



The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought

Arthur M. Melzer

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The true key to all the perplexities of the human condition, Rousseau boldly claims, is the "natural goodness of man." It is also the key to his own notoriously contradictory writings, which, he insists, are actually the disassembled parts of a rigorous philosophical system rooted in that fundamental principle. What if this problematic claim—so often repeated, but as often dismissed—were resolutely followed and explored?

Arthur M. Melzer adopts this approach in "The Natural Goodness of Man." The first two parts of the book restore the original, revolutionary significance of this now time-worn principle and examine the arguments Rousseau offers in proof of it. The final section unfolds and explains Rousseau's programmatic thought, especially the "Social Contract," as a precise solution to the human problem as redefined by the principle of natural goodness.

The result is a systematic reconstruction of Rousseau's philosophy that discloses with unparalleled clarity both the complex weave of his argument and the majestic unity of his vision. Melzer persuasively resolves one after another of the famous Rousseauian paradoxes—enlarging, in the process, our understanding of modern philosophy and politics. Engagingly and lucidly written, "The Natural Goodness of Man" will be of interest to general as well as scholarly readers.

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