once natural and engaging, distant equally from Teutonic clumsiness and Italian pantomime; these are the effects of a taste acquired by liberal studies and improved by conversation with the world. What happiness would it be for those who live among us, if our external appearance were always a true mirror of our hearts; if decorum were but virtue; if the maxims we professed were the rules of our conduct; and if real philosophy were inseparable from the title of a philosopher! But so many good qualities too seldom go together; virtue rarely appears in so much pomp and state.

Richness of apparel may proclaim the man of fortune, and elegance the man of taste; but true health and manliness are known by different signs. It is under the home-spun of the labourer, and not beneath the gilt and tinsel of the courtier, that we should look for strength and vigour of body.

External ornaments are no less foreign to virtue, which is the strength and activity of the mind. The honest man is an athlete, who loves to wrestle stark naked; he scorns all those vile trappings, which prevent the exertion of his strength, and were, for the most part, invented only to conceal some deformity.

Before art had moulded our behaviour, and taught our passions to speak an artificial language, our morals were rude but natural; and the different ways in which we behaved proclaimed at the first glance the difference of our dispositions. Human nature was not at bottom better then than now; but men found their security in the ease with which they could see through one another, and this advantage, of which we no longer feel the value, prevented their having many vices.

In our day, now that more subtle study and a more refined taste have reduced the art of pleasing to a system, there prevails in modern manners a servile and deceptive conformity; so that one would think every mind had been cast in the same mould. Politeness requires this thing; decorum that; ceremony has its forms, and fashion its laws, and these we must always follow, never the promptings of our own nature.

We no longer dare seem what we really are, but lie under a perpetual restraint; in the meantime the herd of men, which we call society, all act under the same circumstances exactly alike, unless very particular and powerful motives prevent them. Thus we never know