

Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Discourse on the Arts and Sciences
[The First Discourse]

1750

Discourse

which was awarded the prize by the Academy of Dijon
in the year 1750
on this question, which the Academy itself proposed,

**Has the restoration of the sciences and the arts contributed
to refining moral practices?**

*Barbarus hic ego sum, quia non intelligor illis. Ovid**

Preliminary Notice

What is celebrity? Here is the unfortunate work to which I owe my own. It is certain that this piece, which won me a prize and made my name, is mediocre at best, and I venture to add that it is one of the least in this whole collection. What an abyss of miseries the author would have avoided, if this first book had been received only according to its merits! But an initially unjustified favour gradually brought me severe treatment which is even more undeserved.*

Preface

Here is one of the greatest and most beautiful questions ever raised. In this Discourse it is not a question of those metaphysical subtleties which have triumphed over all parts of literature and from which programs in an Academy are not always exempt. However, it does concern one of those truths upon which rests the happiness of the human race.

I anticipate that people will have difficulty forgiving me for the position which I have dared to take. By colliding head on with everything which wins men's admiration nowadays, I can expect only universal censure. And I cannot count on public approval just because I have been honoured with the approbation of some wise men. But still, I have taken my position. I am not worried about pleasing clever minds or fashionable people. In every period there will be men fated to be governed by the opinions of their century, their country, and their society. For that very reason, a freethinker or philosopher today would have been nothing but a fanatic at the time of the League.* One must not write for such readers, if one wishes to live beyond one's own age.

One more word, and I'll be finished. Little expecting the honour I received, since I submitted this Discourse, I have reorganized and expanded it, to the point of making it, in one way or another, a different work. Today I believe I am obliged to restore it to the state it was in when it was awarded the prize. I have only thrown in some notes and left two readily recognizable additions, of which the Academy perhaps might not have approved. I thought that equity, respect, and gratitude demanded that I provide this notice.

Discourse

*Decipimur specie recti**

Has the restoration of the sciences and the arts contributed to the purification or to the corruption of morality? This is the matter we have to examine. What side should I take on this question? That, gentlemen, which suits an honourable man who knows nothing and who does not, for that reason, think any less of himself.

It will be difficult, I sense, to adapt what I have to say for the tribunal before which I am appearing. How can one venture to blame the sciences in front of one of the most scholarly societies in Europe, praise ignorance in a famous Academy, and reconcile a contempt for study with respect for truly learned men? I have seen these contradictions, and they have not discouraged me. I am not mistreating science, I told myself; I

am defending virtue in front of virtuous men. Integrity is cherished among good people even more than erudition is among scholars. So what am I afraid of? The enlightened minds of the assembly which is listening to me? I confess that is a fear. But it's a fear about the construction of the Discourse and not about the feelings of the speaker. Equitable sovereigns have never hesitated to condemn themselves in doubtful arguments, and the most advantageous position in a just cause is to have to defend oneself against a well-informed party, who is judging his own case with integrity.

To this motive which encourages me is added another which made up my mind: after I have upheld, according to my natural intelligence, the side of truth, no matter what success I have, there is a prize which I cannot fail to win. I will find it in the depths of my heart.

First Part

It is a great and beautiful spectacle to see a man somehow emerging from oblivion by his own efforts, dispelling with the light of his reason the shadows in which nature had enveloped him, rising above himself, soaring in his mind right up to the celestial regions, moving, like the sun, with giant strides through the vast extent of the universe, and, what is even greater and more difficult, returning to himself in order to study man there and learn of his nature, his obligations, and his end. All of these marvelous things have been renewed in the past few generations.

Europe had fallen back into the barbarity of the first ages. People from this part of world, so enlightened today, lived a few centuries ago in a state worse than ignorance. Some sort of learned jargon much more despicable than ignorance had usurped the name of knowledge and set up an almost invincible obstacle in the way of its return. A revolution was necessary to bring men back to common sense, and it finally came from a quarter where one would least expect it. It was the stupid Muslim, the eternal blight on learning, who brought about its rebirth among us. The collapse of the throne of Constantine carried into Italy the debris of ancient Greece. France, in its turn, was enriched by these precious remnants. The sciences

soon followed letters. To the art of writing was joined the art of thinking, a sequence which may seem strange but which is perhaps only too natural. And people began to feel the main advantage of busying themselves with the Muses, which is to make men more sociable by inspiring in them the desire to please each other with works worthy of their mutual approbation.

The mind has its needs, just as the body does. The latter are the foundations of society; from the former emerge the pleasures of society. While government and laws take care of the security and the well being of men in groups, the sciences, letters, and the arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains which weigh men down, snuffing out in them the feeling of that original liberty for which they appear to have been born, and make them love their slavery by turning them into what are called civilized people. Need has raised thrones; the sciences and the arts have strengthened them. You earthly powers, cherish talents and protect those who nurture them (1). Civilized people, cultivate them. Happy slaves, to them you owe that refined and delicate taste you take pride in, that softness of character and that urbanity of habits which make dealings among you so sociable and easy, in a word, the appearance of all the virtues without the possession of any.

By this type of politeness, all the more amiable for being less pretentious, in previous times Athens and Rome distinguished themselves in the days when they received so much praise for their magnificence and splendour. In that civility our age and our nation will, no doubt, surpass all ages and all peoples. A philosophical tone without pedantry, natural yet considerate manners, equally remote from Teutonic boorishness and Italian pantomime: there you have the fruits of a taste acquired by good education and perfected by social interaction.

How sweet it would be to live among us, if the exterior appearance was always an image of the heart's tendencies; if decency was a virtue; if our maxims served us as rules; if true philosophy was inseparable from the title of philosopher! But so many qualities too rarely go together, and virtue hardly ever walks in so much pomp. Richness in dress can announce a man

with money and elegance a man with taste. The healthy, robust man is recognized by other signs. It is under the rustic clothing of a labourer, and not under the gilded frame of a courtesan that one finds physical strength and energy. Finery is no less a stranger to virtue, which is the power and vigour of the soul. The good man is an athlete who delights in fighting naked. He despises all those vile ornaments which hamper the use of his strength, the majority of which were invented only to conceal some deformity.

Before art fashioned our manners and taught our passions to speak an affected language, our habits were rustic but natural, and differences in behaviour announced at first glance differences in character. Human nature was not fundamentally better, but men found their security in the ease with which they could see through each other, and this advantage, whose value we no longer feel, spared them many vices.

Nowadays, when more subtle studies and more refined taste have reduced the art of pleasing into principles, a vile and misleading uniformity governs our customs, and all minds seem to have been cast in the same mould: incessantly politeness makes demands, propriety issues orders, and incessantly people follow customary usage, never their own inclinations. One does not dare to appear as what one is. And in this perpetual constraint, men who make up this herd we call society, placed in the same circumstances, will all do the same things, unless more powerful motives prevent them. Thus, one will never know well the person one is dealing with. For to get to know one's friend it will be necessary to wait for critical occasions, that is to say, to wait until too late, because it is to deal with these very emergencies that one needed to know him in the first place.

What a parade of vices will accompany this uncertainty? No more sincere friendships, no more real esteem, no more well-founded trust. Suspicions, offences, fears, coldness, reserve, hatred, and betrayal will always be hiding under this uniform and perfidious veil of politeness, under that urbanity which is so praised and which we owe to our century's enlightenment. We will no longer profane the name of the master of the universe by swearing, but we will insult it with blasphemies, and our scrupulous ears will not be offended. People will not boast of

their own merit, but they will demean that of others. No man will grossly abuse his enemy, but he will slander him with skill. National hatreds will expand, but that will be for love of one's country. In place of contemptible ignorance, we will substitute a dangerous Pyrrhonism.* There will be some forbidden excesses, dishonourable vices, but others will be decorated with the name of virtues. It will be necessary to have them or to affect them. Let anyone who wishes boast about the wise men of our time. As for me, I see nothing there but a refinement of intemperance every bit as unworthy of my praise as their artificial simplicity (2)

Such is the purity our morality has acquired. In this way we have become respectable people. It is up to literature, the sciences, and the arts to claim responsibility for their share in this salutary work. I will add merely one reflection, as follows: an inhabitant in some distant country who wished to form some idea of European morals based on the condition of the sciences among us, on the perfection of our arts, on the propriety of our entertainments, on the politeness of our manners, on the affability of our discussions, on our perpetual demonstrations of good will, and on that turbulent competition among men of all ages and all conditions who appear to be fussing from dawn to sunset about helping one another, then this stranger, I say, would conclude that our morals are exactly the opposite of what they are.

Where there is no effect, there is no cause to look for. But here the effect is certain, the depravity real, and our souls have become corrupted to the extent that our sciences and our arts have advanced towards perfection. Will someone say that this is a misfortune peculiar to our age? No, gentlemen. The evils brought about by our vain curiosity are as old as the world. The daily ebb and flow of the ocean's waters have not been more regularly subjected to the orbit of the star which gives us light during the night than the fate of morals and respectability has been to progress in the sciences and arts.* We have seen virtue fly away to the extent that their lights have risen over our horizon, and the same phenomenon can be observed at all times and in all places.

Look at Egypt, that first school of the universe, that climate so fertile under a bronze sky, that celebrated country, which Sesostris left long ago to conquer the world. It became the mother of philosophy and fine arts, and, soon afterwards, was conquered by Cambyses, then the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and finally the Turks.*

Look at Greece, once populated with heroes who twice vanquished Asia, once before Troy and then again in their own homeland. The early growth of literature had not yet carried corruption into the hearts of its inhabitants, but progress in the arts, the dissolution of morality, and the Macedonian yoke followed closely on one another's heels, and Greece, always knowledgeable, always voluptuous, always enslaved, achieved nothing in its revolutions except changes in its masters. All the eloquence of Demosthenes could never reanimate a body which luxury and the arts had enervated.*

It was at the time of Ennius and Terence that Rome, founded by a shepherd and made famous by farmers, began to degenerate. But after Ovid, Catullus, Martial, and that crowd of obscene authors, whose very names alarm one's sense of decency, Rome, formerly the temple of virtue, became the theatre of crime, the disgrace of nations, and the toy of barbarians. This capital of the world eventually fell under the yoke which it had imposed on so many people, and the day of its fall was the day before one of its citizens was given the title of Arbiter of Good Taste.*

What shall I say about that great city of the Eastern Empire which by its position seemed destined to be the capital of the whole world, that sanctuary for the sciences and arts forbidden in the rest of Europe, perhaps more through wisdom than barbarity? Everything that is most disgraceful in debauchery and corruption—treasons, assassinations, the blackest poisons, and the even more atrocious combination of all these crimes—that's what makes up the fabric of the history of Constantinople; that's the pure source from which we were sent that enlightenment for which our age glorifies itself.

But why seek in such distant times for proofs of a truth for which we have existing evidence right before our eyes. There is

in Asia an immense country where literary honours lead to the highest offices of state. If the sciences purified morals, if they taught men to shed their own blood for their country, if they inspired courage, the people of China would become wise, free, and invincible. But if there is no vice which does not rule over them, no crime unfamiliar to them, if neither the enlightenment of ministers, nor the alleged wisdom in the laws, nor the multitude of inhabitants of that vast empire was capable of keeping it safe from the ignorant and coarse yoke of the Tartars, what use have all these wise men been to them? What fruits has it reaped from all the honours lavished on them? Could it perhaps be the reward of being an enslaved and wicked people?

Let us contrast these pictures with those of the morals of a small number of people who, protected from this contagion of vain knowledge, have by their virtues created their own happiness and become an example to other nations. Such were the first Persians, a remarkable nation, in which people learned virtue the way people learn science among us, which conquered Asia so easily, and which was the only one to acquire the glory of having the history of its institutions taken for a philosophical novel. Such were the Scythians to whom we have been left such magnificent tributes. Such were the Germans, in whom a writer who had grown weary of tracing the crimes and baseness of an educated, opulent, and voluptuous people found relief by describing their simplicity, innocence, and virtues. Rome had been like that, especially in the time of its poverty and ignorance. And finally up to the present day that rustic nation has shown itself to be like this, so lauded for its courage, which adversity has not been able to defeat, and for its fidelity which bad examples could not corrupt (3).

It was not through stupidity that the latter have preferred other exercises to those of the mind. They were not ignorant of the fact that in other lands idle men spent their lives disputing their sovereign good, vice, and virtue, and that proud reasoners, while giving themselves the greatest praise, shoved all other people together under the contemptuous name of barbarians. But they looked at their morals and learned to despise their learning (4).

Could I forget that it was the very heart of Greece that saw the emergence of that city as famous for its happy ignorance as for

the wisdom of its laws, whose virtues seemed so much greater than those of men that it was a Republic of demi-gods rather than of men. O Sparta! How you eternally shame a vain doctrine! While the vices led along by the fine arts were introduced together with them in Athens, while a tyrant there collected with so much care the works of the prince of poets, you were chasing the arts, artists, the sciences, and learned men from your walls.*

That event was an indication of this difference—Athens became the abode of politeness and good taste, the land of orators and philosophers. The elegance of the buildings there corresponded to that of its language. In every quarter there, one could see marble and canvas brought to life by the hands of the most accomplished masters. From Athens came those amazing works which would serve as models in all corrupt ages. The picture of Lacedaemon is less brilliant. "In that place," other peoples used to say, "the men are born virtuous, and even the air of the country seems to inspire virtue." Nothing is left for us of its inhabitants except the memory of their heroic actions. Should monuments like that be less valuable for us than those remarkable marbles which Athens has left us?

It is true that some wise men resisted the general torrent and avoided vice while living with the Muses. But one needs to hear the judgment which the most important and most unfortunate among them delivered on the learned men and artists of his time.

"I examined the poets," he says, "and I look on them as people whose talent overawes both themselves and others, people who present themselves as wise men and are taken as such, when they are nothing of the sort."

"From poets," Socrates continues, "I moved to artists. No one was more ignorant about the arts than I; no one was more convinced that artists possessed really beautiful secrets. However, I noticed that their condition was no better than that of the poets and that both of them have the same misconceptions. Because the most skillful among them excel in their specialty, they look upon themselves as the wisest of men. In my eyes, this presumption completely tarnished their

knowledge. As a result, putting myself in the place of the oracle and asking myself what I would prefer to be—what I was or what they were, to know what they have learned or to know that I know nothing—I replied to myself and to the god: I wish to remain who I am."

"We do not know—neither the sophists, nor the orators, nor the artists, nor I—what the True, the Good, and the Beautiful are. But there is this difference between us: although these people know nothing, they all believe they know something; whereas, I, if I know nothing, at least have no doubts about it. As a result, all this superiority in wisdom which the oracle has attributed to me reduces itself to the single point that I am strongly convinced that I am ignorant of what I do not know."

So there you have the wisest of men in the judgment of the gods and the most knowledgeable Athenian in the opinion of all of Greece, Socrates, singing the praises of ignorance! Do we believe that if he came to life among us, our learned men and our artists would make him change his opinion? No, gentlemen. This just man would continue to despise our vain sciences; he would not help to augment that pile of books with which we are swamped from all directions, and he would leave after him, as he once did, nothing by way of a moral precept for his disciples and our posterity other than his example and memory of his virtue. It is beautiful to teach men in this way!

Socrates had started in Athens. In Rome Cato the Elder continued to rage against those artificial and subtle Greeks who were seducing virtue and weakening the courage of his fellow citizens.* But the sciences, arts, and dialectic prevailed once more. Rome was filled with philosophers and orators, military discipline was neglected, and agriculture despised. People embraced factions and forgot about their fatherland. The sacred names of liberty, disinterestedness, and obedience to the laws gave way to the names Epicurus, Zeno, and Arcesilas.* "Since the learned men began to appear among us," their own philosophers used to say, "good people have slipped away." Up to that time Romans had been content to practise virtue; everything was lost when they began to study it.

O Fabricius! What would your great soul have thought, if to your own misfortune you had been called back to life and had seen the pompous face of this Rome saved by your efforts and which your honourable name had distinguished more than all its conquests? "Gods," you would have said, "what has happened to those thatched roofs and those rustic dwelling places where, back then, moderation and virtue lived? What fatal splendour has succeeded Roman simplicity? What is this strange language? What are these effeminate customs? What do these statues signify, these paintings, these buildings? You mad people, what have you done? You, masters of nations, have you turned yourself into the slaves of the frivolous men you conquered? Are you now governed by rhetoricians? Was it to enrich architects, painters, sculptors, and comic actors that you soaked Greece and Asia with your blood? Are the spoils of Carthage trophies for a flute player? Romans, hurry up and tear down these amphitheatres, break up these marbles, burn these paintings, chase out these slaves who are subjugating you, whose fatal arts are corrupting you. Let other hands distinguish themselves with vain talents. The only talent worthy of Rome is that of conquering the world and making virtue reign there. When Cineas took our Senate for an assembly of kings, he was not dazzled by vain pomp or by affected elegance. He did not hear there this frivolous eloquence, the study and charm of futile men. What then did Cineas see that was so majestic? O citizens! He saw a spectacle which your riches or your arts could never produce, the most beautiful sight which has ever appeared under heaven, an assembly of two hundred virtuous men, worthy of commanding in Rome and governing the earth."*

But let us move across time and distance between places and see what has happened in our countries, before our own eyes, or rather, let us set aside the hateful pictures which would wound our sensitivity, and spare ourselves the trouble of repeating the same things under other names. It was not in vain that I called upon the shade of Fabricius, and what did I make that great man say that I could not have put into the mouth of Louis XII or of Henry IV? Among us, to be sure, Socrates would not have drunk hemlock, but he would have drunk, in an even bitterer cup, insulting mockery and contempt a hundred times worse than death.*

There you see how luxury, dissolution, and slavery have in every age been the punishment for the arrogant efforts we have made in order to emerge from the happy ignorance where Eternal Wisdom had placed us. The thick veil with which she had covered all her operations seemed to provide a sufficient warning to us that we were not destined for vain researches. But have we known how to profit from any of her lessons? Have we neglected any with impunity? Peoples, know once and for all that nature wished to protect you from knowledge, just as a mother snatches away a dangerous weapon from the hands of her child, that all the secrets which she keeps hidden from you are so many evils she is defending you against, and that the difficulty you experience in educating yourselves is not the least of her benefits. Men are perverse; they would be even worse if they had the misfortune of being born knowledgeable.

How humiliating these reflections are for humanity! How our pride must be mortified! What! Could integrity be the daughter of ignorance? Could knowledge and virtue be incompatible? What consequences could we not draw from these opinions? But to reconcile these apparent contradictions, it is necessary only to examine closely the vanity and the emptiness of those proud titles which dazzle us and which we hand out so gratuitously to human learning. Let us therefore consider the sciences and the arts in themselves. Let us see what must be the result of their progress. And let us no longer hesitate to concur on all points where our reasoning finds itself in agreement with conclusions drawn from history.

Second Part

It was an old tradition, passed on from Egypt into Greece, that a god hostile to men's peace and quiet was the inventor of the sciences (5). What opinion, then, must the Egyptians themselves have had about the sciences, which were born among them? They could keep a close eye on the sources which produced them. In fact, whether we leaf through the annals of the world or supplement uncertain chronicles with philosophical research, we will not find an origin for human learning which corresponds to the idea we like to create for it. Astronomy was born from superstition, eloquence from ambition, hate, flattery, and lies, geometry from avarice, physics from a vain curiosity—

everything, even morality itself, from human pride. The sciences and the arts thus owe their birth to our vices; we would have fewer doubts about their advantages if they owed their birth to our virtues.

The flaw in their origin is only too evidently redrawn for us in their objects. What would we do with the arts, without the luxury which nourishes them? Without human injustice, what is the use of jurisprudence? What would become of history if there were neither tyrants, nor wars, nor conspirators? In a word, who would want to spend his life in such sterile contemplation, if each man consulted only his human duties and natural needs and had time only for his country, for the unfortunate, and for his friends? Are we thus fated to die tied down on the edge of the pits where truth has gone into hiding? This single reflection should discourage, right from the outset, every man who would seriously seek to instruct himself through the study of philosophy.

What dangers lurk! What false routes in an investigation of the sciences! How many errors, a thousand times more dangerous than the truth is useful, does one not have to get past to reach the truth? The disadvantage is clear, for what is false is susceptible to an infinity of combinations, but truth has only one form of being. Besides, who is seeking it in full sincerity? Even with the greatest good will, by what marks does one recognize it for certain? In this crowd of different feelings, what will be our *criterium* to judge it properly (6)? And the most difficult point of all: if by luck we do end up finding the truth, who among us will know how to make good use of it?

If our sciences are vain in the objects they set for themselves, they are even more dangerous in the effects they produce. Born in idleness, they nourish it in their turn. And the irreparable loss of time is the first damage they necessarily inflict on society. In politics, as in morality, it is a great evil not to do good. And we could perhaps look on every useless citizen as a pernicious man. So answer me, illustrious philosophers, those of you thanks to whom we know in what proportions bodies attract each other in a vacuum, what are, in the planetary orbits, the ratios of the areas gone through in equal times, what curves have conjugate points, points of inflection and cusps, how man sees everything

in God, how the soul and the body work together without communication, just as two clocks do, what stars could be inhabited, which insects reproduce in an extraordinary way, answer me, I say, you from whom we have received so much sublime knowledge, if you had never taught us anything about these things, would we have been less numerous, less well governed, less formidable, less thriving, or more perverse? So go back over the importance of what you have produced, and if the work of our most enlightened scholars and of our best citizens brings us so little of any use, tell us what we should think of that crowd of obscure writers and idle men of letters who are uselessly eating up the substance of the state.

Did I say idle? Would to God they really were! Our morality would be healthier and society more peaceful. But these vain and futile declaimers move around in all directions armed with their fatal paradoxes, undermining the foundations of faith, and annihilating virtue. They smile with disdain at those old words fatherland and religion and dedicate their talents and their philosophy to the destruction and degradation of everything which is sacred among men. Not that they basically hate either virtue or our dogmas. It's public opinion they are opposed to, and to bring them back to the foot of the altar, all one would have to do is make them live among atheists. O this rage to make oneself stand out, what are you not capable of?

To misuse one's time is a great evil. But other even worse evils come with arts and letters. Luxury is such an evil, born, like them, from the idleness and vanity of men. Luxury rarely comes along without the arts and sciences, and they never develop without it. I know that our philosophy, always fertile in remarkable maxims, maintains, contrary to the experience of all the ages, that luxury creates the splendour of states, but, forgetting about the need for Sumptuary Laws,* will philosophy still dare to deny that good customs are essential to the duration of empires and that luxury is diametrically opposed to good customs? True, luxury may be a sure sign of riches, and it even serves, if you like, to multiply them. What will we necessarily conclude from this paradox, so worthy of arising in our day, and what will virtue become when people must enrich themselves at any price? Ancient politicians talked incessantly about morality and virtue; our politicians

talk only about business and money. One will tell you that in a particular country a man is worth the sum he could be sold for in Algiers; another, by following this calculation, will find countries where a man is worth nothing, and others where he is worth less than nothing. They assess men like herds of livestock. According to them, a man has no value to the State apart from what he consumes in it. Thus one Sybarite would have been worth at least thirty Lacedaemonians.* Would someone therefore hazard a guess which of these two republics, Sparta or Sybaris, was overthrown by a handful of peasants and which one made Asia tremble?

The kingdom of Cyrus was conquered with thirty thousand men by a prince poorer than the least of the Persian satraps, and the Scythians, the most miserable of all peoples, managed to resist the most powerful kings of the universe. Two famous republics were fighting for imperial control of the world. One was very rich; the other had nothing. And the latter destroyed the former. The Roman Empire, in its turn, after gulping down all the riches in the universe, became the prey of a people who did not even know what wealth was. The Franks conquered the Gauls, and the Saxons conquered England, without any treasures other than their bravery and their poverty. A bunch of poor mountain dwellers whose greed limited itself entirely to a few sheep skins, after crushing Austrian pride, wiped out that opulent and formidable House of Burgundy, which had made the potentates of Europe shake. Finally, all the power and all the wisdom of Charles V's heir, supported by all the treasures of the Indies, ended up being shattered by a handful of herring fishermen. Let our politicians deign to suspend their calculations in order to reflect upon these examples, and let them learn for once that with money one has everything except morals and citizens.

What, then, is precisely the issue in this question of luxury? To know which of the following is more important to empires: to be brilliant and momentary or virtuous and lasting. I say brilliant, but with what lustre? A taste for ostentation is rarely associated in the same souls with a taste for honesty. No, it is not possible that minds degraded by a multitude of futile concerns would ever raise themselves to anything great. Even

when they had the strength for that, the courage would be missing.

Every artist wishes to be applauded. The praises of his contemporaries are the most precious part of his reward. What will he do to obtain that praise if he has the misfortune of being born among a people and in a time when learned men have come into fashion and have seen to it that frivolous young people set the tone, where men have sacrificed their taste to those who tyrannize over their liberty (7), where one of the sexes dares to approve only what corresponds to the pusillanimity of the other and people let masterpieces of dramatic poetry fall by the wayside and are repelled by works of wonderful harmony? What will that artist do, gentlemen? He will lower his genius to the level of his age and will prefer to create commonplace works which people will admire during his life than marvelous ones which will not be admired until long after his death. Tell us, famous Arouet, how many strong and manly beauties you have sacrificed to our false delicacy and how many great things the spirit of gallantry, so fertile in small things, has cost you.*

In this way, the dissolution of morals, a necessary consequence of luxury, brings with it, in its turn, the corruption of taste. If by chance among men of extraordinary talents one finds one who has a firm soul and refuses to lend himself to the spirit of his age and demean himself with puerile works, too bad for him! He will die in poverty and oblivion. I wish I were making a prediction here and not describing experience! Carle and Pierre, the moment has come when that paintbrush destined to augment the majesty of our temples with sublime and holy images will fall from your hands or will be prostituted to decorate carriage panels with lascivious paintings. And you, rival of Praxiteles and Phidias, you whose chisel the ancients would have used to create for them gods capable of excusing their idolatry in our eyes, inimitable Pigalle, your hand will be resigned to refinishing the belly of an ape, or it will have to remain idle.*

One cannot reflect on morals without deriving pleasure from recalling the picture of the simplicity of the first ages. It is a lovely shore, adorned only by the hands of nature, toward which

one is always turning one's eyes, and from which one feels, with regret, oneself growing more distant. When innocent and virtuous men liked to have gods as witnesses of their actions, they lived with them in the same huts. But having soon become evil, they grew weary of these inconvenient spectators and relegated them to magnificent temples. Finally, they chased the gods out of those so they could set themselves up in the temples, or at least the gods' temples were no longer distinguished from the citizens' houses. This was then the height of depravity, and vices were never pushed further than when one saw them, so to speak, propped up on marble columns and carved into Corinthian capitals in the entrance ways of great men's palaces.

While the commodities of life multiply, while the arts perfect themselves, and while luxury spreads, true courage grows enervated, and military virtues vanish—once again the work of the sciences and all those arts which are practised in the shadows of the study. When the Goths ravaged Greece, all the libraries were rescued from the flames only by the opinion spread by one of them that they should let their enemies have properties so suitable for turning them away from military exercise and for keeping them amused with sedentary and idle occupations. Charles VIII saw himself master of Tuscany and of the Kingdom of Naples without hardly drawing his sword, and all his court attributed the unhopd for ease of this to the fact that the princes and the nobility of Italy enjoyed making themselves clever and learned more than they did training to become vigorous and warlike. In fact, says the sensible man who describes these two characteristics, every example teaches us that in military policy and all things similar to it, the study of the sciences is far more suitable for softening and emasculating courage than for strengthening and animating it.

The Romans maintained that military virtue was extinguished among them to the extent that they began to know all about paintings, engravings, and vases worked in gold and silver, and to cultivate the fine arts. And, as if this famous country was destined to serve constantly as an example for other peoples, the rise of the Medici and the re-establishment of letters led once again and perhaps for all time to the fall of that warrior

reputation which Italy seemed to have regained a few centuries ago.

The ancient republics of Greece, with that wisdom which shone out from most of their institutions, prohibited their citizens all tranquil and sedentary occupations which, by weakening and corrupting the body, quickly enervate vigour in the soul. In fact, how can men whom the smallest need overwhelms and the least trouble repels look on hunger, thirst, exhaustion, dangers, and death? With what courage will soldiers endure excessive work with which they are quite unfamiliar? With what enthusiasm will they make forced marches under officers who do not have the strength to make the journey even on horseback? And let no one offer objections concerning the celebrated valour of these modern warriors who are so disciplined in their learning. People boast highly to me of their bravery on a day of battle, but no one says anything about how they bear an excess of work, how they resist the harshness of the seasons and bad weather. It requires only a little sun or snow, only the lack of a few superfluties, to melt down and destroy in a few days the best of our armies. Intrepid warriors, for once accept the truth which you so rarely hear: you are brave, I know that; you would have triumphed with Hannibal at Cannae and at Trasimene; with you Caesar would have crossed the Rubicon and enslaved his people. But with you the former would not have crossed the Alps and the latter would not have conquered your ancestors.*

Combat does not always produce success in war, and for generals there is an art superior to the art of winning battles. A man can run fearlessly into the firing line; nonetheless, he can be a very bad officer. Even in a soldier, perhaps a little more strength and energy could be more essential than so much courage, which does not protect him from death. And what does it matter to the State whether its troops die of fever and cold, or by the enemy's sword?

If cultivating the sciences is detrimental to warrior qualities, it is even more so to moral qualities. From our very first years our inane education decorates our minds and corrupts our judgment. I see all over the place immense establishments where young people are raised at great expense to learn everything except their obligations. Your children will know

nothing of their own language, but they will speak in others which are nowhere in use. They will know how to compose verses which they will hardly be capable of understanding. Without knowing how to distinguish truth and error, they will possess the art of making both truth and error unrecognizable to others through specious arguments. But they will not know what the words magnanimity, temperance, humanity, and courage mean. That sweet name of fatherland will never strike their ears, and if they hear talk of God, that will be less to be in awe of Him than to fear Him (8). I would be just as happy, a wise man said, for my pupil to spend his time playing tennis. At least that would make his body more fit. I know that it is necessary to keep children busy and that idleness is for them the danger one should fear most. What then is necessary for them to learn? Now, that's surely a good question! Let them learn what they ought to do as men (9), and not something they ought to forget.

Our gardens are decorated with statues and our galleries with paintings. What do you think these artistic masterpieces on show for public admiration represent? The defenders of our country? Or those even greater men who have enriched it with their virtues? No. They are images of all the errors of the heart and mind, carefully derived from ancient mythology, and presented to our children's curiosity at a young age, no doubt so that they may have right before their eyes models of bad actions even before they know how to read.

From where do all these abuses arise if it is not the fatal inequality introduced among men by distinctions among their talents and by the degradation of their virtues? There you have the most obvious effect of all our studies, and the most dangerous of all their consequences. We no longer ask if a man has integrity, but if he has talent, nor whether a book is useful but if it is well written. The rewards for a witty man are enormous, while virtue remains without honour. There are a thousand prizes for fine discourses, none for fine actions. Let someone tell me, nonetheless, if the glory attached to the best of the discourses which will be crowned in this Academy is comparable to the merit of having founded the prize?

The wise man does not run after fortune, but he is not insensitive to glory. And when he sees it so badly distributed, his virtue, which a little praise would have energized and made advantageous to society, collapses, grows sluggish, and dies away in misery and oblivion. That's what, in the long run, must be the result of a preference for agreeable talents rather than useful ones, and that's what experience has only too often confirmed since the re-establishment of the sciences and the arts. We have physicians, mathematicians, chemists, astronomers, poets, musicians, painters, but we no longer have citizens. Or if we still have some scattered in our abandoned countryside, they are dying there in poverty and disgrace. Such is the condition to which those who give us bread and who provide milk for our children are reduced, and those are the feelings we have for them.

However, I admit that the evil is not as great as it could have become. Eternal foresight, by placing beside various harmful plants some healthy medicinal herbs and setting inside the body of several harmful animals the remedy for their wounds, has taught sovereigns, who are its ministers, to imitate its wisdom. Through this example, the great monarch, whose glory will only acquire new brilliance from age to age, has drawn from the very bosom of the sciences and the arts, sources of a thousand disturbances, those famous societies charged with the dangerous storage of human knowledge and, at the same time, with the sacred preservation of morals, through the care they take to maintain the total purity of their trust among themselves and to demand such purity from the members they admit.*

These wise institutions, reinforced by his august successor and imitated by all the kings in Europe, will serve at least as a restraint on men of letters, who all aspire to the honour of being admitted into the Academies and will thus watch over themselves and will try to make themselves worthy of that with useful works and irreproachable morals. Of these companies, those who offer in their competitions for prizes with which they honour literary merit a choice of subjects appropriate to reanimating the love of virtue in citizens' hearts will demonstrate that this love reigns among them and will give people such a rare and sweet pleasure of seeing the learned societies dedicating

themselves to pouring out for the human race, not merely agreeable enlightenment, but also beneficial teaching.

Let no one therefore make an objection which is for me only a new proof. So many precautions reveal only too clearly how necessary it is to take them. People do not seek remedies for evils which do not exist. Why must these ones, because of their inadequacy, still have the character of ordinary remedies? So many institutions created for the benefit of the learned are only all the more capable of impressing people with the objects of the sciences and of directing minds towards their cultivation. It seems, to judge from the precautions people take, that we have too many farm labourers and are afraid of not having enough philosophers. I do not wish here to hazard a comparison between agriculture and philosophy: people would not put up with that. I will simply ask: What is philosophy? What do the writings of the best known philosophers contain? What are the lessons of these friends of wisdom? To listen to them, would one not take them for a troupe of charlatans crying out in a public square, each from his own corner: "Come to me. I'm the only one who is not wrong"? One of them maintains that there are no bodies and that everything is appearance, another that there is no substance except matter, no God other than the world. This one here proposes that there are no virtues or vices, and that moral good and moral evil are chimeras, that one there that men are wolves and can devour each other with a clear conscience. O great philosophers, why not reserve these profitable lessons for your friends and your children? You will soon earn your reward, and we would have no fear of finding any of your followers among our own people.

There you have the marvelous men on whom the esteem of their contemporaries was lavished during their lives and for whom immortality was reserved after their passing away! Such are the wise maxims which we have received from them and which we will pass down to our descendants from age to age. Has paganism, though abandoned to all the caprices of human reason, left posterity anything which could compare to the shameful monuments which printing has prepared for it under the reign of the Gospel? The profane writings of Leucippus and Diagoras perished with them.* People had not yet invented the art of immortalizing the extravagances of the human mind. But

thanks to typographic characters (10) and the way we use them, the dangerous reveries of Hobbes and Spinoza will remain for ever. Go, you celebrated writings, which the ignorance and rustic nature of our fathers would have been incapable of, go down to our descendants with those even more dangerous writings which exude the corruption of morals in our century, and together carry into the centuries to come a faithful history of the progress and the advantages of our sciences and our arts. If they read you, you will not leave them in any perplexity about the question we are dealing with today. And unless they are more foolish than we are, they will lift their hands to heaven and will say in the bitterness of their hearts, "Almighty God, You who hold the minds of men in your hands, deliver us from the enlightenment and the fatal arts of our fathers, and give us back ignorance, innocence, and poverty, the only goods which can make our happiness and which are precious in Your sight."

But if the progress of the sciences and the arts has added nothing to our true happiness, if it has corrupted our morality, and if that moral corruption has damaged purity of taste, what will we think of that crowd of simple writers who have removed from the temple of the Muses the difficulties which safeguarded access to it and which nature had set up there as a test of strength for those who would be tempted to learn? What will we think of those compilers of works who have indiscriminately beaten down the door to the sciences and introduced into their sanctuary a population unworthy of approaching them. Whereas, one would hope that all those who could not advance far in a scholarly career would be turned back at the entrance way and thrown into arts useful to society. A man who all his life will be a bad versifier or a minor geometer could perhaps have become a great manufacturer of textiles. Those whom nature destined to make her disciples have no need of teachers. Bacon, Descartes, Newton—these tutors of the human race had no need of tutors themselves, and what guides could have led them to those places where their vast genius carried them? Ordinary teachers could only have limited their understanding by confining it to their own narrow capabilities. With the first obstacles, they learned to exert themselves and made the effort to traverse the immense space they moved through. If it is necessary to permit some men to devote themselves to the study of the sciences and the arts, that should be only for those who

feel in themselves the power to walk alone in those men's footsteps and to move beyond them. It is the task of this small number of people to raise monuments to the glory of the human mind.

But if we wish nothing to lie outside their genius, then nothing must lie beyond their hopes. That's the only encouragement they require. The soul adapts itself insensibly to the objects which concern it, and it is great events which make great men. The prince of eloquence was Consul of Rome, and perhaps the greatest of the philosophers was Chancellor of England.* Can one believe that if one of them had occupied only a chair in some university and the other had obtained only a modest pension from an Academy, can one believe, I say, that their works would not have been affected by their positions? So let kings not disdain to admit into their councils the people who are most capable of giving good advice, and may they give up that old prejudice invented by the pride of the great, that the art of leading peoples is more difficult than the art of enlightening them, as if it were easier to induce men to do good voluntarily than to compel them to do it by force. May learned men of the first rank find honourable sanctuary in their courts. May they obtain there the only reward worthy of them, contributing through their influence to the happiness of those people to whom they have taught wisdom. Then, and only then, will we see what can be achieved by virtue, science, and authority, energized by a noble emulation and working cooperatively for the happiness of the human race. But so long as power remains by itself on one side, and enlightenment and wisdom isolated on the other, wise men will rarely think of great things, princes will more rarely carry out fine actions, and the people will continue to be vile, corrupt, and unhappy.

As for us, common men to whom heaven has not allotted such great talents and destined for so much glory, let us remain in our obscurity. Let us not run after a reputation which would elude us and which, in the present state of things, would never give back to us what it would cost, even if we had all the qualifications to obtain it. What good is it looking for our happiness in the opinion of others if we can find it in ourselves? Let us leave to others the care of instructing people

about their duties, and limit ourselves to carrying out our own well. We do not need to know any more than this.

O virtue! Sublime science of simple souls, are so many troubles and trappings necessary for one to know you? Are your principles not engraved in all hearts, and in order to learn your laws is it not enough to go back into oneself and listen to the voice of one's conscience in the silence of the passions? There you have true philosophy. Let us learn to be satisfied with that, and without envying the glory of those famous men who are immortalized in the republic of letters, let us try to set between them and us that glorious distinction which people made long ago between two great peoples: one knew how to speak well; the other how to act well.*

Rousseau's Notes

(1) Princes always are always happy to see developing among their subjects the taste for agreeable arts and for superfluities which do not result in the export of money. For quite apart from the fact that with these they nourish that spiritual pettiness so appropriate for servitude, they know very well that all the needs which people give themselves are so many chains binding them. When Alexander wished to keep the Ichthyophagi dependent on him, he forced them to abandon fishing and to nourish themselves on foods common to other people. And no one has been able to subjugate the savages in America, who go around quite naked and live only from what their hunting provides. In fact, what yoke could be imposed on men who have no need of anything? [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(2) "I like," says Montaigne, "to argue and discuss, but only with a few men and for myself. Because to serve as a spectacle for the Great and to make a display of one's wit and babbling is, I find, an occupation inappropriate to a man of honour." But that's what all our fine wits do, except for one. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(3) I don't dare speak of those happy nations who do not know even the names of the vices which we have such trouble controlling, of those American savages whose simple and

natural ways of keeping public order Montaigne does not hesitate to prefer, not merely to the laws of Plato, but even to anything more perfect which philosophy will ever be able to dream up for governing a people. He cites a number of striking examples of these for those who understand how to admire them. What's more, he says, they don't wear breeches! [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(4) I wish someone would tell me, in good faith, what opinion the Athenians themselves must have had about eloquence, when they took so much care to remove it from that honest tribunal against whose judgments not even the gods appealed. What did the Romans think of medicine when they banned it from the republic? And when a remnant of humanity persuaded the Spaniards to forbid their lawyers from entering America, what idea must they have had of jurisprudence? Could we not say that by this single act they believed they were repairing all the evils which they had committed against these unfortunate Indians? [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(5) It is easy to see the allegory in the story of Prometheus, and it does not appear that the Greeks who nailed him up on the Caucasus thought of him any more favourably than the Egyptians did of their god Teuthus. "The satyr," says an ancient fable, "wished to embrace and kiss fire the first time he saw it. But Prometheus cried out at him, 'Satyr, you will be lamenting the beard on your chin, for that burns when you touch it.'" This is the subject of the frontispiece.* [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(6) The less we know, the more we believe we know. Did the Peripatetics have doubts about anything? Didn't Descartes construct the universe with cubes and vortexes? And is there even today in Europe a physicist who is so feeble that he does not boldly explain away this profound mystery of electricity, which will perhaps forever remain the despair of true philosophers? [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(7) I am a long way from thinking that this ascendancy of women is something bad in itself. It is a gift given to them by nature for the happiness of the human race. Were it better directed, it could produce as much good as it does evil nowadays. We do not have a sufficient sense of what advantages would arise in society from a better education

provided for the half of the human race which governs the other half. Men will always do what women find pleasing. Hence, if you wish men to become great and virtuous, then teach women what greatness in the soul and virtue are. The reflections which arise from this subject, something Plato dealt with long ago, really deserve to be better developed by a pen worthy of following such a master and of defending such a great cause. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(8) *Pens[ées] Philosoph[iques]*. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(9) Such was the education of the Spartans, according to their greatest king. It is, Montaigne states, something worthy of great consideration that those excellent regulations of Lycurgus, which were in truth incredibly perfect, paid so much care to the nourishment of children, as if that was their main concern, and in the very home of the Muses they made so little mention of learning that it is as if these young people disdained all other yokes and, instead of our teachers of science, could only be provided with teachers of valour, prudence, and justice.

Now let us see how the same author speaks of the ancient Persians. Plato, he says, states that the eldest son in their royal succession was nurtured in the following manner: After his birth, they gave him, not to women, but to the eunuchs who, because of their virtue, had the closest influence on the king. These took charge of making his body handsome and healthy, and at seven years of age they taught him to ride a horse and to hunt. When he reached fourteen years of age, they put him in the hands of four men: the wisest, the most just, the most temperate, and the most valiant in the nation. The first would teach him religion, the second always to be truthful, the third to overcome his cupidity, and the fourth to fear nothing. All, I will add, were to make him good, none to make him learned.

Astyges, in Xenophon, asks Cyrus to tell him about his last lesson. It's this, he says: in our school a large boy with a small tunic gave it to one of his shorter companions and took his tunic, which was larger. Our tutor made me the judge of this disagreement, and I judged that one should leave matters as they were, since both of them seemed better off that way. At that he

remonstrated with me, saying I had done badly, for I had stopped to take convenience into account, when it was necessary first to provide for justice, which does not want anyone to be forced in matters concerning what belongs to him. And he says that he was punished for it, just as people punish us in our villages for having forgotten the first aorist of $\tau\upsilon\pi\tau\omega$. My teacher would have to give me a splendid harangue, *in genere demonstrativo* [*in the style of a formal presentation*], before he persuaded me that his school was as good as that one. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

(10) Considering the dreadful disorders which printing has already caused in Europe and judging the future by the progress which evil makes day by day, we can readily predict that sovereigns will not delay in taking as many pains to ban this terrible art from their states as they took to introduce it there. Sultan Achmet, yielding to the importuning of some alleged men of taste, consented to establish a printing press in Constantinople. But the press had barely started before they were forced to destroy it and throw the equipment down a well. They say that Caliph Omar, when consulted about what had to be done with the library of Alexandria, answered as follows: "If the books of this library contain matters opposed to the Koran, they are bad and must be burned. If they contain only the doctrine of the Koran, burn them anyway, for they are superfluous." Our learned men have cited this reasoning as the height of absurdity. However, suppose Gregory the Great was there instead of Omar and the Gospel instead of the Koran. The library would still have been burned, and that might well have been the finest moment in the life of this illustrious pontiff. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

Translator's Notes

**Ovid*: The Latin sentence translates as follows: "*In this place I am a barbarian, because men do not understand me.*" [\[Back to Text\]](#)

*. . . *even more undeserved*: This Preliminary Notice was not in the original discourse. When he was preparing a collected edition of his work in 1763, Rousseau added this opening paragraph. The

“severe treatment” he mentions refers to the fact that in 1762 his *Emile* was condemned in Paris and Geneva, and Rousseau was forced to undertake the first of many unwelcome journeys to avoid arrest. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *League*: The Holy League was formed by Catholics in France during the sixteenth century to attack Protestants. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *specie recti*: The Latin translates: "*We are deceived by the appearance of right.*" [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *dangerous Pyrrhonism*: Pyrrhonism (from the ancient Greek philosopher Pyrrho of Elis) means here a sophisticated skepticism, a willingness to argue but without taking a firm stand. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *sciences and the arts*: In the eighteenth century the influence of the moon on the ocean's tides was widely accepted for the first time. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *the Turks*: Sesostris was a common name for Egyptian pharaohs. Sesostris I was a pharaoh who conducted a number of military campaigns in Syria, Nubia, and Libya. He also carried out an energetic program of building monuments. His rule was a prosperous time for Egypt. Cambyses was a Persian Emperor who in 525 BC invaded Egypt, overthrew the pharaoh, and began almost two centuries of Persian control over Egypt. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *and the arts had enervated*: Demosthenes (d. 322 BC) was the greatest of all the Greek orators. Many of his finest speeches were trying to rouse the Greeks against the imperial ambitions of the Macedonians. His attempts to foster rebellion against the Macedonian control of Greece resulted in his having to commit suicide. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *Arbiter of Good Taste*: Ennius (b. 239 BC) was the poet the Romans considered the father of their poetry. Terence was one of their two most famous writers of dramatic comedy. Ovid, Catullus, and Martial are important writers from a later period (the first century BC). The title Arbiter of Good Taste (*arbiter elegantiae*) is the Latin term generally applied to someone who

rules on matters of correct taste. This is probably a reference to Petronius (d. 66 AD), a Roman satirist, who was appointed *arbiter elegantiae* in the court of Nero, that is, during the early decades of Rome's transformation from a republic to an imperial tyranny. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *from your walls*: The tyrant in Athens is clearly a reference to Peisistratus, who, in the sixth century BC, apparently began to establish written versions of Homer's epics, perhaps in an attempt to provide more or less standardized copies for use in school. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* *his fellow citizens*: Cato the Elder was Marcus Cato (234-149 BC) a very prominent Roman soldier, politician, and orator, famous, among other things, for his attacks on corruption and his emphasis on traditional Roman virtues. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *Epicurus, Zeno, and Arcesilas*: Epicurus (c. 341 to 271 BC) is a reference to the Greek philosopher promoting materialistic explanations of natural events and a hedonistic morality; Zeno is probably not a reference to the philosopher (c. 488 to 425 BC) born in Italy, who later moved to Athens, famous for his book of forty paradoxes, but rather to Zeno of Citium (334 to 262 BC), founder of the Stoic school (this observation comes from Wayne Martin of the University of Essex); Arcesilas (c. 315 to c. 241 BC) is a reference to the Greek skeptical philosopher. Rousseau, Martin notes, is thus referring to the leaders of the three best known Hellenistic schools of philosophy: the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Sceptics. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *governing the earth*: Gaius Fabricius Luscinus was a Roman general and statesman in the third century BC, famous for his embodiment of the traditional Roman virtues. Cineas (330 to 270 BC) was a Greek politician from Thessaly. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *worse than death*: Louis XII (1462 to 1515) and Henry IV (1553 to 1610) were strong, successful, and popular kings of France. They fought wars outside of France and helped to consolidate the kingdom internally. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *of the frontispiece*: The illustration in the opening title pages for the Discourse was a picture of Prometheus warning the satyr. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *Sumptuary Laws*: Sumptuary laws were passed in England and France throughout the Renaissance to control the purchase and display of certain goods and thus to restrict and control the spread of luxury items. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *thirty Lacedaemonians*: a Sybarite is a native of Sybaris and, by reputation, a person devoted to luxury and luxurious living. A Lacedaemonian is a native of Sparta. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *has cost you*: Arouet is the original name of Voltaire (1694-1778), the most famous philosopher and writer in France in the eighteenth century. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *to remain idle*: Carle is a reference to Charles-Andre Vanloo, and Pierre a reference to Jean-Baptiste-Marie Pierre, two well-known French painters. Praxiteles and Phidias were the two most famous Athenian sculptors of the fifth century BC. Pigalle (Jean-Baptiste Pigalle) was an eighteenth-century French sculptor. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *your ancestors*: Hannibal was the great Carthaginian general who in the third century BC took his army from Spain over the Alps to attack Rome from the north. He won the major military victories of Cannae and Lake Trasimene. Julius Caesar led Roman armies in Gaul in the first century BC and expanded Rome's empire there. When he brought his troops back across the Rubicon (a river in north Italy), that was a declaration of war against the Roman senate. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *they admit*: The "great monarch" is Louis XIV (1643-1715) who established a number of learned academies. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *perished with them*: Leucippus, a fifth-century Greek philosopher, was the founder of the materialistic school of Atomism; Diagoras was a famous atheistic Greek philosopher. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *Chancellor of England*: the Consul of Rome is a reference to Cicero, and the Chancellor of England is a reference to Francis Bacon. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

* . . . *to act well*: This distinction was commonly made between Athens and Sparta. [\[Back to Text\]](#)