**Western Political Heritage**

Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality”

“Let us therefore begin by putting aside all the facts, for they have no bearing on the question.” Rousseau thought a hypothetical investigation of human history would yield more insight than a historical one. The book of “nature” is true, but books written by people are full of lies.

However later Rousseau seems more ambivalent: “…these conjectures become reasons when they are the most probable ones,” but then he denies that his story is conjecture at all.

**Physical Man** (physical properties)

The only instrument one has is one’s own body. But because of practice, savage men can use their bodies in ways that we cannot. They would have a fair fight against fierce beasts.

Our lifestyles, in contrast, are beset by inequalities, which are bad for rich and poor alike. But in the state of nature there are few ills, and so there is little need for remedies. In becoming habituated into society, one becomes weak, fearful, and servile. Courage is lost.

**Metaphysical Man** (mental properties)

Every animal has ideas given by senses, and—more or less—can combine these ideas. Unlike other animals, humans have a capacity for self-perfection, both as individuals and as a species. Savage man has no desires that go beyond his physical needs. “His imagination depicts nothing to him; his heart asks nothing of him. His modest needs are so easily found..” that he does not need much foresight. His soul is unagitated—he always lives in the present.

There was no language. (Concepts are general ideas, which are ‘purely intellectual’).

There is no agriculture or industry, since such investments would not yield a return (easily plundered).

**So, what is wrong with state of nature theorizing?**

“Savage man” is hardly capable of reasoning in the ways that philosophers suppose (843). (Does not discover the ‘most sublime truths’ as a philosopher, himself.) There was little interaction among people, and they would then go their separate ways, not even recognizing each other.

There was also no cause for misery, contrary to what philosophers suppose.

Hobbes in particular is wrong.

Hobbes is right that there is no “goodness” in the state of nature, but wrong to think that this makes men naturally evil or vicious.

Hobbes is right that there are rights of nature, but wrong to think this means that man is “the sole proprietor of the entire universe.

Hobbes’s science is wrong. He draws the wrong conclusions from his definitions.

Securing out own self-preservation does less to threaten others in the state of nature than in any other condition, so it is the state that is best suited to peace—exactly because everyone in the state of nature fundamentally wants self-preservation. Hobbes goes wrong because he attributes a bunch of passions that only arise in society.

What dispositions do people have in the state of nature?

Self-Love—which helps preserve the species

Pity—an innate repugnance at seeing suffering. “Do what is good for you with as little harm others as possible.”

What corrupts these attitudes? Reasoning, which makes people focus on themselves. Without social attitudes (vanity, esteem, contempt, deference), there is little cause for disputes to escalate. If someone chases you from a tree, you can always just move to another one. There is also no slavery, which would be more work than just providing for one’s own needs.