

THE CONTENDING CLAIMS OF MODERN SCIENCE AND MORALITY  
ROUSSEAU'S ANTI-ENLIGHTENMENT ARGUMENT IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

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Rousseau rose to prominence arguing against the Enlightenment, the strongest intellectual current of his time. As he argued in his first important work, the advancement of learning (particularly in the realm of science and technology) is not always conducive to an individual's happiness or community's wellbeing. Man's technological mastery of nature is the result of a reorientation of scientific inquiry that is ambivalent to normative questions; "what can be done?" has replaced "what *should* be done?" as a guiding scientific principal. Because it eschews normative standards, modern science has raised many ethical dilemmas that cannot be answered by modern natural science alone. Going forward, we must determine if it is possible for the raw power of modern science to be guided by the humanities in order to ensure the morality of scientific innovation. Such regulation is necessary, even if this means a rebirth of the humanities, as modern society cannot continue on its current trajectory. A rebirth of the humanities would result in a field built on synthetic reasoning, a way of thought that has been put forward as a viable alternative to

Value-Relativism, with the goal of creating a field capable of commanding respect – thereby to guide, and where necessary to rein in, the sciences.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Age of Enlightenment radically changed European culture, forever altering scientific discovery, artistic development, and social thought, as well as political and religious institutions. This sweeping movement gave rise to modern day society by giving us a new guiding ethic, a cheerfulness about progress and scientific advancement no matter its cost to traditional ways of organizing society, as well as moral and religious claims in particular. The Enlightenment was so encompassing that much of society has not stopped to consider the possible costs that have been associated with this movement. Exempt from this sentiment is philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who voiced his concerns as early as 1750. Many of Rousseau's opinions are still relevant today.

It is possible that an understanding of Rousseau's work will help today's society evaluate the overarching effects of the Enlightenment, and in the process help answer some of the many ethical dilemmas that society faces today. Despite our advances and rapid technological developments, an in-depth inquiry into a movement that took place three centuries ago is necessary, as modern society is in crisis.<sup>12</sup> The North Atlantic world is wealthier and more powerful than it has ever been, but community and communal bonds are fraying. Since WWII there has been an underlying fear and a political hopelessness throughout the country. There are some who turn a blind eye to this, and claim that the country is fine politically, morally, and economically. Even those who willingly recognize the problem must conquer another hurdle – if the country really is in crisis they must determine a logical reason *why* the country is in crisis. To

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<sup>1</sup> Masters Roger D. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006).

answer both of these questions – if the country is in crisis and why – it is most helpful to look at the work that was done when the movement was in its infancy.

The modern scientific project, as initiated by Francis Bacon in the mid-1600s, was intended to aid in the relief of man's estate, and this project was successful. However, we must ask ourselves if the amenities that we possess today justify the erosion of moral and ethical principles. We must look past the added comfort and freedom of technological advancement and question whether modern science has been as helpful as was originally anticipated or if it has simply added to our anxieties in many subtle ways. Our industrial factories are slowly destroying the world, we have altered the genome, and we are arguably less concerned now, than ever before, with the sanctity of life – the very basis of any democratic regime. We have eschewed our traditions but have no clear path going forward; in fact, ours may be the first community in the history of the world to embrace such radical change whilst remaining ambivalent to where we are headed. Such ambivalence has prevented our democratic regime from answering the many moral dilemmas that our modern society is facing – such as: should we open or close our doors to Syrian refugees? Will global warming cause economic upheaval and unwanted immigration and what, if anything, should be done? Are we capable of preventing New Age warfare such as terrorism and genocide?<sup>3</sup> Are some medical advancements devoid of morality? And will racial tensions continue in the West? These grave situations only constitute some of the dilemmas facing modern society, and unreflective scientific advancement will only continue to lead to such cataclysmic developments.

Though the current political and ecological climate is in disarray, it is possible that it is not too late to come to a deeper understanding, form a clear picture of the future, and take the correct

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 275.

steps going forward. Examination of Rousseau's several works in tandem with several more modern works by Steven Pinker, a Johnstone Professor of Psychology at Harvard University and Roger D. Masters, a Nelson A. Rockefeller Professor of Government at Dartmouth College, could potentially give us the answers we seek. While each of these works examine the crises that society is currently facing, they do not all hold entirely similar beliefs. Rousseau would argue that the issues of modern society stemmed from the Enlightenment, which contributed to the degradation of morality and decay of society by encouraging man to erroneously believe that with scientific advancement he was akin to a god. This belief completely altered man's principles, his way of thinking, and what he deems to be necessary for happiness. It is due to man's misunderstanding of his place in society that Rousseau holds that today's issues are not easily remedied. Pinker would argue that society has made a great deal of progress throughout history, and although there is still a great deal left to do, he claims that there is a great deal to look forward to. It is possible that while the situation may not be as dire as Rousseau presents, it may also be true that Pinker is much too optimistic about the current state of society. Examination of the issues of modern day society may show that it is possible that the answer lies somewhere in between what has been presented.

Any attempt to understand the dilemmas facing modern society should bring us to an examination of Rousseau's philosophy. Such an examination necessitates consideration of the ethical dilemmas that have been raised by modern science and the rise of Value-Relativism as the dominant way of thought. Additionally, it is essential to determine whether the arts and sciences are pernicious to human happiness, as well as whether morality is innate to human beings or if it must be studied. Beyond this, one must also determine where society's guidance comes from and whether the scientific field is capable of answering these ethical dilemmas on its own or if it must turn to the social sciences – which may mean a rebirth of the humanities based upon synthetic



(inductive) reasoning. While Rousseau was rightly awarded the prize by the Academy of Dijon in 1750, it is also possible that this message may not be the best suited for men and women to develop in practice, and that Rousseau's philosophy is hopelessly naïve. Regardless of how we come to judge Rousseau's philosophy, there is much to be said for such erudition and the possible ramifications that come from simply knowing.

#### SYNOPSIS OF ROUSSEAU'S CRITICISM OF THE SCIENCES AND THE ARTS: THE FIRST AND SECOND DISCOURSE

Rousseau, a philosophical writer of the eighteenth century, gained both prominence and disfavor with his writings. Though vastly popular, most of Rousseau's works were controversial – especially when held against the backdrop of his own life – and several of them were not only banned, but publicly burned. Even in his time, Rousseau disagreed with the trajectory of political and social events, and because of this, his ideas were contrary to public opinion and the Enlightenment in general, which was gaining popularity and support throughout Europe during Rousseau's lifetime. Due to the Enlightenment, which emphasized scientific development and placed a renewed interest upon the development of philosophical reason, knowledge was valued more highly than ever before. Contrary to this sweeping movement, Rousseau's *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, generally known as the *First Discourse*, praised ignorance and denounced scientific innovation and the arts in general. Among his many radical claims, it is Rousseau's disparagement of sciences and learning – as pernicious to human happiness and goodness – that is perhaps his most discomfiting teaching. Rousseau justifies this view by stating that the raw power of the sciences has allowed man to mistake what his true place is within society and the cosmos at large. Even with this seemingly audacious claim, Rousseau shows an understanding of political

society, human character, and human happiness that is seldom rivaled and which should be further explored.

Rousseau's *First Discourse*, written in 1750, answers, "*Whether the restoration of the Sciences and the Arts has contributed to the purification of morals.*" Here, despite knowing that in some cases he would be misunderstood and ridiculed, Rousseau confidently claims that the restoration of the arts and the sciences has led to moral decay throughout society.<sup>4</sup> Rousseau defend the position he has taken in his *First Discourse* by reiterating that it is not science that he seeks to abuse, but virtue that he wishes to defend.<sup>5</sup>

To support this bold claim that the sciences and the arts have been injurious to morality, Rousseau examined several prominent ancient civilizations. He compared those that valued the arts and the sciences – such as Egypt, China, and Greece – to Sparta, a city state in ancient Greece which denounced both the arts and scientific developments. Rousseau argues that it is not the continued development of the arts and sciences that makes a civilization great, but that what is great for a civilization is found elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> A great civilization, he says, should support a culture that recognizes what it is and does not make pretenses about being something else.<sup>7</sup> It is through this comparison that Rousseau hopes to show that we are often "*deceived by the appearance of right,*" which continues even today, as a great many scholars would favor Greece over Sparta – a culture that closely followed the laws of nature.<sup>8</sup> Sparta had a simplistic society based upon warfare

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 & 135.

and a mentality that stressed the Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest, many centuries before evolutionary theory was first described. It is this setup of the Spartan civilization that so appealed to Rousseau, as he thought that this turbulent environment better lent itself to man's constitution and brought with it fewer temptations which could lead to man's discontentment – happiness being the ultimate aim. Additionally, Rousseau asserts that what many would consider the barbarisms of Spartan culture are preferable to the artfully fake cultures of Egypt, China, and Greece – cultures which place more value upon erudition than probity.<sup>9</sup> Rousseau notes that, “If the Sciences purified morals, if they taught men to shed their blood for the Fatherland, if they animated courage; the Peoples of China should be wise, free, and invincible.”<sup>10</sup> However, this is not the case, and no amount of scientific understanding has been able to save this civilization from an “ignorant and coarse Tartar.”<sup>11</sup> Rousseau argues that not only is upstanding morality easier to maintain when the civilization is more simplistic, as there are fewer temptations, but there is much less possibility that man would be distracted by the desire for material possessions.<sup>12</sup> Rousseau shows in his Discourses that the states that were best for mankind were simple. As he argues in *Emile: Or on Education*, human happiness requires an equilibrium between man's desires and his capacity to satisfy these desires (with all human faculties in operation). Mankind can only desire that which is known to exist; without such knowledge, man cannot be tormented by a vain and furious longing for the things he does not have.

Simple, if coarse, civilizations such as Sparta kept men and women good, their desires calibrated to their lives. They discouraged vanity and were more adapt at warding off laziness,

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5 -10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20.

which Rousseau condemns as a personal or social flaw. Love of fatherland had to be preserved in the hearts of the citizenry at all costs because it extends self-love outward, thereby suppressing vanity and self-concern – the drivers of unhappy lives. Patriotism is easier to preserve among those who must constantly work to survive, those who are not a stranger to hard labor, and do who not have leisure time to contemplate how their life could be better or how their state could be improved. Such hard labor would not only ensure that man is more willing to fight for his fatherland, but ensure that he is living within his means. Spartan culture, in contradistinction to that of Athens, provided a foundation upon which man could find true happiness.

The pursuits that are developed by mankind, those that support the sciences and the arts within civilized culture, are all born from our vices. “Astronomy was born of superstition; Eloquence of ambition, hatred, flattery, lying; Geometry of greed; Physics of vain curiosity; all of them, even Ethics, of human pride.”<sup>13</sup> Rousseau argues that “the sciences and the arts thus owe their birth to our vices,” which should cause us to doubt their rectitude.<sup>14</sup> If we owed the development of the sciences and the arts to our virtue, we could better trust the possibility of their advantages.<sup>15</sup> Rousseau recognizes that “[t]he mind has its needs, as has the body. The latter make up the foundations of society, the former make for it being agreeable.”<sup>16</sup> But we have failed to realize that in our attempt to make society agreeable we have enslaved ourselves. And, so oblivious are we in this enslavement, that we continue to fortify our prison, Rousseau noted that “our souls have become corrupted in proportion as our Sciences and our Arts have advanced toward

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

perfection.”<sup>17</sup> Such misguided application of our efforts towards the perfection of the sciences and the arts have left mankind bereft of what is truly important – that which could contribute to man’s true happiness.

In Rousseau’s *Second Discourse, On the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, he gives an account of the Origin of Inequality Among Men and the progression of inequality throughout time as man moved from the state of nature to political society. In this Discourse, which was less well received by the Academy of Dijon, Rousseau explores mankind’s history because he believes that man’s history, not his nature, is of primary political importance. However, while this provides a basis from which to form a society, this means that there is no end to strive for – no greater good to try and obtain. Because of this, man cannot evolve or develop. As Rousseau holds self-preservation, and self-preservation alone, to be most important and most noble aim for man.<sup>18</sup> This leaves open one glaring question: if man does not have an ultimate aim, where should mankind take its bearings from?<sup>19</sup> The only answer Rousseau leaves us with is that we must look to the past, and man’s true nature – whatever that may be.

To give this account, Rousseau had to describe what mankind was like in the state of nature, prior to civil society and its many amenities. During this time, man had not yet developed many of civil man’s faculties – including forethought and speech. The Savage man that Rousseau relates to the reader “has trouble giving thought in the morning to his needs in the evening.”<sup>20</sup> Man, unlike

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<sup>17</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6-9.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Lange. *Ethics: What is Public Administration?* Lecture at Morehead State University, Rowan County, KY. Spring 2015.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 169.

the animals, was not even born with the instincts with which to take his bearings – he therefore looks to the animals, and *appropriates* each instinct he sees in the beasts.<sup>21</sup> Savage man lived naked and unarmed, and despite this, Rousseau claims that it was Savage man that was “the most advantageously organized of all” the beasts. He was able to meet all of his needs, “stating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied.”<sup>22</sup> Being “[a]ccustomed from childhood to the inclemencies [*sic*] of the weather, and the rigor of the seasons, hardened to fatigue, and forced to defend naked and unarmed their life and their Prey against other ferocious Beasts or to escape them by running –” man was robust and no beast was man’s natural enemy.<sup>23</sup>

It is with this understanding that Rousseau asserts that “[t]o go naked, to be without habitation, and to be deprived of all the useless things we believe so necessary is, then, not such a great misfortune.”<sup>24</sup> The only preoccupation man had was his own self-preservation, and it was in such a manner that man lived a free and contented life. Inequality first arose in “he who first made himself clothes or a Dwelling,” and “thereby provided himself with things that are not very necessary, since he had done without them until then, and since it is not evident why he could not have tolerated as a grown man a mode of life he had tolerated from childhood.”<sup>25</sup> The inequality that has arisen over time between individuals has been perpetuated by the possession of property, the enforcement of laws within society, and the constant search for perfection.

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<sup>21</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 135.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Rousseau's *Second Discourse* also touches on the ways in which physical inequality has led to moral inequality. Often, those who have fewer material possessions are in possession of greater moral integrity. It is this correlation between material goods and immorality, that Rousseau argues allows us to find fault with political society and its advancements – as society has led to moral depravity. In this, we can see a logical connection between the *First* and *Second Discourses*, as the arts and sciences have furthered inequality among men, not only with regards to their material possessions, but their moral well-being. By living outside of our means, we have enslaved ourselves.

While the destitution and moral depravity that Rousseau highlights within modern society does not seem favorable, there are very few options that we can turn to. In practice, unlike in theory, we cannot go back to the state of nature, and although many may espouse the benefits of a “simple time,” history moves forward, not backward. In light of this, Rousseau recommends two possible courses of action. The first is that we seek to understand the true nature of virtue as practiced by exceptional individuals and communities (the noble savage, Spartans, Romans, the Idealized Genevans of the *Second Discourse*), and once we come to an understanding, we collectively learn to live in a way that approximates that virtue under our new circumstances.<sup>26</sup> The second option open to us is that we become independent, and content ourselves in intellectual development – an option that most closely mimics the state of nature.<sup>27</sup> This second option, we will find, is available to very few people, as Rousseau shows that not every individual is suited for intellectual development.

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<sup>26</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 152.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Rousseau's metaphysical examination of man showed that it was the concept of "perfectibility" that gave rise to man's miseries.<sup>28</sup> The concept of perfectibility has allowed man to attempt to remove himself from the state of nature, and in Rousseau's esteem, making man "lower than the Beast," by increasing his desires to the point that they exceed man's physical capacity.<sup>29</sup> It was the idea of man's perfectibility that led to the rise of modern science and the ethical dilemmas that have stemmed from these unregulated technological advances. The desire for more led to the development of reason. Perfectibility, "the sources of all of man's miseries," was what brought man "out of that original condition in which he would spend tranquil and innocent days."<sup>30</sup> It is perfectibility that allowed for man's "enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues to bloom," and that which "eventually makes him his own and Nature's tyrant."<sup>31</sup> Perfectibility is the source of human unhappiness as it laid the foundation for desire. It was desire that enslaved man, making him constantly desirous of more and ensuring that what he had would never be enough. Additionally, it was the concept of perfectibility that allowed man to believe that he could master nature and elevate himself to a status that was equivalent to that of a god.

#### ETHICAL DILEMMAS RAISED BY SCIENCE AND THE ARTS

The seventeenth century was the beginning of the modern scientific project. This modern project was aimed at "improving the condition of the human race" through the relief of suffering by "enhancing health, and enriching life."<sup>32</sup> Science took the place philosophy once occupied, thus

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<sup>28</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 140-1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 33.



becoming the “grand human endeavor,” attracting the best and the brightest to the field.<sup>33</sup> In many ways science during the Enlightenment was a “profoundly moral enterprise,” with Francis Bacon arguing that science should be for “the glory of the Creator and the relief of man’s estate.”<sup>34</sup> Science was not just to be judged by its material products, but by its influence on how humanity has come to think.<sup>35</sup> When done in this manner, “science is far from morally neutral,” as it is done for the greater good.<sup>36</sup> However, the modern scientific project has moved further away from this philosophy over time. The National Academy of Science has stated that today’s science would “examine only the scientific and medical aspects of the issues” and to let others decide “fundamental moral, ethical, religious, and societal questions.”<sup>37</sup> As such, science today is done simply to satisfy vain curiosity – in the hopes of profoundly altering the physical aspects of man’s life – and is no longer done for “the glory of the Creator.”<sup>38</sup> Additionally, science has changed position from inquiring what would be good for society to simply questioning “what can be done?”<sup>39</sup> This change has altered the goals of man to “[a]void[] the worst, rather than achieve[] the best.”<sup>40</sup> It is also due to sentiments such as this that Leo Strauss calls our modern science “instrumental and nothing but instrumental.”<sup>41</sup> If employed without an eye towards what is morally correct, science is merely a technological advancement that can help facilitate such atrocities as

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<sup>33</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 33.

<sup>34</sup> Francis Bacon in Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 33.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Leo Strauss, *On the Intention of Rousseau*, *Social Research*, 14:1/4 (1947) Extracted from *PCI FUN* Text, published by ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 4.

were committed during the Second World War. Even in the Seventeenth Century, the fact that science had the potential to be so dangerous was not lost on Bacon, who stated that the moral neutrality of science made it potentially dangerous.<sup>42</sup>

While the National Academy may have decided not to answer the ethical questions that science poses, scientific developments, now more than ever, raise many new and unavoidable policy questions with inescapable ethical implications. Such policy questions include whether or not stem cell research should be pursued, whether or not lab grown meat should be funded, or if nuclear weapons are worth the possible risk to human life and environmental well-being. Additionally, we must question if the government should allow scientist to incorporate three sets of DNA into one child, whether or not policy should permit genetic testing on children post-conception, whether abortion should be permitted in all cases or greatly limited, and whether or not birth control methods pose a moral dilemma. Beyond this, it must be decided whether or not the proposed benefits of medical marijuana outweigh the possible risks, whether the prolonged continuation of life support for a comatose patient is worth the exorbitant fee, and if euthanasia is a humane choice for those who are suffering. While modern science allows us to practice any number of these options, it does not explore the ethicality of any of these possibilities or whether the “technical advances can be neutral to the ends or purposes to which they are put.”<sup>43</sup>

As Rousseau reminds his readers, scientific advancement is not always in pursuit of the best possible good. In fact, Rousseau states that as “our Sciences and our Arts have advanced

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<sup>42</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 32.

<sup>43</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 21.

towards perfection,” “our souls have become corrupted in proportion.”<sup>44</sup> Scientific advancement, both now and at the start of the Enlightenment, has sought that which would alleviate many of the strains put on man by nature. Though scientists were successful in doing this – for example, through the adaptation of home goods such as air conditioning and refrigeration, or medical advancements such as the development of penicillin and vaccines – they have not always stopped to ask if these innovations are the best possible good in relation to morality – believing it fell outside their purview. This situation is made obvious when scientific advancements are examined in tandem with questions of morality and how one should best live their life. Masters found that there was a striking correlation between the rise and ease of home refrigeration and divorce, and while “we tend to hold the people who divorce responsible,” this could be part of a “much larger by-product of moral decay.”<sup>45</sup> Additionally, whenever “the pursuit of health through science and medicine conflicts with even the deepest commitments of modern life—to equality, to rights, to self-government, or to protection of the weak—science and medicine typically carry the day.”<sup>46</sup> This can be seen with many of the advancements in biotechnology – especially with regards to embryonic stem cell research and the genetic screening of embryos.<sup>47</sup>

Science can claim to be morally neutral as it does not explicitly examine principles of good or bad.<sup>48</sup> It does not inquire as to what the primary good is, which leaves multiple interpretations. Descartes (1596-1650) claimed that the “new science should be directed to the advancement of

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<sup>44</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>45</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 25-6.

<sup>46</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 38.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 35.

health,” which he described as “without doubt the primary good and the foundation of all other goods of this life.”<sup>49</sup> Hobbes (1500-1579) thought that the primary good was the “relief from the constant threat of death” while John Locke (1632-1704), “a bit less morbid,” saw the primary good as “avoiding violence and protecting life.”<sup>50</sup> As American political analyst Yuval Levin points out, the conflicting views these philosophers hold regarding the highest human aim seem to be lowering the standard of what is considered a primary good.<sup>51</sup> Levin states that this change in attitude is due to both modern science and a lowering of our overall aims – moving further and further away from what Aristotle would claim our true nature to be.<sup>52</sup> Put another way, ambivalence to the ethical questions raised by scientific advancement required the whittling down what is good for human beings to the point of simply settling on the basics – as such, bodily health remains the highest agreed-upon standard. The problem is that the desiccation of ethics, though it made incredible scientific advancements possible, also made careful thinking on the rightness or wrongness of most policy questions – especially those having to do with how we should pursue the limit of the advancement of natural science – all but impossible.

The possible problematic ethicality of modern science is an issue that crosses party lines, and must simply come down to what is best.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, even those with different political leanings have been known to have reservations about certain scientific advancements. “There are

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<sup>49</sup> Descartes in Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 36.

<sup>50</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 36.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 36.

<sup>53</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 23.

conservatives and Catholics who oppose birth control and abortion but favor nuclear power, and liberals who support the medical technologies that have revolutionized family planning while attacking industrial processes that threaten the environment.”<sup>54</sup> The fact that many of the concerns regarding the advancement of technology can, and have, crossed party lines, necessitates that we must get past the conceptions of relativism – an ideology that thinks what is best is relative to (as well as contingent upon) an individual’s culture, time, or place – and come closer to a truer understanding of what is best for our political society.

Relativism is a school of thought that most prominently says not to judge – as natural law does not provide for an absolute truth. This school of thought is a significant precondition of uncontrolled scientific advancement and, in turn, has been reinforced by the success of the modern scientific project. Relativism which asserts that there is no way of knowing what is good for mankind, or what better approximates rightness or wrongness, and ensures not only that there is no limit upon scientific advancement but strips all authority from the humanities. The several branches that make up Value-Relativism tell us that the “truth is whatever individuals feel it is,” or that truth is relative to our laws, our culture, or our [historical time-frame],” ensuring that the “truth” is no more than mere opinion.<sup>55</sup> This perspective has enveloped society, ensuring that we are incapable of reigning in the raw power of the sciences, as it has eliminated all “rational basis from which we might criticize our personal ‘values.’”<sup>56</sup> It has bolstered the modern scientific project because it allows us to maintain “our existing prejudices,” or to “dismiss views” we do not

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<sup>54</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 23.

<sup>55</sup> Patrick Malcolmson, Richard Myers, and Colin O’Connell, *Liberal Education and Value Relativism: A Guide to Today’s B.A* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), 41-2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

like, as there is no truth – only an individual’s or culture’s opinion of the truth.<sup>57</sup> We have forgotten that a basic knowledge of nature and human psychology is necessary for understanding both social life and politics.<sup>58</sup> In place of this basic understanding, modern society has founded its understanding of moral and political issues upon an erroneous understanding of abstract rights – which has replaced actual judgement. However, we must acknowledge that it is only through the careful thinking on the rightness or wrongness of policy questions that one can instill limits upon scientific development and restore to the humanities the legitimacy the field once wielded.

The adoption of Value-Relativism as the dominant way of thought has ensured that our society cannot, with any validity, judge other cultures or societies. These societies do not choose not to judge, but actually cannot judge, as knowledge is considered subjective. Such subjective knowledge can consist of “any collectively accepted system of beliefs,” which are also “relative to the society in which it was discovered and accepted.”<sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup> It is this relativism that has allowed unsupported opinion to be accepted as fact. Today, society asserts that right and wrong are based upon perspective and how you, as an individual or within a culture or time in history, view occurrences – not fact. However, knowledge of reality is possible.<sup>61</sup> Right and wrong cannot simply be a matter of opinion. Leon Harold Craig, Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta, agrees with this dismissal of Value-Relativism along with the dismissal of the fact-value

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<sup>57</sup> Patrick Malcolmson, Richard Myers, and Colin O’Connell, *Liberal Education and Value Relativism: A Guide to Today’s B.A* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), 41-2.

<sup>58</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 145.

<sup>59</sup> Barry Barnes and David Bloor, in Larry Laudan, *Science and Relativism: Some Key Controversies in the Philosophy of Science (Science and Its Conceptual Foundations series)* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 106.

<sup>60</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 89.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

distinction, appropriately claiming that for values to exist they must have their foundation in fact, thus dismissing the Fact-Value Dichotomy.<sup>62</sup> It is Value-Relativism that has allowed us to forget that what is morally and ethically right or wrong is just as dependent upon factual information as is the field of science. Therefore, it goes without saying that an individual can be just as ignorant of what is right and what is wrong as they can be with regards to the scientific method. Morality, like the scientific method, must be mastered. Ethics must be taught at home and within universities. If not, individuals are no more likely to know what is ethically right than they are to know the principles of physics.

Value relativism originated in the minds of great philosophers of the Enlightenment, including Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, as well as the work done by Hobbes, Hume, Kant, and Arnold Brecht.<sup>63</sup> Even though the misinterpretation of Rousseau himself. “Locke’s epistemology, which came to dominate Anglo-Saxon science, if not modern science more generally,” asserted that values came from society and positive law. Locke also initiated the movement of modern thought away from the principles of the ancients, asserting that modern philosophy was closer to reality. It is with this that Locke changed the trajectory of the world. The modern tradition was now based on science being “value-free with regards to the highest questions of right and wrong.”<sup>64</sup> Modern science was effectively cut off from the freedom or ability to study the true values or “goals of human life.”<sup>65</sup> Hume’s philosophy was “derived from Locke but interpreted in the light of subsequent thought.”<sup>66</sup> Hume thought that “all our ideas

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<sup>62</sup> Leon Harold Craig. “Prologue: On Reading a Platonic Dialogue” in *The War Lover: A Study of Plato’s Republic*, xii-xxxviii. Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 105.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

are copied from our impressions.”<sup>67</sup> Interpretation of such claims have led individuals to think that the discovery of what is right and wrong is not possible, and that morality does not exist in fact.<sup>68</sup> Hume also emphasized the distinction between “is” and “ought” which laid the foundation for value-free science.<sup>69</sup> Kant drove the final wedge between facts and values, and his view is “so widely shared in contemporary social science that it is almost invisible.”<sup>70</sup> These philosophical decisions have led to the separation of science and human morality leading to many scientific developments that threaten the sanctity of human life.

Value relativism overlooks essential components of everyday life, among which is our ability to discern right and wrong from what we observe to be true and right in our everyday experiences. Marcello Pera, philosopher and former President of the Italian Senate, and Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI, show in a collection of their letters the issues of relativism and the fact-value distinction. The continuation of Value-Relativism as a world view, as shown in their work *Without Roots*, will ensure that more of the important fundamentals of Western culture are eroded away. These men, one religious, one not, share the same worry – that relativism is eating away at the West’s roots. It is a nation’s roots that provide it with both nutrients and stability, without them, like any organism, the West would not be able to survive. This work provides that the fundamentals of Western society are reason in the Greek tradition, Roman or common law, and Christianity.<sup>71</sup> These men show that all three of these pillars are essential for

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<sup>67</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 105.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>71</sup> Pera, in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006).



upholding the western way of life, and are in no way in contention with one another.<sup>72</sup> Relativism, though has caused these pillars to crumble, and the roots of Western society to dry up, by creating a tension that does not exist. While Rousseau would place much less emphasis upon Christian revelation than Pera or Ratzinger, as he thought that religious teachings were easily corrupted by scientific innovation or political abuse, religion is very capable of helping a society determine what is right and wrong. Christianity was able to add hope, faith, and charity to our lives, which provided a basis from which we can judge human behavior.<sup>73</sup> In many ways, the contention between Rousseau and religion is no longer an issue as the church has not only largely avoided political abuse but has shown that science and revelation need not be in contention. In many ways, science and religion are irreducible, and religion can give deeper meaning to scientific innovation through the establishment of a philosophy for human life. However, such a foundation can only do so much in a world dominated by Value-Relativism.

Pera claims it is due to relativism, that one cannot judge between cultures, theories, conceptual universities, language games, and world views – as well as values, governments, and faiths.<sup>74</sup> While relativism may seem beneficial on the outset, and has swept throughout the world under this illusion, this philosophy has many pitfalls, not least of which is the ability to shut down dialogue between individuals and nations. Among noticeable pitfalls is the inability of the West to claim that its culture is superior to that of some radical Middle Eastern cultures. This theory would suggest that “[i]f one believes the West is better than Islam,” for any reason, “then they ought to

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<sup>72</sup> Pera, in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 154.

<sup>74</sup> Pera, in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 9-15.

object to it.”<sup>75</sup> This assertion is impeded for two reasons. Firstly, the West does not believe that there are good reasons to say that it is better than Islam.<sup>76</sup> Secondly, it believes that, if such a reason exists, it would have to fight Islam.<sup>77</sup> Pera argues that there is good reason to think that the West is better than Islam – this can be contributed to the neo-fundamentalism of practitioners of Islam, Sharia law, or the welcoming attitude of the West towards Muslims that is not reciprocated when Christians go to Islamic countries.<sup>78</sup> However, Pera asserts that while the West is superior, this does not necessarily mean that the two cultures must fight, and he suggests open dialogue as an alternative.<sup>79</sup> Open dialogue, according to Pera, is a sufficient alternative to open warfare as long as Jihad is not declared on the Western way of life.<sup>80</sup> However, one cannot foster such dialogue when value relativism remains the reigning world view.

Pera asserts that “relativism has wreaked havoc, and it continues to act as a mirror and echo chamber for the dark mood that has fallen over the West.”<sup>81</sup> It allows society to disregard fact in favor of unsupported opinion. It allows for the assertion that tyranny is just as good of a political system as is democracy – asserting that it is just a different political arrangement. History has shown us that this is not the case. It has shown us that some political arrangements in life are far superior to others, and that this claim can be supported by fact. As Pera notes, “relativism that preaches the equivalence of values or cultures is grounded not so much in tolerance as in acquiescence, more inclined toward capitalism than awareness, more focused on decline than on

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<sup>75</sup> Pera, in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 9.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

the force of conviction, progress, and mission.”<sup>82</sup> In a fruitful society, values and facts cannot be separated, as we must place greater significance on that which is supported by fact. Craig supports this argument, that value should be supported by fact, showing that the fact-value distinction is greatly misguided. In order to show that for values to exist they must have their foundation in fact, one must look no further than Craig’s prologue to *The War Lover*, which can be broken down as such:

- I. “‘Ought’ implies ‘can,’” and therefore, matters of fact must have implications for values.
  - a. For the fact-value distinction to work, facts would have no implication for values – because it is implying that they are radically different.
  - b. However, we know that standards of right and wrong, principles of justice and morality, are limited by what is psychologically and politically possible (fact).
- II. The natural order is not neutral with regards to “good” and “bad.”
  - a. We tend toward the “good,” e.g. good health, of which there is great supporting evidence.
  - b. Health is not simply a matter of the body, but the mind and soul as well.
- III. People tend to treat their own good as something objective and not subjective – as value separated from fact would be.
  - a. Evidence of this lies in the fact that we treat some views as being better than others – which implies that there is *something* real and objective.
    - i. Despite this, one’s actions are ultimately guided by opinion, although said opinion is closer to the truth than what would have been if objective choices were not made.
- IV. There are objective grounds for preferring certain character traits over others – as some character traits have nothing to recommend them.
  - a. It is important to use inductive reasoning (synopsis).
    - i. However, most people do not do this well, which is why people are always disagreeing on values, and thus necessitating that we constantly revise our judgments.
    - ii. Therefore, it is impossible to *know* what should be valued, though one can gain a pretty good idea through reason.
      - I. With the fact-value distinction, one has even greater limits on what can be known – if anything at all. With the fact-value distinction in place, one could mistake philosophy for the act of falling off a bicycle, as the very act of separating value from fact is a chimerical distinction.

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<sup>82</sup> Pera, in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 34.

- V. Conclusion: The fact-value distinction is inherently flawed, and perhaps impossible with regards to application, as values do not exist – the word ‘value’ itself being no more than an “omnibus term for standards and principles, and even preferences and tastes,” once separated from fact. The fact-value distinction must be disregarded because values should be based on facts – not separated from them. However, what is fact may be hard to determine, which leaves room for disagreement. Yet, even so, use of the fact-value system allows one to reject the notion that life should be lived a certain way, and is therefore one of the greatest mistakes.<sup>83</sup>

Craig shows that the judgements that we make about right and wrong should be rational and based upon fact.<sup>84</sup> Though there is a ‘right’ and a ‘wrong,’ a ‘good’ and a ‘bad,’ it remains difficult for one to know in all circumstances what should be done. To determine this, we must employ reason to sort out the information as well as our own experiences; theories about what is right and what is wrong will arise when a hypothesis cannot be disproven.<sup>85</sup> Often, what is right or wrong will fall on a spectrum, sometimes falling closer to ‘absolute bad’ or ‘wrong’ and sometimes closer to ‘absolute good’ or ‘right.’<sup>86</sup> This is often called synthetic reasoning, which is a way of thought put forward as a viable alternative to Value-Relativism. The intention is that, by employing this practice, an ethics will develop ensuring that we treat others and ourselves with justice and morality.<sup>87</sup> This way of inductive reasoning does not rid society of values, but ensures that the values that are held are based on a factual representation of the world rather than unsupported opinion. In this way, society can better employ the humanities to explore human nature and, where it is needed, place checks upon scientific development to ensure that it does not interfere with the sanctity of human life.

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<sup>83</sup> Leon Harold Craig. “Prologue: On Reading a Platonic Dialogue” in *The War Lover: A Study of Plato’s Republic*, xii-xxxviii. Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Steven Lange. *Ethics: What is Public Administration* Lecture at Morehead State University, Rowan County, KY. Spring 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

By arguing against the sciences and the arts, Rousseau removes many of the stumbling blocks man faces as he seeks a moral life. Rousseau shows that when men create new tools, such as has been done with scientific innovation, they “create new, derivative needs, needs that soon override the primary needs in their urgency.”<sup>88</sup> This is Rousseau’s point whenever he invites the reader to consider whether men might not be better off without the power, faculties, or tools, that modern man has developed that allow him to do just as much ill as good. Rousseau holds that it was only with the progression of time and the development of societies and languages that man became aware of his own morality – and with this his ability to do bad and good. Possession of the knowledge to differentiate between the good and bad is more important than ever before, as man has the ability to do more with science than ever before in history – thus creating many more moral imperatives. Such imperatives may be so grave as the actions man takes in order to delay death or simply the slow alteration of what society deems to be the highest aim. Many societies post-Enlightenment allow for intelligence to be more highly praised than an individual’s virtue, failing to recognize that virtue may contribute more to the well-being of a society than an individual’s ability to create through their intellect.

Throughout his Discourses, Rousseau shows that the sciences and the arts owe their birth to our vices, not our virtues. Misunderstanding of the sciences has led to a willingness to praise what is morally depraved. As Rousseau notes in his *First Discourse*, if the sciences and the arts were developed due to our morality, we would have less reason to question their possible advantages. Much of what scientific advancement has allowed us to do has fed the aspects of our

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<sup>88</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xx.

nature that are selfish and lazy, which has made it more difficult to be virtuous. Over time it has becomes harder to ignore these selfish tendencies. This is a vicious cycle, as the more we succumb to selfish tendencies the easier it gets to succumb again in the future.<sup>89</sup> This can be seen in an example of an individual attempting to diet: it is much easier to resist the first cookie than it is the second or third.

In the Social Contract, Rousseau writes that while “man is born free, ... everywhere he is in chains.”<sup>90</sup> We have enslaved ourselves with our desires and the stigmas that are born out of civil society. In civil society, “[o]ne no longer dares to appear what one is.”<sup>91</sup> Here, Rousseau is referring to the social custom that suggests that, if someone compliments you, you are obliged to follow suit and pay a compliment in return, even if you are not sincere. Rousseau argued that this practice made society artfully fake, as no one said what they truly meant or felt.<sup>92</sup> Because of this, “[o]ne will thus never really know with whom one is dealing” and it will put an end to all “sincere friendships,” and all “real esteem.”<sup>93</sup> This breeds “[s]uspicious, offenses, fears, coolness, reserve, hatred, [and] betrayal” within a society.<sup>94</sup>

Many of the extravagances that we have come to take for granted over time have slowly degraded the morality of society. Such developments include even the development of letters, which has helped contribute to this decline. According to Rousseau, luxury is diametrically opposed to good morals. Rousseau’s position is partly due to his belief that all abuse of time is a

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<sup>89</sup> Steven Lange. *Ethics: What is Public Administration* Lecture at Morehead State University, Rowan County, KY. Spring 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and other later political writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch. (Cambridge: UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xvii.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

great evil. Additionally, historic societies that were not filled with luxuries were more likely to win wars, making them better able to protect and defend their way of life. The rise of luxuries has been shown to reduce the citizen's willingness to protect their fatherland. Those individuals accustomed to luxury and leisure are not only less willing but less physically capable of fighting. These individuals also harbor a greater fear that warfare may cause them great harm as they are not accustomed to feeling want, hunger or thirst, fatigue, or harsh environments. Plato's Glaucon is an example of how tastes can be corrupted with desire for luxuries. When the men in Plato's Republic are defining the just city in speech, Glaucon asks what place 'relishes' would have in such a city. The consequent incorporation of the relishes completely changed the structure of Socrates' city, and demonstrates, that human beings prefer finer things. Just as it was in the Republic, the addition of luxuries has complicated life, making it more difficult to live a pious or moral life. This can be seen within the religious community; often religious clerics will separate themselves from many worldly possessions to rid themselves of certain temptations that have the potential to corrupt morals. Rousseau connects art to the decline of morals. To do so, Rousseau had to harken back to natural man within the State of Nature. As highlighted in Plato's Republic, justice can only be found when there is injustice to compare it to.

Science, despite innumerable benefits, raises many ethical dilemmas. Due to the moral neutrality of science, and the fact that it can be used for as many bad purposes as good, scientific innovation is potentially dangerous.<sup>95</sup> Several of Rousseau's works present the argument that human reliance upon the luxuries brought about by sciences and arts are responsible for the corruption that is rampant throughout our society. As Rousseau predicted, over time, science has

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<sup>95</sup> George W. Bush in Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 32-3.

eliminated any of the moral reasoning it once had – especially more traditional ways of moral reasoning.<sup>96</sup> While, in his natural state, man was born uncorrupt and free of desire. The pursuit of that which would elevate man’s estate has led to his corruption, as science does not “encourage higher and more noble pursuits,” and is not subservient to any other field.<sup>97</sup>

However, although man and society have been corrupted, humanity must think of a solution going forward. As any scientist will admit, the modern scientific principle – based upon systematic study, hypothesis, and independent testing – “simply gives us raw power”; it is up to those outside the field “to determine what is right or wrong.”<sup>98</sup> The sciences have set in motion many ethical dilemmas that we cannot continue to ignore. Because of this, we can logically conclude that this task, of regulation and seeing to the nations morality, must fall to the humanities. The social humanities, which often delve into ethics, morality, justice, and the good life, would seem to have the necessary foundation to provide modern scientific innovation with a desperately needed moral compass.

#### CAN THE SCIENTIFIC FIELD ANSWER THESE ETHICAL DILEMMAS – OR MUST IT TURN TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES?

Scientific development is one of the pressing issues confronting society.<sup>99</sup> Many of the scientific advancements that individuals have deemed to be an unequivocal good have not been properly evaluated from the standpoint of probity, which would now fall outside of the scientific field. Additionally, “questions about the fruits of science are typically directed to the way society

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<sup>96</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 43-4.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-3.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*



uses science rather than to the specific project itself.”<sup>100</sup> As a society, we cannot continue to ignore these ethical dilemmas or the very foundations of modern science. As the ability of the sciences to do what it has previously been incapable of doing grows, “the more troubling and vexing these ethical questions become.”<sup>101</sup> Due to the many ethical questions that are continually being raised, as well as the inability of the field itself to determine what is right or wrong, it is possible that science may need to be regulated from the outside, as it is not feasible to go back to a time without scientific innovation. Modern science has adopted the mentality that it is justified in refusing to explore what is ethical. This is because, while science “does not necessarily encourage higher and more noble pursuits,” it also does “not necessarily conflict with them.”<sup>102</sup> Theoretically, “modern science can coexist with virtuous life;” but, because the sciences have the power to do anything, it is necessary that it be regulated in order to ensure that scientific innovation is limited to what it should do rather than simply what it is capable of doing.

While modern science attracts the best and brightest, this field alone cannot provide the answers that we need. Practitioners within the modern social sciences strongly advocate that the sciences be regulated by the humanities, as they think that without their intervention modern ethical dilemmas will never be answered. The pairing of the arts and sciences seems to offer the perfect answer to the predicament that modern society faces, and could help alleviate the “widespread pessimism, fear, and conflict,” that has spread throughout the nation due to the inability of the sciences to answer ethical dilemmas.<sup>103</sup> Through this pairing, politics can govern scientific practices that threaten to violate important moral boundaries, while separating itself from

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<sup>100</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 105.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

any work that would “distort or hide unwelcome facts.”<sup>104</sup> As “politics exists to govern action, ... at times it must govern science.”<sup>105</sup> Though this seems to be the perfect pairing, we must ask ourselves: why did the humanities not keep pace with the sciences throughout the Enlightenment? As well as, why do prominent scholars such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau argue that the humanities were insufficient to save us? Rousseau’s argument states that we, as a people, have moved too far away from morality, that the humanities have lost much of its credibility, and is just as incapable of promoting ethical decisions as is the sciences. Additionally, the humanities foster a type of individual capable of being insufferably stuck-up, more concerned with brandishing their wit and showing off than seriously considering what is best for mankind. The possibility of such stark realities, and facilitating faux philosophers, should cause us to question, like Rousseau, whether advanced society with such moral dilemmas is truly desirable.

Because political intervention must capitulate to “[t]he preeminence of health” the sciences remain capable of regulating the overarching “goals of the scientific enterprise,” and stripping away power from any political enterprise which may seek to limit the capabilities of the sciences. In addition to stressing the preeminence of physical well-being, the sciences have “also limit[ed] the ability of politics to act in the service of other important goods,” such as mental or moral well-being.<sup>106</sup> Levin notes that “the authority we cede to science, both as the servant of health and as the master of knowledge, weakens our allegiance to those other sources of wisdom so crucial to our self-understanding and self-government.” As a society we have forgotten that it is “those other sources [that] serve to ground our moral judgment, while science avoids or flattens moral

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<sup>104</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 40.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

questions, since it cannot answer them and rarely needs to ask them.”<sup>107</sup> This issue is so ingrained that science is often thought of as above politics – untouchable “by moral premises, or tradition, or religious or personal views, as if every question of public policy with any scientific dimension must be understood as a matter of pure science alone.”<sup>108</sup> As such, the humanities, as they are, would not be able to regulate the ethics of scientific innovation.

Rousseau was one of the first individuals to recognize that modern scientific developments led to various ethical dilemmas and impeded the pursuit of happiness. It was because of this that he called for a rebirth of the salutary humanities. While modern society typically holds the humanities to be an “unquestionably nice endeavor,” Wilfred M. McClay, professor of history at the University of Tennessee, argues, along with Stanley Fish, author of *Will the Humanities Save Us?*, that the humanities do not *do* anything, ““other than give pleasure to “those who enjoy them.””<sup>109</sup> McClay – like Rousseau, though perhaps not to the same extent – thinks that the humanities can be more of a burden than a blessing.<sup>110</sup> Here the two men’s paths diverge, as McClay does not argue that society should get rid of the humanities in their entirety, but that the humanities should find their way back to the “first principles” – those of the ancients’ prior to the Enlightenment – as well as develop a deeper understanding of “humanistic content.”<sup>111</sup> If the humanities are capable of accomplishing this, it is entirely possible that we could pursue

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<sup>107</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 44.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>109</sup> Stanley Fish in Wilfred M. McClay, *The Burden and Beauty of the Humanities*. (American Educator Winter 2008-2009), 26.

<sup>110</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *The Burden and Beauty of the Humanities*. (American Educator Winter 2008-2009), 26-7.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

knowledge or philosophy simply to cultivate a deeper understanding of human nature, rather than to feed man's *amour propre*, or vanity.

In line with Rousseau's philosophy, McClay writes that there is a burden that comes along with the humanities. Rousseau's work suggests that the burden that accompanies the practice of the humanities would be our perpetual unhappiness – the inability to happily live within such a complex society. For McClay this “can refer to the weight the humanities themselves have to bear, the things they are supposed to accomplish on behalf of us, our nation, or our civilization.”<sup>112</sup> Alternatively, the burden can refer to “the ways in which the humanities are a source of responsibility for us, and their recovery and cultivation and preservation our job, even our duty.”<sup>113</sup> Either way, McClay points out, “the humanities, rightly pursued and rightly ordered, can do things, and teach things, and preserve things, and illuminate things, which can be accomplished in no other way.”<sup>114</sup> The humanities alone have recognized the “range and depth of human possibility, including our immense capacity for both goodness and depravity.”<sup>115</sup> However, diverging from Rousseau, McClay notes that unlike the sciences, the humanities teach us to question what the “good life” is, and how we can achieve it. Even so, the idea that the humanities can guide scientific innovation is putting a lot of weight on the humanities – especially as modern society is so quick to dismiss this field. Such responsibility would require in-depth knowledge of several fields such as human psychology and political theory along with a basic knowledge of science including chemistry, molecular biology, and physics. Ultimately, while the humanities do have an important

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<sup>112</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *The Burden and Beauty of the Humanities*. (American Educator Winter 2008-2009), 27.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

use in our lives, this field is limited by the sheer amount of knowledge worldwide and the amount of time it takes to become proficient in each area.<sup>116</sup>

Because “science is inherently progressive,” it “gives us the sense that all other means of understanding must strive to catch up.”<sup>117</sup> However, this is not the case. The humanities needs simply to develop a moral framework capable of keeping the sciences, and perhaps even its own field, in check.<sup>118</sup> The humanities, like the sciences, have not been left untouched by modern principles and Value-Relativism. This field has in many ways been crippled by the misguided ideals of modern society, which has left it damaged by modernity and forgetful of the teachings of the ancients. The Neo-Kantian reasoning that led to Value-Relativism has been so ingrained in modern social science that “it is almost invisible.”<sup>119</sup> Because of this, the humanities have commanded less respect over time. Relativism and the fact-value distinction has contributed to the idea that the humanities are based on opinion and thus entirely subjective. As the humanities are considered “prescientific,” many do not consider the knowledge of this field to be valid, and modern society has wrongly dismissed the work of the humanities.<sup>120</sup> However, while “the humanities are imprecise by their very nature,” it “does not mean that they are a form of intellectual finger painting.”<sup>121</sup> For the most part, the humanities accurately reflect many of the subjects that fall underneath its umbrella by employing the same inductive logic that is employed by the

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<sup>116</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *The Burden and Beauty of the Humanities*. (American Educator Winter 2008-2009), 27.

<sup>117</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 41.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 112.

<sup>120</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2007), 45.

<sup>121</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *The Burden and Beauty of the Humanities*. (American Educator Winter 2008-2009), 27.

sciences. However, overtime modernity has in many ways led to a misunderstanding of basic human nature and a dismissal of the humanities, which the field has not been able to remedy.<sup>122</sup> In instances such as this, we can see how parts of the humanities operate like, and have taken the same path as, the sciences.

Craig states that modern science is an exploration of what “is” and how it works through investigation and classification.<sup>123</sup> This separates science from how one comes to knowledge through reading, which can delve into the realm of what could potentially be.<sup>124</sup> Reading is an investigation of what others have done and thought, which can allow us to gain access to what we want and what we love – not just what we know.<sup>125</sup> Through reading, we can learn about the human soul. Because of this, truly magnificent writers do not simply write for their time, but, like science, are capable of transcending their time and culture. Plato’s Socrates is one such example. His writings were completed in Athens Greece from 469-399 BCE and are still the most commonly read philosophy today.<sup>126</sup> Writers today do not write like this, and many of the readers are incapable of reading such literature. Craig asserts that as a society, we have forgotten how to read.<sup>127</sup> Ancient writers were able to cultivate thought through careful meaning, so careful that everything within a work was significant – including the use of numbers through a practice known

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<sup>122</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *The Burden and Beauty of the Humanities*. (American Educator Winter 2008-2009), 27.

<sup>123</sup> Leon Harold Craig. “Prologue: On Reading a Platonic Dialogue” in *The War Lover: A Study of Plato’s Republic*, xii-xxxviii. Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2003.

<sup>124</sup> Steven Lange. *Ethics: What is Public Administration* Lecture at Morehead State University, Rowan County, KY. Spring 2015.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Leon Harold Craig. “Prologue: On Reading a Platonic Dialogue” in *The War Lover: A Study of Plato’s Republic*, xii-xxxviii. Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2003.

as numerology.<sup>128</sup> Work done by the humanities today is often devoid of mathematical reasoning, cumulative logic, and synthetic reasoning.

The humanities of today would greatly benefit from synthetic reasoning, a method of inductive reasoning that was employed by the ancients. Synthetic reasoning has been put forward as a viable alternative to Value-Relativism.<sup>129</sup> This method of conscious thought provides for the examination of specific cases to determine what they have in common.<sup>130</sup> In fact, most scientific experimentation is done by employing synthetic reasoning. Reasoning through induction allows us to use evidence and reason and to ensure that facts and values are not separated while we determine what is right or wrong.<sup>131</sup> Such a conscious thought process like synthetic reasoning ensures the rationality of human thought, but it also means that such a process must be perfected through education.<sup>132</sup> Advanced education is necessary for synthetic reasoning because judgements of good and bad, right and wrong, noble and base, are not dependent upon mysterious values, but can be found through the application of one's rational power and synthesis of evidence and experience.<sup>133</sup> Such a foundation would be a necessary first step in reestablishing the legitimacy of the humanities.

As a society, we have undergone what Levin has deemed a "moral forgetfulness," as society has "overlook[ed] the importance of tradition" and cumulative thought.<sup>134</sup> This

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<sup>128</sup> Steven Lange. *Ethics: What is Public Administration* Lecture at Morehead State University, Rowan County, KY. Spring 2015.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 39.

“forgetfulness has extended to science,” as it, like other fields, seems to have overlooked the fact that human knowledge regarding “tradition, education, religion, philosophy, and ethics” is most enlightening when the knowledge gleaned by our ancestors is not dismissed as irrelevant.<sup>135</sup> It is such forgetfulness that gives weight to Rousseau’s statement that man understands much less about himself than he does about nature, as science simply tells us about nature – not specifically human nature. Because of this, while science has helped us to understand the physical world around us, we cannot understand the true nature of mankind in our own time. Those theories that were put forward by Socrates and Aristotle have, like the statue of Glaucus, eroded with the passage of time.<sup>136</sup> While science “seems to offer a more advanced way to reason than the old approaches to all of our difficulties,” science itself was built from the knowledge of the ancients.<sup>137</sup> Science was not born independently of all other knowledge, and it therefore cannot be the sole means of reasoning. Mankind would be foolish to continue in its attempt to replace all other means of reasoning with science alone. In fact, “the conventional understanding of modern science is contradicted on key points by contemporary evolutionary biology, behavioral ecology, neuroscience, mathematical physics and logic” in a way that the ancient way of thought never has been.<sup>138</sup> This is because modern thought is predominantly viewed from a value-free understanding, which separates knowledge of the world from knowledge of human nature – leading to various flaws not only in the softer social sciences, but within the scientific field as a whole.

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<sup>135</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 41.

<sup>136</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xx.

<sup>137</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 43.

<sup>138</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 144.



As the scientific field in the modern age has essentially perfected its ability to ignore moral imperatives, many would agree that “the governance of science is legitimate and necessary.”<sup>139</sup> Man has “debas[ed] himself by pursuing “pure scientific advancement” alone.<sup>140</sup> However, the humanities, in their current state, cannot offer insight into true human nature, as it is limited by relativism and a forgetfulness that has distorted what is known about human nature and morality. Because of this, a rebirth of the humanities is essential for the preservation of morality. Through this rebirth, the humanities must develop a better understanding of human nature – including whether morality is innate or if it must be taught – in order to ground moral judgement within modern society.

#### IS MORALITY INNATE OR MUST IT BE TAUGHT?

It is difficult to say with any certainty what, if any, abstract qualities are innate to man and what, if anything, must be done to cultivate these qualities. In his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau calls attention to two principles that he thinks are innate to natural man: self-preservation and a repugnance to see suffering. Beyond this, Rousseau suggests, the principles that are commonly (but erroneously) held to be innate or part of “natural law” are derived from the observation of nature. Rousseau also argued that if man were to stray too far from the noble savage and learn to philosophize, he would lose his ability to feel empathy. It is due to this reasoning that Rousseau praised ignorance and denounced scientific innovation and the arts, as he thought that their cultivation would prevent an individual from empathizing with fellow human beings. In direct

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<sup>139</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 39.

<sup>140</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2007), 53-4.

contention with Rousseau's claim, Steven Pinker suggests that morality, even the ability to feel pity for another living being, is not innate but must be developed overtime. Pinker, in his study of why war has declined over time, suggests that true empathy did not manifest until the invention of the printing press, which allowed individuals to sympathize with others through literature. Pinker seems to suggest that correctly structured popular culture can guide morality and expand an individual's ability to feel empathy. Rousseau himself thought that culture should be guided by philosophic understanding – although he retains his belief that philosophy is not for the masses, who must simply be guided by a correct understanding of virtue.

Through the advancement of modern technology and human psychology we have come to know more about neuroanatomy – the structure of the human brain. This has given man insight into the nature versus nurture debate, showing that both play a significant role and cannot be separated. Although our knowledge remains limited, what we have learned shows that an individual is greatly influenced by nature and evolutionary principles – even education itself. Steven Pinker, in his work *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* seeks to show that neither the Blank Slate nor the concept of the Noble Savage gives an accurate depiction of human psychology. Further, knowledge such as this, concerning what qualities are innate to man, may be able to help society determine what its role should be if it wishes for empathy to be cultivated within its citizenry. It must be determined whether empathy and morality can be guided by philosophic understanding, whether such cultivation is possible within a democratic republic, and whether such an understanding can reinforce the weakened foundation of the humanities.

Pinker shows that although the idea of the Blank Slate had ascended and deeply embedded itself into modern intellectual life, it was a gross misrepresentation of human psychology. The

Blank Slate has chiefly been disproven with the study of neuroanatomy and more recent views of human nature and culture.<sup>141</sup> The notion of a “Blank Slate” originated with John Locke in an effort to counter the notion of the divine right of kings, as it was supported by Robert Filmer, and the institution of slavery.<sup>142</sup> The idea of the Blank Slate “asserts that any differences we see among race, ethnic groups, sexes, and individuals comes not from differences in their innate constitution but from differences in their experiences.”<sup>143</sup> In refuting the Blank Slate, Pinker does not suggest that kings have claim to divine right or that slavery is a noble institution, but that we have claim to other faculties that can work in refutation of these erroneous social constructs. Those who subscribe to the Blank Slate doctrine conceptualize human psychology as something akin to Silly Putty.<sup>144</sup> More than a juvenile comparison, this is an accurate description of a view previously held by prominent psychologists, as they thought the mind, like Silly Putty “can absorb the printed word and it can be molded into different shapes.”<sup>145</sup> Pinker also works to disprove the eighteenth century Noble Savage doctrine held by Rousseau.<sup>146</sup> Rousseau thought that when man was placed within nature he was at his best and in his most gentle state, and because the state of nature was the best state for mankind, each consequent step that has taken away from his most primitive state has been a step in the wrong direction, and has ultimately led to the “decrepitness [*sic*] of the species.”<sup>147</sup>

These once commonly held views began to change in the 1950s due to modern technological advancements. It became acceptable to acknowledge that “the mental world can be grounded in

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<sup>141</sup> Steven Pinker. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), ix.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

the physical world by the concepts of information, computation, and feedback.”<sup>148</sup> The field of neuroscience began to take off, and scientists discovered that while the “structure of the brain is similar, person to person,” that there were occasionally some anomalies.<sup>149</sup> For instance, neuroscientists found that a certain region in the brain, the anterior hypothalamus, was shaped slightly different in men who identified as gay than it was in those who did not.<sup>150</sup> During this time, scientists also developed a more complex understanding of evolutionary psychology, which lent support to the Darwinian notion of natural selection, which “simulates the engineering of the perfect part,” with the hopes of ultimately producing the perfect human being.<sup>151</sup>

Evolutionary psychology is credited with debunking the doctrine of the Noble Savage. It is thought that “a thoroughly noble anything is an unlikely product of natural selection, because in the competition among genes for representation in the next generation, noble guys tend to finish last.”<sup>152</sup> This is especially true as “conflicts of interest are ubiquitous among living things, since two animals cannot eat the same fish or monopolize the same mate.”<sup>153</sup> It is with this understanding that we can conclude that even if natural man had unlimited resources for a time, this would not have lasted for any significant period, perhaps not even extending to the development of languages. Even so, “the noble savage ... is a cherished doctrine among critics of the sciences of human nature.”<sup>154</sup> Social scientists like Stephen Jay Gould have tried to show that “Homo Sapiens is not an evil or destructive species,” even after the development of society. Gould formulated his

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<sup>148</sup> Steven Pinker. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), 26.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 505.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

argument around “what he calls the Great Asymmetry” and the argument that “good and kind people outnumber all the others by thousands to one.”<sup>155</sup> He additionally notes that “we perform 10,000 acts of small and unrecorded kindness for each surprisingly rare, but sadly balancing, moment of cruelty.”<sup>156</sup> This argument, is most likely an idealized version of human nature, and remains unsupported by history and anthropology – especially those commonly agreed upon aspects of evolution. Pinker shows that certain traits – such as favoring oneself or one’s offspring over others – are common to human psychology. What he has shown, while it has little to say regarding whether pity is innate, is insightful. Gould’s theory is, in many ways, in direct contradiction of Rousseau’s philosophy which states that the Noble Savage is man’s best form, as man, regardless of his place in time, is focused on monopolizing finite resources.

Rousseau, in his doctrine of the Noble Savage asserted that while individuals are naturally good they have been corrupted by reason and desire – which led to the formation of languages and society. Rousseau asserts that pity, along with wanting to avoid feeling pain (self-preservation), are innate principles for mankind. Man’s other abilities, including his ability to reason and understand the difference between virtue and vice, were developed later.<sup>157</sup> It was the development of these additional faculties that has corrupted natural man. Prior to the development of reason Rousseau’s Noble Savage was tender hearted. It was with the development of reason that man

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<sup>155</sup> Steven Pinker. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), 124-5.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>157</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 153.

found himself able to ignore the pain and suffering of others if he himself was safe.<sup>158</sup> Rousseau notes:

*“Only dangers that threaten the entire society still disturb the philosopher’s tranquil slumber, and rouse him from his bed. One of his kind can with impunity be murdered beneath his window; he only has to put his hands over his ears and to argue with himself a little in order to prevent Nature, which rebels within him, from letting him identify with the man being assassinated.”*<sup>159</sup>

It was his capacity to feel pity that moved the Noble Savage “to do good.”<sup>160</sup> The Noble Savage did not need a maximum such as: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” as the Noble Savage knew with his natural goodness what was right and wrong.<sup>161</sup> The notion of virtue did not even exist prior to the development of reason.<sup>162</sup> However, with the development of the ability to reason man began to lose that which was once innate, the ability to feel pity and a repugnance to see suffering in other living beings. The type of self-preservation that Rousseau claimed was innate within savage man was *amour de soi*. *Amour de soi* manifests itself as a natural and healthy love of one’s self. Combined with reason and our awareness that others are conscious of us can fuel an individual’s self-esteem, turning *amour de soi* into *amour propre*.<sup>163</sup> It is a desire for others to love and care for you – so you, in turn can know how to love and care for yourself. This self-love is not destructive at its roots, but can quickly lead there, because it is an impossible demand, as others will always love themselves more. Remaining unfulfilled, *amour propre* can lead to anger, pride, vanity, resentment, revenge, jealousy, indignation, competition, slavishness,

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<sup>158</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 153.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

humility, capriciousness, rebelliousness, ect.<sup>164</sup> It is a short step from healthy pride to burning narcissism. Man's inability to make the world bend to his proud conception of himself, as fueled by his *amour propre*, not only leads him to conflict with other over-proud and ambitious men; it also keeps him outside himself, living through the opinion of others, and therefore incapable of the kind of tranquil contentedness that was available to the noble savage.<sup>165</sup>

Steven Pinker holds a contrary view, which he details in his work *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. Pinker argues that there is some evidence to suggest that the capacity to feel pity must be learned – that it is not an innate feeling which is automatically known to natural man. With this work, Pinker shows that over time society has become more docile. The Humanitarian Revolution, which began in the eighteenth century, contributed to the rise of empathy and a higher regard for human life. Unlike Rousseau, Pinker thinks that the “human capacity for compassion is not a reflex that is triggered automatically by another living thing,” but is a trait that must be learned.<sup>166</sup> Because of this, Pinker is a great proponent of the Enlightenment, as his research has supported that as people become more intelligent they are more peaceable. While there was a period of violence that followed the Enlightenment – the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars – there is little reason to believe that the two were correlated.<sup>167</sup> In fact, Pinker notes, the American Revolution, which followed the Enlightenment script much more closely than did the French Revolution, gave birth to a liberal democracy that has lasted for more than two centuries.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 141.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 175.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

The Enlightenment, which spurred the dissemination of knowledge throughout the Western World, greatly increased an individual's quality of life. One plausible hypothesis for the decline in violence is that an individual's capacity for empathy expanded as books became readily accessible. This increased the number of individuals with the ability to read and those who were able to develop the capacity to put themselves in another's perspective.<sup>169</sup> The advent of the Gutenberg Press, which led to an increase in the number of books available to be circulated, a consequent increase in the number of libraries, and an increase in the overall literacy rate of the population, is found to correspond with the decrease in violence. This correlation gives weight to Pinker's hypothesis – that higher intelligence has improved morality and an individual's capacity to empathize with others.<sup>170</sup> Another plausible theory is that humans were easier to dehumanize when they were dirty and unkempt, and that this became more difficult as their etiquette and hygiene improved.<sup>171</sup> This theory is just as likely, and can be supported by many personal experiences today – though on a far lesser scale – as we find it is essential to look nice for a job interview and at other times when we want certain goods or services. There is one final theory that runs along these lines – that it is possible that human beings became more compassionate as their own lives improved and as they were living longer and in greater comfort.<sup>172</sup> Each of these theories could have worked alone or in tandem to begin the humanitarian revolution and the significant decline in violence; however, it is important to remember that none of this would have been possible without the Enlightenment.

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<sup>169</sup>Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 184.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.



There are those who would argue that, like the philosopher Rousseau wrote of, today's man can tune out the violence from around the world as long as it does not directly impact his quality of life. Pinker is not blind to this phenomenon, but disagrees with Rousseau's reasoning. Pinker notes that mankind is simply incapable of processing the extent of destruction that modern technology has allowed for and all that modern media disseminates. Pinker highlights this inability by noting that when an individual dies, it is viewed as a tragedy – yet, if a thousand individuals die, it is viewed as a statistic. Most individuals simply cannot wrap their heads around such atrocities. Modern man has difficulty empathizing when it comes to large scale atrocities or when very little personal information is known about the individual or individuals who are suffering. This does not debunk Pinker's claim though, as modern man remains capable of empathy. In fact, it is possible that modern man must empathize with more individuals now than ever before. He is told of atrocities that have occurred world-wide, not simply those that are limited to a certain province. In these cases, it may be more difficult to empathize as these individuals are often not linked by culture, religion, or geography.

Pinker's theory, that people must learn how to be compassionate and that this ability can be improved with time, is also supported by Kant who, like Hobbes, thought that peace had to be established – leaving war, not peace, the “natural” state for mankind.<sup>173</sup> Kant however, was very optimistic, and in his work laid out conditions for perpetual peace: a republican state, a league of nations that had a third party to adjudicate disputes, as well as universal hospitality and world citizenship.<sup>174</sup> Today, while wars have become less frequent than they were previously, there is no doubt that they have become more damaging. A consequence of scientific development that cannot

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<sup>173</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 165.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

be ignored. However, Kant's theory of perpetual peace is not left unsupported, especially with the spread of democracy, the expansion of commerce and trade, and international organizations that are working together.<sup>175</sup> Pinker notes that "for all its limitations, human nature includes [a] recursive, open ended, combinatorial system for reasoning, which can take cognizance of its own limitations."<sup>176</sup> As such, we can hardly envision a world without war – and most international law is based on the theory of realism. Though this may be the case, "the engine of the Enlightenment" both humanism and rationality, "can never be refuted by some flaw or error in the reasoning of the people in a given era."<sup>177</sup> In some ways, this statement by Pinker is a refutation of cultural and historical relativism – and even modern thought.

It is difficult to know for certain if pity is an innate part of man's constitution or if it is cultivated by culture and experiences. It has been argued that pity is a natural feeling which is supported by the early development of medicines; that, man would not have expended the effort to develop medicine if he did not feel pity for those who were suffering. However, this argument is deeply flawed. First, man only began to develop medicines after his natural constitution had already been corrupted. The other reason that this argument is flawed is because it is possible that medicine was developed for man's own desire for self-preservation rather than the desire to prevent suffering in others. Additionally, because medicine developed in tandem with the ability to reason, man was also cultivating the means to contemplate abstract notions such as death. An understanding of death altered the overarching goal of medicine, and this art was not only practiced

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<sup>175</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 168.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 186.

for the prevention pain of but in order to cheat death. Such a realization made it possible for fear of death to replace pity for others. It is with small steps such as this that we have, in the past several centuries, developed such ethical questions that we would not have to answer if it were not for the progression of science. Additionally, the art of medicine was originally practiced in order to treat physical ailments, not to delve deeper into man's psyche. As such, the scientific interpretation of what would make man happy has been interpreted to mean no more than the alleviation of physical pain, leaving unexplored that which would suit his character. Erroneous conceptions such as this have contributed to the general misunderstanding of the true nature of mankind and has led to a general confusion concerning the governance of science and society in general.

#### WHERE DOES SOCIETY'S GUIDANCE COME FROM?

Regardless of whether they are right or wrong, "our theories on human nature shape how we live our lives." These theories help us to formulate our viewpoints regarding "violence, gender, childrearing and the arts."<sup>178</sup> It is, therefore, essential for mankind to develop theories that are not just plausible but based upon factual observation. These theories shape every aspect of our lives, from our thought process to how our society should conduct scientific innovation. In the West, our theories have either relied on reason or revelation, with each examining what is most fundamental to the world. With proper cultivation, it is possible that reason and revelation can, as part of the humanities, provide the necessary supports for moral judgement and assessments of right and wrong and thus serve as a guide for the sciences.

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<sup>178</sup> Steven Pinker. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), ix & 6.

Religion can serve as a guide for individuals, and in many ways, would work in tandem with Rousseau's philosophy, since many religions are not based upon the cultivation of knowledge but upon belief simply. In this way, religion would just be a standard to help a society judge between right and wrong through a basis of hope, faith, and charity. Additionally, religion provides a grounding that cannot be found elsewhere in society. Above all, religion provides "theories on human nature" and ensures that morality plays a part in how we shape our lives.<sup>179</sup> Christianity is one of the few theories on human life that can provide a "synthesis of reason, faith, and life."<sup>180</sup> It has been found, through the American experiment, that religious belief can work in tandem with secular governmental institutions, although this seemingly works best when the religious tradition has its origin in Christianity.<sup>181</sup> <sup>182</sup> However, though religion remains a logical guide for society, it may simply be the easy answer. As seen in his letter to Beaumont, Rousseau is disparaging of certain aspects of Christianity. However, although Rousseau was critical of religious doctrine, he encouraged religious belief. Additionally, Rousseau thought that certain components of religion were essential for good society, especially love and morality. Religion would be able to put a check on modern science as it stresses human rights and dignities, thus pulling into question many procedures concerning the human body and soul including human cloning, organ harvesting, and abortion among other things. While Rousseau does not recommend that we turn to religion for guidance, it may be necessary to go beyond Rousseau's philosophy when it comes to revelation.

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<sup>179</sup> Steven Pinker. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), 1-2.

<sup>180</sup> Pera, in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 38.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

Revelation is a key pillar of Western society, it can help support a moral society and in turn, lead to happiness and strength of feeling, as well as lend support to secular teachings.

As Pera and Ratzinger have noted, while Christianity and the Enlightenment have been considered mutually exclusive, the effects of the Enlightenment have hit Christian thought particularly hard. Today's society has been critical of many religious principles, and it has become more difficult for religious doctrine to convincingly synthesize all aspects of reason, faith, and life.<sup>183</sup> Much of this comes down to the tenets of relativism. It is because of this, that religion, a component of the humanities, has been incapable of cultivating and maintaining morality within the citizenry and has, in many cases, lost ground to the sciences. As part of the humanities, Christianity must be lent support. It is possible that both good governance based upon promoting virtue and the promotion of a virtuous education could be the support that is needed in this endeavor. This is not to say that there are not road blocks to such a suggestion. Not only has Value-Relativism stripped much of the meaning away from politics and education, but Rousseau has been as, if not more, critical of advanced education as he was of religion.

Politics, when done correctly and either acting alone or in tandem with Christianity, could serve as a logical guide for society. Political life currently holds a great deal of power especially when juxtaposed with Christianity. Politics can potentially govern scientific practices that threaten to violate important moral boundaries, but it must ensure that it does not go too far and "distort or hide unwelcomed facts."<sup>184</sup> This is a logical solution as "[p]olitics exists to govern action, and so at times it must govern science."<sup>185</sup> While many would agree that "the governance of science is

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<sup>183</sup> Pera, in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 38.

<sup>184</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 39.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

legitimate and necessary,” one must recognize how difficult this would be in practice, as it would essentially negate the development of specialization.<sup>186</sup> Politicians would have to become as well versed in science as they are in governmental theory. Even so, this would still leave room for conflict – especially within a liberal democracy if politicians were to place morality over the health and safety of the citizens.<sup>187</sup> This is not because morality is not currently – or cannot eventually be – highly valued, but because the benefits of a moral citizenry are much less tangible than the benefits of the physical health and safety of the population. Another barrier to such a suggestion is that science is often thought to hold a preeminent place over politics, and is perhaps more highly valued than “liberal-democratic self-government.”<sup>188</sup> We have seen that this is a dangerous arrangement, as scientific innovation remains untouched by “moral premises, or tradition, or religious or personal views, as if every question of public policy with any scientific dimension must be understood as a matter of pure science alone.”<sup>189</sup> Education based upon synthetic thought, with the goal of promoting better political and religious virtue as part of the humanities, would be the logical solution for ensuring that morality is not ignored and discarded with the continuation of unregulated scientific innovation.

Many societies would agree with Pinker, rather than Rousseau, that morality and the ability to empathize with others is increased, rather than decreased, with education. While perhaps less obvious today than ever before, many societies, both past and present, have been built upon the assumption that morality comes from a well-rounded education. This assumption is especially

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<sup>186</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 38.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 39.

evident when looking at early America, and the emphasis that each of the several states placed upon education. Early in American history it was commonly agreed that morality and education went hand-in-hand, and that one would foster the other. Education was thought to be especially necessary, because the founding fathers did not believe that man was naturally good, but naturally selfish, vain, and stupid. Because of this, a proper education was highly valued as it was a necessary precursor for the moral development of the citizenry – and thus good government. Because education was originally thought to be so important, states, localities, and communities were encouraged to center their governments around the cultivation of education and morality in citizens from an early age. Because the founding fathers recognized that the states could more easily cultivate citizen morality, this task fell to the states and not the federal government. This is because the states were close to the people and had a vested interest in their good behavior, nor were they restrained by the Bill of Rights as the federal government was at the time. This responsibility allowed the states to cultivate morality not only through higher education, but through religion as well. Often, religion, even more than education, provides greater substantiation to morality, which helps to cultivate upstanding citizens. Over time the United States has moved away from this reasoning, as the federal government has become increasingly involved in the educational process. Federal regulation has taken much of what was taught regarding religious virtue out of American school systems and has even lessened the importance of education within the American tradition. Throughout this process, the education that is so necessary for cultivating a good and just citizenry has been transformed into a one size fits all policy focused upon science and math rather than the cultivation of morality.

Although the United States has embarked on such a path, it does not mean that the cultivation of morality is less important today than it was in the early 1800s. In many ways the

decline of morality can be attributed to this separation. The psychologist Jonathan Haidt “has underscored the ineffability of moral norms in a phenomenon he calls moral dumbfounding,” which has taken hold of the common man.<sup>190</sup> Haidt stated that “[o]ften people have an instant intuition that an action is immoral, and then struggle, often unsuccessfully, to come up with reasons *why* it is immoral.”<sup>191</sup> In an experiment conducted by Lawrence Kohlberg, where an individual “must break into a drugstore to steal an overpriced drug that will save his dying wife,” they found that people could “muster no better justification for their answers than that [the individual] shouldn’t steal the drug because stealing is bad and illegal and he is not a criminal,” or that the individual “should steal the drug because that’s what a good husband does.”<sup>192</sup> Pinker points out that it is rare that “people can articulate a principled justification, such as that human life is a cardinal value that trumps social norms, social stability, or obedience to the law.”<sup>193</sup> Moral dumbfounding has taken a hold of society as a result of the Enlightenment. This movement stripped the humanities, and thus reason and revelation, of its influence within society; therefore, preventing the humanities from making moral judgements and deferring this knowledge, allowing science to develop unchecked and ensuring that modern society is incapable of correctly answering questions concerning morality without deferring to Value-Relativism. Because synthetic reasoning is dependent upon higher education we cannot dismiss education as an unessential aspect of modern day civilization. Correct judgements of what is good or bad, right or wrong, noble or base, cannot remain dependent upon mysterious values, but must be found through the application of

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<sup>190</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 624.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*



one's rational power and synthesizing of evidence and experience.<sup>194</sup> This, and thus morality, must be taught. The ancients knew this, as did the early Americans. Additionally, this falls in line with the first of the two possibilities Rousseau recommends for society going forward: that we seek to understand the true nature of virtue, and once we come to an understanding, we collectively, learn to practice virtue.<sup>195</sup>

Rousseau saw religious education to be an acceptable alternative to the typical scientific education that an individual could receive, as it stressed morality and virtue over scientific advancements, which would lead to vanity and lay the seeds of discord within a society. Rousseau did not feel strongly about which religion was practiced, as he regarded morality as more important than any religious creed. In many ways, religious education, which would lead to morality, was the most important aim of the several states. Early American states valued morality as this would cultivate good citizens and thus good government. Because states had a vested interest in the morality of their citizens, Christianity was stressed in tandem with their educational programs. It is for these same reasons that Rousseau stressed morality in the citizen body.

Higher education based upon synthetic reasoning is essential for modern society. Such education would detail ethics, morality, and what is necessary to remain virtuous in a society that often falls toward corruption. Although education, which remains unbiased towards revelation, Greek philosophy, and Roman law, could save modern society, it is essential to be cognizant of the several warnings throughout Rousseau's teachings – especially his warning that education can be pernicious to human happiness. While modern society views higher education to be a lofty aim,

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<sup>194</sup> Steven Lange. *Ethics: What is Public Administration* Lecture at Morehead State University, Rowan County, KY. Spring 2015.

<sup>195</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 152.

Rousseau is weary of the possible negative effects of education. In his *First Discourse*, Rousseau tells us that education is not for everyone, indeed, it is not for most. In his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau notes that although the ability to reason is often taken for granted in society as an unequivocal good this is a flawed assumption.

#### ARE THE ARTS AND SCIENCES PERNICIOUS TO HUMAN HAPPINESS?

To determine whether the sciences and the arts are pernicious to human happiness, it is essential to first determine how science and the arts relate to society and what man's highest aim is. As was touched on previously, Rousseau does not think that there is a higher aim for man. By simply living a moral life man can achieve happiness, and is therefore doing what is best. Man only entered into civil society because he was ignorant of his own nature. It was due to this ignorance that he has effectively enslaved himself, making happiness much more difficult to obtain. Rousseau claims that true happiness can only be found within a civil society if virtue is better understood and taught. Other philosophers and scientists at the launch of the Enlightenment seem to think that there *is* in fact a higher aim for man – they simply cannot agree upon what it is. To Descartes, this end was “the advancement of health,” through scientific innovation.<sup>196</sup> For Hobbes, the primary good was the “relief from the constant threat of death,” which could be found in civil society, and for John Locke it was “avoiding violence and protecting life,” by cultivating a deeper understanding of the natural order.<sup>197</sup> Levin notes that “if health and power over nature are the highest human goods, then surely science (as opposed to politics) must be the primary

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<sup>196</sup> Descartes in Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 36.

<sup>197</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 36.

instrument of our fulfillment.”<sup>198</sup> This is because science, far more than politics, aims towards advancing mankind’s control over natural phenomenon. This would support Descartes’ conception of man’s highest aim. Modern civil society has single-mindedly pursued the relief of man’s estate, at the expense of political, religious, and philosophical aims. According to Rousseau, it is this pursuit that has corrupted rather than purified morals, making man miserable rather than content with his own lot.

Many of today’s “scientific explanations of the world often seem unrelated to the concerns of the average citizen.”<sup>199</sup> Day-to-day life is in many ways devoid of scientific explanation, even though we are unceasingly reliant on its fruits. Practitioners of modern science do not know how to best apply the raw power they have harnessed. They seek to improve the natural state of man without stopping to inquire whether we are on the correct path.<sup>200</sup> If we pause to examine modern life, we can see how our current trajectory has led to the fulfillment of certain aspects of Rousseau’s assertions – in part, that modern civil society is an impediment to happiness. Much of this conflict has arisen from man’s inability to understand his true nature, the essential link between morality and happiness, and man’s inability to reach perfection. Failure to understand this has allowed man to unilaterally pursue scientific development at the detriment of Roman law, Greek philosophy, and Christianity. While modern science has greatly improved the physical aspects of our life, man is left feeling unfulfilled. While science itself is not immoral, it must be reminded of its original

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<sup>198</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 38.

<sup>199</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), vii.

<sup>200</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 45.

purpose – which was not to be all-encompassing, but to contribute to the relief of man’s estate while remaining mindful of what is morally good.<sup>201</sup> Levin noted:

*“The problem is not that our inventions might be used for both good and evil purposes, but that we denizens [sic] of the scientific age are at risk of becoming unable to distinguish between good and evil purposes. Moral imperatives, including especially those profound moral imperatives at the root of the scientific enterprise, are becoming clouded over just as the scientific enterprise begins to focus its attention most directly on the human animal itself.”<sup>202</sup>*

It is due to the unfocused nature of science as well as an insufficient understanding of the true nature of humanity that Rousseau argues modern science has made society discontent. Such a development was initiated with the spread of the arts and sciences throughout the Enlightenment, but has come to a head in modern society as there are more and more developments that are directly impacting man both physically and spiritually. Because of this, it is essential to examine if the arts and sciences in their most basic state are pernicious to modern man or if it is simply the use of science without a check that is pernicious to man.

We have seen, through the examination of the modern scientific project and Value-Relativism, how easy it is to misstep and how difficult it is to go back. Morality and human happiness are no longer the goal of modern society, and it seems as if the nation is in a downward spiral. Our love of philosophy led to the adoption of Value-Relativism, as we followed, or perhaps misinterpreted the philosophy of Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Kant. Additionally, employing education as a check on society has been problematic for two reasons: people are fearful of what they do not know and they are intellectually lazy. In many ways, this is comparable to the reasons

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<sup>201</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 46.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

why the Christian faith has been struggling – as individuals believe that Christianity either puts too many restrictions upon life, or, erroneously state that due to the inventions of modern science, it is out of step with the modern era.<sup>203</sup> As such, one must consider if the sciences and the arts truly are pernicious to human happiness and goodness.

Today, though the advancement of evolutionary principles, we can see evidence that the doctrine of the Noble Savage should be dismissed as a fallacy. Therefore, the potential for happiness should be just as great now as it was then. However, it is possible that the setup of certain societies can greatly reduce or improve the likelihood of happiness. One must inquire whether the ancient's philosophy and the systematic inquiry of natural phenomenon, held in check by Reason and Revelation, could in fact foster human happiness and goodness within a civil society in a way that is superior to our current society.

Rousseau claims that education stems from our vices and that there are very few people who can learn without selfish motives. It is therefore better to be ignorant, as an ignorant individual can more easily find happiness, even within civil society. While many individuals can aspire to this lofty aim, of being both learned and happy, only a few will succeed. Such stark realities shake our confidence in the desirability of learning and philosophy as a way of human life – as true knowledge may not be possible for most people. Rousseau's claim cannot be dismissed out of hand as his philosophy finds parallels within everyday life. Many creative geniuses struggle with depression, as their desire to reach perfection often surpasses their talent or human ability. Such a desire has in many ways been the defeat of man. It was this desire for perfection that permanently

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<sup>203</sup> Pera, in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 90.

altered natural man. Scientific innovation was begun because what was once “fine” or “good” no longer sufficed after our sights were set upon the concept of perfection. However, despite the leaps and bounds that are made with the invention of new technologies, man is unable to satiate his passions, and new innovations remain “fine” or “good,” as the human condition prevents us from obtaining perfection. This is a cyclical issue that is never abating, thus ensuring that man can never be happy. Man has also found himself discontented by his mistaken conviction, which has subconsciously been adopted in modern society, that he is a god capable of controlling nature. Believing oneself a god that is unable to reach perfection is likely to cause its fair share of anxieties.

Reason was cultivated because we desired more. More control over nature, more years of life, more luxuries. Rousseau states that “[w]e seek to know only because we desire to enjoy, and it is not possible to conceive why someone who had neither desires or fears would take the trouble to reason.”<sup>204</sup> This capacity to reason has developed overtime. “The Passions owe their origin to our needs, and their progress to our knowledge; for one can only desire or fear things in terms of the ideas one can have of them, or by the simple impulsion of Nature.”<sup>205</sup> It is through the cultivation of our desire that we developed the capacity to desire more. Savage man, “deprived of every sort of enlightenment,” could only conceive of desires which would meet and not “exceed his physical needs.”<sup>206</sup> The Noble Savage knew only to desire universal goods, “food, a female, and rest; the only evils he fears are pain, and hunger.”<sup>207</sup>

While our entire way of life is built on the idea that learning leads to enrichment, Rousseau argues that this is not the case, at least not initially or for most people. Our advanced society has

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<sup>204</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 142.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 467.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

made man miserable, discontented with his lot in life, and unable to find happiness within himself. Civil society has only shown that humanity is vain and self-serving. Rousseau's own example, that he is fond of learning, shows that not everyone is capable of retaining their morality and simultaneously be fond of learning. Rousseau was a learned man, but he was miserable and paranoid. He was distrustful of his friends and unable to keep close acquaintances for any extended period. He confesses that he would have been much happier if he had not devoted his time to study. Like many other philosophers, Rousseau acknowledged that not everyone has the same intelligence level, or can adequately deal with philosophic information. Like Plato, Rousseau knew that not everyone was born to philosophize. This is seen in the Allegory of the Cave and in the life of Emile, as well as within Rousseau's other philosophical writings.

Rousseau's *Emile* shows an in-depth view of education, and how even with dedication it may not be the right path for everyone. Rousseau's novel *Emile* was about the education and maturation of a young boy. At the pinnacle of Emile's education he was given several tests in order to determine if he had what it takes to be a philosopher. These tests show that Emile, like the great majority of the individuals within society, was not meant to be a philosopher. Because of this, the teacher shows him his new life's meaning – to love a woman named Sophia. To Emile, this one woman is the embodiment of philosophy, and with that his needs in life are satisfied. This novel supports Rousseau's claim that not everyone, or even most people, can be cut out to practice philosophy. It is because of this that Rousseau criticizes Socrates for making philosophy seem too appealing to the masses. Plato's Socrates made philosophy so appealing that individuals who were not capable of philosophizing were inspired to become philosophers. It was those individuals who tried to live a philosophic life, but were incapable of doing so, like Thrasymachus, who led to the tarnishing of the field. Rousseau sought to show the dark underbelly of philosophy in order to

make it sound unappealing to those who should not practice it. Individuals who are not capable of philosophizing should not strive for an end that can never be attained, as that would lead to unhappiness as their desire would outstrip their ability to fulfill. Happiness is being able to fulfill one's desires.

Because Rousseau valued education, but thought himself incapable of practicing philosophy without becoming morally corrupt and miserable, he considered himself a useless member of society. Throughout his life, Rousseau remained unhappy. He lost many of his friends and was in a loveless relationship with the woman he eventually married. It was because he never found happiness that he argues he was not an individual capable of pursuing education. This was not surprising to him, as he thought that "Science is not compatible with the virtue of 'the peoples'; rather, it is compatible with the virtue of certain individuals."<sup>208</sup> As intelligent as Rousseau was, he had many difficulties that he has attributed to his knowledge and to vanity. He cautions others against this, as he does not think that this is a worthy trade off. Not only did Rousseau think that he would be better off if he had neglected study and looked after his morality, he also believes that this is the case for society. A society would be better off and happier if it looked towards its own morality, rather than to the advancement of the sciences.

The sciences, in their current form, can only help man understand his physical surroundings and his physical being – not his true nature. The philosophy that Rousseau recommends can be seen as a different type of science, one which centers on human happiness and morality. It is because of this that Rousseau can permit that some individuals become learned, as their practice is not seen as putting their morality in jeopardy. Only a few individuals can do this, Rousseau

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<sup>208</sup> Leo Strauss, *On the Intention of Rousseau*, *Social Research*, 14:1/4 (1947) (Extracted from *PCI FUN* Text, published by ProQuest Information and Learning Company), 465.



himself claiming that he was not capable of this feat. Among those people Rousseau asserts could become learned are Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, and Isaac Newton. Rousseau limited the exception to these three individuals as he thought that they alone could pursue philosophy without compromising their morality. Rousseau makes the argument that such an ability, to learn without corruption, is exceedingly rare, and because of this, it is better for the majority of the population to never learn. Failing to realize this would give them great ambitions they are unable to meet, and feed their *amour propre*, making it more likely that they would give in to all their vices and never be truly happy. It is not uncommon for individuals to seek to become learned so that they will be valued more highly by society and their peers. In this sense, education furthers vanity – as it is human pride that pushes them to learn. To be moral, one may want to avoid science.

Education in the sciences and the arts have allowed for a dishonest society, making it easier for individuals to hide whether they are virtuous. While the arts and the sciences have not contributed to an increase or decrease in the number of individuals who are virtuous, they have made it easier to deceive and be deceived. This ability has collectively compromised society's principles, making it customary to say and do what one does not believe.<sup>209</sup> If someone compliments you, it is customary to follow suit, even if you do not mean what you say. This is where the arts have gotten society. Rousseau asserts that knowing who is and is not virtuous would spare individuals a great deal of pain. An examination of Rousseau's life depicts many ways in which insincerity and vanity caused him pain that he otherwise may not have had to contend with. This is seen especially in regards to his relationship with the Baron von Grimm, though also with Denis Diderot and Madame d'Épinay. The arts have ensured that there are no longer sincere

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<sup>209</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

friendships, as propriety has prevented individuals from truly coming to know each other.<sup>210</sup> To some extent, this is dependent upon the society and the times, as some conceal more or less depending upon what is fashionable at the time. The development of reason unleashed true human selfishness and vanity. While it is often difficult to judge the morals of a society, Rousseau asserts that there is a direct correlation between a society's morality and the development of the sciences and the arts. As a society's sciences and arts have advanced unchecked so has the corruption of society's morality.

To highlight the connection between art and vanity, Rousseau quotes Socrates, who said that the poets and the artists know nothing, though they all pretend to know something.

*“We do not know, neither the Sophists nor the Poets, nor the Orators, nor the Artist, nor I, what is the true, the good, and the beautiful: But there is this difference between us that, although these people know nothing, they all believe they know something: Whereas I, while I know nothing, am at least not in any doubt about it.”<sup>211</sup>*

Today's intellectuals must remain humble. It is better to assert you know nothing, than to boldly proclaim that you are learned, though you do not understand the world, as “The less one knows, the more one believes oneself to know.”<sup>212</sup> It is with this understanding that Rousseau claims that Socrates would disdain our vain sciences. Arts and sciences can corrupt and make people lazy – there are very few goods that come from this.

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<sup>210</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>211</sup> Socrates in Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Discourses and other early political writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch. (Cambridge: UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

<sup>212</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17.

However, Rousseau also recognized that happiness and one's capability of obtaining happiness changes over time. Happiness reflects one's mental capabilities, or the ability to fulfill your desires. It is important to remember that Rousseau himself asserts that seeking higher intelligence is a noble aim if it does not compromise morality or happiness. If one is not careful, reason will act as the source of our unhappiness. Rousseau's rejection of science is only absolute with regards to the common man. The conception of science is superior to society, as scientific principles will exist regardless of whether society is around. The faults that Rousseau found with the Enlightenment is that it did not pursue science in the correct manner, and although philosophy once fought against prejudices, it has become the purveyor of such prejudices. Not everyone is able to expand their capability to reason and retain their morality. Rousseau uses his own life experiences to demonstrate this. Rousseau holds a high opinion of his capabilities, and rightly so. He was a learned man whose writing has withstood the test of time and is still analyzed today.

The sciences, although much advanced since Rousseau's writings, have remained structured in much the same way. They remain aloof to questions concerning morality and are unregulated by social constructs. As such, society has had difficulty promoting that which is essential for human happiness. The sciences and the arts, still failing centuries later to represent man's true nature, are pernicious to human happiness. The only option going forward is to turn to the humanities in the effort to restore to them the credibility that they once commanded. Restructuring of the humanities, in order to ensure that its foundation is firmly based upon reason and revelation, will aid society in discovering how to be virtuous within civil society. Although this too, presents its fair share of difficulties, we cannot continue upon our current trajectory – which has led to unanswerable ethical questions and great political and ideological rifts.

In dismissing the arts and sciences, as pernicious to human morality, Rousseau claims that what the mind has come to need is not necessary for good society or human happiness. In doing so, Rousseau is not suggesting that what the mind needs is more base than what the body needs; but that, in a world without a purpose, it is better to be happy and content with one's self than have numerous material possession and be miserable. As a society, we have decided to pursue the sciences and the arts – the acquisition of wealth – over happiness and virtue. We have chosen this path without being cognizant of the gravity of our decision. We have forgotten that mankind was once happy without education, and many of the luxuries of modern day life. Even in his defense of a free and liberal society, Rousseau seems to question whether it is actually best for man. There are many ways to form a society, but not all lead to human happiness. Rousseau himself took great joy in solitude. Long walks in the country allowed him time to think, free from the demands of others and allowed for the creation of his opus. This preference, like many others, fed Rousseau's work, and it is for this reason that he has claimed man was better off before he formed society, which fed his *amour propre*, his selfish vanity. As such, Rousseau thought of politics as a necessary evil – a compromise that was good for no one in particular but better than any other alternative. It is possible though that Rousseau takes this philosophy too far, as even Jefferson, who wrote of the *Country Yeoman* was able to come to terms with industrialization and commerce.

Rousseau advocated for a democracy over all other forms of government. Democracy allowed for the equal input of individuals in all levels of society. This was desirable, Rousseau argued, as the poor and uneducated are more likely to be less morally corrupt than the rich. As shown in the *Second Discourse*, the rich have selfishly sought their gain over others, and at some point in time, those with money took advantage of their fellow man. By virtue of their position,

the rich have become experts at ensuring that events transpire in a way that is to their benefit regardless of the wellbeing of others. These actions are contrary to that of natural man and his true nature, and empathy as a general rule. It was the rich that invented the concept of slavery, and the vanity of the poor that prevented them from breaking free of these bonds. It is education and the ability to reason that precipitated the rise of inequality among men. With reason, not only did man become a slave to his desires, but he could become a slave to other men. There could be no such arrangement in the state of nature, because the need was not mutual and the slave could easily walk away from the master whenever he pleased.<sup>213</sup> Within society, this is not possible. Slaves are viewed as their master's property and both master and slave have need of each other, as they follow an arbitrary system of government. Such an arrangement continued to separate the rich from the poor extenuating the inequalities among men. Such enslavement has changed the very nature of man. This can be seen because the slave is content with the worst of chains but the free man is completely unwilling to be a slave and will do anything possible to retain their freedom – even suffering death. One must replace natural right with civil right, because when you have a slave you are asserting that a “man was not born a man.”<sup>214</sup> Rousseau's praise of democracy when the monarchy was still fashionable, as seen in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Second Discourse*, was found to be highly controversial. Though times were changing, democracy was not a popular form of government. While Geneva, the place of Rousseau's birth was considered a democracy at the time, it was more or less an expansive oligarchy – as a few wealthy families had control over all the political power. Rousseau praised democracy, as it allowed for individuals to retain an equality among themselves that was not found in other types of regimes. This equality of men allowed for

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<sup>213</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 177.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

the moderation of wealth amongst individuals, and thus, prevented the exuberance of a few. The fact that democracy did not need to depend upon a group of wealthy individuals gained it Rousseau's praise, as he claimed that luxury and idleness was the root of avarice and immorality. Wealth allowed for luxury and ease of living, which allowed man more time to act immorally. This immorality was perpetuated by man's ability to reason, to think up ways he could fashion or create what was necessary for a life of pleasant idleness. As this luxury led to an individual's participation in the arts and science, which in turn facilitated the ease with which an individual could live and create more, these modern activities were to be criticized. These developments, and man's continued control over the ability to reason led to a society fashioned around the sciences and the arts. Because Rousseau is concerned with individual happiness, he points to a liberal society. A liberal society places great claim upon individual happiness. Individualism is part of our true nature as savage man, since we did not depend upon others or live within a society. Rousseau does not claim that humans are social creatures, but that we grew into this, as we were not originally part of a society.

In the late seventeenth century, the earliest stretches of the Enlightenment, John Locke freed the acquisition of wealth. Merely a century later, Rousseau asserted that this went against the grain of human nature. Modern society has met every physical need of modern man, so why does such an acclaimed philosopher tell us that civil society is in fact disadvantageous? When Strauss calls our modern science "instrumental and nothing but instrumental," it is because our modern science could just as easily provide advice "to tyrants as well as to free peoples," and it is

only by luck that we do not have a tyrannical government.<sup>215</sup> Rousseau, in decrying the immorality of the sciences and the arts, shows us how this could come to be. Rousseau notes that “[w]hile our sciences are vain with respect to the objects they pursue, they are even more dangerous in the effects that they produce.”<sup>216</sup> As a society moves away from morality in favor of scientific innovation, the easier it becomes to simply examine what science is capable of rather than what science should be permitted to do. “Modern science does not claim wisdom or truth about the ends of life but instead focuses on methods of research that lead to the discovery of regularities, or ‘laws’ of nature.”<sup>217</sup> However, it does not examine the principles of human nature. Even modern day schools fail to show students how the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities fit together.<sup>218</sup> “Our news magazines and daily newspapers report scientific discoveries but usually fail to consider how these findings should guide practical decisions.”<sup>219</sup> Masters notes that because of this, “science is often mysterious and threatening for the public at large.”<sup>220</sup>

Modern society must learn how “to make sense of competing perspectives in contemporary natural sciences, traditional philosophy, and the study of human behavior.”<sup>221</sup> To do this, science and the humanities should be brought together to answer important questions – such as, “how should we live?”<sup>222</sup> Masters says that how we live should be defined by the world around us. We

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<sup>215</sup> Leo Strauss, *On the Intention of Rousseau*, *Social Research*, 14:1/4 (1947) Extracted from *PCI FUN* Text, published by ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 4.

<sup>216</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17.

<sup>217</sup> Roger D. Masters *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 14.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> Roger D. Masters *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), vii.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

are not gods, and cannot separate ourselves from the laws of nature. Individuals in today's society should be discouraged by the gap between science and morality. Schools have failed to make this connection, which is both "paradoxical and dangerous in a society whose economic health and military power are so dependent on technology and science."<sup>223</sup> Much of the political dissent in our society comes from the dysfunction of modern science. Many individuals do not have a proper guide to inform them on important decisions concerning modern scientific innovation including but not limited to birth control, abortion, human cloning, stem cell research, life support, organ harvesting, and euthanasia. Science can offer no moral guide. Politics, religion, and education are often dismissed. This has led to a great many factions within political society, and one of the most contentious political climates we have seen in decades. Political parties cannot agree how these policy questions should be handled. It is in these ways that the cultivation of the sciences and the arts have been pernicious to human happiness.

#### ROUSSEAU'S PLACE IN MODERN DAY PUBLIC POLICY

Such a harsh political climate and the inability of modern society to seek guidance in politics, education, or religion necessarily makes one question whether technological innovation as it is set up today is a threat to liberal society.<sup>224</sup> To determine this, it is important to explore the question: "What is the place of science and technology in a liberal democracy in the decades ahead?"<sup>225</sup> While science is constantly working towards facilitating the ease with which we live our daily life, it does not question what could be done to improve overall quality of life regarding

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<sup>223</sup> Roger D. Masters *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), viii.

<sup>224</sup> Irving Kristol. *Is Technology a Threat to Liberal Society?* (The Public Interest. Spring).

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.



human happiness. As such, such grand innovation has consistently fallen short in examining what developments would also benefit the maturation of our morality. This is not to say that the sciences have not in some way been a positive force in society. Despite many inarguably great medical advancements, the sciences can in some way also be congratulated for negating the need for slavery; as running water – hot and cold – can be affordably accessed with the mere flick of the wrist within the comfort of our own homes. Unfortunately though, despite the many amenities of modern science, there are still slaves in modern day society. In fact, in modern times slaves are more numerous than they ever have been before, although they make up a much smaller proportion of the world than ever before – due to population growth.<sup>226</sup> It is instances such as this that show that the moral decay of society is inescapable.

Rousseau, in disparaging the arts and sciences, simply longed what was best for mankind. He noted that when he thought of morality he could not help but thinking with delight the simplicity of the first times.<sup>227</sup> Rousseau thought that virtue and happiness should be preeminent – more important than even scientific advances. Although Rousseau’s philosophy is averse to the development of the sciences and the arts for most of society, which is a concept that seems to strip the enjoyments from modern civilization – this is not his intent. Rousseau is greatly concerned with human happiness and long as it does not conflict with morality. Rousseau realizes that human happiness does not have just one static definition, but that it changes throughout time and in response to certain outside influences. Savage man, prior to the first revolution and the development of language had a different definition of happiness than after the Great Revolution,

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<sup>226</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 147.

<sup>227</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20.

and the discovery of metallurgy and agriculture, which varied yet again from civil man's definition of happiness. Man, at every stage of political development, has been forced to redefine happiness. With this progression, we see that this internal emotion has come to rely more and more upon external conditions, such as the opinions that others hold of you. With the progression of time, happiness has also become less obtainable, as it is dependent upon many more factors than it once was. This is a vicious cycle that ensures that our passions are always increasing with our ability to satisfy them. As soon as we can envision a useful development it is made and employed, and as soon as that fails to satisfy, it is human nature to go after the next new thing.

It is important to remember that just because a certain thing is possible, the sciences need not pursue it. This has had precedence throughout history, although the guides that determine what should and should not be allowed must be strengthened. Certain societies, including the Greeks and Chinese which were very advanced, have turned away from the sciences at times, failing to develop technology as far as "their theoretical science made possible."<sup>228</sup> Writer Irving Kristol has attributed this to their knowledge that "science was only beautiful in a theoretical sense."<sup>229</sup> They understood that if they were to develop their theoretical knowledge "in practice, science and technology" would become "a form of power, which could be good or evil."<sup>230</sup> Unfortunately though, over time, the idea arose that "man could be trusted with this power."<sup>231</sup> It was the Enlightenment and liberal democracy that fueled this view and the notion that the technology that was made possible by scientific advancement should be made available to all. Kristol points out

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<sup>228</sup> Irving Kristol. *Is Technology a Threat to Liberal Society?* (The Public Interest. Spring 2001), 46.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

that such assumptions are problematic, as was seen with the development of the atomic bomb.<sup>232</sup> Such doubts, he reiterates, have been increased by the destruction of earth's ecology – the very basis of civilization. Such actions show us that scientists frequently “do not think about their stature in the universe or on the evolutionary ladder.”<sup>233</sup> Although we have developed this capability, it has been used very infrequently. The world has made great strides in reducing the technology that it employs in times of war. Pinker notes that “since 1964 as many countries have given up nuclear weapons as have acquired them.”<sup>234</sup> Countries are often unwilling to use nuclear weapons except in the most extreme circumstances, risking a loss in war. This was shown when North Korea, North Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, Panama, and Yugoslavia, all defied the United States despite not having nuclear weapons. Such action has not been unprecedented, as a similar decision was made in WWII with poison gas. Warring adversaries – including Germany – did not use poison gas on the battle field as it was considered a faux pas. Ironically though, they had no such qualms domestically.<sup>235</sup> Ultimately, man must realize that there is a limit to our “self-transcendence.”<sup>236</sup> Man cannot alter his position in the cosmos – even if he were to develop the necessary means for living on a planet other than earth.

In his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau shows that mankind is better equipped to handle any of “the ferocious beasts they might meet up with in the woods,” than the “more formidable” ills that

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<sup>232</sup> Irving Kristol. *Is Technology a Threat to Liberal Society?* (The Public Interest. Spring 2001), 46.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 276.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

are found within society.<sup>237</sup> Society exposes man to illness and melancholy which are not common to animals or even natural man.<sup>238</sup> Rousseau contributes the many misfortunes in the world to scientific exploration and vain curiosity, contributing many of the ills that man faces to having excess, Rousseau claims that many ills would be avoided “if we had retained the simple, uniform and solitary way of life prescribed to us by Nature.”<sup>239</sup> Rousseau even goes so far as to say that it is better to die than to go to excess.<sup>240</sup> Civil man also began to look to the opinion that others held of him to determine whether or not he should be happy, rather than simply being happy in his own right. Natural man only needed to meet his needs for food, water, and shelter – while civil man must contend with the escalator of reason and the need for perfection. Rousseau shows that by placing such restrictions upon happiness, man has made a grave error in his understanding of what is best. Society was able to develop in such a way because man was negligent, failing to understand what would best suit his character. Throughout time, mankind has perfected many different fields of study, but he has not worked to gain a deeper understanding of himself and what would lead to human happiness. Rousseau claims that “the most useful and least advanced of all human knowledge seems to be that of man.”<sup>241</sup> Man has not spent time exploring why he thinks what he thinks or does what he does and he does not understand what way of life will best suit his nature. Because of this, man has formed societies and made innovations which has only led to inequality, immorality, and man’s unhappiness. To know anything about man, Rousseau shows that it is important to understand man’s origin and, through this, his true nature. Man’s origin is the

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<sup>237</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 136.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-7.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 & 137-8.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

necessary starting point, as Rousseau claims that there is no overarching aim for man or natural law which must be followed, so we can conclude that the circumstances of man's origin provided a good and natural state for man. It is due to this lack of self-awareness that Rousseau criticizes man in his *First* and *Second Discourse*, and advocates for the acceptance of priorities that are much different than those that have been commonly held since the Enlightenment. To fully benefit from Rousseau's writings, one must question why was it necessary to take the side of society – and why doing so must work against scientific innovation. It should also be noted that human psychology is the key to politics. A true understanding of man's nature will ensure that we employ a political regime that is compatible with and capable of keeping our vices in check. Rousseau thought that the state of the world at man's origin was good for him, and should be replicated to the extent possible under new historical conditions. While he may be right, in part, it is difficult to really know what the first man was like and how language and society truly formed. While there is evidence to suggest that much of what Rousseau theorized regarding the early origin of mankind is incorrect, contemporary anthropological accounts affirm Rousseau's basic contention, that reason and language are emergent capacities. As such, it is worth giving careful consideration to his political science.

#### IS ROUSSEAU'S PHILOSOPHY HOPELESSLY NAÏVE?

Rousseau has stated that it was with the advent of the sciences that the morality of man began to decline, claiming that prior to the advent of scientific innovation man “had been content to practice virtue.”<sup>242</sup> At first glance, this seems to be a farfetched claim. However, prior to the

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<sup>242</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

sciences the best and brightest of mankind practiced philosophy and theology, spending their time contemplating the good life. Additionally, there were very few distractions for man prior to the development of the sciences, as man had to work hard simply to survive. This way of life left very little time for distractions, and harkens back to the correlation that Masters found between the advent of refrigeration and the drastic increase in divorce.<sup>243</sup> While seemingly a confusion of causation and correlation at first glance, Master's shows how divorce rates rose precipitously as more households obtained home refrigeration systems and a husband's survival became less reliant upon his wife staying home doing the many household chores it took in order to ensure that he would not starve. By lessening man's reliance on his wife, man was given more freedom to divorce her if he was so inclined. There is a Rousseauian logic to his finding: the advancement of science and technology created an environment in which men were free to want more – despite the possible pernicious effects for morals and the broader community. It is through luxury and money that man can obtain anything – allowing man to develop a god-like mentality due to the control that he can wield over nature.<sup>244</sup>

For those educated in the modern principals of evolutionary psychology, we can see the numerous faults in Rousseau's doctrine of the Noble Savage. However, we must remain cognizant that it is difficult to make sweeping assertions concerning human nature with any accuracy. Even today, we cannot know for certain what the earliest man was like or the exact parameters regarding the development of languages. One can make assumptions, as Rousseau did, but they will remain simply that. Even while the doctrine of the Noble Savage can be dismissed as a fallacy, there are

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<sup>243</sup> Roger D. Masters. *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values*. (Hanover: NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 25-6.

<sup>244</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 19.

striking claims within Rousseau's philosophy that cannot be dismissed as an error in judgement. Rousseau was right in noting that science and the arts can be pernicious to human happiness and that luxury and wealth have inadvertently contributed to man's decline. Rousseau noted that "ever since the Learned have begun to appear among us, . . . good men have been in eclipse."<sup>245</sup> Rousseau even goes so far as to claim that if the sciences had never been developed and taught, people would not be "less numerous, any the less well governed, the less formidable, the less flourishing or the more perverse."<sup>246</sup> It is with this knowledge that Rousseau recommends that we reexamine what we hold to be our achievements, as they have actually provided very little that is actually useful.<sup>247</sup>

A great deal of Rousseau's work, especially the *Second Discourse*, was largely a refutation of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679).<sup>248</sup> However, when his work is examined as a complete opus, one can see that his work is much more than a simple rejection of Hobbes's ideas. Rousseau puts much less emphasis on governance than does Hobbes, as Hobbes thought it was with government that man was at his best and Rousseau thought that it was within the state of nature. Rousseau "associated blankness with virtue rather than nothingness."<sup>249</sup> He thought that savage man was not "wicked precisely because they do not know what it is to be good."<sup>250</sup> Throughout time, many social scientists have "glorif[ied] the noble savage" as he is "peaceable, egalitarian, materially

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<sup>245</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Steven Pinker. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), 8.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

satisfied, and sexually unconflicted [*sic*].”<sup>251</sup> However, modern evidence has shown that natural man was not constituted in this way.

Rousseau was, in many ways, shaped by his time and the circumstances of his life. He was highly discontented, and lived “[i]n an age of loveless marriages of convenience and widespread adultery.”<sup>252</sup> His writings in *Emile* has caused some women to challenge Rousseau based upon their limited role. Trouille argues that women of intellect did not fit into any of Rousseau’s neatly prescribed roles. Rousseau thought that humankind, and therefore reason, cannot be perfected. That the evolution of mankind is not possible as we are not moving toward a certain end goal, and because there is no way to improve. However, human nature and what will lead to happiness is in constant flux – it is useless trying to predict it in the future. This means little for Rousseau’s philosophy, though as it is our history that we should look back to, not to the many different manifestations of man. The only thing for mankind to strive for is upstanding ethics and morality and the ability to be unaffected by the opinions others hold of you – beyond this there is no ideal human behavior.

## CONCLUSION

The rise of the Modern Era has led to a complete deviation from the contemplative way of the Ancients. This deviation has allowed us to abandon the cultivation of the human mind and study of our proper place in the cosmos in favor of the unreflective advancement of technological innovation. Modernity encourages the manipulation of nature, allowing human beings to live as

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<sup>251</sup> Steven Pinker. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), 26.

<sup>252</sup> Mary Trouille. *The Failings of Rousseau's Ideals of Domesticity and Sensibility*. American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1991), 451-483.



gods taking for ourselves what nature does not willingly provide. We have become so far removed from our true nature that we no longer use nature as a limit or even a guide. We have not stopped our scientific growth in order to inquire after the best possible good – from the perspective of the community’s common good or even individual happiness. In our constant struggle for the ‘good life,’ which always remains just out of reach, we have proven that we are capable of rising above nature, while our failure to put a check upon scientific innovation has prevented us from asking if this ‘rising’ is best for humanity.

The dawn of the Enlightenment completely altered the trajectory of modern society; it embraced a new kind of dependence on technology, and has, with time, reduced the emphasis that was placed upon cumulative knowledge and the wisdom of the Ancients. We have become accustomed to our lifestyle and all its benefits, and we do not spare a second thought for the moral neutrality of science, as Value-Relativism has taught us that that which is not born of scientific innovation is insignificant and can at best be simply based upon a culture’s opinion. We have rejected the humanities as a possible guide because this field of study predated scientific innovation, and it is therefore not viewed as legitimate. However, the current ethical dilemmas that society faces should raise doubts concerning whether the onset of the Modern Era has helped improve the trajectory of human progress. Additionally, even if we fail to shake off the firm grasp of Value-Relativism we must remember that all knowledge, both scientific as well as that which comes out of the humanities, is based upon inductive reasoning. Because we are not gods, we can only put forward hypotheses. If they are not proven wrong, it is only then that they can be accepted as a theory. Even then, we are incapable of knowing anything for certain. However, through synthetic reasoning, it is possible to come to know whether a concept is closer to or further from what is naturally good – whether according to nature (as the Ancients would recommend) or as

Rousseau would have it, for human beings as the kind of creature we actually are (driven by reason, imagination, and emotional desire). The humanities then, are not all that different than the sciences. At their best, they hypothesize about the good life, test their suppositions, and work to uncover false assumptions in order to refine the understanding put forth.

Hannah Arendt, in her article *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man* states that “[h]ad the scientist reflected upon the nature of the human sensory and mental apparatus, had he raised questions such as ‘What is the nature of man and what should be his stature?’” or “‘What is the goal of science and why does man pursue knowledge?’” or “‘What is life and what distinguishes human from animal life?’” then man “would never have arrived where modern science stands today.”<sup>253</sup> It is “political philosophy,” not “political science” that we must turn to when we try to determine how to move away from the modern predicaments that society is facing.<sup>254</sup> It is important to facilitate a rebirth of the humanities so that they will not only be capable of governing the sciences but can recollect the teachings of the Ancients and the importance of collective knowledge. Recollection of our collective history is important for a well-functioning society, and we cannot turn away from what was known prior to the development of modern science and we cannot continue to govern as gods when we are no more than slaves. The important questions of our time must be answered by the culmination “moral and political philosophy,” as we will otherwise remain confined to within a society that does not provide for human happiness.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2007), 44.

<sup>254</sup> Irving Kristol. *Is Technology a Threat to Liberal Society?* (The Public Interest. Spring), 50.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

It is impossible to ignore the imperatives raised by an ethically neutral society any longer. Science has failed to offer a moral guide. Politics, religion, and education in their current state have been dismissed as mere opinions of society. This allows for factions within political society to prosper and for Value-Relativism to flourish. We have great reason to worry as is shown not only in our day-to-day lives, but within progressive dystopian science fiction. The concern of these authors, as can be seen in the work of Kurt Vonnegut, Nancy Kress in *Beggars in Spain*, and Ray Bradberry in *Fahrenheit 451*, warn of these issues. Although popular culture can serve as a guide – and, at its best, even popularize salutary teachings – novelists and movie directors are not up to the task of catalyzing a rebirth of the humanities. Society must find an alternate way to restore the crumbling pillars of Roman Law, Greek Philosophy, and Christianity, so they can once again bear the weight of a moral society.

As always, the task of intellectual reform will fall to the academy, where our scientists, teachers and givers of culture are trained. First and foremost, scholars must advocate for the rejection of Value-Relativism as a way of life, the restoration of the legitimacy of the humanities, and restructuring of the fields of theoretical inquiry to ensure that they are based upon ancient wisdom and inductive reasoning. It is essential to stress the importance of synthetic reasoning if we hope to restructure modern society. Dialogue must be fostered and we must gather the many intellectual guides provided in order to have a basis with which to work from to discover a way of life that will work best for humanity. Such though is dependent upon higher education and in many cases revelation, which provides alternate reasoning for the same essential values of human goodness. Correct judgements of what is good or bad, right or wrong, noble or base, cannot remain dependent upon mysterious values, but must be found through the application of one's rational

power and the synthesis of evidence and experience. Because synthetic reason must be taught, we can conclude that morality must also be taught.

While the ancients knew this, we have long since forgotten. We have forgotten that the world provides various sources upon which we can ground our moral judgements, and we have forgotten that such judgements are necessary for a well-functioning society.<sup>256</sup> Such education is not based upon vanity, but coming to know for a larger purpose beyond oneself, as can be found through revelation. Such a religion must be able to support a liberal democracy and its principles of equality and moderation of wealth amongst individuals. As a society, we must seek to understand the true nature of virtue, and once we come to an understanding, we must collectively learn to practice virtue, which is, according to Rousseau, a necessary precursor to happiness.<sup>257</sup> Thus, we can conclude that higher education based upon synthetic reasoning is essential for modern society. Such education would detail ethics and morality and what is necessary to remain virtuous in a society that often falls toward corruption when left without a guide.

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<sup>256</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Moral Challenge of Modern Science*. (The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society. Fall 2006), 39.

<sup>257</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 152.

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