Relativism as Fate of the Modern Civilization

—A Reading of Diderot's Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage —

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> Whatever conception of *the freedom of the will* one may form in terms of metaphysics, the will's manifestations in the world of *phenomena*, i.e. human actions, are determined in accordance with natural laws, as is every other natural events.— Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (translated by H. Reiss).

0 Presentation of the Theme.

I aim here to demonstrate that relativism is integral to modern Western thought. "Modern" here includes the Renaissance: the period in which the profane world view, making of the cultural creation realized by human abilities the leading principle of civilization was established, overcoming and replacing the a priori world view which took God as the absolute principle. This concept of the modern is defined in opposition to the medieval, rather than the "postmodern". Though from the postmodern viewpoint, one might make a different vision of the modern, according to the concept of the modern adopted here, it is difficult to place the present time outside the modern age. Relativism, then, is here to be considered as a basic idea of modern times, up to and including the present. I am not willing to argue the division of periods: I wish only to make clear that the following discussion, aiming to establish that the modern implies relativism, concerns not a past time but rather our own situation of thought.

What, then, is relativism? For the moment, I mean no more than 'relativism' in the ordinary sense: the world vision which not only acknowledges the plurality of value-principles, but claims this plurality to be necessary. That is to say, I am not thinking of relativism in an epistemological sense. In comparison with epistemological relativism, relativism concerning practical values does not seem to demand a strong theoretic basis. However, "anything goes" is not yet relativism. A theory needs to establish a historical or logical necessity and legitimacy before it can be called an -ism. Aside from the fact that I will propose no definite epistemological background, the notion of relativism here will not be very different from that of such a staunch relativist as Joseph Margolis [1]. I think, however, that, in aggressively

1) Cf. Joseph Margolis, "Relativism and Cultural Relativity", *JTLA*, Vol.22, 1997, pp.1-17. As shown in the following, I stand against the "strong" metaphysical relativism, which wishes to found relativism logically. On this point, see the critique of Margolis I develop in "Who's Afraid of Joseph Margolis? —Cultural Relativity vs. Relativism", *ibid.*, pp.61-77. In that paper, I am opposed to relativism, while in this present paper I argue for relativism. The contradiction, however, is only apparent. In the above paper, I argued that the notion of cultural relativity is already philosophical, while in the present paper I discuss relativism in that sense.

attacking other theories, as Margolis does, relativism would probably negate itself. Relativism is a positive world view rather than a destructive weapon against existing value principles. Insofar as it is opposed to an absolute monism, it would reject this, but the way of opposition should be relativistic: the wisdom of mutualism exists at the root of relativism. Wishing to make a claim, we pause to consider our claim objectively from the viewpoint of our opponent; that is mutualism. When we theorize, on the empirical basis of this mutualism, the mutuality's logic axiologically (i.e. from the viewpoint of political philosophy, ethics and aesthetics), we can establish relativism.

When people lost or dismissed God as ruler, the modern age began. There remained only human beings. Hobbes described this situation as perpetual struggle. In order to redraw the picture as more peaceful, what is required is the wisdom of a mutualism that will take notice of the rights of antagonists: it is this which instigated the modern age. We have an even simpler schema: having denied absolute monism, people had no other choice than relativism. Both are clear and logical enough as macroscopic explanations. The real state of thought is not, however, so simple. The import of our theme here—that relativism is necessary for the homocentric modern age—differs a little from these viewpoints. What I have in mind is the following: that the human beings who became the new masters of the world bear in their nature freedom and historicity, and that this is the root of relativism. Nature has no history in the proper sense: history establishes itself only in denying nature (and itself). The contradiction of human beings as historical nature[2] is pregnant with a drama, and so too is relativism as modernity. We are now going to read this drama in one text by Diderot: *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage* (hereafter *Supplement*).

Though our brief is not to describe the totality of Diderot's thought [3], we may need to confirm the importance of historical nature in his thinking. He began his philosophical career with deism, and passed afterwards to atheism. Deism is based on a perception of the regularity of the construction of the natural universe, and recognizes God only as the author of such a universe while denying or avoiding reference to God as *persona* in the manner of the Church. With regard to nature study, there is no difference between deism and atheism. Both recognizes the regularity (i.e. construction according to natural laws) of nature; whether one deduces from that regularity the existence of God as the author of natural laws or not, does not affect natural study. However it goes without saying that they produce basic differences in moral outlook. If one acknowledges the existence of God even as the author of natural laws, that God is the creator of human beings, because human beings are a part of nature. It would be impossible to assert that God is the creator only of the bodies of human beings: it would distort human nature, because human beings are such only by virtue of the union of mind and body. We have then to acknowledge that deism is really only a half measure as a critique of

2) This phrase is identical with the concept of the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida ("Logic and life"), but the content is different. Nishida identifies the human world with nature as "historical nature", while I mean by this expression only human nature, i.e. the nature peculiar to human beings.

3) I have sketched the outline of Diderot's thought in the following article for a philosophical dictionary: *Encyclopedic Dictionary of French Philosophy and Thought*, Tokyo, Kobundo, 1999, pp.161-71.

the Church as institution. To fulfil the purpose and meaning of the critique of the Church — moral liberty— , it is necessary to go on to atheism. *Supplement* is a work written in this context [4].

1 The physical and the moral

Supplement is generally known as a praise of free love: unlike in a civilized country such as France, in a "natural" society like Tahiti it is a matter of course to make love following natural desire. Indeed, "nature" was one of the most fundamental key concepts of the early modern age, especially in 18th century, widely expected to become the criterion of value in place of God. If nature can be a new standard of value, we are not far from the affirmation of sexual freedom.

When he originally planned the work as a book review [5], Diderot obviously recognized in the report of our adventurer a significant critique of civilization. He quotes as one of its most important merits "a better knowledge of our old earth (*notre vieux domicile*) and its inhabitants [6]". Indeed, Bougainville's *Voyage* teaches that there exist on this earth many different worlds and manners. Such knowledge however is not merely an object of simple curiosity. Instead of such an extrovert curiosity, Diderot's consciousness returns reflexively back to itself, and focuses into a critique of his own society. To this gaze of his, the customs from the hetero-cultures described by Bougainville offer a mirror in which to see itself. Personally I should even like to read this "*notre vieux domicile*" as meaning the European world. In fact, in opposition to France, Tahiti is described as a country which, curiously enough, has no religion and is managed with a morality based on nature. That is the reason why it can serve as a measure for a critique of institutions.

Supplement consists of dialogues between A and B as structural framework, into which are incorporated an address by an old Tahitian man, and conversations between the Almoner of Bougainville's troop and Orou, the Tahitian who takes him in. The setting is like this: in addition to the published *Voyage*, there exists in reality an unpublished supplement, which A is going to read with B who procured it. The old man's speech is a general critique of civilization, and the dialogue between the Almoner and Orou focuses on the critique of religion from the viewpoint of the morality of nature, targeting Christianity as a compulsory institution ruling over people's life and as an axiological notion. This is expressed exactly by the subtitle of the

4) This text appeared, in two parts, in Grimm's *Correspondance Littéraire*, 1773-74. All references are to the text of the following new complete edition: Diderot, "Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville ou Dialogue entre A et B sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas", in *Œuvres Complètes* (hereafter DPV), t. XII, ed. par G. Dulac *et al.*, Paris, Hermann, 1980, pp.197-249. I quote the text in English according to the following translation: *Diderot, Interpreter of Nature, Selected Writings*, translated by Jean Stewart and Jonathan Kemp, New York, International Publishers, 1963 ([1]1936), pp.146-91. The notes refer to, in the first place, the page of this English translation, then, in parenthesis, that of the French complete works.

5) The text of this book-review too is published in the same volume of the complete works as *Supplement* (note 4 above), pp.509-19.

6) *Op. cit.*, p.147 (580)

book: "Dialogue between A. and B. on the disadvantage of attaching moral ideas to certain physical actions incompatible therewith". Apparently "moral" may be interpreted as 'concerning morals', and "physical" as 'concerning the flesh', as "certain physical actions" means sexual intercourse. As we shall see in the following examination, through a discussion on sexuality, Diderot's argument directs itself of its own accord to the moral code in general; moral deeds in that context, however, cannot be called "physical actions incompatible with moral ideas". So the subtitle means: "sexual intercourse being purely physical or natural, it is a mistake to judge it from the viewpoint of morals". But at the same time, we have absolutely to take into account the fact that the pair of concepts "moral-physical" had a much wider meaning than now, and constituted a basic conceptual framework in 18th century France. We may comprehend this import, even in underlining the nouns in the subtitle: "actions and their ideas". It concerns, indeed, the relation between the "facts" and their "ideological assessment". This comprehension is important, because the sense of Diderot's question consists in it.

Today, morality and physics can hardly be opposed to one other. But in 18th century France, *morale-physique* had the wider meaning of "culture-nature", denoting, therefore, a basic pair of concepts. As an early example, let us examine the argument on the conditions for the appearance of genius by J.-B. Du Bos. In the first place, differences in the environment of the artist will bring about a great difference in result. If people are indifferent to art and men of power do not support artists, the might-have-been genius will not bring their talents to blossom; when, on the contrary, the public loves art and the emperor generously remunerates good artistic works, the ambition and emulation of artists are stimulated and the birth of genius is encouraged. Including also the presence of excellent masters, Du Bos calls such favorable conditions the "moral causes[7]" of genius. This phrase is not equivalent to 'moral support', for it denotes also substantial support; all indeed that we might understand as 'human causes'.

The 'human causes' are, however, not all. In spite of the most intensive encouragement given by emperor or king, in some countries art remains sterile. Quoting Fontenelle's words: "ideas are like plants and flowers which do not grow well in every climate", Du Bos affirms that art "did not blossom either beyond the 52 degrees of the northern latitude or in the region lower than 25 degrees [8]". This means that there exist "physical causes" as well: lacking these, art cannot prosper despite all human efforts. It is evident that this "physical" is not restricted to the area of physics, but covers all the domain of nature, or everything that is given to human beings. Therefore, we can consider the pair "physical-moral" as equivalent to "nature-culture". What is remarkable here is the fact that Du Bos, with regard to "physical causes", asks himself whether "it is not physical causes that start up moral causes [9]". He suggests that the promotion of art by men of power is also determined by natural causes. Diderot's problem in *Supplement* is exactly the same, in the sense that it concerns the intertwined relations between nature as given and history as human creation: the question is whether human activities are determined

7) Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poësie et sur la peinture*, Seconde Partie, 7e édition, (Slatkine Reprints, 1967), Section XII, p.136. My own translation.
8) *Ibid.*, Section XIII, pp.156-58.
9) *Ibid.*, p.151.

(or to be determined) by nature, or whether human freedom itself is a part of nature. If you accord a little more delicate attention, you find that this problem coincides with the subject of the theological polemic on the relation between grace and freedom[10]. Here is the basic element of philosophy for homo-centric modern civilization.

With the above confirmed, we can interpret the theme of *Supplement* expressed in its subtitle as the question of human freedom. Whether freedom is "moral" or "physical", is the theme of this work. "Moral" means here the normative system of ideas which regulates and makes significant our actions. Let us read our text. Orou the Tahitian asks the following question to his guest the Almoner:

> Yesterday, at supper, you mentioned 'magistrates' and 'priests,' whose authority regulates your conduct; but, tell me, are they the masters of good and evil? Can they make what is just to be unjust, and unjust, just? Does it rest with them to attribute good to harmful actions, and evil to innocent or useful actions? You could not think it, for, at that rate, there would be neither true nor false, good nor bad, beautiful nor ugly; or at any rate only what pleased your great maker, your magistrates and your priests to pronounce so [11].

The question has arisen from the refusal that the Almoner made with a sigh —"but my religion! my office!"— of Orou's wife and three daughters, from among whom Orou requested he should choose a companion for the night. Questioned about what religion is, he talked about "the great maker (*le grand ouvrier*)", i.e. God as the Creator. Of course, "magistrates" means profane powers including the King, "priests", religious powers. The problem is, then, to know whether such powers can arbitrarily decide values. From the viewpoint of Orou the Tahitian, as sexual love is a pure pleasure given by "nature, the sovereign mistress[12] ", which produces in addition such property as children, it would be folly to prohibit it. Then he wondered whether it is possible to evaluate something good as bad, or conversely to estimate something bad as good. It is the same problem that is expressed by the subtitle. Apparently, this speaks of sexual love, but in reality has a much broader meaning: a general critique of the ideological structure ("moral ideas") attributing values to conduct belonging to nature ("physical actions"), that is the theme of *Supplement*.

2 Nature as animality

Orou asked whether it is possible to "make what is just to be unjust, and unjust, just". "Make just/unjust" is the function of the assessment our ideas or thoughts execute. Well, what, in the first place, is "what is just/unjust"? Oruou talks ironically of the arbitrary decision by

10) In the so-called "Controversy on grace". The relation between grace and nature was one of the most fundamental subjects (see the work of Malebranche). Now, freedom takes the place of grace in the same structure: the same problem wears modern cloth.

11) Diderot, *op.cit.*, p.165 (605-06).

12) *Ibid.*, p.161 (601).

three masters. That is to say, in modern parlance, that values have no other foundation than institutional decision. Of course, Orou thinks this a laughable abnormality. For him, it is evident that the fundamentals of values reside in "nature as the sovereign mistress". Certainly, we have no other reason than nature to believe that sexual love is good. In the common notion of *Supplement* as praise of free love too, the axiological principle to affirm free love is considered as being simply in nature. In fact, the principle of Orou's axiology is to found the moral upon the physical. Is that, however, also Diderot's axiology? We should recall the structure of this book: A and B examine the "supplement" to Bougainville's *Voyage* including the dialogues between Orou and the Almoner. The spokesman of the author is not Orou but B. Indeed, reading this book from the standpoint of the axiology of nature promoted by Orou, we feel perplexed with a certain ambiguous attitude that B shows in his last dialogue with A, where they examine closely "nature".

The conclusive argument of Diderot is to be found in the summarizing dialogue A and B develop in the final part. Having read through together with A the unpublished "supplement" by Bougainville (including the address of the old Tahitian and the conversation between Orou and the Almoner), B says: "I see that except in this remote corner of our globe, there has never been morality and perhaps never will be anywhere." Then, answering A. who asks what B understands by "morality (*mœurs*)", B explains: "I understand a general submission to, and a conduct consequent on good or bad laws". If laws are good, we have good morality (*bonne mœurs*), if bad, bad morality (*mauvaise mœurs*). With regard to these laws, B speaks of three sorts of code as their real forms: "the laws of nature (*le code de la nature*), civil law (*le code civil*) and the law of religion (*le code de la religion*)", which conflict with one another. We should take notice of the fact that these three codes are variants of the three masters discussed by Orou and the Almoner, with this modification that God ("the great maker") is replaced by nature, a replacement which inaugurated modernity. Then B insists that we should accord to nature the same authority as has been given to God, and that civil law and the laws of religion must be modeled on the laws of nature[13]. It is a paradox to say that morality is found only in Tahiti, the island of nature. Indeed it is a radical paradox, because it implies a standpoint that wishes to found on nature the "law" to regulate human society. This suggests the radical heterogeneity of law and nature: to found law on nature means that men need such a voluntary decision as law even to follow nature. The fact that there is "morality" in Tahiti reveals that

13) I present in a simplified form the argument of: *ibid.*, pp.181-82 (628-30). I now explicate my reading. What A assumes to be B's opinion and B agrees unconditionally, is only the choice that after abolishing the codes of religion, people subordinate civil law solely to the law of nature. But A reformulates this and proposes another version: "if it be judged necessary to keep all three codes", the religious code and civil law "should only be exact copies" of the law of nature. B corrects this second version which he find "not very exact". However, what he negates in A's analysis concerns the idea that the law of nature is something "we carry always graven in our hearts": Diderot had consistently criticized this innatism throughout his career. Correcting A, B says that what we have by nature and share with other people is not something like "law", but only a similar "organization", "the same needs", and the same inclinations toward pleasure and pain. We should interpret this correction by B as suggesting what it can be for civil law to be a copy of the law of nature, but not as a negation of the second version proposed by A. The ideal is to abolish the religious code, but that is not a realistic idea: the two forms presented by A are not, then, practically very different.

Tahiti is not an island of pure nature, but constitutes a human society.

Now we need to know what is this nature, on which is to be modeled civil law. So B examines one after another, marriage, *galanterie*, coquetry, constancy, faithfulness, jealousy and modesty (*pudeur*) to ascertain which are natural and which are not[14]. For example, marriage is in nature, because it is an act necessary for "the reproduction of individuals", i.e. the conservation of the species. A's standard is simpler and clearer: what is shared by animals is in nature. In fact, if the definition says 'male-female' instead of 'man-woman', then we can judge without fear of error that the act or emotion in question is regarded as "natural". In fact, *galanterie*, which is described in terms of 'male-female', is regarded as a phenomenon in nature. From B's description of "coquetry" as "a contemptible game (*jeu perfide*)" and "a lie", A concludes that B regards it as not in nature. But B replies: "I don't say that". Indeed, *galanterie* is defined in terms of 'male-female' (meaning that animals know *galanteire* too?). The following two, constancy and faithfulness, are described in terms of the "child (*enfant*)" which applies only to human beings, and 'man-woman', but it is unclear whether they are in nature or not. It looks as if the answer is unnecessary; however is it evident that they are in nature? It is difficult for us to judge. This ambiguous impression is confirmed by the explanation given to "jealousy":

> B. The passion of a destitute and avaricious animal which fears a lack; in man an unjust feeling, a consequence of our false morals and of a property-right extended to a feeling, thinking, desiring and free object.
> A. Jealousy, then, you think, does not exist in nature?
> B. I don't say that. Vices and virtues equally exist in nature[15].

From the viewpoint of taking nature for the standard, we are shocked by this last phrase. However the primary question posed, in the second place, was whether it is possible to "make what is unjust to be just", thus acknowledging that nature includes "what is unjust"; the utterance "vices are in nature" is therefore congruent with the basic observation. Indeed, jealousy is said to exist in nature and is defined as an animal passion. But I find here two problems. The first, as I have indicated concerning *galanterie*, is the opinion that jealousy is in nature, i.e. that animals know this passion. In fact, through conversation with Orou, the Almoner observes that the Tahitians "hardly know jealousy [16]", which suggests that jealousy is a disease of civilization. Moreover, jealousy is described here as "a consequence of our false morals." "Being in nature" means "being a simple physical fact"; but, are not vices as well as virtues purely and simply moral concepts derived from our evaluative acts through the mediation of ideas? No doubt, the second problem is the most essential. B/Diderot thinks that "vices and virtues equally exist in nature", probably because of a consciousness of "law": if there are in nature no virtues to follow and vices to avoid, or at least something like their germs, it would be impossible to speak of the laws of nature, and the idea of modeling civil law

14) *Op. cit.*, pp.182-84 (629-34).
15) *Ibid.*, p.183 (632).
16) *Ibid.*, p.176 (622).

upon the laws of nature would be unfounded. Nature as animality is 'simply physical'; but when such an emotion as jealousy is said to be "in nature", that nature contains already a hint of moral ingredient. Nature containing some moral ingredient is nothing other than human nature.

3 Nature as humanity

The key that could resolve the ambiguity in the concept of nature we have found above, is the notion of property. Jealousy comes from "our false morals", because the notion of "ownership" is misapplied to human beings. B borrows this conception of property directly from the idea that emerges in the conversation between Orou and the Almoner. Besides, Diderot thinks that the problem of property divides the state of civilization from that of nature. In other words, the notion of property with regard to marriage and jealousy concerns the very core of the philosophy of nature and civilization. We shall, therefore, begin with an examination of this notion.

According to Orou, the mistake of the European system of marriage consists in taking human beings as objects of property: through the wedding before God, a man becomes the property of one woman, and a woman, of one man. Besides, this prohibition of adultery is effectively not respected. Orou "finds these singular precepts opposed to nature and contrary to reason".

> Contrary to nature because these precepts suppose that a free, thinking and sentient being can be the property of a being like himself. On what is this right (*droit*) founded? Don't you see that in your country they have confused the thing which has neither consciousness nor thought, nor desire, nor will; which one picks up, puts down, keeps or exchanges, without injury to it, or without its complaining, have confused this with the thing which cannot be exchanged or acquired, which has liberty, will, desire, which can give or refuse itself for a moment or for ever, which laments and suffers, and which cannot become an article of commerce, without its character being forgotten and violence done to its nature[17].

Needless to say, "property" in this sense is what B considered the origin of jealousy. Therefore, B claimed that jealousy is "a consequence of our false morals". Yet, in spite of all this, he affirms that jealousy exists in nature. On the other hand, Orou judges this custom "contrary to nature", and consequently criticizes it as a scandalous error. Our concern is B's judgment, but, in order to understand his point, we will examine first of all the ground of Orou's judgment. The "nature" in italics above encompasses the properties of human beings which neither other animals nor material objects share, i.e. human nature. Here "nature" is discriminated according to conformity to the nature peculiar to man, contrary to the former standard of conformity to the animal world. For the moment, the definition suggested here of human nature as "having feelings, thoughts and will" is objective and clear. However applying

17) *Ibid.*, p.164-51 (604-05). The editor of this work in the complete works (Le Centre d'Etude du 18e Siècle à Montpellier) indicates in a footnote that this thought was already a commonplace at the time of Diderot.

this standard to various human emotions and actions in order to estimate their naturalness, we find that ambiguity immediately appears. In principle, if human nature is having feelings, thoughts and will, any feeling, any thought, any will can be judged as fitting to human nature and therefore as "natural". It shall go without saying that jealousy is natural, and even indeed that all perversions, including vices, are to be regarded as existing in nature. We see here what B was thinking of, when he affirmed that jealousy is in nature, and this human nature is just what we have caught a glimpse of: "nature containing some moral ingredient". Orou could keep his domain of nature pure, because his critique was directed to the principles themselves, and did not touch the ambiguity of the reality: his critique is idealist, and because idealist, it could be sharp and trenchant.

Orou's concept of property, defined in contrast to nature, is congruent, for the moment, with the thought of Diderot expressed in the whole of this work. For Diderot finds in property the origin of civilization: nature ignores property, and with the notion of property begins civilization. The old Tahitian man addresses Bougainville as he is leaving the island:

> Here everything belongs to everybody. You have preached to us I know not what distinctions between "mine" and "thine". Our daughters and our wives are common to us all. You have shared this privilege with us; and you have lighted passions in them before unknown. They have become maddened in your arms; you have become ferocious in theirs. They have begun to hate each other; you have slain each other for them, and they have returned to us stained with your blood [18].

It is the notion of possession that gives birth to conflict. Tahiti, having previously ignored the concept of possession, is contaminated by the civilization coming from outside, with its concepts of property and struggle; Tahitian women are awoken to the feeling of jealousy. The idea that property and struggle are one with civilization, fits perfectly with the utopian vision of nature proper to the fictive "supplement" (the old man's address and the conversation of Orou and the Almoner). We should, then, ask whether we ever see either property or struggle in nature untainted by civilization. For, if not, how in the world was civilization born? Let us consult the dialogue between A and B:

> B. It seems that the cruel character which is sometimes found in him [the savage] comes from his having to defend himself against wild beasts. He is innocent and gentle wherever nothing troubles his repose and security. Every war is born from the common claim to the same property. One civilized man has a common claim with another civilized man to the possession of a field of which each occupies one end; and this field becomes the subject of dispute between them.
> A. And the tiger has a common claim, with the savage, to the possession of a forest; that is the first of all claims and the oldest cause of wars[19].

From war among civilized peoples is deduced the essence of war: something produced by a

18) *Ibid.*, p.154 (590).
19) *Ibid.*, p.151 (585).

collision of claims. Then this essence of war is applied to the primary war, that between beasts and men. This argument reveals that property is not peculiar to civilization, but rather the efficient cause of the birth of civilization. Indeed, aside from his struggles with beasts, the savage is gentle. But this supposition is fictive and utopian, while the struggles with beasts are a reality. In other words, nature civilizes itself from inside. Diderot acknowledges this ambiguity: that nature is civilization and nature at the same time. Certainly, the savage is considered as one ignorant of collisions of interest or struggle, as the Tahitians, for example, hardly know jealousy: as they have no notion of property, so there is no conflict. That is Tahiti and nature as utopia. Whence then, comes civilization? As to this question concerning reality, Diderot wished to find the cause of civilization in an outside enemy, that is , in beasts. We can recognize here the utopian tendency in Diderot, his wish to keep nature pure. In contrast to this pure nature, property is the cause of civilization, and the European system of marriage, which takes the human being as an object of possession, is a disease of civilization: that is the opinion of Orou. On the contrary, when B, representing Diderot, considered jealousy, which is a sort of faulty emotion of possession, "being in nature", Diderot was fixing his gaze at the radical ambiguity of nature in connection with human beings. Utopia is beautiful. But such an ideal vision should illustrate a reality, otherwise it remains a fairy tale. A sense of reality is required for thought that wishes to respond to the problems of the time.

4 Nature and the Laws of Nature

Unlike the clear opinion of Orou, there remains something obscure in B's assertion that vices, including jealousy, exist in nature as well as virtues. That obscurity comes from the radical ambiguity of nature in connection with human beings, from the fact that nature is civilization, and civilization is nature: nature in man includes together with feeling, reason and will, evils and perversions. Needless to say "vices" like jealousy belong to these. What, then, does it mean to say that these belong to "our false morals"? In other words, what is the ultimate criterion by which to judge some act as virtuous i.e. something to follow, and some other as vicious i.e. something to avoid?

As I have noted above (Section 2) in relation to the judgment that "morality is only in Tahiti", we must distinguish the laws of nature from nature in order to envisage this fundamental ambiguity. Free human nature can even choose an evil included in nature. Therefore, a free decision intervenes even when we follow nature. The law of nature is a legislation set up by a human freedom that wishes to render nature normative in rejecting perversions. If we distinguish the law of nature from nature, jealousy should, then, be able to "exist in nature", and to be "a consequence of our false morality" without contradiction anymore. That is, a vice may be a phenomenon in nature, and yet to follow it goes against the laws of nature. I admit that Diderot does not articulate this discrimination. His argument, however, as I have remarked above (at the end of the Section 2), presupposes it. And indeed, by supposing this discrimination, we can solve at least one seemingly very serious contradiction in the work.

It is undeniable that Diderot's logic in the conversation between A and B is confusing. If it is the laws of nature that civil law should model itself on, then he must ask what the laws of nature are. In place of this, however, he questions what nature is. From the viewpoint of the reader, as the main subject of the work is sexual love, and it is indeed recommended that we should follow natural pleasure, we may be disposed to take nature itself for the norm. Therefore, we are shocked by the affirmation that jealousy is in nature, with its scent of a positive evaluation. Diderot should have said that jealousy is in nature but is against the laws of nature. If, however, he did confuse nature and the laws of nature without any discrimination, he would have had to say that jealousy is not in nature. We have a hint in the text: in proposing that civil law should follow the laws of nature, B corrects A's notion of the laws of nature. Hearing B's above mentioned discussion on the three codes, A conceives that B intends to restore the unity of axiological principle by founding civil law upon the laws of nature so as to abolish the religious code which would thereby become useless[20]. Believing so, he thinks that the law of nature, as "the eternal relations which exist between men", is something "which we carry always graven in our hearts"[21]. B denies this innatistic notion, and explain the meaning of "nature" as follows:

> We have at birth only a similarity of organizations with other beings, the same needs, an attraction towards the same pleasures, a common aversion for the same pains; that is what makes man as he is, and which ought to be the basis of the morality suitable for him[22].

Nature in men consists in a definite form of physical organization and common inclinations to pursue pleasures and avoid pains. The law of nature, on the other hand, far from being graven as such in the heart, is only "the eternal relations which exist between men". What, then, are these "eternal relations"? They could be nothing but this ingredient of being "common" in nature. "Nature" is a certain organization inherent in every individual and inclination; that these are common constitutes the "relation" between individuals, which is regarded as equal to "the laws of nature". Law, however, is a form of imperative, while the simple notion of a relationship lacks the moment of an imperative. We notice here that the conversation between A and B, although founded upon the distinction between nature and the laws of nature, proceeds cautiously in order not to attract attention to this difference, or to create the semblance of the smallest possible difference.

At another point, however, this law of nature as "the eternal relations which exist between men", that is not pronounced here, is explicitly spoken of. It is to be found in Orou's reply to the Almoner, to which B clearly refers in the conversation with A, when he says "as Orou

20) As I have mentioned, these three correspond to the "three masters" described by the Almoner to Orou, with "nature" in place of God, that should be considered here as co-authors of the religious code along with "priests". Why then would the religious code be useless, if civil law were founded on the law of nature? This argument suggests, in my opinion, that Diderot conceives of religion only in terms of morality, i.e. rules measuring civil life.

21) *Op. cit.*, pp.181-82 (629).

22) *Ibid.*, p.182 (630).

guessed of ours [our country]" with regard to the necessary contradiction between the three codes. This additional reference to Orou's argument reveals that Diderot considers B's argument identical with Orou's. Orou discusses, not the three codes, but rather the "three masters". Hearing the account by the Almoner, he presumes there will be conflicts between the codes, and says as follows:

> Do you want to know what is good and what is bad in all times and in all places? Hold fast to the nature of things and of actions; to your relations with your fellows; to the influence of your conduct on your individual usefulness and the general good. You are mad if you believe that there is anything, high or low in the universe, which can add to or subtract from the laws of nature. Her eternal will is that good should be preferred to evil, and the general good to the individual good. You may ordain the opposite but you will not be obeyed [23)]".

Orou maintains that the ground of value consists solely in "the laws of nature". These laws are constituted by two articles. The first, that "good should be preferred to evil", is probably a tautologicaly valid formula, because, in the proper relation, what is preferred is called good. It is to be remarked that Diderot inverts this relation to give it the character of an imperative, since this reveals that the author recognizes the difference between nature and the laws of nature. That we have an inclination to pursue pleasure and to avoid pain, is a simple fact in nature. That "good should be preferred to evil", on the contrary, is clearly an imperative, or "law". Why, then, is the dimension of law necessary?

Diderot does not directly mention the topic of perversion. The existence of pain and evil in nature is spoken of, but not perversion. The precept, however, that "good should be preferred to evil" is senseless where no one prefers evil to good, which preference is precisely what constitutes perversion. The conception of the laws of nature owes its origin to a recognition that there exists in human nature at least the possibility of perversion. Because of its imperative moment, this law of nature can have a moral meaning, and function as a critique of institutions. Actual institutions include aspects to criticize. Institutions are not nature, but a result of the historical development of nature: as we have seen, civilization began within nature. Likewise it is perversions in human nature that gave birth to institutional evils: this first precept, then, serves as the principle of the radical critique of the institutions concerning sexual love. Thus, nature and the laws of nature are to be distinguished, and in fact are distinguished. At the same time, we have to notice that the difference between them is conceived as minimal. This precept comes directly from the facts in nature, and means that you should respect facts in nature. The difference is of dimension, and not of content. This is very important for the construction of theory, because, when nature is made into law as such, the law must be founded upon nature, otherwise the ground of the imperative within the law may be brought into question. Civil law should be modeled upon the law of nature, which, however, being the last reference, can not take something else as its ground. The law of nature is nothing other than the imperative to respect facts in nature as precepts. This presupposes there exist distinct virtues and vices in

23) *Ibid.*, p.166 (607).

nature. Both are founded upon pleasure and pain, and differentiated according to the attitude taken vis-à-vis pleasure and pain. Virtue is the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, vice, the converse, i.e. perversion, at the level of mutual existence with others.

The second article is also remarkable in another sense: the utilitarian imperative that "the general good" should be given priority over "the individual good". The first precept, that "good should be preferred to evil", has a force to regulate individual decisions, because we can choose a perversion for one reason or another. But this is mainly efficacious for individual conduct, and hardly influences the collective, which constitutes the most important field for morality. It is this second precept that concerns the collective, and so is indispensable for moral codes. Here we are dealing with the principle which opens "nature" in each individual horizontally to communal existence with others. This second article corresponds, in my opinion, to "the eternal relations which exist between men" presented in the dialogue between A and B as a law of nature. Orou, let us remember presented at the beginning two things to be taken into account: "the nature of things and of actions", and "your relations with your fellows". The former corresponds to the first precept, the latter, to the second.

The second article seems evident too. Yet is it evident because it is a "law of nature"? Where is the natural in this precept? Certainly it is founded on nature: as A and B say, that physical organization and a definite inclination of response to pleasure and pain are common to all men, is indeed a fact of nature. But the problem of the ground of the imperative as law is even more serious here, because, unlike value concepts such as good and evil, the fact of "being common" contains no moment of imperative.

However, Diderot conceived of this question differently. B says, in the above argument on marriage and jealousy, that in reality in France or Europe, it is difficult, especially concerning sexual love, to adopt a naturalistic morality. This means the utilitarian principle is not so difficult to implement. In fact, this principle would be soon established as basic rule of decision making in modern democratic society, and we may guess that it had spread to a certain extent into the ancien régime of Diderot's time. The power of the king might be absolute, but among people of similar power, there could be no way to make decisions other than on the principle of majority. The fact that this principle was implemented of its own accord might be considered as the sign of its naturalness. But theoretically, the problem is not solved. A common organization and common inclination to pleasure and pain are a natural but merely physiological fact. From such a fact, how are we to deduce an imperative for social morals? This seems a very difficult question, because it appears that, if all men share the same attraction towards the same pleasures and the same aversion from the same pains, the result should be conflict. In "nature", all people lay claim to the same pleasures and scramble to escape from the same pain; a conflict which could only be settled by muscular strength. However perverse an institution may be, it can be a device assuring the man of power pleasures, and that would be natural from his point of view. Power provides the man of power with natural pleasures and brings about a perverse state of affairs for most people. The utilitarian principle that "the general good is to be preferred to individual good" seems to be a precept of a higher dimension, i.e. not a "physical" but a "moral" precept, which regulates such a natural struggle and the

absolute claim on pleasure made by the individual, and by extension, all institutional perversions.

But Diderot argues in converse way. In considering this utilitarian principle to be founded on nature, he wishes to believe that there was no conflict in the state of nature (i.e. the savage is gentle). After translating nature into the common character, he considers, just as in the case of the first article, that to respect nature consists in respecting this common character, i.e. the existence of others. We have seen above that it was the primary struggle with the tiger that led to the formation of society and at the same time imposed the ethics of "common existence". In *Fragments of Politics*, written about the same period as *Supplement*, we find a clearer discussion of this problem. In apposition to the common physical organization of men, we have the following noun clause: "origin of the necessity of society, that is, of a common fight against common dangers coming from the bosom of nature itself which menace men from hundreds of sides[24)]".

By considering that society was born from nature, and that the genesis of society was accompanied by utilitarianism as the rule of its management, naturalistic morality is somehow ultimately supported. The core precept of this morality is, rather than the first precept of the pleasure principle, the second which insists on the common inclination to pleasure. This common character however requires a corollary which claims the subordination of individual pleasure to the common pleasure. For that purpose, it is necessary to interpret the common character as the equality of men, and to understand this in terms of mutuality. Pleasure and pains are facts of nature, and these are in fact common to all men. But this latter fact must be recognized. This recognition may lead us to realize that other people have a claim to pleasure just like ourselves, and that we need to acknowledge the other's claim in order to make our own. In addition to this, we have to accept the utilitarian principle of the majority will as a rule of mediation. The naturalistic morality of *Supplement* can only be established by such an extension of the concept of nature. The viewpoint of mutuality, which dominates the whole argument, is to be considered as a judgment of reason, although it is an extension of nature. It is a correct judgment of *lumen naturalis*: the "nature" in question here is no longer nature as animality but rather human nature, and besides, human nature apart from the perversions made by reason. This human nature is ambiguous; composed of the "moral" as well as the "physical", the laws of nature as well as nature.

We should recall what Orou says. Criticizing the European system of marriage for making human beings objects of property, he said not only that is "opposed to nature", but also "contrary to reason". "Opposed to nature", because it violates human nature: a human being cannot become object of possession. "Contrary to reason", because it "refuses to admit that change which is a part of us [25)]". We might try to compare the fact that a human being has feelings, thoughts and a will, and, therefore, cannot be an object of possession, with the fact that the human mind is susceptible to change; in doing this, however, we could never grasp the

24) DPV, t.XIII, p.629, n.67. This *Fragments of Politics* (*Fragments politiques échappés*) first appeared in the August 15, 1772 number of the *Correspondance Littéraire*.

25) See note 17 above, and the following part in the original text.

difference between "nature" and "reason" which Orou intends, because the latter fact is also a part of human nature. Here, "opposed to nature" means contray to facts; while "contrary to reason" implies that an error of judgment is also involved, so implying that is laughable. We must notice, then, that a judgment on moral precepts is made according to two standards: "nature" and "reason". These are two components of "the laws of nature". The project to establish a morality based only upon nature is carried through, therefore, by taking this "reason" as "natural reason".

We may summarize the above argument as follows. The project to found civil law upon the laws of nature, i.e. the "moral" upon the "physical", implies a consciousness of the difference between nature and the laws of nature, facts and precepts, because it presupposes an awareness of the necessity of law. Nature consists in the inclination to pursue pleasure and to avoid pain. The fact that we not only live this nature, but try to legitimize it by a law, reveals the existence of perversions as non-nature: this is the nature peculiar to men, who are equipped with feeling and will. Perversions can either arise from an individual's will, or be imposed by an external power. The legislation of morality is useful especially with regard to perversions involving other people: this is the place for the utilitarian principle that prefers the general good to the individual good. This precept is regarded as a law of nature, through a procedure of acknowledging one's human existence in common with others and this mutuality as a fact in nature, and of making of this into a norm. We should consider this procedure as based upon a judgment of reason. It concerns the structure of fact-judgment: so far as this is a legislation, even the first precept, which looks to be nature made normative, presupposes a judgment of reason, namely that we should make it a law to follow nature. This judgment takes the modes of nature as a norm, because the reason in question is the reason of nature.

5 Utilitarianism and Relativism

In the way of thinking peculiar to Diderot, there existed a ground for considering the aspect of being in common a "reason of nature". The sense of mutuality was deeply embodied in the circuit of his thought. We find at the beginning of the book review part of the essay an assertion that strongly conveys this. Acknowledging that Bougainville's *Voyage* was the only book that "had given him a taste for any other country than his own", B. (Diderot) says: "Until reading this I had thought that nowhere was there anything so good as at home, with the result that I believed the same for every inhabitant of the earth [26]." Far from being made absolute, the concept that "nowhere was there anything so good as at home" is immediately relativized. It is characteristic of this fairly unique way of thinking that he considers a natural thought he perceived in himself as being common to all people. It goes without saying that this concept of "each in his own way" does not insist on the collision of interests, but serves to relativize his own claim. In view of this circuit of thinking, we can easily understand why Diderot thought of the pleasure principle of nature not as the cause of conflict but rather as something to be developed in the direction of common=equality=mutuality. We can even establish a stricter

26) *Op. cit.*, pp.151-52 (586).

analogy: if we put "pleasure" in place of the above "natural thought", we can conceive an argument that takes the first precept as accompanying the second. Probably, the first precept is not even thought without the second.

The mutualism peculiar to "each in his own way" brings relativism forth: the attitude that accords equal rights to opposing thoughts or claims, and that takes this attitude as legitimate. We find in *Supplement* clear claims of relativism. For example, in their dispute on whether an incest is admissible or not, when the Almoner describes it as "Crime, horrible crimes, for any one of which people are burnt in my country", Orou replies:

> Whether you burn or don't burn in your country doesn't matter to me. But you will not judge the morals of Europe by those of Tahiti, nor, consequently, the morals of Tahiti by those of Europe [27].

This "consequently" expresses the logic of mutuality. We pay attention to the following word of Orou, who cites as a "more certain rule", "the general good and personal utility". That is to say, after relativizing, by the logic of mutuality, the morality of Tahiti as well as that of Europe, Diderot presents the morality of nature with its utilitarianism in order to overcome that relativity. Relativism as mutualism, therefore, concerns the essence of the naturalistic morality proposed by *Supplement* in that it takes precedence over utilitarianism and constitutes the axiomatic premise founding the latter. This might appear, according to what Orou says, to be a simple fact constituting the starting point of discussion, but, in fact, it also represents the text's final position on the problem. The last question posed by *Supplement* is whether we should choose nature or civilization. To this question, asked by A., B. answers:

> Let us copy the good almoner, a monk in France, a primitive man in Tahiti [28].

Our first impression from this is that the author wishes to give an acceptable conclusion in spite of all the preceding argument, adopting a common-sense attitude, and rejecting the radical naturalistic morality. Acceptable though it might be, it is in fact not a *deus ex machina*. This seemingly acceptable thought had been included in the seemingly radical naturalistic morality as its axiomatic premise. Is then, the wisdom of B a simple reversion to the starting point? Certainly the itinerary of the argument was as follows: a recognition of relativity gave birth to an investigation into an objective and universal standard of value, which arrived at a naturalistic morality. But we should not overlook the fact that this investigation gave relativism a logical ground.

There remains another question to ask. The second precept the naturalistic argument tried to legitimate was not relativism, but utilitarianism: what, then, is the relationship between relativism and utilitarianism? Both are ideal principles which try to mediate collisions of interest and will. Relativism acknowledges certain rights to belong to every person, and rejects the notion of a sole legitimate right, while utilitarianism tries to unify diverse claims in collision

27) *Ibid.*, p.174 (619).
28) *Ibid.*, p.190 (643).

with the principle of majority. Do they, then, contradict one another? At the level of definition, yes, as we have just seen. But, since they are applied to different scenes, we should rather think of them as complementary. By "different scenes", I mean the following. In our above investigation, relativist thought was shown in the relation between Tahiti and France. Utilitarianism, on the contrary, is applied to both Tahiti and France: each of them has its own "general good", and many different "individual utilities". Utilitarianism claims that in every culture or society, priority should be given to the "general good". But the "general good" of Tahiti does not necessarily coincide with that of France. Relativism is the according of an equal right to each. Utilitarianism, therefore, is the domestic moral principle, and relativism, the international one between different cultures. In order to explain the reason for this difference, we need a further insight. Relativism is really an egalitarian/mutualist notion, that wishes to respect the antagonist's position. On the other hand, utilitarianism represents a wish to unify different opinions and reject minority dominance. It is natural that this attitude is applied to domestic moral problems, because "domestic" indicates a situation in which people lead their lives in close relation one another, so that there will always be some discord; in short, the state of civilization. "International", on the contrary, refers to the relation between two areas which have so few contacts that there are no collision yet to mediate, as in the case of Tahiti and France. In the relation between countries in close contact, a contact highly susceptible to give birth to collisions, as in such cases as England and France, or France and Germany, relativism is regarded as the ideal attitude. It is however important to remark that relativism as an idea is to be applied not only to the tensions of the international scene, but also to the domestic moral dilemmas of daily social life. It is relativism that controls claims of purely individual pleasure backed by muscular force: this is the spirit of morality in the proper sense.

6 Aesthetics and relativism

We have thus discovered in our reading of *Supplement* the necessity of relativism. Before making a concluding summary, I want to insert here a clarification of the relation between this concept in *Supplement* and Diderot's early aesthetic thought. The theme of this paper is the essential relation between the "modern" and relativism, rather than the thought of Diderot, whose text is taken as illustrative of this. Accordingly, we have not considered the context of Diderot's thought. However, when we read *Supplement* in terms of relativism, a strong correspondence with his early ideas on aesthetics (especially as found in the *Encyclopédie* article "The Beautiful") cannot escape our attention. As this seems not to be generally known, I wish to sketch it here. This sketch shall complement our above discussion in two ways. In the first place, if we can succeed in making clear that the basic problem proposed in such later texts as *Supplement* takes over and develops an earlier concern, we shall corroborate that our theme is essential. What people generally call Diderot's "atheistic materialism" corresponds to what we have been calling the "modern" world view: it is the search for an absolute, in the

consciousness of that relativity which follows on the cutting off of God, that relates "The Beautiful" to *Supplement*. *Supplement* was written on the occasion of Bougainville's *Voyage*, and the subject of sexual love presupposes the report on the customs of Tahiti, but the problem of relativism, as the real theme of the book, does not originate with the occasion. This theme is far from accidental to the "modern" rather concerns its ground.

Another merit of introducing Diderot's aesthetics here will be to complement our interpretation of the *Supplement* with viewpoint offered by those aesthetics. The arguments in *Supplement* focus on morals, but aesthetics has a special meaning for modern relativistic axiology. The central concept of "the aesthetic" established by Kant, consists in a direct grasping of value: that the grasp of the beautiful is direct and without mediation means there is no possibility for relativity to intervene. Modern aesthetics is, therefore, a field essentially heterogeneous to relativism. Of course Diderot precedes Kant, but, as is shown for example in the critique of Chardin in his *Salons*, he was gifted with an acute aesthetic sensibility. He does not apply the concept of aesthetic, but the experience of being in ecstasies over a painting lacking any especially deep meaning, such as a still life, is entitled to be called "aesthetic". The fact that Diderot took the relativity of the beautiful as a basic problem corroborates the importance of this problem to him.

As mentioned above, we consider here only the article "The Beautiful" published in Volume 2 of the *Encyclopédie* (1752), focusing on a consciousness of relativity similar to that to be found in the argument of *Supplement*, and similarly combined with a tendency to look for an absolute. In this regard, we will pay attention to three problems: the most important is the *rapports*, the key concept in "The Beautiful", in relation to the notion of relativity; the second, the notion of absolute beauty which Diderot found in André; the third, the critique of Batteux' notion of "beautiful nature".

The first point concerns the central thesis of "The Beautiful": "the beautiful consists in a perception of *rapports*". As it is not our main subject to interpret this article, I will limit myself to this point[29]. This definition of the beautiful is constituted by two terms: *rapports* and perception. The former is an objective moment, the latter, the moment of the perceiving subject. *Rapports* means, in the first place, physical relations (a ratio) between object and object, and between parts in an object: Diderot learned this notion from Euler, a specialist in acoustics. We can, however, find *rapports* between qualities such as touch or color. We can even say that it is thanks to this extension of the concept that "perception of *rapports*" can define the beautiful, and that Diderot's aesthetics, based upon this definition, can be rich in nuance. Moreover we are naturally compelled to compare this notion of *rapports* with the following definition in *Supplement* of the laws of nature: "the eternal relations (*les rapports éternels*) which exist between men". It goes without saying that this network of "eternal

29) I have proposed a detailed interpretation of the part focused on the "perception of *rapports*" in "The Beautiful" in Chap.3,§ 3 of my doctorate dissertation : *Study of the History of the 18th Century Aesthetics, Mainly in France* (in Japanese), Iwanami Publishing Company, 1999.

relations" constitutes the natural ground of men as social existence. The physical relations (*rapports*) in physical nature in "The Beautiful" can be the natural ground of physical existence, because, since Diderot's philosophy of nature regards the whole of nature as a single huge organism [30], the (organic) relations between parts constitutes the real existence of nature. The word rapport is not accidentally used in these two scenes. Certainly, these two represent different dimensions, so much so that no matter how far we may extend the physical *rapports*, we cannot reach the *rapports* between men. But, in my opinion, Diderot wished to consider them as a continuum. As evidence, I cite Chapter 1 of the *Treatise on Painting*, where our philosopher describes the conduct of nature in one individual object, such as a human body, as a mechanism of influences; such that a change in one spot (for example, loss of an eyeball) causes a change to another spot (a twitch in the cheek). We can, however, only explain natural constitutions interior to individuals in such a way, and not such a complex state of affairs as the scene of painting. So Diderot dares to argue that there exists a similar relation of influences among quarreling people, who are united through this relationship[31]. We can hardly think he succeeds in his theoretical explanation, but it is beyond doubt that he wished to integrate these two dimensions by making *rapports* their common basis. When he affirms in his philosophy of nature that "there is only one great individual, that is the whole[32]", this is probably what he had in mind.

In "The Beautiful" itself, we notice such an extension of the concept of *rapports*; or rather, all his argument can be considered as concentrating on this point. According to Diderot, the beautiful can only be perceived as such by a being constituted by a body and mind such as belong to a human being; in this sense, every beautiful object is "beautiful in relation to us (*par rapport à nous*)[33]". Certainly the word rapport is just part of a prepositional phrase, and does not make a description, but the word denotes here a relation between two terms, and thus determines the relativizing moment of the beautiful. In fact, calling this "beautiful in relation to us" "relative beauty (*le beau relatif*)", Diderot insists that "all relations (*rapports*) are a function of understanding[34]". We thus actively intervene in the beautiful: relating an object to a variety of others, we perceive different, unique beauties.

This analysis of beauty is also a trial of its definition. Diderot presents his theory of "perception of *rapports*" with the clear intention of opposing other representative theories, which he summarizes in historical order in the first part of the article. When he claims his theory is right, he wishes to show that it applies to all phenomena of the beautiful. Immediately, then, there emerges the moment of relativity: does "all" mean what is called beautiful in all languages, or, does it include all different beauty in different eras, in different places, and according to different generations[35]? Affirming all these, Diderot pronounces proudly: "Put beauty in the perception of *rapports*, and you should obtain the whole history of

30) *Ibid.*, p.79 (*D'Alembert's Dream*).
31) DPV, t.XIV, p.359; cf. p.398 (*Treatise on Painting*).
32) See note 30.
33) DPV, t.VI, p.157 (Article "The Beautiful").
34) *Ibid.*, p.161.
35) *Ibid.*, p.163.

its progress from the origin of the world until now. .../The perception of *rapports*, therefore, is the ground of the beautiful[36]." How could he make such a universal claim? He had just one reason: because the notion of "the perception of *rapports*" includes the moment of the relativity of beauty as the "relativity" between subject and object. After claiming this universality, Diderot concludes the article with an enumeration of the causes of diverse judgments of beauty in twelve forms. This proves how deep was his consciousness of relativity. Vis-à-vis the beautiful as theoretical subject, he noticed first of all the fact of relativity. It was the concept of *rapports* that enabled him to establish a universal and general definition of beauty starting from and based upon its relativity, because that concept included relativity. We find exactly the same structure in *Supplement*, where he inaugurates the argument with an awareness of relativity, seeks for an absolute which should overcome the relativity, and complete the project by an appeal to a law that includes relativism.

The first point above is essential, and the other two are supplementary, concerning the theoretical context in which Diderot was writing around 1752. André and Batteux represent two systems of aesthetics published in the forties, of which Diderot can be assumed to have had a strong consciousness of confronting; a confrontation which led indeed to the formation of his aesthetic theory. At the conclusion of the historical part of the article, Diderot recognizes that André's theory is the most elaborate to date, with this reservation that the notions of "*rapport*, order, symmetry" are proposed as the ground of beauty, without however any elucidation of their origin: whether they are "acquired and artificial (*factice*)" or "innate" [37]. In fact Diderot's first efforts are concentrated on explaining how the notion of *rapports* is formed, borrowing Condillac's epistemology. What, then, did he appreciate in André? André distinguishes three phases of beauty: essential, natural, and artificial[38]. He must have intended to found the latter two upon essential beauty. Artificial beauty in particular is a phenomenon of cultural relativity. So the theoretical will André shows to seek for an absolute in relative phenomena, must have aroused Diderot's sympathy. If we take notice of the fact that the conceptual structure of "The Beautiful" endures up to the writing of *Supplement*, it can be seen that the role of André in the formation of Diderot's ideas should be highly estimated.

Batteux defined art as the "imitation of beautiful nature". "Beautiful nature" here means what is called "idealized nature". Here too, showing an intensive interest in the matter, Diderot criticizes Batteux for neglecting to explain this cardinal notion, and proposes accepting this task himself[39]. Interpreting Batteux' thesis as "choose the most beautiful, if the choice is perfectly free", Diderot insists that the choice of motifs in real artistic creation is determined by the subject and context of the work, and concludes that perfectly free choice is an empty idea. Now, contrasting "beautiful nature" with simple nature, we can regard as equivalent to the contrast between the laws of nature and nature. The interest of Diderot in Batteux thus also

36) *Ibid.*, p. 164.
37) *Ibid.*, p. 154.
38) *Ibid.*, pp. 147-48.
39) *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 159.

shows the same structure as is found in *Supplement*, because the notion shares already the will to legalize nature, and Diderot's theoretical critique underlines relativity.

Conclusion Relativism as the Fate of Modernity

We have thus verified that the axiology of naturalistic relativism in *Supplement* is the consistent position of Diderot from the time of his early aesthetics, in other words that it is a cardinal idea in his philosophy. Now we shall return to our original argument and bring it to a conclusion. We recapitulate the above interpretation of *Supplement* as follows. In the first place, France encounters a hetero-culture, that is, Tahiti. Vis-à-vis the radical difference between the morals of each culture, Diderot adopts a relativistic stance insisting on egality and mutuality, and seeks for an objective and universal principle of value. This investigation originates from a critical consciousness asking whether French morals do not "attach moral ideas to simply physical actions incompatible therewith". It is therefore Orou the Tahitian who leads the investigation. From the naturalistic viewpoint which is based solely upon the inclinations common to men— "pursuing pleasures and avoiding pains"— Orou deduces two moral precepts. The first says that we should prefer pleasure and happiness to pain and unhappiness. This almost tautological precept is very efficacious as a critique of civilization in terms of nature, especially with regard to sexual love and the system of marriage, but the range of critical efficacy is not wide. It is, therefore, integrated with a second, utilitarian precept, concerning the mediation of interests between men: "general good is to be preferred to individual good". This second precept is posited as natural according to the following argument: human nature is the characteristic common to all men; being common is being equal, and this egality can be conceived in terms of mutuality; the moral precept thus deduced from the idea of mutuality is the second one above. This naturalistic morality of Orou is confirmed by B, who, as spokesman of the author, represents France or civilization. This whole morality is based upon a circular structure. It was the consciousness of relativity inspired by an encounter with a hetero-culture such as Tahiti, that led to the criticism of existing morals and the search for an ideal morality. That relativism is to be founded, together with utilitarianism, upon the morals of mutuality. With respect to the morality of mutuality, relativism and utilitarianism are applied to different scenes. Utilitarianism is the principle for unifying opinions and policies in a community. But the community, far from covering all the earth, is rather, culturally limited. So while in every community utilitarianism manages morality domestically, relativism is the rule for problems in the interrelation of different communities. Arriving at this stage, Tahiti is relativized as a particular culture, and naturalistic morality founds a logic which relativizes this also: here we have a very deep circular structure.

Relativism, with this circular structure, is the fate of modernity. To conceive the morality peculiar to the modern age, is identical with adopting the naturalistic viewpoint. The modern age denied apriori institutions founded upon God, but its naturalism continued the ancient system in aiming to unify political and moral opinions: the spirit and method of this unification is utilitarian. But utilitarianism is accompanied by its twin brother—relativism— which

functions to relativize all opinions, including the modernist/naturalist. From whence comes this circular, self-denying structure? Its ultimate origin should be found in human nature, which is essentially free, and produces all differences. Man is man, because he is so free as to be able to prefer perversions, and to create a variety of cultures. Because of this freedom, human beings need laws. But as the modern has no ground other than nature in itself, people have to exclude perversions of nature in the name of nature. So they rely upon that "reason" which acknowledges relativity as a natural fact. Such an argument is possible because human nature is not simply "physical", but also "moral".

Relativism however is a weak logic. Purely logically, it might seem that relativism is stronger than utilitarianism. But practically, utilitarianism is strong, and relativism weak, because the former rejects all small differences in favor of just one major conclusion, while relativism wishes to respect every claim and notion of value as such. Certainly, adopting the principle of majority, utilitarianism wishes to possibly integrate something of minority opinion; but ultimately, minority opinions should be excluded. In order to solve the problems imposed by the real world, utilitarianism in this wide sense is necessary. Needless to say this was realized as the political institution of democracy. Sometimes "modern" is understood as synonymous with "democratic", and the modernization in this sense is in progress even now, pushed forward especially by the United States. The development of this utilitarian democracy is, in fact, a regression of relativism. This modern history is symbolized by cosmopolitanism. Although often seen as an empty utopianism, this notion in fact conforms with the reality of modern history. To try to establish a naturalistic universal morality in the world considered as a unity, is to neglect the fact of cultural differences and to reject that relativism which wishes to respect this fact.

Relativism as a weak practical logic arrived belatedly. We can take artistic stylistics as an index of this: stylistic history appeared in art history between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth[40]. In order to ascertain its relativistic spirit, it is best to compare such history with the Hegelian notion of history. According to the latter, there is just one period of zenith in which was realized the ideal of art; and other styles are described as preparatory to, or a decadence of this ideal. That means, there exists a difference of value among styles: some style is the ideal, some other less important, some worst, etc. By contrast, stylistics evaluates all styles as pure differences, each of which has its own reason, and so an equal right to exist. It is well known that the typical case is found in the reevaluation of the baroque. So-called postmodern trends underline relativism with a recognition of the weak, the minor, and hetero-cultures. Belatedly relativism has arrived, because human nature implies freedom and history, and defined by the creativity. Creativity produces differences, and relativism respecting these difference is necessary. If there is something which can control the radical progress to unification virtually promoted by the modern, it is the relativistic spirit. In

40) Its pilot work by Riegl, *Problems of Style*, was published in 1893, and the generally acknowledged representative work, *Ground Concepts of Art History*, by Wölfflin in 1915. As to the problem of style in general, see the chapter dedicated to "Style" in my *Dictionary of Aesthetics, 25 Basic Concepts* (in Japanese), the University of Tokyo Press, 1995.

this sense too, relativism is the fate of the modern.

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