How does Rousseau show his argument for evolutionary progress through the quote, “By stripping this Being, so constituted, of all the supernatural gifts he may have received, and of all the artificial faculties he could have only acquired by prolonged progress; by considering him, in a word, such as he must have issued from the hands of Nature, I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but, all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all” (page 81).

Rousseau believes that human inequality is a naturally occurring phenomena as humans are destined to be unhappy. Rousseau directly contradicts his predeccessors, Plato and More, as he argues that humans continuously move further and further away from Utopia, the more we become a society; thus, he argues that humanity cannot go back to the Utopian state as they have evolved too far past it. The crux of Rousseau’s argument lies in the concept of evolutionary progress, which at the time is a revolutionary idea. Rousseau carefully demonstrates his argument for evolutionary progress through careful diction in the quote, “By stripping this Being, so constituted, of all the supernatural gifts he may have received, and of all the artificial faculties he could have only acquired by prolonged progress; by considering him, in a word, such as he must have issued from the hands of Nature, I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but, all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all,” (Rousseau 81).

Rousseau first strips humans down to the bare bones in order to begin his argument that evolutionary progress in human society lead to the inequality seen in France during the mid-1700s. This removal introduces the argument of evolutionary progress in human societies leading to the inequality as seen in the mid-18th French society. “Stripping”shows the simplification of a human being. By doing so, Rousseau demonstrates how humans have progressed to inequality while also showing his criticism of the political system in France during the mid-18th century. In addition, Rousseau’s choice of “stripping” creates the image of a naked human, implying that the human race and its knowledge become vulnerable when looked at rawly. In addition, Rousseau implies that when we are the most vulnerable, humans are the happiest. **“**Supernatural gifts” refer to gifts from God that appeal to the spirit like guilt and grace. Rousseau implies that guilt and grace are not innate, which contrast the thoughts of More and Plato, by arguing that man is not happiest when his soul is at peace but rather when his basic instincts are satisfied. Rousseau’s choice in diction demonstrates his argument for evolutionary progress as these higher thinking abilities are layered onto basic human instinct. This layering allows Rousseau to demonstrate how this evolution leads to inequality and issues in society. Rousseau refers to the social hierarchies and societal issues like governmental abuse when talking about “artificial faculties.” Similar to supernatural gifts, Rousseau strips humans down to the bare bones away from “artificial facilities” in order to further his argument that the evolutionary progress leads to the inequality discussed. Rousseau directly addresses his argument for evolutionary progress in the phrase, “prolonged progress” and uses it to form his central argument that social layers added on by society lead to inequality and other worldly issues. The phrase also adds onto the sub-text that inequality is inevitable. I think that it is interesting how Rousseau emphasizes inequality due to the rising tensions in France at the time because of the political inequality. At this point, Rousseau shifts the sentence from stripping humans down to their basic instincts to discussing the basic characteristics of this stripped human.

Rousseau shifts his focus away from stripping away social layers to get the purest form of human nature. He then turns his attention to the discussion of how humans actually are in nature compared to other animals to deepen his argument for evolutionary progress. This shift begins Rousseau’s discussion of natural man as a utopia. At this point, the reader clearly sees how Rousseau believes what a utopia would be like and how it could exist, which lie in his argument for evolutionary progress ending a utopia. Rousseau grounds his argument of evolutionary progress that man is purest in his natural state, bringing elements of humanism’s tabla rosa. He begins to assert this claim by emphasizing “hands of nature.” This phrase allows the audience to understand his argument that humans progress negatively from their natural, instinctive state given to them by the “hands of nature.” I think it is interesting that Rousseau chose the word “nature” here because it clearly separates his argument from a spiritual background, placing emphasis on the natural, scientific inevitability of progress. This diction choice displays Rousseau’s Enlightenment ideals. Rousseau’s emphasis and repetition of the word “animal” adds onto instinctive state that he creates, emphasizing how man is stripped down to his fundamental state. This addition strengthens his argument for evolutionary progress by again showing the natural state as the purest form without inequality, displaying his idea of utopia. Rousseau uses the phrase “most advantageously organized” in order to show how humans will naturally evolve to organize a society and create the inequality seen in mid-18th century France. Through this diction choice, Rousseau foreshadows his overall argument of inequality and furthers his argument for the natural evolution to complete inequality.

In this quote, Rousseau asserts his argument for evolutionary progress through his careful selection in word choice. He argues that man has passed utopia and will divulge further and further into extreme inequality through its natural evolution. In addition, he separates himself from More and Plato by implying that humans cannot go back to this utopia as they have already evolved past this point.

Word Count: 1006

Honor Pledge:

I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completions of this work

*Shannon G. Kane*