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The Godless Fall: Rousseau and the Moral Arc of Original Sin

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I. Introduction

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the eighteenth-century Genevan political philosopher, is famous for believing that humans are naturally good. For this reason, he is not usually considered a natural bedfellow of the Christian doctrine of original sin, first elaborated by Augustine of Hippo, who was markedly pessimistic about fallen human nature. Yet Augustine likewise holds that humankind is naturally good. Both thinkers, moreover, present an origin story of humankind in which, at a specific historical moment, human moral psychology is forever changed by the onset of a single moral perversion: pride for Augustine and *amour propre* for Rousseau. This moment is the origin of all subsequent human vices and introduces humanity to death and physical corruption. Both thinkers also identify human free choice and rationality with humankind's potential for both moral perfection and degradation, and argue that human goodness following the moment of corruption is substantially different from goodness before.

Some scholarship has discussed the relationship between Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* and the doctrine of original sin, and more explores the connection between Rousseau's writings and religion in general. Jean Starobinski notes that the second *Discourse* "has least to say about [Rousseau's] Christian beliefs…because it is conceived as a revelation of the human; it is a thoroughly religious work, but of a very particular kind, a substitute for sacred history."[1] Starobinski argues that the work is shot through with Christian theology and closely parallels the biblical Creation story, not in an effort to pay it homage, but to replace it. "This is a secularized, 'demystified' version of the origins of mankind," Starobinski writes, and "all mention of the supernatural has been eliminated."[2] Jeremiah L. Alberg pulls on this thread, both expanding upon Starobinski's comparison and contrast between the Christian account and Rousseau's, and

[1] Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 290.
[2] Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 290.

suggesting that Rousseau's renewed search for the explanation of evil seeks a more practicable solution. "It was Rousseau's unwillingness to accept any of the standard answers in response to the problem of the depravity of humans that made his thinking so creative," Alberg writes.[3]

The *Discourse on Inequality* provides the grounds for comparing it to the biblical Creation story and the story's Christian interpretation even before one might notice the parallels that this paper will investigate. Rousseau frames the discourse as a rational myth: a history or origin story of humankind that is not evidenced by historical record, but whose accuracy and evocativeness allows us to understand human moral psychology today. His undertaking is "to know accurately a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist…and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions in order to judge our present state adequately."[4] Rousseau reasons through the moral psychology of human beings at present and reconstructs a hypothetical state of nature that explains how we became this way. He offers no promises that this is accurate to the history of human development. The contents of the *Discourse* "ought not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings; better suited to elucidate the Nature of things than to show their genuine origin."[5] The conjectural history aims to present the development of human moral psychology with more clarity than an actual history of humankind would. And interpreting this rationally derived myth may yield further insights that are not transparent from the story's plain text. The second *Discourse*'s status as a rational myth reflects how many readers view the story of Genesis: perhaps not as a literal history of humankind, but as conveying powerful truths about the human condition that might not be yielded by an exact anthropological history of the species.

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[3] Jeremiah L. Alberg, "Rousseau and the Original Sin," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 57 (October/December 2001): 779.
[4] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men *or* Second Discourse," in *The* Discourses *and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 127[4].
[5] Rousseau, "Discourse," 135[6].

Given this implicit comparison, the second *Discourse*'s rejection of Genesis and revelation is all the more piquant. At first, Rousseau is tempered in his discussion of Genesis. Religion may provide one story of how humans came to be, he writes, but it "does not forbid us to form conjectures based solely on the nature of man…about what Mankind might have become if it had remained abandoned to itself."[6] His story answers the same kind of question that Genesis does, but he claims it is based on reason alone, not revelation. Then he writes, "O Man…Here is your history such as I believed I read it, not in the Books by your kind, who are liars, but in Nature, which never lies."[7] The identity of these "Books" might be vague—perhaps he refers to books of natural history or anthropology—if not for the prior reference to religious texts. Rousseau thus denies Genesis, claiming to provide his own "substitute for sacred history," as Starobinski puts it.[8] He places his own conjectural history in the role of Genesis, casting any interpretations of the history—including what he tells us and the exegesis that readers might come to on their own—as analogous to the doctrine of original sin. Though on its face the text rejects scripture, it places itself in scripture's position, priming the reader to seek the parallels that are the subject of this paper. My suggestion is that in drawing these parallels, Rousseau bases this work in revelation and doctrine more than the work wishes to let on.

Rousseau, like Augustine and the doctrine of original sin, soberly recognizes the depths of human evil. And both Rousseau and Augustine believe human beings to be good at root, even if the doctrine of original sin "was often interpreted to mean that humans were corrupted, that there was no goodness in the heart and therefore humans could not recognize moral goodness."[9] So each thinker needs to account for how humankind got to this point. In this paper, I will flesh

[6] Rousseau, "Discourse," 136[6].
[7] Rousseau, "Discourse," 136[7].
[8] Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 290.
[9] Alberg, "Rousseau and the Original Sin," 775.

out the parallel that Starobinski and Alberg observe between Rousseau's conjectural history of humankind and the Christian story of the Fall, relying in particular on Augustine's *City of God*. I will argue that it is precisely in the "demystification," i.e., Rousseau's removal of God from the story, that the novel features of Rousseau's moral psychology of early human beings arise. Rousseau's moral psychology is based upon loves—*amour de soi-même* and *amour propre*—out of which reason and reflection develop, closely reflecting Augustine's account of the human rational will as rooted in love. Moreover, in both accounts a shift in the object of humankind's love introduces a radical change in human nature: people become vicious. And at the end of their respective stories, each thinker proposes a reorientation away from the pernicious love object as a solution to humankind's moral failures. For Augustine, this reorientation takes the form of grace, and for Rousseau, the general will. The two stories' moral arcs, if not their pace and tone, parallel one another.

But, notably, God is missing from Rousseau's second *Discourse*. In Augustine's account, God gives human beings rationality and sociality before the Fall, whereas for Rousseau, rationality and sociality are not natural but arise alongside *amour propre*. I shall argue that God's absence justifies the absence of these two characteristics from human beings in Rousseau's state of nature. And without rationality, Rousseau argues in his *Letter to Beaumont*, human beings in the state of nature can have no conception of God in the first place. It is only rational, reflective capacities—which arise as human beings enter into society—that allow humans to properly understand God. How can one claim that God interacted with the first human beings if they cannot have understood his nature? The most extreme possibility is that Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, read together with the *Letter to Beaumont*, insinuates that the concept of God arises as a result of the human rationality and sociality that Christian doctrines have mistakenly

identified as God's gift. Thus there is an admission and a suggestion latent in the second *Discourse*: an admission of the compelling explanatory power of Genesis and the doctrine of original sin, alongside the suggestion—or perhaps prescription—that if we must remove God from our story of the origins of human moral failures, he accordingly cannot be part of the ideal solution toward which we strive.

II. The original sin

Such are the fatal proofs that most of our ills are of our own making.
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*[10]

In the *City of God*, Saint Augustine interprets the Creation and Fall stories extensively and, in doing so, writes what become seminal texts of the Christian doctrine of original sin. The shortest version of the doctrine is familiar from caricatures of fire-and-brimstone preaching: thanks to Adam and Eve's original disobedience to God, all of their descendants—in other words, all human beings, including you—are sinners to their core. A slightly more detailed explanation goes as follows. The first human beings were given a life of sinless felicity in the Garden of Eden, and all they had to do to maintain it was to obey God's will. But when they disobeyed, their punishment was that their own bodies and desires became disobedient to their minds, and that moreover this disobedience would be inherited by their descendants. This internal disharmony takes the form of all kinds of recognizable human experiences: for example, we become angry when we know it is not beneficial for us to do so, or we have desires that we do not rationally choose to have. The final punishment for this disobedience is physical corruption and death, which Augustine argues were not originally components of the human condition. But, according to this doctrine, the possibility of grace remains for some: God may reorient a person's love back toward God, thereby granting that person the willpower not to sin. In this section, I will lay out the moral arc of original sin and grace, with special attention to the elements that I shall argue are reflected in Rousseau's second *Discourse*. These elements will be the character of natural human goodness, sociality, and rationality; human beings as creatures of love; pride; free choice; the divided moral psychology after the Fall; the punishment of physical corruption and death; and grace.

[10] Rousseau, "Discourse," 141[8].

Natural goodness, rationality, and sociality. Despite original sin's pessimistic reputation, Augustine is careful to assert that God created human beings as good. He writes, "God created man aright, for God is the author of natures, though he is certainly not responsible for their defects."[11] Yet in Genesis, the serpent persuades Eve and Adam to partake of the tree of knowledge because they will "be like God, knowing good and evil."[12] If the first human beings are good, but also in some sense do not yet know good, what is the character of their natural goodness? According to Augustine, humankind's natural goodness is based on the fact that prior to the Fall, human beings loved God, as God created them to do.

Augustine argues that humans are creatures of love: they are oriented toward and wish to cleave to a certain object, and whichever object they strive for will determine the orientation of their will and actions. For the first human beings to have lived indefinitely in the felicity of the Garden of Eden, they had only to obey God's will. Augustine writes that "a rightly directed will is love in a good sense and a perverted will is love in a bad sense."[13] So for Adam and Eve—or any person, for that matter—to obey God's will, the pair must have a proper orientation of their loves and desires. To maintain its obedience, the will must have "remained unshaken in its love of the higher changeless Good."[14] Humankind's original goodness thus means that humans were created as creatures that love God, or who have a basic desire to adhere to and obey God's will. It does not mean that the pair "know[s] good and evil," or has a command of morality's heights and depravities, as the serpent promises them that they will gain. Adam and Eve are created to love God and for a brief period it appears that they do; for Augustine to call them good is as simple as that. They are not moral philosophers or perfect theologians; they know little of moral

[11] Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), 13.14.
[12] Gen. 3:5 (New Revised Standard Version).
[13] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.7.
[14] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.13.

reasoning and simply follow God's command. They are good because—and only because—they are capable of cleaving to God and acting according to his will with ease.[15]

Though the first humans' goodness is not rational in itself, the pair's love for God is the basis of their rational wills. Genesis 1 states that "God created humankind in his image."[16] Augustine argues that this refers to a specific component of the human being: "the mind of man, the natural seat of his reason and understanding."[17] The part of humankind that is made in God's image is their intellectual nature and rational capacities. This rational will, as Augustine calls it, is directed by whatever a person loves. A person before the Fall, who loves God as he or she was created to do, in turn wills to obey God's commands. Given that humankind's intellectual capacities reflect God's nature, it makes sense that the source of human goodness is cleaving to God: God is the source and cause of human reason and intellect. So the rational will, made in the image of God, is at its best when it most closely hews to him in whose image it was made. And, with God as its cause and model, it makes sense that the rational will would wish to cleave to him. Though the pre-Fall humans are not quite rational in the way we might now assume it means to be rational—they do not yet employ reason to determine their actions, for example—they are rational because they are created with an intellectual component in their nature: the rational will.

Another characteristic that God granted to the first human beings is their natural sociality. Prior to the Fall human beings are already "social by nature," as Augustine writes.[18] "It is not good that the man should be alone," God says, and he seeks for the first man a companion among the other creatures.[19] When this proves insufficient, God crafts a second human being, a woman,

[15] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.12: "The injunction forbidding the eating of one kind of food…was so easy to observe, so brief to remember; above all, it was given at a time when desire was not yet in opposition to the will."
[16] Gen. 1:27 (NRSV).
[17] Augustine, *City of God*, 11.2.
[18] Augustine, *City of God*, 12.28.
[19] Gen. 2:18–19 (NRSV).

from the first man's rib to live alongside him.[20] The marriage pair—and thus a form of sociality—is given by God to human beings in their original, natural state. God asserts that Adam is not complete by himself: it is in the nature of the first human being that he should have companionship.

Moreover, God created Eve from Adam's rib, meaning that the first two human beings and all of their future descendants are of quite literally the same stock. Augustine argues that humankind's descendance from a single person creates a sense of kinship and sympathy. Expanding on the claim that human beings are "social by nature," Augustine writes that God created Adam with the intention that "from that one individual a multitude might be propagated, and that this fact should teach mankind to preserve a harmonious unity in plurality."[21] Thus human beings are made social not only in their original social circumstance, into which Adam and Eve were placed by God, but by the kinship ties that stretch across the species. Because each person, according to Genesis, is familially related, we should ideally recognize a common humanity—a "unity"—in every person. According to Augustine, then, human beings are naturally social: prior to the Fall, God places them in marriage, a lasting social bond, and makes all humankind related to one another to provide them an inborn, familial sympathy.

In short, when Augustine writes that human beings were created good, he means that humans were created to love God and found their rational wills on that love, obeying him indefinitely. People are also naturally rational—though they so far lack the moral knowledge promised to them by the serpent—and social, because God has created them in his image and given them sympathy for all humankind and the bonds of marriage. But what happens when the first human beings no longer base their lives on love of God?

[20] Gen. 2:20–23 (NRSV).
[21] Augustine, *City of God*, 12.28.

Pride. The sin of pride is, very simply, the perversion of loves. When a person loves him or herself more than God, his or her rational will no longer cleaves to God, its cause and source of goodness. According to Augustine, pride is what originally causes Adam and Eve's choice to eat of the tree of knowledge. He writes:

> It was in secret that the first human beings began to be evil; and the result was that they slipped into open disobedience. For they would not have arrived at the evil act if an evil will had not preceded it. Now, could anything but pride have been the start of the evil will? For 'pride is the start of every kind of sin.' And what is pride except a longing for a perverse kind of exaltation? For it is a perverse kind of exaltation to abandon the basis on which the mind should be firmly fixed, and to become, as it were, based on oneself, and so remain. This happens when a man is too pleased with himself: and a man is self-complacent when he deserts that changeless Good in which, rather than in himself, he ought to have found his satisfaction. This desertion is voluntary, for if the will had remained unshaken in its love of the higher changeless Good…the will would not have been so darkened and chilled in consequence….[22]

As the previous section discussed, Augustine's prelapsarian moral psychology argues that the human rational will, created in God's image, has its basis in love for God and remains obedient to and humble before God as a result. For Adam and Eve, this would have taken the form of obeying God's command to avoid the tree of knowledge's fruits, something that would have been possible indefinitely. Yet one can become "pleased with himself" and "self-complacent," and begin to turn away from love of God.[23] When Eve complied with the serpent's persuasion, she turned her will "to become, as it were, based on [her]self;" she made a choice to appeal to her own capacity for reason rather than God's command.[24] Pride is thus the will taking itself as capable of self-direction and changing its foundation from God to itself. And the disordered loves at the heart of pride precede and cause all other sinful actions, dispositions, and behaviors.

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[22] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.13.
[23] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.13.
[24] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.13. See also Gen. 3:4–5 (NRSV): the serpent appeals to Eve's reason, and desire for further moral understanding, by saying: "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

It is only because God endowed the first humans with the capacity of free choice that their obedience was meaningful and their disobedience was possible. The rational will that is founded on love of God chooses to obey his command; the rational will that is "pleased with himself" will choose actions according to its own reason.[25] Another way of framing this is that Adam and Eve's obedience to God's will can only be considered meaningful if they freely choose to obey. But for the choice of obedience to be free, the will must also be capable of freely choosing something else. (Otherwise, the pair is like an animal or even a rock or a tree, whose behavior cannot be meaningfully interpreted as loving or obedient, but merely as instinctive or inert.)[26] The first human beings, as long as they both love God and have free choice, are always on the precipice of choosing to disobey. As Augustine writes, "the failure is voluntary, not necessary."[27] However, following the original sin of Adam and Eve, humans can no longer choose to live sinlessly. Instead, Augustine argues, we all inherit the punishment.

Physical corruption and death. In Genesis, God promises the first humans death if they eat fruit from the tree of knowledge and, after their disobedience, he curses the pair to painful labor in the fields and in childbirth.[28] In Augustine's interpretation of the story, he furthers this claim: human beings' subjection to death and suffering after the original sin is caused by a novel discord between body and soul.

The punishment for human disobedience to God, Augustine writes, is that humans must in turn experience the disobedience of their bodies to their souls. For example, we have desires that we do not rationally choose to have, and we experience sadness, anger, and pain when we do not wish to. "For who can list all the multitude of things that a man wishes to do and cannot,

[25] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.13.
[26] See Augustine, *City of God*, 12.1, where Augustine discusses how "such things as beasts, trees, and stones are incapable of enjoying this blessing" of felicity and happiness to which angels and humans are privy.
[27] Augustine, *City of God*, 12.8.
[28] Gen. 3:3, 3:16–19 (NRSV).

while he is disobedient to himself, that is, while his very mind and even his lower element, his flesh, do not submit to his will?"[29] Our desires and emotions are intractable and their inner workings are opaque to us; human intelligence and capacity for free, rational choice are no match for the unpredictable nature of human impulses. In contrast, had human beings remained forever obedient in the Garden of Eden, Augustine argues that our bodily desires and impulses would have remained "subject to us."[30] Humankind "would have become spiritual even in his flesh, by observing the command" of God, but instead "became carnal even in his mind."[31]

The condemnation of humankind to death comes as a result of this newly divided human nature. Augustine argues that the life of the soul—the rational, intelligent component of the human being that is made in the image of God—finds its proper foundation in the love of God, though the soul can turn away from God, too.[32] The life of the body, on the other hand, is always dependent on the soul, whatever the soul's orientation is.[33] As such, Augustine argues, the bodily pains to which humankind is condemned are "really pains of the soul, experienced in the flesh and from the flesh. The flesh can surely feel no desire or pain by itself, apart from the soul."[34] Illness, physical injury, and bodily pains are introduced only when the soul itself suffers. So even though we can describe our internal discord as the body's disobedience to the mind, it remains true for Augustine that the body can have no life—and no sentient experience—independent of the soul. What we experience as so-called fleshly disobedience is really discord within the soul. We can think of this in terms of the uncontrollable emotions people sometimes experience, such as anger, leading to shouting or violence, or hysterical grief. These disturbances originate in the mind, manifesting in our bodies as a result.

[29] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.15.
[30] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.15.
[31] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.15.
[32] Augustine, *City of God*, 13.2.
[33] Augustine, *City of God*, 13.2.
[34] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.15.

It is because the body is dependent on the soul for life that humankind becomes subject to death after the Fall. Augustine writes, "the death of the soul results when God abandons it."[35] God abandoned Adam and Eve's souls, so to speak, when they abandoned him. Augustine argues that, had the first human beings remained obedient to God, their souls would have lived indefinitely, because they would draw upon him indefinitely as their source of life and felicity. In turn, their bodies also would have lived indefinitely. But the body does not live by itself—"the death of the body [results] when the soul departs"—and as a result "the death of the whole man, of both these elements, comes when the soul, abandoned by God, leaves the body."[36] After human beings chose to disobey God, God abandoned their souls. Human bodies, no longer sustained by something immortal, are no longer immortal themselves. In the doctrine of original sin, this newfound internal discord—between body and soul but also within the psyche itself—introduces death as a fact of human life.

Sociality after the Fall. Pride also changes the character of humankind's natural sociality. Let us recall Genesis 3: after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, the pair covers their genitals with fig leaves.[37] Augustine writes that "immediately they were embarrassed by the nakedness of their bodies…These organs were the same as they were before, but previously there was no shame attaching to them. Thus they felt a novel disturbance in their disobedient flesh."[38] The pair's shame arises from the newfound disobedience of their bodies to their minds. But their shame also reflects the changed character of human sociality. Embarrassment and shame are necessarily social emotions. The thought that genitals are embarrassing and shameful entails their designation as private. In other words, the "novel disturbance" of sexual desire must be

[35] Augustine, *City of God*, 13.2.
[36] Augustine, *City of God*, 13.2.
[37] Gen. 3:7 (NRSV).
[38] Augustine, *City of God*, 13.13. Prior to the Fall, Augustine proposes that human beings could rationally will their sexual arousal without lust—i.e., that a person's flesh was obedient to his or her mind—no matter how preposterous this sounds to us today. For this, see *City of God* 14.24.

considered appropriate only in the private sphere because its public display is inappropriate.[39] In this moment, Adam and Eve become aware of their public appearance as something to be dignified and cultivated in the eyes of observers. Following suit with the newly conflicting body and soul, human self-perception becomes divided, and the first pair becomes newly aware of their public appearance as different from their "private" self—even worth falsifying. This represents more a quotidian valence of pride: vanity and concern with one's appearance.

Grace. Grace completes the moral arc proposed by the doctrine of original sin. Through grace, God reorients human love back to him, so that its fallen recipients are capable once more of choosing not to sin. The first human beings could have chosen not to sin, but once they do, their nature is set into such radical discord that it is passed down to all those who existed *in potentia* in the first human beings—which is all of us, says Augustine.[40] So the rest of humankind does not have a choice in experiencing this discord and the impulses, desires, emotions, and physical pain that accompany it. The doctrine of original sin proposes that the human condition, often the source of suffering, is caused by the first act of pride, the first turning of love toward oneself. As a result, human beings' love, as a rule, is not directed at God; they remain divided from their cause and source of goodness.

But it does not leave human beings hopeless; instead, it proposes the solution of grace. Augustine writes that "those who are set free through God's grace escape from this calamitous sequence."[41] Grace reinstates the freedom to choose not to sin that Adam and Eve were also given; those who are granted grace are able to love and cleave to God again. This is not to say they do not experience the impulses and drives that human beings all inherit, but that they are free to choose not to act upon them.

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[39] Augustine, *City of God*, 13.13.
[40] Augustine, *City of God*, 13.14.
[41] Augustine, *City of God*, 13.14. XIII.14 523

To love and cleave to God is substantially different from loving and cleaving to any other object of love. One feature of God's nature is constancy and unchangingness. In contrast, the concept of pride that Augustine proposes—loving oneself more than God—not only casts one into a discordant, variable state, but makes one cleave to one's own discordance and mutability. The first human beings, as long as they cleaved to God, were simple and constant themselves, but they mistook their own constancy as a reason to make themselves the object of their love. The complexity of the human condition as we know it today, which the doctrine of original sin intends to account for, is in part due to the fact that human beings are not just changeable, but through pride come to rely on their changeability as the yardstick of what is right and good. Grace offers the hope of a solution to some. By granting some people the ability to reorder their loves and cleave to God, those people still know the complexity of the postlapsarian human condition, but are able to resist it and transcend it, cleaving again to God's constancy.

The doctrine of original sin, in short, narrates an origin story for the complex moral psychology of human beings, positing that human beings are naturally good, free, social, and rational. The reorientation of loves, however, from something constant—God—to something inconstant—ourselves—has placed human beings in a state of discord and mutability, introducing irrational vices, desires, impulses, and emotions. Human beings are also eventually condemned to death after the original sin. Grace reinstates the possibility that a person can choose not to act on their discordant impulses, and can, through love, cleave to God's constancy again.

III. Rousseau's retelling

And so the first man was more blessed in paradise than any righteous man in this state of moral frailty, as far as concerns the enjoyment of present good.

—Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*[42]

Now let me summarize another story that shows the origin of, and solution to, humankind's discordant moral psychology. In their original state, human beings are good and have a natural sympathy for one another. This original moral psychology, simple and good, is founded on love for an object whose constancy leads the first human beings to lead simple, consistent lives. But at a specific historical moment, human moral psychology is radically changed, making the human being following this shift and the one who precedes it unrecognizably different from one another. The change occurs when humankind's love shifts from a constant object to a variable one. As a result, human nature becomes divided between what one is like privately and how one appears to others. This divided inner life becomes the font of all imaginable vices, as well as of great moral knowledge. So humankind's great potential for virtue is concomitant with a great potential for moral depravity and suffering. Following this shift, human beings come to know death and illness. All the pains and evils—bodily, psychological, and social—that humankind lives with today are not natural to us but are contrary to the original human nature. Yet all of humankind has inherited this changed nature and must live with this vitiated moral psychology.

Still, hope remains. This story offers the possibility of a reorientation of the human mind toward a constant object that can help human beings avoid moral failure. This third and final stage of the moral arc, ideal in nature, remains in the future for readers, and motivates them to consider human moral failure and how it might be solved.

[42] Augustine, *City of God*, 11.12.

Though this sounds like Augustine's moral arc of the original sin, I'm actually describing Jean-Jacques Rousseau's second *Discourse*, in which he presents a moral origin story of mankind that explains our complex, depraved condition. In this section, I will argue that the three-stage moral arc of Rousseau's second *Discourse* corresponds to that of the doctrine of original sin, with a simple, good first stage; a second stage that introduces moral evil (but also a full conception of moral good); and a final stage that redeems human beings without reducing them to the simplicity of the first stage. One major omission in Rousseau's version is, of course, God. I will argue that, like Augustine, Rousseau identifies the basis of human moral psychology in loves. But whereas Augustine's moral arc lies in the object of love changing from God to oneself to God again, Rousseau identifies various kinds of subjectivities as the objects of love that direct human moral psychology. Rousseau is consistent with Augustine, however, in that the three stages of his moral arc are defined by the character of the changing objects of love. For Rousseau, these three stages are *amour de soi-même*, *amour propre*, and the general will. In both versions of the first stage, the human being's psychology is oriented by love for an object of a constant character, and the radical shift begins with the love for an inconsistent object. Redemption in both versions of the story is possible only by reorienting one's mind to cleave to a constant object once again.

Natural goodness. Rousseau's moral arc of humankind is also founded upon the love at the basis of a person's psychology. As in the doctrine of original sin, the object of human love shifts from one that is consistent in nature to one that is variable, and the hope of moral redemption lies in the possibility of a return to constancy. However, in God's absence, the objects of love are instead different kinds of subjective experiences. In this first section, I will explore

the two principles of humankind's natural goodness in Rousseau's retelling: *amour de soi-même*, a self-love focused on preservation, and pity, a compassion divorced from sociality.

First, *amour de soi-même*: love of oneself, or the drive toward self-preservation. Underlying this love is the principle that in the state of nature each person recognizes only their own subjectivity, which is rather limited. *Amour de soi-même*, or "self-love," is a "natural sentiment that inclines every animal to attend to its self-preservation."[43] Rousseau writes that in the state of nature, driven only by *amour de soi-même*, "every individual human being views himself as the only Spectator to observe him, as the only being in the universe to take any interest in him, as the only judge of his own merit."[44] Human beings don't frequently encounter one another or interact very much in the state of nature. Each person has only a relationship to himself; no other human being or observer, such as God, intervenes in his self-conception. As a result, the primitive self-awareness available to those in the state of nature is very limited compared to the self-conceptions that human beings now possess.

Because the limited, natural subjectivity of *amour de soi-même* does not comprehend or recognize the subjective experiences of other human beings, these subjectivities are more or less indistinguishable. To become distinguished from others, one must recognize that other people have differing subjective experiences from oneself and in turn define one must oneself against those others, becoming increasingly different in the process. The asociality of Rousseau's state of nature lies in the fact that human subjective experiences do not develop by interaction with—and in contrast to—other people's subjectivities. These self-conceptions, not differentiated in contrast to one another, are more or less indistinguishable and consistent within themselves. In this way, the object of a person's driving love in the state of nature—their own life—is stable, mirroring

[43] Rousseau, "Discourse," 224–225[1–2].
[44] Rousseau, "Discourse," 224–225[1–2].

the stable love of God in the first stage of the doctrine of original sin. However, unlike prelapsarian human beings in the doctrine of original sin, those in Rousseau's state of nature neither interact with or relate to God, nor are they naturally social.

However, even without sociality, Rousseau's state of nature accounts for natural human sympathy through pity, an asocial compassion that motivates people to reduce the suffering of other beings. Humankind's "only Natural virtue," pity inspires in human beings "a natural repugnance to seeing any sentient Being, and especially any being like ourselves, perish or suffer."[45] Pity is simply that: an aversion to seeing the suffering of living beings. Rousseau argues that human beings are roused innately to counteract the suffering of other living beings. This is especially the case the more that the sufferer is like the onlooker: "Indeed commiseration will be all the more energetic in proportion as the Onlooking animal identifies more intimately with the suffering animal."[46] I will feel pity if I observe the suffering of a dog, an orangutan, and a human being, but the pity will not be equal. I am likely to be most roused to action in the human being's case and the least in the case of the dog. Pity therefore looks something like compassion: literally, a "feeling with" the suffering of other living beings, increasing in proportion to our likeness with them, i.e., our capacity to feel as they feel. Even while pity exists before humankind enters into society, Rousseau writes that "from this single attribute flow all the social virtues" that we can observe in humankind, now that we do live in society.[47] This includes charity to the poor, mercy to the guilty, and beneficence to our friends: each is a manifestation of the natural human impulse to prevent the suffering of and increase the happiness of other beings like ourselves.[48]

[45] Rousseau, "Discourse," 155[34], 129[9].
[46] Rousseau, "Discourse," 157[36].
[47] Rousseau, "Discourse," 156[36].
[48] Rousseau, "Discourse," 156[36].

Yet, as I mentioned, pity in Rousseau's state of nature is divorced from sociality. Rousseau writes that one can identify pity in human psychology "without it being necessary to introduce into it that [principle] of sociability."[49] Though pity can arise when human beings interact socially, as I mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is an aversion to the suffering of a being that is *like us*. To identify oneself and one's likeness, one does not need to have a social nature or to interact with and depend on others. A person only needs to have an instinct for himself. The goodness of pity, then, arises from identifying others as versions or reflections of oneself, and wishing to minimize their suffering on these grounds. As I wrote above, in the state of nature, one person does not recognize that another has a subjective experience that is distinguishable from his or hers. This limited subjectivity sees others, not as different from oneself, but essentially like oneself.

Just as pity arises independently from sociality, so too is it opposed to reason. Rousseau writes of pity, "Such is the pure movement of Nature prior to all reflection"; it is "a virtue all the more universal and useful to man as it precedes the exercise of all reflection in him, and so Natural that even the Beasts sometimes show evident signs of it."[50] Whereas in Augustine's view rationality is so natural to man that it is based in and directed by a person's loves, Rousseau argues that reason arises later in the development of human moral psychology. Instead, the first human love, *amour de soi-même*, gives rise to a limited subjectivity that does not recognize its difference and distinguishability from the subjective experiences of others. This limited subjectivity, more or less equivalent to others, leads to the goodness of pity: everybody wishes that a creature like themselves should not suffer. Just as people in the state of nature act to

[49] Rousseau, "Discourse," 129[9].
[50] Rousseau, "Discourse," 155–156[34–35].

preserve their own lives, they also desire to reduce the suffering of others. These two features together constitute the simple psychology of the human being in Rousseau's state of nature.

I propose that the human in Rousseau's state of nature begins the parallel to the moral arc of the doctrine of original sin that runs throughout the second *Discourse*. This figure is the arc's first stage. Those in Rousseau's state of nature, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, are naturally good, but simple and morally dumb, so to speak. Just as Adam and Eve do not know good and evil until after they eat the fruit, the human being in the state of nature—who is famously naturally good—does not yet know virtue.[51] In Rousseau's state of nature, people don't yet reflect or reason. Likewise, in the Garden of Eden human beings are rational and intellectual by nature, but don't exercise moral reasoning on their own: the serpent awakens in Eve the possibility of her reasoning for herself, persuading her by making an argument and thus appealing to her reason. In both versions of the first stage, human moral psychology is founded on love of a constant object: love of God in the Garden of Eden, and *amour de soi-même*, that limited and undifferentiated concept of "self," in Rousseau's state of nature. Adam and Eve's rational nature is based upon that love at first: rather than employing reason to their own purposes, they cleave to God's will. As long as they do this, their felicity is accordingly consistent. Human beings in the state of nature are driven by their *amour de soi-même* to act toward their self-preservation. In both cases, human beings have a basic sympathy toward other people. For Rousseau, natural pity, along with *amour de soi-même*, makes up the simple

[51] See Rousseau, "Discourse," 157[37]: "It is pity that carries us without reflection to the assistance of those we see suffer; pity that, in the state of Nature, takes the place of Laws, morals, and virtue…pity that, in place of that sublime maxim of reasoned justice *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, inspires in all Men this other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the first: *Do your good with the least possible harm to others*." Rousseau is clear to distinguish moral, i.e. reasoned, goodness and virtue from the simple good of the state of nature.

goodness of the first stage. For Augustine, the "bonds of human sympathy" are an expression of human beings' natural goodness and sociality.[52]

But Rousseau's version of the story is not just missing God, but also rationality and sociality, inborn in Adam and Eve. I argue that these latter absences are not additional differences, arbitrarily made, but are instead a function of Rousseau's removal of God. In Augustine's interpretation of Genesis, God grants human beings both rationality and sociality. Adam and Eve are created in the state of marriage, and when God makes Eve from Adam's rib, humankind is created with a species-wide sense of kinship. Likewise, God creates Adam and Eve in the image of his rational, intellectual nature (suggesting why it is meaningful for the pair to love and cleave to him). Not including God as an actor in his account, Rousseau's story must go differently. Removing God as an actor—and as an object of human love—in his moral arc, Rousseau then pares back the characteristics of human nature that God grants in the first stage. Instead, the goods that arise in Rousseau's first stage are deduced from the object that those in Rousseau's story love: the limited subjectivity of the state of nature. One might consider the good of Rousseau's first stage, pity, to be a social virtue, but instead it is an expression of that early subjectivity's limitation. Conceiving of no difference between myself and another, I wish for that other being not to suffer in proportion to how much I identify with the sufferer.

The first stage, accounting for a human condition that Rousseau shrewdly notes "no longer exists," allows for Rousseau's retelling to diverge from Genesis, precisely because his claims are not empirically falsifiable.[53] As such, he rewrites the doctrine of original sin as a natural history, maintaining an architecture of human psychology based on our loves and drives while replacing the main object of that love, i.e., God. As a result, rationality and sociality,

[52] Augustine, *City of God*, 12.22.
[53] Rousseau, "Discourse," 127[4].

whose presence in the first stage of the moral arc is justified by God giving these traits, fall away in Rousseau's version. But he must account for these undeniable features of human nature at some point. He does so in the second stage of his moral arc. Whereas in Augustine's account, rationality and sociality are corrupted by the new object of human love, Rousseau argues that the shift in loves in fact introduces them.

Amour propre. In the moral arc of the second *Discourse*, as in the doctrine of original sin, a shift in the object of human love breaches the idyll of the first stage, leading to the development of all sorts of moral failures. The new object, variable rather than constant in nature, fragments human subjectivity and introduces human beings to moral evil, physical maladies, and awareness of impending death. But in *Discourse on Inequality*, the second stage isn't catalyzed by the failure to love God, as in the Garden of Eden. Instead, *amour de soi-même* is usurped by *amour propre*, a novel form of self-regard that is based on a more complex, socially developed subjectivity.

According to Rousseau, the story goes as follows. Human beings, originally living solitary existences, slowly begin to interact with one another. They begin to learn and pass down methods for keeping warm and for raising crops; they hunt in teams; they form families and communities.[54] As human beings increasingly interact with one another, the solitude that sustains their limited subjectivity begins to dissolve. By virtue of having a sustained concept of another human being, rather than the sporadic and brief contact in the state of nature, one must come to realize that he is not simply seeing himself reflected back at him. Instead, one develops

[54] Rousseau, "Discourse," 166–168[4–12]. See also 173[22]: Just as God curses Adam to agriculture in Genesis 3:17–19 as a punishment for the sin of pride ("cursed is the ground because of you; / in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; / thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; / and you shall eat the plants of the field. / By the sweat of your face / you shall eat bread / until you return to the ground…."), so too in Rousseau's retelling does agriculture arise as a feature of the second stage. Whereas God's will is what dictates that humans enter this new agricultural stage of society in Genesis, in the second *Discourse* the organic beginning of agriculture is in tandem with the shift towards *amour propre*.

"perceptions of certain relations" between beings.[55] That other person must see me and relate to me from her point of view just like I see her from mine. She must have a different subjective experience than I do.

Once human beings begin to enter into social relationships and to understand that others see them from a perspective different from their own, people come to regard their appearance and reputation as paramount. In Rousseau's parlance, *amour de soi-même* begins to be overtaken by *amour propre*. Rousseau writes:

> Everyone began to look at everyone else and to wish to be looked at himself, and public esteem acquired a value. The one who sang or danced the best; the handsomest, the strongest, the most skillful or the most eloquent came to be the most highly regarded, and this was the first step at once toward inequality and vice.[56]

The love that attaches to self-preservation, *amour de soi-même*, is transformed once society arises: now, for the sake of one's survival and advantage, one must seek to be well regarded. Now that human beings recognize that each person has their own subjective experience, they know that other people have sustained memories and judgments of them, too. As a result, each person aims to increase how he or she is estimated in the eyes of others. To do this, people must make their public image exceptional and differentiate these images from one another. Inequality between people can only arise when people become aware of the difference between themselves and others.[57] They then self-consciously differentiate themselves, in the process only becoming

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[55] Rousseau, "Discourse," 166[5].
[56] Rousseau, "Discourse," 170[16].
[57] The "new enlightenment that resulted from this development increased his [man's] superiority over the other animals by acquainting him with it," Rousseau writes (Rousseau, "Discourse," 166[6]). *Amour propre* arises alongside not only sociality and rationality, but also human awareness of the species' superiority over animals. Human beings, by sustainedly encountering animals and the natural world as the subjects of their conquering, come to compare themselves to those beings and recognize the differences between humans and animals. The human being's "first look at himself aroused the first movement of pride in him; this is how…considering himself in the first rank as a species, he was from afar preparing to claim first rank as an individual" (Rousseau, "Discourse," 166[6]). Note that in Genesis, like rationality and sociality, superiority over animals is granted to Adam and Eve directly by God (Gen. 2:19–21, NRSV). It is another feature of human nature that Rousseau, having removed God, reincorporates as an organic development that only arises in the second stage of the moral arc.

more aware of the inequality between themselves and others. This complex, full subjectivity only arises in the second stage, in relation to other human beings.[58] The human subjectivity we know today cannot exist by itself, Rousseau seems to suggest. It requires the counterpoint of others' subjective self-conceptions, against which we must define ourselves.

When the way that we are perceived becomes our primary motivation, Rousseau describes this as *amour propre*. "Amour propre is only a relative sentiment, factitious and born in society, that inclines every individual to set greater stock by himself than anyone else, inspires men with all the harms they do to one another, and is the genuine source of honor," he writes.[59] As I have described above, *amour propre* is "relative"—it only arises in relation to other human beings, because if we don't regularly interact with human beings it is impossible to prize their esteem. *Amour propre* is the source of all other harms that human beings inflict on each other, and it leads people to value their honor over everything else. Importantly, *amour propre*'s effects sound a lot like those of pride. Recall the moment in which Adam and Eve cover themselves with fig leaves. The pair wishes to prevent outside eyes from seeing their internal source of shame, and in doing so they are the first to manipulate their public image for the sake of a decent reputation. Likewise, a person whose *amour propre* dictates their choices has a split self-perception. I am both my public image, which I can manipulate and falsify, and a private

[58] The difference between sociality in Rousseau's moral arc and in the doctrine of original sin is expressed most starkly in the second *Discourse*'s discussion of sex and marriage. Augustine interprets Genesis as indicating that Adam and Eve were created in the state of marriage; lustful sex only arises in the second stage, after humankind has fallen. But as I have described, the first stage of Rousseau's moral arc is bereft of sociality and morality (precisely because of the absence of God, as I will argue). If marriage is the social dimension of sex, proscribed by morality, then there can be no marriage in Rousseau's state of nature. And that is, in fact, the case. Sexual relations in the state of nature take the form of one-off encounters, a "purely animal act" driven by "blind inclination, devoid of any sentiment of the heart" (Rousseau, "Discourse," 165[2]). Afterwards, "the two sexes no longer recognized one another" (Rousseau, "Discourse," 165[2]). In contrast, marriage and romantic love arise in Rousseau's second stage, "since [the moral aspect of love] is based on certain notions of merit or of beauty which a Savage is not in a position to have" (Rousseau, "Discourse," 159[41]). (Rousseau even provocatively suggests that marriage is "extolled with much skill and care by women in order to establish their rule and to make dominant the sex that should obey" (159[41]).) Marriage is, in both Rousseau's and Augustine's eyes, the chief example of social life, but this comes to bear very differently in each of their moral arcs.

[59] Rousseau, "Discourse," 224[1].

self, separate from my reputation and inscrutable to those around me if I am successful in projecting the image I want. Pride and *amour propre*, the psychological shifts that spur on the second stage in each story, both lead human beings to the divided and often conflictual subjectivity that we know today.

The comparison that gives rise to the new social subjectivity of *amour propre* likewise leads human beings to develop their capacities of reason. Once they enter into social relationships with one another, human beings wish to be seen as the strongest, the most courageous, the smartest, et cetera. These superlatives, as comparisons, are the first exercises of reason that humans undertake. Rousseau writes that "The relations that we express by the words great, small, strong, weak, fast, slow, fearful, bold, and other such ideas…finally produced in [the human being] some sort of reflection."[60] At first these thoughts are closer to instinct, but over time they develop into reflection.

Amour propre—the love for how one is perceived, usurping the innocent *amour de soi-même*—not only arises alongside reason, but guides and determines a person's reason, too, just as Augustine claims the loves orient the rational will. It is "by [the passions'] activity that our reason perfects itself…it is not possible to conceive why someone who had neither desires nor fears would go to the trouble of reasoning."[61] Rousseau argues that human beings' ends are not determined by their reason, but rather their reason is determined by their ends. Why would these early human beings have reasoned that they should form hunting bands if not for their desire for meat, i.e., for self-preservation? Likewise, why would a human being in the second

[60] Rousseau, "Discourse," 166[5].
[61] Rousseau, "Discourse," 145[18].

stage reason about how to become the most socially esteemed if not for the driving force of *amour propre*?[62]

The development of rationality in the second stage, and its relationship to the *amours*, reveals the depths of the parallel between the second *Discourse* and the doctrine of original sin. In both, human rationality takes a person's love as its end, and the second stage is defined by a corruption of that love: from a constant object to a variable one. (In both, too, the objects of love give birth to reason, though in markedly different ways: God simply gives reason to human beings, though it is still limited in the first stage, while in Rousseau's retelling reason develops organically to achieve the ends of the *amours*.) Just as the so-called "standard of man" toward which Adam and Eve turn is mutable and even volatile compared to God, so too is the socially determined yardstick of *amour propre*.[63] As people become increasingly unequal to one another, their subjective capacities of judgment also differ more widely. But these capacities for judgment are precisely the way that one must gauge his or her reputation. *Amour propre* leads people to rely on others' judgment, and also, by the same process, to become increasingly different. As an object of love that grounds human reason, *amour propre* is by its nature inconsistent. In both Augustine's doctrine of original sin and Rousseau's second *Discourse*, the second stage of the moral arc is characterized by this shift from a constant to a mutable object of love—and in both cases, the resulting pridefulness and vanity gives rise to all other vices, and even to the depths of human depravity.

[62] It still seems possible that, under this schema, a highly civilized person might be able to employ reason to determine his or her ends, or at least come to believe that he or she is capable of this (perhaps mistakenly—who's to say this is not simply guided by the desire to be reputed as the most enlightened or reasonable?). Rousseau rather argues here that without the basic love for one's own advantage, reason couldn't come to be because a person would otherwise have no end toward which to employ it. Reason is secondary to the loves that ground a person's psychology.

[63] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.4.

Perfectibility. Just as the second stage of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* reveals the potential magnitude of human immorality, it also opens the great potential for human achievement. Rousseau calls this perfectibility, leading toward "the perfection of the individual, and in effect toward the decrepitude of the species."[64] Such a magnitude of potential—in both positive and negative directions—derives from humankind's unique freedom and rationality. As I will demonstrate, Rousseau's conception of human perfectibility is another of the many parallels to the doctrine of original sin.

For Rousseau, human freedom is the possibility to choose actions within a range of possible options, such as acting according to or against a given natural instinct. While animals must act according to instinct, human beings behave "by an act of freedom; as a result the Beast cannot deviate from the Rule prescribed to it even when it would be to its advantage to do so, while man often deviates from it to his detriment."[65] (In his description of freedom, Rousseau already suggests its pernicious possibilities.) Human beings are free to choose their actions: they may follow their first impulse, but they may also suppress or ignore instinct and choose a different course of action. Human free choice is not causally determined by nature—it is its own cause. Rousseau writes that a person "recognizes himself free to acquiesce [to his natural impulses] or resist…in the power of willing, or rather of choosing…are found purely spiritual acts about which nothing is explained by the Laws of Mechanics."[66] A person's choices are not part of a predetermined, scientifically discoverable chain of events. They may be bounded by the possibilities of a person's material context and guided by *amour propre*, but any freely made choice is still its own cause.

[64] Rousseau, "Discourse," 171[18].
[65] Rousseau, "Discourse," 143[14].
[66] Rousseau, "Discourse," 144[15].

Remember how similar this is to Augustine's description of human freedom. Because it would be preposterous for God to cause evil, Augustine argues that the only cause for Adam and Eve's disobedience is their choice to disobey. No predetermined causal chain can explain their action. Even after the Fall, when human beings are burdened with the punishment of internal discord, they still may choose to act on or suppress impulses such as lust or anger. For Augustine as well as Rousseau, the will is not free to determine its orienting love, but a person is free to make choices within that orienting love. In the second stage, for Augustine, freedom *from* the fallen state is elusive, even if we may make various choices within that state. Likewise, Rousseau suggests that *amour propre* directs our choices away from what is perhaps in our best interest, but we still are capable of making choices.

For Rousseau, our freedom means that we human beings can choose to perfect our nature or to degrade it. The "faculty of perfecting oneself," which "resides in us, in the species as well as in the individual," causes humankind's "enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues to flourish."[67] Take moral reasoning in philosophy and religion as an example. Only in the second stage, when humankind's capacity for reason develops, does Rousseau note that "morality was beginning to enter into human Actions."[68] Morality, or goodness achieved through and bolstered by reason, is fuller and more sophisticated than the natural, immediate goodness of the first stage. But the rationality that leads human beings to develop systems of morality and

[67] Rousseau, "Discourse," 144–145[16].
[68] Rousseau, "Discourse," 170[16].

ethics also permits them to suppress their natural pity and ignore others' suffering.[69] (Remember that the serpent promises that the tree of knowledge will grant knowledge of both good and evil.)

Likewise, without being driven by *amour propre*, we wouldn't care to become the best singer or dancer or orator, or the most handsome or strong.[70] The heights of human achievement have been motivated, in part, by the vain subjectivity of the second stage. But neither would we be insistent that the most important thing to preserve is our public image, rather than our lives. Human beings would not kill and be killed for honor, or risk their health to perfect a skill or one's beauty. Only human beings, with their rationality and freedom, are capable of the achievements of the arts and sciences that we know today, but likewise "man alone [is] liable to become imbecile."[71] Human beings have a much greater moral and intellectual potential than animals or inanimate objects, but this greatness can be of a negative magnitude just as easily as—and perhaps more easily than—it can be positive.

Augustine expresses the same in his moral psychology of humankind. He writes, "the condemnation was of such a kind that man who would have become spiritual even in his flesh, by observing the command, became carnal even in his mind."[72] Free choice had the potential to exalt human beings to a life of felicity and peace, to raise them to a spiritual life far higher than the creatures over which they were set to rule (those creatures could not choose to be good like human beings can).[73] But free choice, grounded in a love for oneself rather than love of God,

[69] See Rousseau, "Discourse," 157[36]: "It is Philosophy that isolates him [man]; by means of Philosophy he secretly says, at the sight of a suffering man, perish if you wish, I am safe. 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. Savage man has not this admirable talent; and for want of wisdom and of reason he is always seen to yield impetuously to the first sentiment of Humanity."

[70] Rousseau, "Discourse," 170[16].

[71] Rousseau, "Discourse," 144[16].

[72] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.15.

[73] See Augustine, *City of God*, 12.1: "Yet the other things in the created universe are not in a better condition [than human beings] because they are incapable of misery; for the other members of our body are not to be called better than our eyes, just because they cannot be blind. A sentient nature, when suffering, is better than a stone which is

debased even the higher human faculties. And to those who receive grace, the heights of human achievement are even more clearly palpable, for they have the moral knowledge that Adam and Eve did not alongside the freedom from their fallen nature so that they properly love God and are capable of acting on it.[74] Likewise, Rousseau's concept of perfectibility does not just encompass the potentially good faculties of human beings that arise alongside *amour propre*—the achievements of reflection and free choice—but also the moral debasement that can occur.

Physical corruption and death. Like the second stage of the moral arc of original sin, the second stage of Rousseau's proposed moral arc brings about physical maladies and newfound awareness of death for humankind. Given that the beginning of Rousseau's second stage is marked by entry into society, he writes, "one is strongly inclined to believe that the history of human diseases could easily be written by following that of civil Societies."[75] The variation and inequality between people that results from *amour propre* becomes manifest not just psychologically, but materially. Rousseau describes

> The extreme inequality in ways of life, the excessive idleness of some, the excessive labors of others, the ease with which our appetites and our sensuality are aroused and satisfied, the excessively exotic dishes of the rich that fill them with astringent sauces and wrack them with indigestions, the bad food of the Poor…the want of which leads them greedily to strain their stomachs when they get the chance, the late nights, the excesses of every kind…Such are the fatal proofs that most of our ills are of our own making….[76]

The state of nature's material equality meant that all were more or less equal in moderation and vigor. In the first stage, people knew "almost no other illnesses than wounds and old age."[77] But *amour propre*, like pride, makes our bodies into our antagonists. (He notes the extreme toils of

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quite incapable of suffering; and in the same way the rational nature, even in wretchedness, is superior to the nature which is bereft both of reason and sense and therefore cannot be the victim of misery."

[74] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.26.

[75] Rousseau, "Discourse," 141[8].

[76] Rousseau, "Discourse," 140–141[8].

[77] Rousseau, "Discourse," 141[8].

some people, mirroring God's curse in Genesis that humans will be cursed to toil in order to yield food from the earth.)[78] While in a state of relative equality, all people can live well. In contrast, a wide distribution of lifestyles means that most people cannot live within the moderate range of what is healthful. Just like in the fallen state, in Rousseau's version of the second stage maladies and physical pains abound.

Not only do human beings suffer more illness and injury in the second stage, but they are also conscious of their impending death. He writes, "an animal will never know what it is to die, and the knowledge of death and of its terrors, is one of man's first acquisitions on moving away from the animal condition."[79] In the state of nature, a person can know and fear pain because he or she can experience it, survive it, and remember it. But a person can never remember his own death, and without coming to know and remember other people through social life, he will never be affected by their deaths. We must have sustained social contact with others to learn and care that they die, and we must have developed our capacities of reason to deduce that we, too, will die in the future. The rationality and social self-conception that develop alongside *amour propre* bring along with them the anxieties of our inevitable end.

Recall that the punishment for the original sin is not immediate death, but rather a life of suffering with the knowledge of future death. Eve fears that she will die as soon as she disobeys God's command, but instead the pair is banished from the Garden of Eden to live a toilsome, painful life, with the ominous promise that "you are dust, / and to dust you shall return."[80] Even though Augustine maintains that Adam and Eve would have remained immortal had they continued to love and obey God, this does not negate the parallel between the punishments for pride and the aftereffects of *amour propre*. Rather than being punished by immediate death, the

[78] Gen. 3:17–19 (NRSV).
[79] Rousseau, "Discourse," 145[18].
[80] Gen. 3:19 (NRSV).

original sin is instead immediately punished by giving Adam and Eve the concept of their inevitable future death, just as *amour propre* grants human beings the concept of their death, too.

The general will. Rousseau reunites the fragmented subjectivity of civilized man through his concept of the general will.[81] After people, entering civil society, develop a sense of *amour propre*, the author continues a moral arc parallel to that of the doctrine of original sin. As this paper has discussed above, the doctrine of original sin's hopeful end is the concept of grace, through which God reorients human love toward him, granting some people the willpower not to sin after the Fall by cleaving to God's will. In both Rousseau's entry into civil society and the Christian account of the Fall, human beings come into a fuller subjectivity by shifting the source of their self-conception from something consistent in character (for Rousseau, the limited self-concept of "Savage man" and for Augustine, God) to something variable (for Rousseau, the perception of others; for Augustine, one's own will and desires). In each case, a variable human standard replaces something stable. The division and newfound instability of human social life and rationality is what brings about the human moral psychology we experience today. The doctrine of original sin provides a solution to this state through grace: God grants some people the ability to love God and adhere to his will again, which the pre-Fall human beings were also once capable of. Moral psychology before the Fall is still markedly different from the moral psychology of those granted grace, as the goodness of the latter is more fully informed by a moral concept of good—only granted by the tree of knowledge. In addition, those granted grace still may experience the difficulties of a divided, fallen soul in their earthly lives.

Rousseau's general will represents a parallel move in his account of human moral and social development: he recreates a newly stable basis for human subjectivity by suggesting that

[81] Rousseau discusses the general will most famously in his work *Of the Social Contract*, but as this paper refers to the second *Discourse* and the *Letter to Beaumont* only, I will limit my discussion of the general will to Rousseau's description of the concept in these latter texts.

those in a society may unite their wills into one. In the second *Discourse*, he briefly discusses the proper government of society: "The People having, in regard to Social relations, united all their wills into a single one, all the articles this will spells out become so many fundamental Laws that obligate all the members of the State without exception."[82] He advocates for a similar course of events in religion in the *Letter to Beaumont*: because all are "in agreement about what is important…With this small number of articles, form a universal Religion that is, so to speak, the human and social Religion which every man living in society is obliged to accept."[83] The onset of *amour propre* begins in social life, when people become aware that what one person sees through his or her own eyes is not the same as what another person sees. They realize that every other human being has the same subjective capacities of judgment and esteem that they do, and begin to prize that esteem. This places their ends in competition with one another: each wishes to be considered the strongest, the most honorable, the most attractive. And at the creation of the general will, Rousseau notes that it is "in regard to Social relations" that humans unite their wills.[84] The process by which human beings reconcile the conflicts and vices introduced by *amour propre* is a reconciliation of *amour propre* itself. The general will returns those who participate in it to subjective experiences that are more or less equal to one another, like those in the state of nature, but this time complete with the rationality, sociality, and morality of civilization.

Rousseau's general will, like grace, thus completes the moral arc of humanity. The first stage is good but rather simple, the second stage is vicious but with a fuller knowledge of moral good, and in the third stage human beings are finally returned to a constant goodness. Both

[82] Rousseau, "Discourse," 184[44].
[83] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Letter to Beaumont," in Letter to Beaumont*,* Letters Written from the Mountain*, and Related Writings:*, trans. Christopher Kelly and Judith R. Bush and ed. Christopher Kelly and Eve Grace (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2001), 59.
[84] Rousseau, "Discourse," 184[44].

Rousseau's and Augustine's accounts depend on the orientations of human beings' loves and desires, with Augustine's arc centered around the changing relationship of humans to God and Rousseau's arc depending on the development of human subjectivity. Rousseau's account does not stick strictly to the timeline of Genesis and the doctrine of original sin, and frames it as a more naturalistic, anthropological account.[85] And, of course, God is conspicuously absent from Rousseau's version, justifying his description of human beings in the first stage as pre-rational, pre-social, and pre-moral. Still, Rousseau creates a moral arc in his second *Discourse* undeniably parallel to that of the doctrine of original sin.

[85] Hence the episode of the Golden Age in the second *Discourse*. The Golden Age might, at first glance, appear to present a problem to my claim of the parallel moral arcs. It is the very first phase of human life in society, after subjectivity, sociality, and reason develop but before vice takes hold, and Rousseau describes it wistfully. It is an age in which human beings are capable of reflecting upon morality, justice, and order, but aren't yet so alienated from one another as to be evil (see Rousseau, "Discourse," 171–172[18–19]). Alberg writes that this is the "rousseau-ian equivalent of the Garden of Eden" (Alberg, "Rousseau and the Original Sin," 787). And he is right, insofar as this is the stage at which characters like Adam and Eve might have existed, if ever. In Rousseau's Golden Age, human beings achieve a semblance of *moral* goodness, but they haven't quite eaten of the tree of knowledge, so to speak—they are not "like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5, NRSV). Alberg's account, however, of the divergence between Rousseau's second *Discourse* and the doctrine of original sin also relies on the asymmetry of the two stories, in particular because the transition between the state of nature, the Golden Age, and civil society may not appear to fit neatly into the arc I propose.

Still, this does not negate the strength of the parallels between Rousseau's moral arc of humankind and Augustine's. Rousseau's removal of God and his perhaps related choice of a natural history as his form—even while he acknowledges that the story is imaginary—suggests the rather different pacing, which in turn allows for a more gradual transition between stages than in Genesis. (There, we barely see anything of the Garden of Eden at all.) The Golden Age marks the turning point between the first and second stage that I have proposed, perhaps sitting ambiguously between them but not decisively countering my schema. Perhaps it can also be read, in line with Alberg's commentary, as Rousseau's concession to Genesis: morally good, but simple, people who had limited concepts of justice and good might have once existed.

IV. Getting rid of God

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern.

—Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*[86]

In his 1762 *Letter to Beaumont*, Rousseau defends his writings against a takedown by the Archbishop of Paris, Christophe de Beaumont. The letter addresses questions of religion with reference to his *Discourse on Inequality* (as well as *Emile*, especially the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar"). In it, Rousseau makes several remarks about the relationship of reason to belief in God that suggest an answer to why Rousseau might have excluded God from his moral arc of humankind. Christianity, as the "most reasonable" religion, and its immaterial God may be incomprehensible to pre-society human beings, who lack the capacity for reflection.[87] Why include God in a story about humans before those very humans could have understood or known him?

In previous sections of this paper, I have pointed out a relationship between God's absence from Rousseau's second *Discourse* and the absence of sociality and rationality from humans in the state of nature. One reading of this relationship goes as follows: Rousseau sees that the moral arc of the doctrine of original sin is compelling, but removes God to provide a more naturalistic account and, as a result, finds that human beings would also be without the gifts of rationality and sociality prior to Rousseau's version of the Fall. However, Rousseau is self-professedly not an atheist, even if the second *Discourse* garnered such accusations against him.[88] Instead, he insists to the Archbishop that the Christian conception of an immaterial God is

[86] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 35.
[87] Rousseau, "Letter," 47.
[88] See Rousseau, "Letter," 47: "Your Grace, I am Christian, and sincerely Christian, according to the doctrine of the Gospel…I join in my heart with the true servants of Jesus Christ and the true adorers of God…." See also Rousseau, "Letter," 22: "After my *Discourse on Inequality*, I was an atheist and a misanthrope. After the *Letter to d'Alembert*, I was the defender of Christian morality…Now I am impious. Soon perhaps I will be devout."

something only accessible via reason and reflection. So the *Letter to Beaumont* suggests that the order of causality is the reverse: first, he has come to the conclusion that human beings are, before the progress of society, without reason. As a result of this conclusion, it is reasonable for Rousseau to rewrite the moral arc of original sin without God as an actor in the story.

Defending his model of religious education, Rousseau argues that prior to achieving the capacity for reflection, human beings cannot understand the nature of God. He writes that "the mind of man—without progress, without instruction, without culture, and just as it comes from the hands of nature" cannot alone come to understand "sublime notions of the divinity."[89] Instead, "these notions present themselves to us in the proportion that our minds are cultivated."[90] The Christian notion of God is incorporeal and intellectual, and thus inaccessible to the senses. To come to understand the nature of the Christian God is a process of education and refining one's reasoning, for there exists no concrete object, or anything with material extension, to which a person can point to and identify as God. As such, a person whose capacities for reason and reflection are undeveloped cannot come to a full understanding of God.

Rousseau uses this line of reasoning to argue that children should not be taught about the nature of God before the age of reason, because they will inevitably come to an erroneous understanding of him.[91] But he specifies that he refers also to "barbarous or savage men."[92] Humans in the state of nature, such as those he describes in the second *Discourse*, cannot conceive of God before they develop the capacity for reflection, which happens as they enter social life. Elsewhere in the letter, he notes that the first time human beings develop conscience and concepts of justice and morality is in the so-called Golden Age, when human beings have

[89] Rousseau, "Letter," 40.
[90] Rousseau, "Letter," 40–41.
[91] Rousseau, "Letter," 35–37.
[92] Rousseau, "Letter," 39.

begun "to cast their eyes upon their fellows."[93] So Rousseau implies that humans in the state of nature could not conceive of God, precisely because they are unable to reflect.

Only by reading the *Letter to Beaumont* can we come to a fuller understanding of why Rousseau has come to rewrite the moral arc of the doctrine of original sin in the way he has. Observing that many people are not capable of arriving at the true concept of God without highly developed reason—let alone without a sophisticated education—Rousseau would have seen it as impossible for the first human beings to have understood or interacted with God. The second *Discourse* therefore excises God, and accordingly describes the first stage of human moral development as pre-social and pre-rational. At minimum, Rousseau's more naturalistic version, self-conscious about its status as a rational myth, aims to implicitly accuse Genesis and the doctrine of original sin of themselves being rational myths. For both stories, the first stage is irretrievable and the third seems perpetually out of reach. The former explains where we are and the latter motivates us to improve. These arcs are powerful because human beings seem to always exist in the middle state that is riddled with suffering, whether we take after Augustine and call it "fallen" or follow Rousseau's lead and call it "civilized." The second *Discourse*, by mimicking the moral arc of the doctrine of original sin, forces readers to acknowledge that the latter's powerful evocation of human moral psychology comes from its status as mythic or fictional.

But there are other, more provocative suggestions here. By borrowing the moral arc of original sin, but marrying it to the assertion that through reason alone human beings attain moral knowledge, the second *Discourse* suggests that God and religious morality are in fact extraneous to the arc that original sin first asserts. Rousseau could have proposed religious morality as a solution to the moral failures of humankind—indeed, he writes to the Archbishop that "the

[93] Rousseau, "Letter," 28.

essential truths of Christianity…serve as the foundation of all good morality."[94] But he chooses to maintain the symmetry of the arc: his third stage is a social reconciliation of human beings under the general will, which he argues will resolve the social division that spurred on the second stage. If God isn't part of the first stage, then Rousseau assumes he can't be part of the last. We see that for Rousseau, the importance of understanding the doctrine of original sin as a myth, and in turn the importance of rewriting it, is that the profound explanatory power of the first stage has real influence as to how the myth's readers conceive of the third, future stage. The second *Discourse* and the *Letter to Beaumont* taken together imply that God, if he only arises as a contingent feature of human history, cannot properly figure into the arc's third stage.

Further, is it possible that Rousseau suggests that God does not cause, but is caused by, human intelligence? Left uncredited as the Creator in the second *Discourse* and qualified as only knowable by the heights of human intelligence in the *Letter to Beaumont*, God loses all potency except as a concept or an ideal. These two texts are ultimately ambiguous as to whether God is real beyond the concept; the *Letter to Beaumont* seems sincere in its value of religion and religious thought, but qualifies them as rational endeavors nonetheless. If Christianity is the height of rationalism, perhaps humankind's perfectibility—rationality included—calls for not just a general will of laws and government, as Rousseau suggests in the second *Discourse*, but of a universal religion, as he writes in the *Letter*. But the second *Discourse*, whose general will is absent religious implications, leaves open the question as to whether Rousseau's suggestion to Beaumont is a straightforward one.

[94] Rousseau, "Letter," 47.

V. Conclusion

This paper has endeavored to show that Rousseau's second *Discourse* mirrors the moral arc of the doctrine of original sin, adopting its use of three stages in which different objects of love orient human moral psychology to differing effects. Where Augustine writes of the Garden of Eden, in which Adam and Eve love and obey God and are good as a result, Rousseau has the state of nature and humans' *amour de soi-même*, which produces the goodness of pity. Then, in both stories the object of human love changes, marking the shift to the second stage. In the doctrine of original sin, humans turn their love away from God toward themselves. This is the sin of pride, in which human beings cleave to their own decision-making, more mutable than the unchanging God, as a yardstick for goodness. In the second *Discourse*, as human beings enter society, they develop *amour propre*, a pride-like love for one's appearance and reputation. As people attempt to distinguish their own reputations from others', people become increasingly unequal and so this object of love becomes more and more variable. The second stage, then, is defined by human moral psychology's foundation on mutable, and sometimes volatile, love objects. Both pride and *amour propre* cause human beings to have divided and conflictual subjective experiences, and are the source of all subsequent vices in their respective stories. Augustine's readers, Rousseau's readers, and the readers of this paper all live in the second stage. The moral arc is compelling across time because it seeks to explain and solve the moral strife in which humankind has always lived.

The third stage, perpetually in the future, offers a solution to humankind's moral ills: a return to the simple and constant love of the first stage, without reducing the moral, rational, and social sophistication gained in the second stage. For this purpose Augustine presents grace, God's ability to reorient a person's love toward him so that person may have the moral fortitude

to withstand the temptations of his or her fallen nature. This version of the third stage is achieved on an individual basis. Some people receive grace, while others remain in the second, fallen stage as long as they live. For those who are not yet reoriented towards God, grace remains an ideal, only to be read about or hoped for. Rousseau's third stage is ideal when he proposes it, but unlike grace it is necessarily communal, and thus begs for its real-life implementation if it is ever to be realized. His third stage takes the form of the general will, a social reconciliation of human wills that counters the division, competition, and vice caused by *amour propre*. As described in the second *Discourse*, the general will is enacted in the form of agreed-upon laws and government, all expressions of the united will to which everyone consents. Rousseau's third stage, though clearly ideal as long as it remains on the page, cannot both be enacted for some and remain ideal for others, like Augustine's version. Instead, for the general will to be brought about, it requires that all people in a society participate. Any hope for Rousseau's third stage must include the wish that the general will exit the realm of the ideal and enter reality.

The tension between ideal and actual is all the more salient in the *Letter to Beaumont*. There, Rousseau suggests that Christianity, "the most reasonable and holy Religion on earth," and the Christian conception of God are inaccessible to the unreasoning mind—and therefore to those in his first stage, the state of nature.[95] This helps to clarify why Rousseau has excluded God from his rational myth, even while he has repeated a moral arc first provided by Christianity. The pre-rational human beings in the first stage cannot understand God's nature, let alone interact with him. If God is only comprehensible to rational beings, he should not feature in an account of a species that starts out without rationality. As a result, God and many of the characteristics of the human condition that he grants (such as rationality, sociality, human superiority over animals, and agriculture) are absent in Rousseau's first stage. Rousseau suggests that God,

[95] Rousseau, "Letter," 47.

comprehensible only by way of advanced reason, is an ideal that we cannot in good faith include in our imagination of early humankind. It is "necessary to have exact Notions" about the state of nature, says Rousseau, "in order to judge our present state adequately," and that means getting rid of God.[96]

One thing Rousseau certainly maintains from the story of the fall is the symmetry of the first stage and the third (hence why I have dubbed the structure an "arc"). While the symmetry is not perfect, the solution to the strife of the second stage is, as in Augustine's account, to refound human moral psychology on the love of a consistent object. In Rousseau's first stage, the object of human love is not God; neither is it God in the third stage, even if human rationality now makes this possible. Instead, these stages are defined by *amour de soi-même* and the general will. Rousseau admits that human beings have a concept of God in the *Letter to Beaumont*, but nowhere does that figure into his proposal for a solution to human moral failures in the second *Discourse*. In this light, the *Letter*'s description of a religious general will—"a universal Religion"—suggests itself as not entirely sincere, or at least not as straightforward as it purports.[97] It seems, instead, that if God is not a necessary feature of human nature from the start, the second *Discourse* proposes that God is not necessary for its ends, either. One could read this as an accusation only against organized religion and the grand edifices of theology, but perhaps Rousseau also suggests that the concept of God itself is a construction of highly sophisticated human reason, available only to those in civilized society.

Given this paper's limitation of scope to only two of Rousseau's many writings, the question of whether Rousseau views God as real or as a rational human construction will not be

[96] Rousseau, "Discourse," 127[4].
[97] Rousseau, "Letter," 59. Rousseau writes here that this "universal Religion" is also "the human and social Religion." Perhaps this religion, "human and social," is not so different from the secular government enacted by the general will.

decisively answered here, though I would like to suggest this question as an avenue for future investigation. For now, I hope to have gotten into view the precision with which Rousseau's second *Discourse* enacts a Godless version of the moral arc of original sin (even if its presentation as a natural history sometimes obscures the parallels). I also hope to have suggested why Rousseau thought that a new rational myth was necessary: God and humankind's natural sociality, rationality, and morality must go hand in hand. To remove one—whether God or these features of human nature—requires a reformulation and reassessment of the other.

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