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Supplementary letter VII

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Usbek to Rica [1]

I found a few days back, in a country house where I had gone, two scholars who enjoy great celebrity here. Their character seemed to me admirable. The first man's conversation, properly estimated, came down to this : What I have said is true, because I have said it. The second's conversation had a different tenor : What I have not said is not true, because I have not said it.

I rather liked the first one : for I care not a whit whether a man be obstinate ; but for him to be impertinent, I do care a good deal. The first defends his opinions, which are his ; the second attacks the opinions of others, and they belong to everyone.

Oh, my dear Usbek, how ill vanity serves those who have a stronger dose of it than what is necessary for the preservation of nature ! [2] Those people want to be admired by dint of being disagreeable. They seek to be superior, and they are not even equal.

Modest men, come let me embrace you. You make the pleasantness and charm of life. You think you have nothing, and I tell you that you have everything. You think you put no one to shame ; and you put everyone to shame. And when I compare you in my mind with those categorical men I see everywhere, I cast them down from their tribunal, and place them at your feet.

Paris this 22nd day of the moon of Chahban 1720

[1] First published in edition D, 1758.

[2] An allusion to the theory that self-love is not only natural but an integral aspect of the organism's self-preservation, one which is not only innocent but necessary. This is one of the essential ideas of Malebranche, notably in his *Traité de morale* (1684).