

Preface

I am not about to write a dedication, nor do I solicit protection for this work. It will be read, if it is good; and if it is bad, I am not anxious that it should be read. The philosophers who wrote these letters lodged at my house, and so they concealed nothing from me. Indeed, people so far deceased could hardly be said to have secrets. They showed me their letters, and I copied them. It should be noted that at a certain point, almost as if they were a group text thread, these letters were addressed and distributed to all parties, for the purpose of collaboration. I am therefore nothing more than a translator: all my endeavor has been to adapt the work to our taste and manners. (Parisian Letters, Montesquieu's Preface)

Letter 1

Montesquieu to Voltaire

I must admit I found myself feeling rather foolish when I did not see you at my birthday party, though my sentiments were comforted after learning that you had been imprisoned. How many times must you be punished before learning that the best way to criticize your own is through the name of another? Alas, your exile may be for the best; things here seem to be worsening and I have, through my travels and many experiences with foreigners, seen the wonders of the world, and I could not recommend them enough. Should you find yourself in a strange world, I recommend you to take note of the people and the ways in which they choose to govern themselves. Should you find yourself in contact with our dearest Diderot, please be so kind as to ask him whether or not he is still accepting entries for his encyclopedia. They boys and I were discussing that particular collection at my birthday party and were wanting to make additional contributions. I wish you the best, my dear Voltaire, and as always, keep in touch.

XOXO, Montesquieu

Letter 2

Voltaire to Montesquieu

Oh Montesquieu, how troubled was I, locked in my cell and dreaming of your celebration! I must admit, I am a bit troubled by your unfounded optimism on the topic of my exile. It is highly unlikely that this misfortune is "for the best", and should anything good ensue, it will necessarily be a direct result of my hard work and perseverance (*Voltaire 94*). I will, however, admit that my recent travels have vastly expanded my knowledge of man and of society and I too am hoping to contribute these findings in Diderot's latest revision. It has been many a fortnight since we have had contact, though I would suspect that little has changed since then. I would recommend that we all write and collaborate on a comprehensive study into man and society, so that we may present a future reader of the encyclopedia with the most accurate representation of himself. Gather the greatest minds at your disposal and I shall do the same!

Much love, Voltaire

Letter 3

Montesquieu to Rousseau, Kant

My dearest acquaintance, it is with great excitement that I write to you with this opportunity. Surely, you have heard of the philosopher Diderot, but perhaps you have not heard of his latest undertaking. He wishes to amass a collection of all evidenced ideas on the subject of man and society so that the world may become wise through self-reflection and understanding. Should you be interested in contributing to such a monumental task, kindly send your thoughts on the

aforementioned subjects to myself, so that I may then distribute them to the other collaborations for comments and corrections. You are free to write that which you choose, but you must be weary of your audience and its rulers! It is my hope that together, we will show the people the true state of their existence and rid the world of such tyrants. I eagerly await your response.

XOXO, Montesquieu

Letter 4

Rousseau to Montesquieu

Montesquieu, my dearest! Oh what joy fills my spirit at the thought of such a powerful collection! It is true that self-reflection is the basis of our unhappiness (*Rousseau, 85*), yet since it is an inevitable damnation, let it be an informed damnation! I have below included a summary of my observations, though I am sure they will require no revisions, as they are direct observations of nature and spirit and are as infallible as the forces that drive them. Any incongruences may be attributed to my unintentional misrepresentation of the facts, though I can assure you that these will be minor and inconsequential (*79*). Alas, I begin on the subject of man;

Before I may begin to examine man in his present form or the society in which he conducts his affairs, I must first examine the characteristics of the natural man, so as to identify the influence of the former on the latter.

The Natural Man is what the present day man would be had God abandoned us after creation and is us in our simplest, most primitive state. The Natural Man is physically superior in every way, from speed to strength to agility, he is carved like a brainless God out of marble. Under the hood, Natural Man has only the bare necessities that ensure survival: the ability to assess potential danger, the ability to feed oneself, and the ability to always choose oneself over anything else. He is incapable of reason, curiosity, or foresight. Because of this simplicity, Natural Man is not troubled by the anxieties and afflictions that weigh on our present souls (*83, 89*). He is solitary and unsociable, interacting with Natural Woman only when conception is to occur. It is likely that he has no true capacity for language and communicates at the most rudimentary level.

Present man is a sophisticated creature that has, through socialization and self-domestication, doomed himself to a life of conflict, in both an internal as well as external form (*84, 85*). Present man alone is essentially a useless lump of even more useless emotions, but combined with his tools, present man is an unmatched adversary (*82*). All men in this state are equals by nature, though they have established between themselves every kind of inequality imaginable (*57*). At times, this inequality has come as a result of a people unused to and uncomfortable with freedom giving control of themselves and their state to masters who chain them and abuse their resources. There are other times, though rare, in which the inequality comes as a result of a voluntary accord between a people and its elected magistrates. Here, inequality is just, as the magistrates, through fair elections and proven intentions, have shown to be deserving of their power and hold the good of the state above their own passions. Unfortunately, as has been proven throughout the history of mankind, man will always, in the end, fall victim to his passions. Any delay in this inevitable corruption can be attributed to the work of virtuous women.

Natural Woman and present woman are both creatures that physically mirror their male counterparts, but with more inner strength and power than either. Natural woman is entirely as capable as natural man, and can perform every task as he with the added weight of a young child. On the subject of children, both natural child and present child are useless in their form and serve only as a burden to their parents and sponges of bad manners and customs (*82*), but I suppose the

necessity of continuing a species outweighs the burden for some parents. I would not know this myself, as I have wisely refused any child that may exit from the wombs of my women. Back to the subject at hand, it must be recognized that present woman is so powerful that without her, man would stand no chance when tempted by his passion. Through wise whispers of sweet, sweet nothings and subtle glances of the eye, she has tamed the untamable beast that is man (65). It goes without saying that present woman is not the same creature as she who has acted outside the bond of marriage, and consequently, is not the subject of this here discourse.

Society itself is the creator of our unnecessary suffering, and there are several characteristics which can be found in every society. The first, and most apparent being the inequalities that exist in every aspect of human life. Now, it should be noted that even though men are equal in nature, they are given by nature a set of inequalities that give one an advantage of strength, age, or ability, over another. All other inequalities are given to one man by another, and are consented upon by all parties, either directly or ancestrally (72). There is one inequality that seems to drive the others; power. One's power can be directly evaluated by one's wealth, and any of the privileges that come about as a result of inequalities must necessarily be enjoyed to the prejudice of others (77). There is no better example of privilege than within a state controlled by tyrannical monarchs (not France, of course - Long live the king!), and no better example of prejudice than their subjects. This is not to say that the people of this hypothetical and totally not French nation-state deserve to be free from a governing power, as they would likely be so unused to this freedom that they would drive themselves further into oppression (58). However, the monarchy has fallen further to passion than any other; they have no interest in the wellbeing of the people, and consequently do not represent their doomed subjects (62). We must be thankful for our benevolent God, for without him, things would surely be worse (72). But alas, what can be done of this injustice? I implore you to present me with a solution, for I have only a representation of an ideal society and no real way for those hypothetical people to get there.

TTYL, Rousseau

At this point, Rousseau's letter has been distributed to all parties and the letters that follow may be treated as a group message thread.

Letter 4
Kant to all

May the sheeple awake from their undisturbed slumber! This is my hope, though I doubt it will ever come true, as the laziness and complacency of the human race are sure to prevail (*Kant 1*). It is, however, my belief that this written form is the best, nay the only, way to critique society and raise any concerns we may have with the laws that govern us (2). We are all scholarly men, and thus, are capable of recognizing and responding to the world around us.

To Rousseau's description of man, I would disagree with his claim that man is equal in nature. This is expressly evidenced by the limited mental capacity and heightened physical capacity which nature has given to the people of Africa and the Americas. The climate is controlled entirely by nature, and it is the climate which will determine a man's capacity for thought (*Bouie 3*). I would extend Rousseau's notion of the man unaccustomed to freedom and consequently undeserving of it past the governing body and to every aspect of the man's life, notably his ability to think freely. For a man that is used to having his thinking done for him will surely be incapable of reason. I must note that individuals like us, who have lived under another's rule yet are capable of independent thought,

are an exception (*Kant 1*) and I cannot help but wonder whether these people who are free of thought are, under Rousseau's philosophies, deserving of freedom of body. Personally, I do not believe that freedom entails being responsible for every aspect of one's own life, but rather the ability to respect all of the laws which govern us while raising concerns through scholarly discourse such as this. In fact, it is our right to debate the suitability or utility of the organization and implementation of our official bodies, though this must be done in a way that does not undermine their authority, or we are sure to fall into chaos (2). We must be wary of any body that is resistant to change, as society (the whites of course) will always advance to perfection, and our principles and guiding rules must advance with us (3).

Ta ta! Kant

Letter 5
Voltaire to all

Only a fool would attempt to define man in the absence of God without noticing that he is himself, a man in the absence of God. It is this same fool who has failed to realize that our unhappiness comes not as a result of self-reflection, but from the unfounded hope that comes with belief in a benevolent ruler (*Voltaire on optimism, ex 10,11,24*). A quick examination of the state of the world and the life of people within that world would almost immediately show the stupidity of such a notion.

Kant, Rousseau, you both are guilty of placing chains upon the human race which do not exist outside your theories. Kant, the limitations of who may or may not have an opinion of their state is the reason for which progress is slow. What sense does it make to see the error in the religious institution and only speak to it in your diary? (31) What sense does it make that a man who has come to a conclusion that differs from the one he was given, has less right than you to make his claim, simply because of status? Your claim that only the educated may reason is false, yet you have a right to claim it, and the slave who claims his oppression is unjust is not only correct, but is entitled to his claim just as you are. Rousseau, why must you place such importance on the emotions of man when you, I, and everyone else have seen just how volatile and unreasonable emotions are? It is no wonder that you believe man doomed to fall to his passions, for you have given him only his passion as tools to resist this fall! Nay, his passions and his women, and yet you have placed limitations on her too. We must not subscribe to this silly notion that a chaste woman who has her virginity stolen from her has too her value stolen (*Voltaire on Cunegonde and the old woman*). It is clear to me that your experience with women is extremely limited if you believe them to be so docile. Yet you give them such power over man, power that they do not possess. There is no God controlling man, there is no woman controlling man, there is only man controlling man (59, 92), and if he wants to live a life of purpose, he must control himself with reason and not baseless emotion (94). This is the true definition of freedom.

It is entirely evident that this collaboration and search for theories on which we may agree will lead Diderot to publish a parchment empty of everything but our names. For this reason, I suggest we all submit our claims independently so that the reader may synthesize his own truth in reasoning through our own. My hope for you all is that you may broaden your horizons and examine the limitations of your claims and my hope for myself is that I may never hear of them again.

Much love, Voltaire

This is the full extent of the correspondence between these philosophers. Please refer to Diderot's own encyclopedia for any information not contained within these letters.