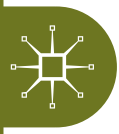

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND PUBLIC PURPOSE

Rousseau Today

Interdisciplinary Essays

Edited by
Neal Harris
Denis Bosseau
Ploykai Pintobtang
Owen Brown

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Political Philosophy and Public Purpose

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Ployjai Pintobtang · Owen Brown
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Rousseau 'Reloaded'

Denis Bosseau, Neal Harris, and Ployjai Pintobtang

Rousseau is undeniably a titan of social and political thought. He simultaneously provided a blueprint for liberal modernity and kick-started the tradition of its thoroughgoing critique. Few figures are as contentious, as admired and as reviled; he is credited with sparking the democratic bourgeois revolutions—especially the French Revolution—and condemned as

The title of this introduction is meant as a *clin d'oeil* to the book *Lenin Reloaded* (2007) edited by Sebastian Budgens, Stathis Kouvelakis and Slavoj Žižek.

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an ally of totalitarianism and state-terror.[1] Such apparent contradictions remain indelibly attached to Rousseau's work: the father of pedagogy who abandoned his own children, a supreme critic of inequality who embodied misogyny and racist anthropologies[2,3]; he was the founding sociologist[4] yet despised his proto-bourgeois society. Rousseau is the philosopher who wanted to 'force people to be free'.[5]

Rousseau's breadth of study and lasting influence is remarkable, even amongst an Enlightenment cast of prodigious polymaths. His *Confessions* is the first modern autobiography, the *Social Contract* [1762] is foundational to political and legal theory, *Julie* [1761] was a ground-breaking epistolary novel, while arguably it was his *Writings on French Music* [1753] which scandalised the establishment most. He wrote operas, contributed to botany; this is not to mention arguably his most famous works, the first and second discourses. In this regard, the editors of this volume reflect the breadth and continuing impact of Rousseau's scholarship: Harris is a critical theorist and sociologist, Pintobtang is an intellectual historian, Bosseau is a philosopher, and Brown is invested in psychoanalysis.

The animus behind this project was noting both the resurgence of interest in Rousseau's work[6] and the timeliness of a return to his insights. Rousseau identified a fundamental cultural malaise, a societal 'pathology' which required excoriating diagnosis and critique. There was something deeply wrong with the world in which Rousseau found himself, something which transcended the traditional conceptual arsenal within which

[1] For more on the debate around Rousseau's alleged totalitarianism, see Brooke (2016) and Nisbet (1943).

[2] For an important broader discussion on Rousseau and misogyny, see Rosenblatt (2002). Rosenblatt shows how and why the feminist consensus on Rousseau's misogyny is increasingly breaking down.

[3] For an important broader discussion on Rousseau and the myth of the noble savage, see Ellingson (2000). Ellingson dispels the idea that Rousseau pioneered the framing of the noble savage, or indeed, that his work unambiguously popularised the framing. Indeed, Rousseau is shown to have been critical of how the understanding was propagated without empirical evidence by various missionaries.

[4] Durkheim (1960) famously called Rousseau the founder of sociology.

[5] This is the oft-repeated vernacularisation of Rousseau's framing in *The Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter VII.

[6] Consider Ferrara (2017), Thompson (2021), Harris (2022), Honneth (2014), inter alia.

he had been raised. His work helped birth modern social and political thought, while impacting far beyond academia. We join the growing chorus that contend that today's existential crises and interconnected cultural-political trials render Rousseau an important intellectual figure to return to (see also Thompson, 2021; Harris, 2022).

Whither Rousseau?

Rousseau certainly has a well-defined place in the history of philosophy. But as the chapters of this book demonstrate, his eclectic *oeuvre* also presents us with far more than a collection of antiquated ideas sitting dustily within the canon of Western academia. In fact, in this volume, we show it is more appropriate to think of the spirit of Rousseau's work as something which imposes itself as a *living heritage*, the impact of which can be found extending far beyond the limited boundaries of European social and political theory. For instance, as the contributions of Eddy Dufourmont and Ployjai Pintobtang indicate, Rousseau's influence has left its mark on the thought of Nakae Chômin (a Japanese theorist) and Thai constitutionalism (see Chapters "Rousseau in Thai Constitutionalism" and "Rousseau in Modern Japan (1868–1889): Nakae Chōmin and the Source of East Asian Democracy"). In this volume, we demonstrate that Rousseau's influence expands both far beyond the city-walls of Geneva, indeed far beyond Europe, and far beyond the academy.

As Nietzsche suggested in *Untimely Meditations* [1873–1876], one cannot honour the legacy of past thinkers simply by placing their body of work on the vivisection table. Instead, one must strive to get to grips with the living part of that which they leave us, their spirit, and the most alive part of their thought that can enrich the critical perspectives we take onto our own present. But how are we to identify and connect with the various facets of the Rousseauian inheritance—where to begin?

If there was one underlying theme, an Ariadne's thread, in Rousseau's thought it would perhaps be his philosophy of will.[7] It is from his

[7] As Peter Hallward reminds us, 'Obsessed by the memory and implications of the Jacobin Terror…', Benjamin Constant would for instance '…set a lasting pattern in the reception of Rousseau's work when, after confusing the autonomous activity of a general will with passive submission to the dominant whims of a ruling clique', he denounced Rousseau's conception of sovereignty as 'the most terrible auxiliary of every kind of despotism' (see Hallward, 2016, p. 127).

understanding of a particular form of collective volition which emerges his egalitarian, and highly controversial, conception of democracy as a product of the general will (*volonté générale*). Having elaborated some of the first principles of his philosophy of will in his *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* [1755], what would become one of Rousseau's most enduring maxims can be found expressed with particular clarity in the fourth book of *Emile*, 'The Creed of a Savoyard Priest' [1762]:

> […] The motive power of all action is in the will of a free creature; we can go no farther. (…) To suppose some action which is not the effect of an active motive power is indeed to suppose effects without cause, to reason in a vicious circle. Either there is no original impulse, or every original impulse has no antecedent cause, and there is no will properly so-called, without freedom. (*Emile*, Book IV)

Here, one already comes to be confronted with what is arguably the most distinctive feature of the Rousseauian conception of the will; one that is centred around the notion of autonomous capacity (or motive power). This is the capacity for voluntary self-determination, free from coercion or submission to another's will, or simple subservience to socially induced desires. Central to the development of Rousseau's thought will eventually be the question of how to remain free while existing as part of a *polis*, within a politically organised civil society. And to be sure, Rousseau here too will remain insistent on the idea that only *active willing* can enable an inclusive association of free beings. This in turn must imply an active pursuit of 'common interest' (*poursuite de l'intérêt commun*).

In the political context then, Rousseau's conception of voluntary self-determination (*motive power*) is meant to translate into a *collective power* or capacity. The need for political life, after all, is born from the unique features of what it means to be a human being; that is, a free creature whose will is meant to be expended and ennobled by socialisation, by practice.[8] This distinctive Rousseauian conviction that the will of free beings is ennobled through voluntary engagement in social and political life would eventually become the organising principle of his *Social Contract* [1762]. The centrepiece of the project thus constituted his effort to philosophically outline what could make politics something other

[8] See, Rousseau (1928), pp. 630–631.

than a masked force coercing individual wills into (peaceful) coexistence. Indeed, the idea here would be to conceive democratic politics, or the political body, not as the mere expression of the *will of all* but as the sovereign expression of a *general will* animated by the collective pursuit of the common good. In Rousseau's conception of democratic practice, only from such a *general will* could the mechanisms of political and civic society derive its authority and retain legitimacy.

Rousseau knew that the practical realisation of such a democratic ideal would prove to be an extremely difficult task. There is always a danger that one's *amour propre* and the pursuit of individual self-interest might come in the way of the common good. Analogous to the rocky path to adulthood of the individual, which requires moving beyond reliance on the decision-making capacities of parents, political maturity will be dependent upon a people's capacity to consciously resist the authority of political leaders and representatives who wish to speak on their behalf, nullifying their capacity for self-determination.[9]

As Rousseau wrote at the beginning of the *Discourse on Political Economy* [1755], if we compare our leaders with idealised fathers, we are doomed, and we would be debasing ourselves, as a collective power, by bowing to the authority of others who only justify they own power via the status of their offices. This sentiment is expressed in *Emile* [1762], wherein Rousseau suggests the following:

> […] Grasp all, usurp all, and then pour out your silver with both hands; set up your batteries, raise the gallows and the wheel; make laws, issue proclamations, multiply your spies, your soldiers, your hangmen, your prisons, and your chains. Poor little men, what good does it do you? You will be no better served, you will be none the less robbed and deceived, you will be no nearer absolute power. You will say continually, 'It is our will,' and you will continually do the will of others. (*Emile,* II)

These words from Rousseau serve as a cautionary tale fit for our times. In fact, one may be tempted to argue that the actuality of Rousseau's thought resides, at least in part, in that he presses us to engage anew with the spectre of popular sovereignty which moves and boils below the

[9] As Martina Reuter's insightful chapter from this collection shows, this aspect of Rousseau's work also raises controversial yet very important questions vis-à-vis the latter's thought on gender relations and the issue of patriarchal domination.

smooth surface of democratic formalism. That is to say, this formalistic veil which hides a deeply rooted fear of the masses and the passion for law and order which characterises much of contemporary democratic societies. The question being, how to liberate the will of the people from the yoke of illegitimate authority? What forms of socialisation or organisation, what democratic processes, could effectively guard the people from usurpation, from the subduing of its will to the private interests of the few who would seek to manipulate it?

Returning to *Emile*, it would seem as though Rousseau hoped to find solutions to this problem through pedagogy, as much as through constitutional design. *Emile* teaches us that civil liberty is dependent on one's ability to learn to be free, which is an active, and at times, painful process. With that in mind, Rousseau insists that a *social contract* would need to be established according to which only the general will of self-mastering citizens—not that of select representatives—could legitimately direct the forces of the state according to the purpose for which it was instituted, which is the common good (Rousseau, 1987, 153).

From this perspective, politics is not to be understood as reducible to the sum of private individual contracts, but rather as that continuous apprenticeship in civic life through which could emerge the unity of the multiple; that educational process through which is collectively decided, in the form of a wager on the uncertain, the fate of the possible. In this sense, truly democratic advances could only ever be made by exercising the collective will of a body politic that is accountable only to itself as sovereign.

But it is perhaps here, inscribed in the aporias of the *Social Contract*, that the effective contradictions of democracy also seem to emerge. One could, for instance, think of the unresolved problem of the ways by which the supreme authority of the general will is meant to formalise itself politically. After all, the general will remains forever an abstraction: one cannot send it an email asking for its opinion on Brexit or Trump's tax returns. Here perhaps lies the biggest problem with Rousseau's philosophy: his conception of sovereignty appears to leave no place for operationalisable political representation. How is democracy to take shape *in practice*? How is the general will to guard itself against corruption and how is it to accommodate the uneven development of the integral parts of its 'body'?

Rousseau's insistence that the only legitimate government is that which remains accountable to the *general will* of the people in the most direct way possible will forever remain the apotheosis of the democratic ideal. In

part, this is because it remains always an ideal. As such, Rousseau leaves us with a spectacular normative horizon which remains aspirational for any polity which seeks to be truly democratic, offering an understanding of democracy which is fundamentally predicated on the humanity and dignity of each citizen, yet which coalesces in a non-aggregative, truly synthetic, general will. As a result, Rousseau's thought on democratic exigency will retain its relevance as the years proceed before us. As his heirs, it is incumbent upon up to reactivate his thought, to work *through* his imagination, as it were. But as we do so, there also emerges the need to move beyond his initial blueprints, while holding fast to the spirit which animated his work. Our contention is that each of the chapters collated in this volume will perhaps help us in this endeavour.

The Structure and Contribution of This Volume

The collection begins with Chapter, James Block's, "From Fashioned to Fashioner: Rousseau and the Reclamation of History". Block offers a targeted re-reading of *Emile,* which is held to hold palliative insights, capable of offsetting the assault on subjectivity precipitated by neoliberalism. In contrast to the hyper-reification of the free-market, Rousseau is shown to present a world in which individuals can once again be masters of their own desires and be collaborators in the solidaristic learning process of building a collaborative democratic society. Block holds Rousseau is in an almost reverential esteem, presenting him as one of the great thinkers of Western political thought. This unchecked championing of Rousseau's contemporary importance, drawn from a targeted reading of Rousseau's own work, captures the sentiments which animated this volume more broadly.

Part II of the volume, 'Marxism and Critical Theory', presents chapters by Peter Hallward, Panagiotis Sotiris, and Onni Hirvonen.

In Chapter, "The Most Absolute Authority': Rousseau and the Tensions of Popular Sovereignty", Peter Hallward explores how, long before Marx or Lenin, before Luxemburg or Martov, before Zetkin or Gramsci, before Fanon or Rodney, Rousseau anticipated with unprecedented clarity and prescience some of the key tensions involved in grounding the legitimate exercise of democratic power as a common purpose derived through mass association and public deliberation. Focusing on the Genevese philosopher's unapologetic insistence on the

primacy of the will (*volonté générale*) over any involuntary or sub-voluntary forms of determination—which often forms the focal point of attention of much Marxist analysis to date—Hallward shows how a renewed attention to Rousseau may help us to better appreciate the voluntarist dimension of all legitimate democratic practice and pursuit of emancipatory politics. Key to this approach is the author's attention to the fact Rousseau anticipated the following challenge, which is that the real foundations of political power rest squarely on the available means of directing wills—either to the advantage of a privileged few, or in favour of the common good, with the central question being: *how can people come together as free and equal participants in the framing and imposing of a common purpose?* For Hallward, Rousseau's greatest achievement was to sketch an account of how this might be done, and also of how it might be undone. Ultimately, Hallward demonstrates how Rousseau might help us to sharpen our analysis of emancipatory politics today.

In Chapter, "Althusser, Rousseau and the Politics of the Encounter", Panagiotis Sotiris turns to Louis Althusser's lessons on Rousseau as a way to explore the significant impact the latter has had and can continue to have on Marxist thought and analysis as having anticipated what could be the basic elements of a critique and supersession of bourgeois politics. Looking at Rousseau through Althusser's eyes, as a precursor of historical materialism and the first philosopher to have 'systematically conceived the development of history, the development of society, as a development dialectically linked to its material conditions' (Althusser, 2006, pp. 112–13), Sotiris demonstrates how the Genevese philosopher foregrounded an analysis of democratic emancipatory politics freed from the ideological restraints of teleological thinking. In this sense, as Sotiris aptly shows, Rousseau can be approached as opening the path for a profane analysis of transformative politics as a contingent and experimental exercise from which much can still be learned today.

Chapter "The Ambivalence of Human Sociality: Rousseau and Recognition", by Onni Hirvonen, reconstructs Rousseau's understanding of intersubjectivity and demonstrates its implications for contemporary debates on recognition. Hirvonen considers Rousseau as 'a theorist of negative recognition' who is shown to present insights which are absent in the work of contemporary theories of recognition, as most notably advanced in the work of Axel Honneth. Hirvonen demonstrates how Rousseau's work can add nuance to the contemporary understanding

of sociality by highlighting the ambivalence of recognition, which opens possibilities for future research.

Part III of the volume engages with Rousseau's work on gender and the environment. Rousseau made contributions on both topics and is shown to be informative and stimulating on both fields today.

Martina Reuter's Chapter, "Complex Relations: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Olympe de Gouges on the Sexes", re-examines the claim that Rousseau's stance on gender equality is paradoxical. While past literature has typically offered psychological arguments to explain the apparent contradiction at the heart of Rousseau's work, Reuter's chapter serves to provide a coherent philosophical analysis of Rousseau's position. While there were undeniably an extraordinary amount of inner conflicts within Rousseau, scholars are shown to benefit from locating his work within broader discussion on equality, similarity and difference between the sexes. Thus, through bringing Rousseau into dialogue with Olympe de Gouges, a more nuanced and philosophically ungirded reading of Rousseau's views on gender is presented.

In Chapter, "Towards a Feminist and Queer Ecology in Rousseau", Rosanne Kennedy proposes to look at Rousseau as an early, and unlikely, advocate of an 'ecology without nature' whose work could effectively serve as a potential point of departure for an ecological perspective that is potentially feminist and queer. To support this thesis, Kennedy focuses on two key texts in Rousseau's *œuvre*: The *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, or *Second Discourse* (1755) and his last unfinished autobiography, *Rêveries of a Solitary Walker* (written from 1776 to 1778). In a way which complements and perhaps deepens some of the remarks advanced by Panagiotis Sotiris' reading of Althusser's Rousseau, Kennedy brings the reader's attention to Rousseau's distinctive critique of the question of *origins* (or state of nature) and his instance on nature as a fantasy distorting one appreciation of the complex processes involved in human socialisation. By showing how Rousseau conceived of sexual difference and gendered roles as socially mediated, the author demonstrates how the thought of old philosopher may be rediscovered as both a precursor of anti-essentialist social critique and the valuable point of departure for the development of an ecological perspective that is both feminist and queer.

Part IV of the volume focuses on Rousseau's work on Sovereignty and Economic Democracy.

In Chapter, "Sovereignty as Responsibility", Cody Trojan and Matthew Hamilton argue that by reading Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* as a genealogical approach to freedom, in tandem with a reading of *The Social Contract* as a normative counterpoint, a new understanding of sovereignty can be unearthed. The contention being that twenty-first-century social and political thought tends towards a repudiation of the very concept of sovereignty and sovereign power, the co-authors present a reading of Rousseau centred around the figure of the lawgiver which suggests that the concept of sovereignty could, and indeed should, be rethought in order to address the perennial concern of popular participation in politics first outlined in the latter's radical voluntary conception of civic responsibility.

Robin Jervis' chapter draws on Rousseau's understanding of property to highlight the problematic association between possession, property and power in the capitalist firm. Rousseau's contribution to political economy, especially in the *Discourse on Inequality*, is used alongside the democratic theory outlined in *The Social Contract*. By subjecting capitalist models of firm ownership to critique informed by these works, Jervis highlights the possibility for alternative systems such as an economy made up of workers' co-operatives. The need for this reconsideration of the status quo rests on critiques of the liberal capitalist firm from two interlinked perspectives—firstly, a republican argument outlining the firm as an arena of domination and dependence, and secondly, the argument that democratic theory needs to apply to the firm in much the same way as it does to the state given the weaknesses of consent theory and the difficulties of exit. Jervis proposes that legitimate authority within a firm can come only from the members themselves in the form of a general will. Drawing on Rousseau's democratic theory, it suggests that this general will can be drawn out through deliberative democracy within the co-operative. This form of democracy allows for discussion of what the common good might look like for the members. The chapter suggests that features of the co-operative, in particular its small size, established norms and principles, and broad agreements on its terms of reference allow for deliberative consensus to be reached and for decisions to be made in accordance with a general will. This chapter brings Rousseau's work into contemporary republican debates while reinforcing the intellectual linkage between political economy and democratic theory.

While Rousseau's contribution to European as well as Anglo-American intellectual history is well documented, his legacy beyond the English-speaking world remains limited. The last part of this volume explores this gap in the literature through two reception projects.

Ploylai Pintobtang's 'Rousseau in Thai Constitutionalism' traces Rousseau's legacy in Thai political thought after the Siamese Democratic Revolution of 1932. Contrary to existing literature on the topic which often emphasises Rousseau's influence on popular politics and radical movements, Pintobtang's chapter highlights Rousseau's noteworthy contribution to the formation of Thai constitutionalism as an integral part of the country's project of modernisation. Through the examination of various readings and adaptations of Rousseau to fill in the social vacuum left by the abolishment of Siamese absolute monarchy, the chapter adds nuance to the monolithic legacy of Rousseau as the philosopher of the radicals by disclosing other strands of his reception as a constitutional theorist and a pioneer of *Raborb Rathathammanoon*.

Finally, in 'Rousseau in Modern Japan (1868–1889): Nakae Chōmin and the source of East Asian democracy', Eddy Dufourmont reveals how Rousseau's *Social Contract* and the two discourses were a crucial part in the Meiji debate on political reform. Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901), who was an important part of the Movement for the Liberty and the Rights of the people (*Jiyū minken undō*), distinguished himself from the rest of the Meiji reformists by his staunch advocacy of republicanism, as opposed to constitutional monarchy. The author shows how, through the translation and the interpretation by Chōmin, Rousseau's philosophy became an inspiration for the movement. Most notably, Dufourmont demonstrates how Chōmin contributed to the heated debate on the definition and the political implications of liberty which was initially negatively perceived as egoism (*Wagamama*). Rousseau's work is shown to have also contributed to the Meiji debate on the various aspects of political modernisation such as the meaning and the locus of sovereignty, capital punishment, the citizen's reserve army, and tax reform in Japan and beyond.

We hope the essays collected here further interest in Rousseau who we consider to be a theorist for our time. Even if he is no longer one capable of providing inspiration for radical change, he will still be a worthy companion in reverie. We encourage the progressive reader to join him, whether they wish to man the barricades, to flee for the Peak District or to float aimless on Lac Léman.

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Rereading Rousseau, Reclaiming History

From Fashioned to Fashioner: Rousseau and the Reclamation of History

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Grasping preternaturally from deep within the self-lionizing world of eighteenth-century continental monarchy the contradictions of social orders both decaying and ascending, he pushed still beyond as only two other thinkers in Western political thought, Plato and Hobbes, to discern what was to come. That Rousseau foresaw the end of the ancient order in an age of revolutionary challenges has long been recognized. His exposé of the ultimate erosion and collapse of the liberal-cum-neoliberal order just emerging in his time with its descent into nihilism and domination, on the other hand, have become—if sporadically before—fully apparent with expanding elite control, institutional fragmentation, savage inequity, and popular revulsion across the spectrum. That Rousseau absorbed this without regret, refusing to mourn a system whose internal deformities foretold its fate, emerges clearly in his work. His visionary insistence that systemic decline constituted an unavoidable phase to be surmounted in the larger narrative of human psychological development and the achievement of a just society takes on greater urgency with each contemporary

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failure and missed opportunity. Demonstrating that, by understanding crisis at its source, the human project could be reoriented to flourish as never before possible, an inspiration for both Hegel and Marx, renders his voice the surest guide to transcending our present predicament.

The central task facing a study of Rousseau's importance for our time is to render tangible—and in turn build upon—his remarkable insight into the underlying dynamic of human psychological experience that he shared with his great predecessors. Athens may have fallen, and the time of the English monarchic world may have passed, but political theory at its most illuminating seeks to understand the enduring forces propelling these transformations which mobilize not just collapse, but renewal, not only endings, but new beginnings. The challenge in such dramatic transitional ages is to identify operating beneath the misshapen and dehumanized natures of the old order, the now unrecognizable Glaucuses produced by corrupt and compromised regimes, the emerging psychosocial aspirations and dreams. It is these latent dimensions of human possibility that would produce in time Western Platonized Christianity, early modern Hobbesian liberalism, and the emancipated collective, psychological, institutional, and citizen-shaping order toward which Rousseau's work points.

Rousseau was a complicated thinker, by no means single-mindedly focused over the different periods of his life, as he at times retreated from the blazing originality and historical leaps of which he was uniquely capable. At the same time, from his epiphany on the road to Vincennes through the works he regarded as his testament, culminating in *Emile*, a work whose visionary specter infuses the most far-reaching thinking of the past two-and-a-half centuries, he offers a compelling framework for the vindication of human history. For in a remarkable way, his work binds the vast reweaving of meta-history as elevated by his nineteenth-century heirs to the process of remaking the world one child and one expression of faith in ourselves at a time. Finally in the late modern period, with the psychosocial writings of Fromm and Marcuse, radical educator A. S. Neill, utopian novelist Marge Piercy, and post-Freudian depth psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, among many others, have the many transformative dimensions of his theoretical contribution begun to take hold. While the project remains to be fulfilled, it offers an unparalleled and enduring statement of our power to ultimately master our earthly fate through the realization of full human selfhood and community.

Reading Rousseau

Rousseau presents a nearly insurmountable challenge to the interpreter, for the scope and impetus of his vision remain inaccessible through recognized scholarly methods. The efforts made in the centuries following his writings to locate the work in relation to previous thinkers evade the irreducible claim shaping his project—that the future could be not merely distinct from what preceded, but essentially released from the weight of the past. In his revelatory letter to M. de Malesherbes announcing the conceptual foundation—the 'crowds of great truths'—of his endeavor, he writes of a 'sudden inspiration' in which 'my mind' was 'dazzled by a thousand lights'. At its center was the wish to 'have shown all the contradictions of the social system', to 'have expressed all the abuses of our institutions', and to 'have demonstrated that man is naturally good' and only 'by these institutions' to have 'become wicked' (Rousseau, c.f. Masters, 1968 [1799]: xii).

This dramatic encapsulation of his transformative intentions reframes the prior eons of human history as the time before people were prepared, in the position, to recognize and affirm their role as the makers, the shapers, of themselves and their history. Damaged and eroded like Glaucus by the demands of survival and seemingly insurmountable forces imposing inner and outer subjugation, human pre-history was constrained to reactivity, accommodation, self-compromise, and self-abnegation, precluding the opportunity of ever facing our true selves, of grasping what we were capable of becoming.

Rousseau thus places himself at a pivotal moment in human history—a turning point at which we can witness ourselves emerging from entanglement in external forces and determinants occluding our true and ultimate shape. At the same time, because all of history had been beset by mis-readings of the human project, evidence of our complicity with the conveniences of incapacity, Rousseau's innovative project also serves as a caution: we are being warned about the potentially tainted conclusions derived from reading not only the authorized past and the future smugly anticipated as mere extrapolation, but reading Rousseau himself. The problematic that lurks over his work, and certainly Rousseau scholarship, is how we can grasp him to the extent we still manifest the moral and conceptual conventions, pressures, and compromises that wrap the fear of change in timeworn presumptions of human impossibility and the folly of affirming human development.

Embodied in Rousseau's transvaluations, if we attend carefully, dwells a lesson as with other spiritual teachers, on how to read the human project and our own humanity anew: to proceed from the inside out. In reversing the current of human meaning, to reject beginning from the existing vanities of a corrupt world shaping the false selves we have been conscripted to assume, it is possible to start from our—hitherto dormant—primordial needs and authentic wishes. Emerging with psychological birth, vast internal intimations alert us to what we can, each of us and together, be. Like Archimedes, he offers us a new fulcrum to move the world, the conceptual power to strip away the historical embellishments and accretions from gods and masters and face our new role as stewards of psychological flourishing and shapers of futures emerging from the shadow of domination.

In reading Rousseau with his intentions uppermost, we must be mindful that while he proposed for us, as for the shrub in *Emile*, a new beginning open to the promises accessible at creation, he was unable to fully picture the emergent world. He confessed elaborating his vision in three works, 'that first discourse, the one on inequality, and the treatise on education, which three works are inseparable, and form a single whole' (Rousseau, c.f. Masters, 1968 [1799]: xiii). Yet Rousseau realized this project could not alone dissipate the burdens of history, that his fullest ideals had no clear fit with his times. Facing the continuing power of the past, realizing toward the end of *Emile* that his model development would not provide a new reality for his protagonist, he was forced in *Emile* and other writings to consider, as with *The Social Contract*, 'men being taken as they are' (Rousseau, 1971 [1762]: 3). While identified by Rousseau scholar Roger Masters (1968: xiii) as efforts to 'mitigat[e]' the 'ineluctable depravation of man by society', the result was what political theorist Louis Hartz (1971: 19) modestly called the 'sadness of a man…trying to reconcile himself to a situation he does not like'.

Reading Rousseau's work through these mitigations may mislead interpreters to assume a thinker eager to overcome a sense of social marginalization. Yet, in our inability to absorb his comprehensive critique of existing failures and his vision of our full humanity, we reveal not Rousseau's failings but our own. Unlike his address to a future from an *Ancien Regime* not yet aware of these truths, we, from that future, are called to fulfill the project: first, to dislodge our complicity in patterns of self-deformation as symptoms of our continued evasion of self-recognition and then to identify and recover the sources of human possibility enabling

us to begin again, not in fear of our nature, but through the miracle of its unfolding.

Dismantling the Past #1

The three works constituting Rousseau's transformative project are inseparable, forming, as he asserted, a single whole. At the same time, they represent evolving—and inconsistent—stages in his continuing effort to undercut the powerful institutional and deeply affective hold of established social systems by dismantling their sense of inevitability and in turn lay the foundation for a comprehensive reconstruction of the social and human order. The discourses are far more successful regarding the former task, tracing the frighteningly dehumanized assumptions and nightmarish implications driving first traditional society and then the liberal successor.

In place of realized individuals and collaborative worlds, these systems produce each in their own ways an intensifying dynamic of developmental arrest and psycho-emotional malformation, diverting individuals from their natures and rendering them vulnerable to the exploitation of unfulfilled core needs and wishes. Easily manipulated by elites adept at mobilizing deficiencies to amass power and wealth, systems of domination and subordination are organized to facilitate mass victimization and justify vast inequities on the presumption of intractable human incapacity. Grand symbols are instead constructed as distraction and compensation to cushion the distress over systemic failures, what Rousseau called 'garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which men are burdened' (Rousseau, 1964a [1750]: 36).

Regarding the reconstructive project, the discourses appear to suggest little way out. Once power is consolidated and the logic of domination and incapacity institutionalized, such regimes, at once 'brilliant and transitory' (Rousseau, 1964a: 52), follow a virtually predetermined overreach until overtaken from sheer inconsistences and incommensurabilities by collapse or revolution. Gradually recognizing an alternative course was needed early in the social process while fuller options are still accessible, Rousseau in the first discourse simply offers a plea for wise rule while profoundly suggestive reframings in the second will prefigure his ultimate conception.

Above all, the discourses furnished Rousseau with an important conceptual *tabula rasa*. Providing in an uncanny parallelism the clearing both to begin his own thinking anew, released from the trap of existing

logics, and to imagine history anew unburdened by past systemic framings anchored in human incapacity and compromise, they produced the imaginative and inspirational space to fashion the great transvaluation in *Emile*. Moreover, lessons gained from the discourses, that even deeply flawed systems contain core human aspirations however betrayed and disfigured, enabled Rousseau to embrace dialectics over outright repudiation of these earlier systems. Recognizing them as the product of developmental impasses, he would integrate them as stages on the path to authorship of a collaborative narrative of human self-realization.

The first discourse is written in a state of extreme distress, preoccupied with recovering the human subject trapped within an endless loop of images in a vast hall of mirrors. So encompassing and self-exalting, proclaimed the crowning achievement of civilization, this traditional system casts aside all efforts at interrogation. Even the acute observer struck by its hollowness has no option but to declare oneself an uncomprehending barbarian. Rousseau is at this early point torn: on one side overwhelmed by this shameless impersonation of greatness; yet a gnawing conviction that this utter failure to even address human actualization represents a blind deviation without extenuation. Given the yawning gap between commanding political and cultural power 'alone on the one side' and 'intellect and wisdom' seeking the 'felicity of the human race….alone on the other' (Rousseau, 1964a: 64), no path toward reconciliation surfaces.

It was tempting to discount this realm of images as entirely insubstantial and undeserving of further consideration. Yet, if the dream of transformation was to forge a place in the shaping of human culture, such blatant projects of mystification must, as Nietzsche later learned, be arraigned as insidious and calculating flights from the real. The discourse will leave no aspect of the contrivances of 'external appearance' unimplicated, the 'ornamentation' and 'disastrous splendor' and 'fatal arts', the 'sterile speculations' and 'specious arguments' of 'charlatans', a world of 'semblance' revealing as its underlying logic 'exactly the opposite' of 'what' things 'are' (Rousseau, 1964a: 37, 45, 46, 48, 56, 60, 36, 39). Such an obsessive retreat to the illusory betrays deeper feelings of dread and incapacity at work, some psychosocial dynamic needing to be exposed regardless of defensiveness in order to diagnose the (real) source of the panic.

Once we seek to pinpoint the patterns of aversion from Rousseau's perspective as a cultural psychologist approaching the manifest

phenomena in a way akin to dream interpretation, these etudes take on deeper and less evident connections and interrelations. By 'examin[ing] closely the vanity and emptiness of these proud titles that dazzle us' in terms of their inner sources, the mushrooming 'contradictions' of the social world reveals their deeper 'apparent contradictions' (Rousseau, 1964a: 47, 34, 47). From this perspective, the underlying motivations driving the culture of 'exterior appearance' are hardly trivial: they reveal a desperate 'desire to please one another' in order to gain 'approval', disciplinarily 'reduced' to the 'art of pleasing' according to 'set rules' identified as 'virtues' that one 'must either have' or 'affect' (Rousseau, 1964a: 36–38).

This cultivation of appearances, which Rousseau calls 'vanity', can now be understood as an aversive facade camouflaging the need to 'hide constantly' under a 'false veil'. What cannot be exposed is the terror of disapproval, of others 'seeing through' and identifying our underlying 'inclinations' and even more 'dar[ing]' one 'as he is'. To ensure personal inaccessibility and social acceptance, individuals have adopted the will to presentation as their controlling desire, multiplying shells of competitive performativity enmeshing them in 'so many chains' of 'servitude' (Rousseau, 1964a: 50, 38, 37, 38, 36). Presuming that only dire apprehensions could have prompted such self-negation, Rousseau concludes that some 'deformity' of 'conduct' or 'character', some 'depravity' or 'corrupted…soul[]', leads us to prefer being 'molded' over what is 'sincere' and 'real' (Rousseau, 1964a: 37–39).

Why such aversion? Within the argument lies Rousseau's surmise that imperial Europe had in transitioning from the rudimentary world of survival and group discipline to relative affluence and advanced cultural production left behind cohesive social practices anchored in material and cultural deprivation without cultivating emergent needs and satisfactions. Absent genuine new avenues for the pursuit of pleasure, the vacuum was filled by institutional power, imperial monumentalism, and self-glorification, all compulsions to dominate and control others as substitutes and compensations for inner emptiness and futility. Rousseau's flirtation with early subsistence and warrior societies as alternatives demonstrates his uncertain agenda at this point, for he would in *Emile* soon reject traditional virtue, patriotism, duty, localism, natural simplicity, and the ill-suited philosopher king as incompatible with the increasingly cosmopolitan world of late eighteenth-century Europe.

Neither ordinary people, nor those elites wrapped up in compensatory competition, nor even Rousseau himself, can yet discern new forms of genuine fulfillment. This leaves only 'great men' who can find their way 'walk[ing] alone' without deferring to social pressure. Such an individual could, without succumbing to vanity, dissipate the mystifications, the 'darkness…envelop[ing]', and 'come back to himself to study man and know his nature', to recover the true 'strength and vigor of the soul' and find 'engraved in all hearts' to be unearthed more evolved needs and satisfactions (Rousseau, 1964a: 63, 35, 37, 64). While Rousseau vacillates, unable to identify these underlying 'inclinations', his initial diagnosis had ascertained the fears of individuality underlying the self-diverting surfaces that paradoxically revealed the determinative power of the real. Shortly, he would realize that not mainstream thinkers but often those on the margins 'find it within ourselves' what must be done (Rousseau, 1964a: 38, 64).

Dismantling the Past #2

Given that the *Second Discourse* equally depicts a world forsaking psychological and institutional development for systems of domination and victimization, this work could be interpreted as another scenario of human failing, another false start for the fledgling theorist. But Rousseau has in the interim taken immense steps in redefining his project: instead of framing this discourse as another disquisition on historical fact, fettered to 'knowledge' of the misguided pre-history, ever 'farther away' from and 'incapable of' illuminating underlying truths, he proposes it as an '*experiment*[]', that is, freed from the past to contemplate 'conjectures' regarding possible 'fixed and invariable principles'. To this end, it is more advantageous to consider a 'state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist' (Rousseau, 1964b [1755]: 91–93).

As a thought experiment, establishing 'precise notions' is undertaken 'less in the hope of resolving the question' of fact regarding human origins than 'clarifying' its 'true state'. Given a humanity 'so disfigured', however, theoretical inquiry must be freed to consider what 'was' or 'might' have been possible in light of 'philosophy, when history is lacking', and thus what may still be. To achieve this, to 'separate what is original from what is artificial in the present nature of man', is thus a matter of speculation. The method in the *Second Discourse*, a set of original approaches and

conceptual breakthroughs, will be to produce a prototype of the original condition and assess its feasibility (Rousseau, 1964b: 91–93, 160, 141, 92, 93).

Analysis of the *Second Discourse* can thus help illuminate Rousseau's progress toward his ultimate reconceptualizations. Emerging as the author capable of assembling 'even more philosophy than is generally thought', producing a 'good solution' to these ultimate questions would demonstrate a level of reflection 'not…unworthy of the Aristotles and Plinys of our century', even of 'Plato and Xenocrates' (Rousseau, 1964b: 141, 93, 103). Perhaps, given the 'dangerous dreams' proffered by recognized philosophers, their willingness to 'deceive', (Rousseau, 1964a: 60, 61) the 'arbitrary' reasoning and 'sophisms' despite 'knowing nature so little', one eschewing conventional assumptions, able to reassess their miscalculations shaping 'what human art has pretended to do' and confident enough to forge an 'unshakeable' human art, has a singular contribution to make (Rousseau, 1964b: 95, 164, 94, 97).

While framed as a conjecture about the past, then, his philosophical interjections indicate that not the past, but future possibilities, including a new starting point, form the true subject. Insights from the past can—with abiding caution—be extricated, but not by entangling the dynamic of transformation in its egregious misconceptions. Utilizing the past cautiously, Rousseau recognizes that the advanced societies portrayed in the *First Discourse* had underlying their 'fatal' and 'frivolous' excesses testified to the central importance of gratification in a post-rudimentary world (Rousseau, 1964a: 46). By the 'activity' of our 'passions', he now explains, more advanced capacities including 'reason is perfected; we seek to know only because we desire to have pleasure' through satisfying our needs. Human 'progress', then, 'precisely' results from people's 'needs' and from the 'passions which inclined them to provide' satisfaction for them (Rousseau, 1964b: 116). Tracing the emergence of gratification in its many forms, however undermined and diverted previously at its early stages, will reveal the rich dynamic animating human advancement and ultimately the pathway to self-actualization.

Since the 'passions… derive their origin from our needs', which is to say as 'nature' has 'formed' them, the pressing issue for ascertaining the nature of human fulfillment must be on 'not…corrupt things', that is, on uncovering 'those which are well ordered in accordance with nature'. The two central questions shaping his inquiry thus emerge at the outset, to identify what is natural and in turn the pattern of its intrinsic order.

While no clear answers emerge from the discourse amid a set of arguments that are contradictory, ambivalent, unresolved, stunning intimations are brought to light not only of what constitutes the pre-social core but the dynamic underlying the nature of the developmental process.

Regarding first the identification of uncorrupted human nature, a new starting point was needed that would avoid inevitable repetitions of past failures. Unlike prior philosophers claiming access to the 'foundations of society' by 'going back to the state of nature' and 'savage man' but—with 'none' having 'reached it'—presenting only 'civil man', Rousseau promises to identify the 'original constitution' of the 'human soul' or individual, albeit in its 'hypothetical' rather than 'true origin', that is, prior to 'changes' through the unceasing 'acquisition' of 'knowledge and errors', before the 'artificial' and 'external', the 'conventions' and 'superfluities'. While identifying this hyperbolically as the 'primitive state', thus illuminating the turn of this discourse to the perspective of the excluded embraced in the *First Discourse*, his commitment to origins derives from his belief in an intrinsic design—as with 'animal[s]'—to human nature. To ignore or circumvent this fixed foundation with artificial modifications and surface impositions only impedes the inner dynamic, unnecessarily prodding nature into resisting, opposing, undermining, thus producing unceasing internal and societal conflict (Rousseau, 1964b: 102, 91, 103, 91, 93, 97, 101, 181, 91, 105).

To discern what 'best suits his constitution' in achieving the optimal 'establishment of society', those 'true needs' and 'qualities' present at the outset and never to be 'destroy[ed]', the 'difficulties that hide' the 'real foundations' must be 'remove[d]', 'separate[d]' out, 'strip[ped]' away, to allow '*natural man*' at once invariably 'true' and universally applicable from wherever 'you may come', to provide an 'unshakeable base' (Rousseau, 1964b: 95, 94, 96, 104, 93, 91, 105, 93, 103, 104, 97). Central to the project of removal, in turn shaping the discourse, is his overriding concern with preventing the emergence or activation of the greatest danger, an inflated and unmanageable self-regard or vanity: 'foolish pride' and 'vain admiration for [one]self', demanding domination and the 'esteem of others' and becoming the wish to be 'sole master of the universe'. As demonstrated throughout history, vanity overwhelms genuine desires with a 'multitude of new needs' that one must either 'have…or affect' in order to 'place oneself above others'. Provoking a 'consuming ambition' to 'profit at the expense of others', it leads ineluctably to both 'domination and servitude' with 'perpetual conflict'

and 'violence' as well as the incessant need to exaggerate one's capacities to 'appear' worthy of 'contrived inequality' (Rousseau, 1964b: 193, 199, 195, 155–157).

The logic of the conjecture thus emerges, to posit a condition in which 'vanity does not exist'. Dismantling the conventional psychosocial dynamic, Rousseau strips away the internal refuges of internalized expectations and artificially contrived desires in order to identify the human drives before vanity emerges. Probing for original human nature underneath the acquired layers required radical surgery: 'anterior to reason', where the 'simple impulsion of nature' operates prior to 'every kind of enlightenment' that 'stifle[s] nature' and 'engenders vanity'; and before 'sociability', which animates mutual 'recognizing' and interpersonal 'commerce' and in turn 'relationship[s]' which through 'comparisons'—aided by 'reflection'—magnify 'differences' and in turn the wish for 'distin[ction]' and 'preferences'. Enabling the 'relative sentiment, artificial and born in society' of 'vanity' to proliferate, each as it 'inclines each individual' to manifest a 'greater esteem for himself than anyone else', drives a fierce and unrelenting competition over one's 'relative fortune' and 'rank' (Rousseau, 1964b: 222, 95, 116, 96, 132, 95, 121, 133, 139, 222, 110, 138, 222, 155, 156).

With the putative source of human misfortune temporarily excised, despite the erasure of 'social bonds' and even social contact, absent any 'notion of thine and mine', the 'imagination' and 'knowledge' now limited to the 'needs from nature' to be satisfied through 'self-sufficien[cy]', individuals can be imagined having never developed the relative capacity to 'evaluate themselves' or 'compare themselves', dwelling as their sole referent in all matters. While from a more limited perspective fanciful, Rousseau has gained insight into the nature of a viable starting point: true or core needs as 'desires' that can be 'satisfied' without 'exceed[ing]' their immediate fulfillment. The initial elementary impulses not subject to expansion are those related to the exigencies of 'self-preservation' and, where those needs are being effectively met, a sensitivity to the humanity of others (Rousseau, 1964b: 126, 133, 116, 117, 137, 222, 116, 105, 116, 95).

Always operating in equilibrium between 'our desires' and satisfactions available in our 'possession' or 'easily acquired', individuals can resist, be shielded from, the 'temptation' to pursue 'excesses', the 'appetites' and 'want[s]' associated with 'luxury', the 'dissolute' and 'deprave[d]', the

'useless' and 'hardly necessary' which produce 'degeneration' and 'enervation'. This balance of 'modest needs' and satisfactions 'easily found at hand' allows Rousseau to posit, for the first time, a primordial condition of adequate fulfillment, presciently suggesting its potential in much later affluence as the genuine condition of well-being (Rousseau, 1964b: 213, 117, 114, 109, 199, 114, 111, 112, 117).

While hemmed in by a framing which is inherently unsustainable, unable within the terms of the conjecture to address the eventual appearance and indeed dominance of vanity and disquieted by the exclusion of much that is invaluable, Rousseau's uncompromising reductivism creates the opening for a great theoretical breakthrough. Amid his considerations, in a note unintegrated into the text, Rousseau concludes that the valid needs of one's 'own preservation' and one's 'humanity and virtue' regarding others previously identified themselves emerge out of an impulse more primal than either these or vanity: this 'natural sentiment', which is 'very different' in its 'nature' and 'effects' from 'vanity', he calls 'love of oneself'. While not yet fully absorbed, Rousseau has unearthed the grounding of healthy self-development as it arises from the evolving fulfillment of self-actualizing needs without damaging rupture or diversion or from patterns of excess generated in response to internal deprivation. In this way (there will be others), he has also penetratingly rendered his own primitive, bound by the rigors of subsistence, an implausible basis for the abundant unfolding of human self-love (Rousseau, 1964b: 222).

The second foundational inquiry, concerning an intrinsic order to internal processes, proved more problematic and less resolvable. Because Rousseau, focusing on the original condition, posited an already self-sufficient individual constitutionally unable to develop further or adjust to the inevitably forthcoming threats, insight into the dynamic of human development was hindered from the outset. And yet, again contesting the logic of his own assumptions, he also underscored internal development as a core attribute of human nature. Moreover, recognizing from his reflections on Western progress that fulfillment of more rudimentary needs had enabled new needs and capacities to emerge together with more elaborate social forms, then presumably the healthy satisfaction of more basic desires without excess or deformation would enable further internal stages to naturally emerge as an attribute of human maturation.

In Rousseau's terms, development derives from the 'freedom' to 'choose[]' one's fulfillments as an intrinsic capacity separating humans

from other species which 'cannot deviate' from what 'nature commands'. The progressive unfolding of pleasures and the means of satisfaction as a natural human tendency thus constitutes beyond 'dispute' the core 'faculty of self-perfection', what we might call the capacity for self-actualization, a 'distinctive and almost unlimited faculty' which 'successfully develops all the others'. To be sure, it is the 'source of all man's misfortunes', propelling humans through its propensity to misuse to 'deviate' from their natures 'often to [their] detriment', compounding—as the discourse will detail—the initial misshaping of the instinctual core to produce a fatal history of folly and degradation. And yet, as a 'free agent' able to 'acquiesce or resist', humans need not always adopt 'errors' and 'vices' when through the 'serious study of man, of his natural faculties and their successive developments' further 'enlightenment' might 'bring[] to flower' our 'virtues' and prepare the way for 'correcting our institutions' (Rousseau, 1964b: 113–115, 97, 115, 97).

Despite this opening, Rousseau yields to the apprehension that no imaginable future could redeem the previous record of failure. Still tentative about the emerging distinction between love of oneself and vanity, the developmental process is treated as a process of decline with every step beyond rudimentary self-preservation engendering excesses 'far above nature', the 'vanishing' of 'original man', and thus the triumph of vanity. Though a frightening tale, however, a less apparent implication has emerged to suggest an alternative outcome. For, though nowhere activated, the latent capacity for self-development has been identified for shaping the world beyond preservation, employing the aspiration toward self-perfection to achieve more actualized forms of mastery and fulfillment (Rousseau, 1964b: 115).

This core human characteristic, then, has—however intrinsic—been excluded from the experiment, unutilizable because there are no subjects, no makers of history, and no individuals capable of responding to and possibly surmounting the inevitable—even 'very trivial'—challenges through either personal development or collective collaboration. Constituted from the outset as victims, lacking 'foresight' and 'curiosity' and 'imagination', being 'so far from the degree of knowledge required', they 'remain[] ever a child', stillborn, who can 'never develop by themselves' the 'potentiality' latent in *'perfectibility'*, they are overmastered and rendered passive in the face of every challenge by the quagmire of 'servitude and domination'. Yet the failure, it is apparent, lies not in a limited

human potential but rather in a conjectural subject unequipped to realize it (Rousseau, 1964b: 141, 117, 137, 139–140).

Forced, absent a more empowering turn in the discursive logic, to identify modernization as a failure, Rousseau addresses the complex role of English liberalism, its institutional evolution and underlying theoretical framework as well as its operational post-traditional society. Condemning its savage neglect of human potential, he characterizes it as the modern exemplification of domination and exploitation, self-arrest and hollow artifice. At the same time, Rousseau notes liberalism's indispensable contribution to human advance: mobilizing evolved instrumental capacities to fashion collective mechanisms for surmounting both the primitive condition and European traditionalism; moreover, by premising modern political order on pre-social personal capabilities, providing an extraordinary opening for the transformative role of the individual. Making evident through its social contract formulation and commercial dynamism the critical role for instrumental agency, liberalism integrated societal and economic development as central features of the modern West.

At the same time, despite claiming to have begun with original individual impulses to generate society and history, liberalism merely posited irreversible pre-institutional vanity which it utilized to induce vulnerable individuals into the dead end of corrupt and exploitative social forms. Moreover, in its ardor to shatter traditional confines and mobilize the driving energies of modernization and economic development, it indiscriminately called upon and inflamed appetitiveness of all forms as springs for human enterprise. To resist the liberal result, nurturing those original pre-social capabilities and opportunities liberalism had been unable to access and implementing procedures for their mastery and integration had to be initiated before individuals were irreversibly induced and manipulated into fatal self-compromise and social entrapment.

Rousseau's sharpening focus undercuts the premises of the conjecture: establishing robust initial growth before the onset of vanity pointed toward human subjects responsive to facilitative nurturing rather than self-sufficient and also constitutionally equipped for continuing internal and interpersonal growth, rather than fixed. Implicitly an alternative developmental model was crystallizing distinct from previous patterns succumbing to the dynamic of vanity: a path grounded in pre-vanity needs and their satisfactions, facilitating flourishing self-love and expanding actualization. Since this alternative path involved, seemingly paradoxically, social arrangements cultivating genuine pre-social growth beginning

from birth, societal transformation would require human agents who could utilize collective resources to implement the early dynamic of self-formation. For all who 'can no longer' recover 'original simplicity' but demand the 'development' and 'enlightenment' of 'human faculties', an evolved human art—an originative political theory—would have to be called upon (Rousseau, 1964b: 202, 150, 202, 150). This novel and innovative art would be charged with navigating the dangerous forces of institutional cooptation and deformation, laying the foundation in turn for an enhanced human history.

The Creation Story—Take Two

Is it possible to begin the world anew? The revolutionary impetus spreading from the French Revolution staked its two-century rewriting of history on that affirmation, only to discover that mass psychological transformations rarely proceed from institutional reconstructions. The great political theorists have addressed this issue differently: critical shifts in the human self-conception at key moments in history reveal unprecedented human powers and capabilities which at once dissolve old structures and provide, if grasped in their fullness, a fulcrum for the fundamental reshaping of the collective project. Rousseau, as had Plato and Hobbes, understood that self-reconstitution is not the consequence, but the cause of the reshaping of the human order, and *Emile* is the living testament to that realization. In an age on the cusp of upheaval, old orders were dying, and through release from their once crushing grip new vibrant dreams of more encompassing self-actualization were furtively emerging from the human depths. Many prescient witnesses identified such intimations, but only Rousseau—even to this day—fully apprehended the emerging capacity of individuals to create aspirations and ends and realized that the world would never be the same.

Having cleared away the first human creation, formed in reaction to unmanageable challenges and compliantly defended to provide justification and palliation for systematic self-suppression, a second chance, a genuine re-creation, awaited. Rousseau in *Emile* reconstitutes the world upon the basis of powers and capacities humans have always possessed yet never recognized as their own. Returning not to the liberal pre-social condition but further back to our pre-socialization roots, he proposed that this grounding would provide the developmental basis for intrinsic self-actualization. While unable to fill out numerous particulars, in his

unfolding account of this self-creation story we become potential authors of a realized humanity.

Offering the opportunity extended at the beginning of the *Second Discourse* to 'go backward' to 'what you were', to the time before individual development was traumatically arrested by societal pressures, in order to recover access to full human potential, *Emile* is the acceptance. Now firmly grasping the centrality of human development as well as its necessary formation in society, Rousseau provides an originative conceptual frame evolving organically from pre-socialized human nature organically toward mature self-actualization. While previously rejecting the model of the 'child' as' 'weak' and 'dependent', he now recognizes that humans at the start are 'ever a child' (Rousseau, 1964b: 104, 129, 137). If every future begins in childhood, creating a world unencumbered by the chains of human vanity requires more than simply conjectural evasion or even altered institutions which can at best contain its impact. As a developmental diversion arising from the frustration of natural needs and satisfactions, producing as a consequence a futile search for compensations, vanity must be prevented from emerging at its internal source. While the considerable specifics of this transformed socialization in *Emile* are open to continual reconsideration (and beyond the scope of this essay), the irreducible questions facing a transformative human art have been dramatically posed: *what are humans in their emergent natures? what can humans in turn become if true to these natures in the course of growth?*

Rousseau's redesigned architecture of human development is introduced at the very outset of *Emile* with a stunning series of conceptual innovations. In the beginning of this new human history, the individual is conceived as a 'numerical unity', one whose subjectivity must align with its own experience, unlike the 'fractional unity' of 'civil man' which aligns with either the traditional collective or the collectively constructed individuality of the pre-contractual liberal citizen. In the age of emerging individualism, the civil person is the epitome of modern inauthenticity or 'double men', ever 'in contradiction with himself, always floating between his inclination and his duties', torn between genuine wishes and external pressures. To realize an individual that will 'be oneself, and always one' and 'act as [one] speaks', given that we are born 'weak' and 'totally unprovided' for, we must acknowledge that 'everything we do not have at our birth and which we need when we are grown is given us by education'. And because the goal is an individual whole and unconflicted, 'in agreement with himself', previous educational models inculcating either

social absolutes or worldly instrumental functions that rent humans from their natures must be subordinated to serve that lone component 'which we have no power' to alter, our 'nature[s]' (Rousseau, 1979 [1762]: 38–41).[1]

Building upon his illumination that 'man is naturally good' (Rousseau, c.f. Masters, 1968: xii), a fitting education would enable one to be 'set free' rather than denatured, raised 'uniquely for himself' as a 'man' before a 'citizen'. To provide this, the 'natural man' will 'have to be known…his inclinations…observed, his progress seen, his development followed'. More specifically, such natural self-development and self-actualization, following the note in the *Second Discourse*, must be encouraged to emerge from the early experience of *amour de soi*, the non-comparative love of oneself, well prior to internalized needs and constructed pleasures as the basis of authentic and un-coopted self-valuing: 'The source of our passions, the origin and the principle of all the others, the only one born with man and which never leaves him so long as he lives is self-love'. All false and inauthentic passions, by contrast, must be understood as 'modifications' from 'alien causes', which force the individual 'outside of nature' and 'in contradiction with himself' (Rousseau, 1979: 39, 41, 212, 213).

The definitive art, then, is the facilitation of genuine human development, promoting the progression of self-love as it unfolds to generate and shape the subject's desires and aspirations, capacities and connections, self-mastery and self-regulation: first, through facilitating the flourishing of the child's 'original dispositions' and 'inclinations' of positive self-connection and self-commitment from the start, including protective measures to prevent the destructive 'disfigur[ing]' of emergent potential through the typical socialization shaping 'trained…school horse[s]'; and then, in a strikingly original formulation, through facilitating the internal unfolding of discrete developmental stages characterizing an optimal process of intrinsic self-actualization. Among the conceptual advances in his developmental framework is the reframing of his previous examples of abortive social orders as cases of collective psychosocial arrest and malformation at specific stages (Rousseau, 1979: 39, 37).

[1] Education for the modern individual cannot even any longer presume either a traditional 'fatherland' or even liberal forms of citizenship, for in an 'unsettled and restless' 'age of mobility and change' the only certainty, the 'single guide' is one's own nature and development (Rousseau, 1979: 42).

From the outset of *Emile*, Rousseau has resolved his earlier uncertainties: there is a 'path of nature' for the species, an underlying order to self-development achieved through the 'education of nature'. Given that a child is 'born capable of' and 'already learning', the stages of internal growth and self-integration begin with the initial experience of self-regard, each evolving in turn as our 'dispositions are extended and strengthened' to advance and enhance the core love of self. At each developmental step, the growing individual can thus integrate new capacities to take on novel challenges in order to fulfill its maturing desires and aspirations through effective instrumental activity, sustainable relations, and moral understanding, evolving at its own internal pace through genuine engagement with oneself and world on its journey to full actualization (Rousseau, 1979: 68, 38, 61, 62, 39).

The optimal sequence of Emile's development and corresponding education is initially outlined as the unfolding priorities providing gratification: from initially what is 'pleasant or unpleasant' as exemplified in the *First Discourse*, to exercise of instrumental capacities on 'objects' to fulfill worldly interests central to the *Second Discourse*, and finally to an unprecedented culminating post-liberal stage utilizing individual moral 'judgments' to advance one's 'idea of happiness or of perfection', including what a 'man raised uniquely for himself [will] become for others'. These stages, involving fundamental structural advancements in self-capacity and self-empowerment, sequentially cultivate specific psychological, emotional, and experiential potentialities, for 'each age, each condition of life, has its suitable perfection' and 'maturity proper to it' (Rousseau, 1979: 39, 41, 158).

Proceeding to trace the socialization committed to this 'internal development of our faculties and our organs' in great depth and detail, Rousseau begins with early socialization focusing on the infant's 'purely affective' initial 'sensations' oriented toward 'pleasure and pain' through 'cultivation of the senses' as the 'great mover' of 'present interest'. This requires securing the young child's 'original form' from external pressures and expectations, adult 'whims' and pretentions, the malignant 'domination and servitude' with which 'we fill up his young heart' and then 'impute to nature'. With 'more true freedom and less dominion', the opportunity to 'do more by themselves' and to cultivate genuine 'wants' and not 'whims', the young child experientially discovers its desires and needs 'relative' to oneself while embracing the world as the setting for

the realization of inner wishes (Rousseau, 1979: 38, 62, 117, 38, 48, 68, 120, 92).

Aspiring preconsciously without comparative or socially corrupted measures of value to be none 'other than himself', one's 'first duties' are experienced to 'ourselves' to grow and learn: 'Give the child desire, then let your desks… go. Any method will be good' after that. What has been kept 'hardly aroused' are the seeds of '*amour-propre'*, that wish for a 'relative *I*', while 'self-love', the non-comparative sense of being 'contented when our true needs are satisfied', has become firmly anchored (Rousseau, 1979: 243, 97, 117, 208, 213). As young children become 'able to do more by themselves', instead of being pressured into functional tasks or preparation for future success, this time of 'reason's sleep' is to 'enjoy our whole being': 'Love childhood; promote its games, its pleasures, its amiable instinct'. Being 'constantly in motion' and 'play[ing]…all day', the child explores 'what suits him' and the world all around. By satisfying things 'immediately related' and 'want[ing] nothing uselessly', one is implicitly learning instrumental competence. Moreover, free from 'vanity' and 'obedience', from 'routine' and 'custom' and 'habit', a 'need to prove himself', the child internalizes the value of experience, genuine impulses, and a sense of personal worth (Rousseau, 1979: 243, 97, 117, 208, 213).

Gradually acquiring new capacities that can expand its pleasures, the growing child now seeks to enhance its powers of competence, to 'discern what is useful' and 'seek new means….appropriate to his designs'. Self-development, while never lectured about, is always proceeding from the child's initiative as it advances naturally from pleasurable experience to the capacity to fulfill simple pleasures to the pleasure that activity—play—brings to the pleasure in worldly activity from learning and mastering the various useful pursuits. With an expanding concern for the 'true relation of things', the functional 'order of the whole', priorities consistent with one's specific 'taste' and 'talent' will suggest a calling to 'assist nature' (Rousseau, 1979: 243, 97, 117, 208, 213).

Now approaching the final stage of development, the desires for social connection and moral engagement, a constructive reading must account for those complex and seemingly incommensurable dimensions of Rousseau's framing previously inchoate and now explicit: on the one hand, its conceptual grasp of the goal of optimal self-realization within a developmental framework of unimaginable brilliance and originality not approached before or since, serving as a world-transforming source of

modern developmental and transformative thinking both individual and collective; on the other hand, its psychosocial and pedagogical missteps and contradictions that, until understood as the envisioning of a distant world that he was unable to fill out either developmentally in his own experience or conceptually, jeopardize the project's power.

Entering the period of social relations and moral understanding committed to 'real well-being' and 'fearlessly show[ing] himself precisely as he is', grounded not in 'public opinion' but 'relations such as they are', the project of 'moral' education now addresses 'relations' with others and issues of human nature, psychological development, and society. Moral and abstract understanding now arises as the culmination of the 'ordered development of our primitive affections' from a 'natural need in the human heart'. To that end, socialization must cultivate a 'sense of the true relations of man', and to 'order all the affections of the soul according to these relations' (Rousseau, 1979: 120, 203, 187, 214, 235, 219). At the same time, the discourse shifts at this point from its grounding in the education from experience, for Emile is the singular precursor in a world that cannot yet be experienced. Absent appropriate companions, educations, or social relations in the society of his time, he has been raised in a protected enclosure, and in describing the education upon leaving the enclosure Rousseau is forced to improvise alternative strategies to suggest his moral and social pedagogies.

Rousseau presciently discerned that an individual moral self, if not arrested, would emerge through an authentic and non-comparative development, generating moral priorities and ideals of collective well-being shaping connection with and commitment to others and to the larger world. Uniquely prepared to 'enter[]' a 'new order of things', now 'leaving the state of nature' by 'enter[ing] the moral order' to become a 'moral being' (Rousseau, 1979: 203, 193, 235, 214), one now assumes the culminating task of one's 'whole life', to engage the world with 'impartiality' and 'equitable[ness]' rooted in one's own 'authority'. The challenge for socialization, with the individual now 'amidst so many new relations' and needing to 'depend' on and 'judge' with increasing vulnerability to vanity, is to help Emile acquire a 'soul' in 'love' with the 'true principles of the just'. Possessing the 'strength of an expansive soul' which consequently 'makes' him 'identify himself' with others, he will be able to achieve the 'love of men derived from love of self', which is 'the principle of human justice' (Rousseau, 1979: 214, 244, 207, 205, 252, 253, 235).

The moral education consists of two distinct parts, developing 'friendship' and 'attachment' by 'extend[ing]' his 'heart' to others, and then in time pursuing the larger 'study of the human heart' in order to 'embrace the whole'. In the 'Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar', Rousseau presents a full picture of the moral 'order' and the individual's just and 'harmon[ious]' relation to it. As one's 'conscience' and 'inner light' emerge as constituents of the just soul, which in 'agreement with [one]self' unites reason and 'natural sentiments', one 'can want only the good'. As the 'love' of ultimate 'order' and one's place in it, the 'innate principle of justice' expresses itself by 'giv[ing] each what belongs to him': 'the good man orders himself in relation to the whole', placing oneself on the 'circumference' in equal 'relation to the common center' and 'all' the 'creatures', unlike the 'wicked one' who 'orders the whole in relation to himself' as the 'center of all things'. In realized selfhood, one is 'accountable to himself' morally to perform one's 'true duties' established 'independent' of 'institutions'. At the end of Book IV, imagining a future beyond Emile, Rousseau pictures a 'reciprocal….society' of 'mutual attachment', a playful egalitarian community with each participant 'openly preferring himself', each 'our own masters', yet each appreciating the self-love of the others with 'our hearts…b[ou]nd together' (Rousseau, 1979: 220, 226, 240, 249, 275, 267, 269, 291, 282, 289, 285, 313, 318, 311, 348, 349, 352).

In evaluating *Emile* and its importance for the future, the difficulties encountered filling out the transformative vision must be emphasized. Rousseau's ideal of an individual self-realized and self-grounded in a world of such individuals was offered, as with Plato's resort to the myth of a just world and Hobbes' mythic projection of an absolute sovereignty for an individualistic age, to a world not yet ready. Rousseau's 'natural education' emphasized experiential learning in 'actions rather than in speeches': 'Let them learn nothing in books which experience can teach them'. But in a society without facilitative companions, socializations, or social relations, no other Emiles can be found or even imagined, only a singular 'big pear tree' in a garden of 'dwarf pear trees', within a larger world that 'ought to be equal everywhere' but entails vast 'inequality' (Rousseau, 1979: 184, 251, 254, 194, 202).

Without access to the experience of the healthy self-love of others, young Emile had to be protected until the moral stage from a world consumed by vanity. Moreover, this culminating stage, necessarily limited to lessons from books and verbal advice, was directed to stirring pity

for the suffering beneath the epidemic of inflated self-presentation rather than love of fully companionable others and ultimately turns—unable to project Emile's full development—to Rousseau's own experience. This inability to conceptualize evolved relationships characterized even Emile's childhood as lacking significant connections, including with the governor, and his ultimate companion, Sophie, is only an insubstantial complement and support in a world incommensurate with Emile's singularity.

Rousseau recognized the relational complexities facing himself—and his governor—poignantly asking 'how is it possible that a child be well raised by one who was not well raised himself?' Admittedly 'lost' himself without the 'worthy' Vicar, his governor's detachment reflects his own imaginative and relational inability to surmount the insecurities of vanity and comparison, evident in both the governor's extreme praise for Emile and his need to control Emile and 'make him feel' humiliation at its slightest surfacing (Rousseau, 1979: 50, 262, 260, 245). And yet, forced to employ the meager personal and collective resources available, Rousseau was able to peer far beyond himself and his world, illuminating our potential to grow into a valid sense of authority within a larger moral world, to shape genuine ends and priorities and jointly shape equitable relations and communities as a fulfillment of that self.

Beyond Emile: From Exemplary Development to a Transformed World

Rousseau acutely sensed that the emerging developmental energies he called Emile were bursting forth to shatter the self-arrest of the traditional and in time liberal worlds. And if Emile himself could not retain self-authority to complete the journey experientially to a collaborative society of developed equals, given a world driven by incomplete and aggrandizing individuals needing domination to compensate for their thwarted development, he etched in the Western soul a vista of individual and collective actualization. As the most compelling thinker for the late modern world, initiating a new framework for human maturation that reshaped continental philosophy and political thought, the emerging fields of psychology and educational theory, and the projects of human liberation, he revealed that natural self-development, if facilitated using our full capacities and our collaborative resources, can, through a new socialization and pedagogy, nurture the synthesis of individual aspirations and collective well-being for a post-liberal world.

Laying the ground work for transformations emerging just beyond the horizon of a collapsing liberal system, Rousseau has placed within our grasps the power of remaking history in the image of our aspirations rather than our deferrals and refusals. His model points us toward the emergence of individuals as authors of their own life narratives, shapers of their own ends, and collaborators in the project of democratic community formation. We are in an age where many now seek to realize these new potentialities, to foster our understanding of the path ahead. At the same time, the project remains each of ours: to unfurl and master our dreams of empowerment and human flourishing fitting for a post-industrial age as we have so long believed within reach.

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Marxism and Critical Theory

‘The Most Absolute Authority’: Rousseau and the Tensions of Popular Sovereignty

Peter Hallward

Rousseau’s equation of popular sovereignty with a general will remains an exceptionally helpful way of approaching the main problems that regularly confront emancipatory and egalitarian political projects. A short list of the most familiar modern examples of such projects might include the French and Haitian revolutions, the Russian Revolution, the anti-colonial mobilisations of the twentieth century, and the patriotic internationalism that oriented the myriad liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Whether or not they invoke Rousseau directly, each such project tends to ground the legitimate exercise of power more or less explicitly in ‘the will of the people’, understood not as the prevailing spread of individual opinions (or what Rousseau disparaged as the mere ‘will of all’) but as a common purpose derived through mass association and public deliberation, i.e. as an actively *generalised* will, one empowered by collective capacities.[1] As they are built up over the course of their generalisation, the

[1] I have developed some of the broader aspects of this account of political will in ‘The Will of the People: A Preliminary Outline’, 2022; cf Hallward (2024, 2025).

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scope of these capacities expands or shrinks with the size and determination of the association. If it is to achieve its aims, each such association must then find a way of resolving the several tensions that will always threaten to undermine it.

Considered in the very broad terms that might apply to a wide range of mass movements, these tensions include those between historical circumstances and political aspirations, between material constraints and moral priorities, between common interests and specific concerns, between prevailing majorities and dissident minorities, between leaders and followers, between legislative authority and executive capacity, between direct participation and indirect delegation, and more generally, between inclusion or extension and intensity or concentration. If they are not addressed effectively, these many tensions risk the division, corruption, or usurpation of a movement's capacity, and its collapse into demoralised impotence. Before Marx or Lenin, before Luxemburg or Martov, before Zetkin or Gramsci, before Fanon or Rodney, Rousseau anticipated each of these tensions with unprecedented clarity and prescience, and if his own way of approaching them is sometimes limited by his anachronistic historical imagination, his candid confrontation of these difficulties helps to orient the analysis of emancipatory politics to this day.[2]

In what follows, I take it for granted that Marx's account of capitalist exploitation and of the formation of the proletariat as a tendentially universal class still offers the single most insightful analysis of the historical conditions and economic pressures that, in a world structured by capital, both enable and constrain the organisation of emancipatory mass movements.[3] All of the thinkers considered here agree in principle with Rosa Luxemburg's thoroughly Marxian insistence, in the final weeks of her life, that 'socialism will not be and cannot be inaugurated by decrees […]. Socialism must be created by the masses, must be made by every proletarian. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there must the chains

[2] As CLR James once put it, 'what has endured from the eighteenth century is the man who challenged it from top to bottom, Jean-Jacques Rousseau' (James, *Modern Politics*, p. 35).

[3] Although there isn't space here to review them, for a range of perspectives on the relation (or non-relation) of Rousseau and Marx see for instance Vargas (2014, pp. 223–243), Della Volpe (1978), Colletti (1972), Levine (1994), Tamás (2006), Vincenti (2019).

be broken'.[4] They agree that any revolution worthy of the name 'can be begun and carried out only by the masses of people themselves', and that unlike the minoritarian revolutions of the past, a genuinely socialist revolution (in keeping with the guiding idea of the *Communist Manifesto*) will be 'the first which is in the interests of the great majority, and which can be brought to victory only by the great majority of the working people themselves'.[5] Analysts of such revolutions who rely solely on Marx and a Marxian critique of capitalism, however, to the exclusion of Rousseau, often tend to evade rather than solving some of the most intractable problems identified by the earlier thinker. What follows, then, will work through each of these problems in turn, in as much dialogue with Marxian revolutionary thinkers as space allows, starting with Rousseau's own unapologetic insistence on the primacy of the will over any involuntary or sub-voluntary forms of determination (whether these be the result of natural forces, or of geographic conditioning, or of cultural inheritance, or of providential design, or of apparent historical or technical progress, or of economic necessity, or of market imperatives and their purportedly 'spontaneous order', etc.).

Before we start, we need to remember that what's essentially at stake for all these thinkers remains a version of the classical political question of *sovereignty*, understood (as much by Lenin or Luxemburg as by Rousseau or Hobbes) as the highest power of command, i.e. the capacity of one social actor or class to solicit obedience from others.[6] As is well known, modern conceptions of sovereign authority concentrate it in a single commanding or law-giving centre, a single exercise of political *will*, one that now over-powers all disparate rival (e.g. religious, customary, parochial) sources of authority. It's in this sense that Seyssel, Bodin, and Hobbes make their arguments on behalf of a centralised state authority, and it's in roughly this same sense that capital (understood most succinctly as 'the command over unpaid labour') will subsequently emerge, via its 'originary accumulation', colonial expansion, and industrial development, as the de-facto sovereign power of its globalised world

[4] Luxemburg, 'On the Spartacus Programme', 31 December 1918, https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/30.htm; cf. Pannekoek, 'Theses On The Fight Of The Working Class Against Capitalism', 1947, MIA.

[5] Luxemburg, 'What Does the Spartacus League Want?' (December 14, 1918), in *Selected Political Writings*, p. 368.

[6] Cf. Hallward (2019), and Hallward (2024, ch. 1).

(Marx, 1990, p. 672). Sovereign authority is also the defining characteristic of the *anti*-capitalist power that Marx will invest in what he calls the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', that Luxemburg will associate with mass democracy, and that Lenin and Martov will attribute to their respective conceptions of a *narodovlastie* or people's power.

Over the past couple of centuries, the progressive integration of sovereign state power and capitalist command advanced not only through conquest, enslavement, and expropriation, but also through refinement of its 'supra-coercive' exercise. For reasons too familiar to mention, the history of global capital, and of the state mechanisms that have secured its grip, is a history written in 'blood and fire' (Marx, 1990, p. 875). But it is also the history of a power whose most distinctive legitimation strategy is grounded in an appeal to *voluntary* or purportedly voluntary capacities.[7] On the one hand, as Hobbes and other absolutist theorists conceived it, a sovereign law or command operates (unlike wise counsel or respect for custom) simply as 'an instruction in which the reason for following it is drawn from *the will of the instructor*' (Hobbes 1998, p. 153; cf. Hobbes 1994, p. 165). Sovereign is that actor who can say 'this is legal because we wish it'. On the other hand, what makes such wishes come true, so to speak, is the fact that those who formulate them can indeed do so with actually commanding authority; that is, they are equipped with all the material means required to 'form the wills' of their subjects (Hobbes, 1994, p. 109). As they fell from power, over-reaching sovereigns like Charles I of England, Louis XVI of France, and Nicholas II of Russia each discovered in turn that, for all their pretensions, they had lost the means of translating wish into will.

Given his crudely mechanical conception of the will, Hobbes himself was satisfied that direct coercive pressure, backed up by doctrinal conformity, would normally suffice to terrify people into 'willingly' obeying their sovereign lord. Later theorists of sovereignty, however, would soon realise that less abrasive means of 'manufacturing consent' can also be more effective, more durable, and more far-reaching. Hegel's account of the state, for instance, relies less on coercive force than on the suitable 'disposition' of civic deference and on cultivation of a reverential respect for established hierarchies (Hegel, 1991). Subsequent figures preoccupied with the apparently inexorable rise of mass democracy, from Guizot

[7] On this general point, see in particular Wood (2005), and Mau (2022).

and Tocqueville to Bagehot and Bismarck, likewise pondered distinctively modern means of preserving mass deference; in another key, Foucault and then Agamben's work on disciplinary, bio-political, and 'psycho-political' forms of power pursue comparable lines of investigation. Marx's account of the distinctive mechanics of capitalist exploitation can likewise be understood as part of this uneven but unmistakable re-orientation of power from coercion to consent. The unpaid labour commanded by a capitalist, unlike that of an ancient lord or feudal seigneur, is extracted from 'free workers', workers who now (since they can be trusted to prefer subsistence to starvation) ordinarily submit to waged employment 'of their own free will'. Nothing does more to consolidate the capitalist order of things as 'natural' and irresistible than the replacement of the brazen chains of slavery with the 'invisible threads' and 'golden chains' of 'silent compulsion' (Marx, 1990, pp. 719, 769, 899).[8]

Rousseau anticipated this epochal re-orientation and its implications for both oppressive and emancipatory forms of power. Since a sovereign law or command is the expression of a will, and since 'morals alone penetrate internally and direct wills' (Rousseau, 1994, p. 71 [16:6]) so then the real foundations of political power now rest squarely on the available means of directing wills—either to the advantage of a privileged few, or in favour of the common good. 'While it is good to know how to use men as they are', Rousseau notes, 'it is much better still to make them what one needs them to be; the most absolute authority is that which penetrates to man's inmost being, and affects his will no less than it does his actions' (Rousseau, 1997b, p. 13). For good or ill, legitimate modern rule must be seen to rest on the consent of the people ruled—or more precisely, on the apparent consent of a *sufficient* portion of the people ruled. If under conditions of class or colonial rule such 'people' are defined via exclusions according to property, race, gender, occupation, and so on, nevertheless they may also, in certain circumstances, come to define themselves on the basis of inclusion alone, as free and equal participants in the framing and imposing of a common purpose. Rousseau's greatest achievement was to sketch an account of how this might be done, and also of how it might be undone.

[8] Cf. Lordon (2014), and Davis (2018).

I

Rousseau's point of departure is an unequivocal rejection of any form of sub-voluntary determinism or necessity, in favour of a voluntarist account of political action. His famous reconstruction of a pre-historical state of nature characterised by solitude and sufficiency serves to preclude recourse to supposedly natural or 'innate' conceptions of a general interest or a common good (Rousseau, 1997a). In the rare cases where one exists, a common interest shared by a gathering of people can only arise as something that they themselves have deliberately willed and consciously instituted, and not as something they need simply recognise or receive, on the basis of instinct or inheritance, or as the gift of a benevolent ruler. If an association comes to value equality, it's because its members have chosen to do so; by the same token, common interests are only clarified, and only acquire some political force, through active participation in their clarification and imposition.

Rejecting natural forces or sub-voluntary pressures that might orient political actors, Rousseau affirms that 'there is no true action without will. This is my first principle' (Rousseau, 2010, p. 434). Furthermore, 'there is no true will without freedom. Man is therefore free in his actions' (ibid., 2010, p. 442). As actors we are free in an immediately and sufficiently practical sense, even if Rousseau (no less than Kant) readily accepts than we remain incapable of understanding or of knowing theoretically the nature and scope of such freedom. Taking these points together, Rousseau concludes that 'the principle of every action is in the will of a free being. One cannot go back beyond that. It is not the word freedom which means nothing; it is the word necessity' (p. 442). Although he rarely mentions Rousseau, Gramsci continues in this line of thinking when he immediately welcomes the Bolshevik insurrection of October 1917 as the opening of an era in which a people's 'collective will becomes the driving force of the economy, the force which shapes reality itself' (Gramsci, 1994, p. 40), or when he later recognises, more generally, that 'one can "foresee" to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes concretely to creating the result "foreseen" […]. What "ought to be" is therefore concrete; indeed it is the only realistic and historicist interpretation of reality, it alone is history in

the making and philosophy in the making, it alone is politics' (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 438, 172).[9]

Rousseau's voluntarist point of departure further implies the insufficiency of any amount or quality of 'objective' knowledge in the making of moral and political choices, i.e. in the deciding of 'what ought to be'. To affirm the primacy of the will in political decisions is to affirm the committed participant's perspective over that of a detached observer (or benevolent ruler), and to recognise that commitment and engagement are themselves decisive in any political project, from a local community initiative to a full-scale insurrection. The concentration and expansion of a will to pursue a particular end, and to develop the capacities and means required to pursue that end, are themselves transformative of both the actors and their action. Success or failure of such efforts cannot be predicted in advance, and every 'drama of the will' unfolds in its own irreducible domain of practice and struggle.

Willing practice distinguishes itself from merely wishful thinking by its ability to grasp and overcome the obstacles that confront it, but however careful the investigation of a situation and its objective conditions, every exercise of will rests on a free and thus fragile commitment, one that must forever confront the temptation to yield or quit.[10] This conversion of diffuse popular wishes into a concerted mass will can accelerate and expand, as illustrated by the general course of the Russian Revolution over the year 1917, or by the eventual exhaustion, in the France of 1791–1792, of what Sophie Wahnich calls the 'long patience of the people' (Wahnich, 2008). The expansion of the pursuit of 'general liberty' for the slaves, over the first several years of the Haitian Revolution that began in 1791, and the conversion of this pursuit from a short-term means

[9] It's for precisely this reason that Gramsci insists, along recognisably neo-Jacobin lines, on the need 'to study precisely how permanent collective wills are formed, and how such wills set themselves concrete short-term and long-term ends—i.e., a line of collective action' (Gramsci, 'The Modern Prince', *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 194).

[10] As Keohane explains, 'The heart of Rousseau's theory is what the citizens do together, on which everything else depends: the willing of the general will. […] Rousseau indicates that whatever the outcome of the deliberations that yield this interest may look like, it is not the embodiment of clear and evident natural truth. […] The common good does not exist "out there" to be discovered, but as a configuration of interests revealed in the process of willing' (Keohane, 1980, p. 447).

to a non-negotiable end, offers another especially suggestive dramatisation of this point.[11] The transformation of wish into will can also, of course, proceed in reverse, in the face of new obstacles, new divisions, or new incapacities—a point likewise dramatised by the progression of each of these revolutionary sequences, as they came to rely on militarised forms of coercion; the eventual fate of Toussaint Louverture is again a case in point. The legacy of the Russian sequence, needless to say, casts an especially long shadow here. Within weeks of the October insurrection, Martov's sustained critique of Bolshevik 'maximalism' and 'utopianism' had already raised questions that the new ruling party would eventually prove unable to answer.[12]

The unequivocal primacy of engaged volition in Rousseau, and in broadly neo-Rousseauist thinkers like Sartre, Fanon, or Badiou, stands in marked contrast, of course, to the dialectical approach of Marx and his partisans. Following Hegel and in opposition to Kant, they reject any 'one-sided' disjunction of freedom and necessity, or of morals and nature, and tend to downplay the scope of political volition in favour of the material factors and relations that operate 'independently of the will'. As Marx's famous formulation has it, it is people's 'social being that determines their consciousness' rather than the reverse (Marx, 2000 [Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*], p. 425), and from his scientific or anti-utopian perspective communism is not a mere 'ideal' to be pursued but 'the real movement' already shaping the emergent order of things (Marx, 2000 [*The German Ideology*], p. 187; *The Civil War in France*], p. 590). Since Marx believes that 'capitalist production begets its own negation with the inexorability of a natural process' (Marx, 1990, p. 929), so then what most matters, at least in the general development of the class struggle, is not 'what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do' (Marx, 1975, p. 37). Since 'no social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed' (Marx, 2000 [Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*],

[11] See in particular Fick (1991).

[12] Cf. Martov, 'Marx and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' (1918), in Martov (2021), Getzler (1967), p. 193.

p. 426), so then from this perspective any attempt at political revolution made prior to capital's exhaustion can be condemned in advance as 'quixotic' (Marx, 1993, p. 159).[13]

On the other hand, and complicating this seemingly unilateral account of historical progression, Marx also insists on the primacy of revolutionary practice and on treating social transformation as an emphatically practical question. He insists, early and late, that 'Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness' (Marx, 1992 [*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*], p. 329) and by doing so steadily 'subjects the play of [nature's] forces to his own sovereign power' (1990, pp. 283, 284). If its eventual establishment can be predicted as the necessary result of forces operating independently of the will, nevertheless communism involves 'the development of all human powers as such' (1993, p. 488), and in particular 'the control and conscious mastery of these powers, which, born of the action of men on one another, have till now overawed and governed men as powers completely alien to them' (*The German Ideology* [1846], *Collected Works* 5: 51, 52). As we gain some purposeful control over our social relations, Engels concludes, so then 'it depends only upon ourselves to subject them more and more to our own will, and, by means of them, to reach our own ends […]. Man's own social organization, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by Nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action' (Engels, *Anti-Dühring* [1877], *Collected Works* 25: 266, 270).

Now as Lenin and Marx's other most militant followers never tired of insisting, in the generation after his death, it was precisely his scientific credentials, his demonstration of the apparently inevitable collapse of capitalism as anticipated by its own 'laws of motion', that secured his following in activist-revolutionary circles. As Lenin stressed, Marx 'was the first to transform socialism from a Utopia into a science, to lay a firm foundation for this science, and to indicate the path that must be followed in further developing and elaborating it in all its parts'[14]; 'the Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true'.[15] No less than Lenin or Trotsky, Luxemburg saw no tension let alone contradiction

[13] The neo-Menshevik implications of this aspect of Marx's work are explored in detail by Chattopadhyay (2019, 2021).

[14] Lenin, 'Our Programme' (1899), *Collected Works*, vol. 4, p. 210.

[15] Lenin, 'The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism' (1913), *Collected Works*, vol. 19, p. 23.

between demonstrations of capital's imminent demise and exhortations to make every effort to hasten the process and lessen its 'birth pangs'. The same can be said of Martov, Pannekoek, or Mattick. After all, as Walter Rodney points out, both proletarian and bourgeois actors share the same 'objective reality': what distinguishes them is precisely their political perspective on it, and consequently, their priorities, their aims, and their means of achieving them—in other words, their class interests or 'subjective' concerns (cf. Rodney, 2022, p. 45). It is the scope of these *aims* or ends and the viability of their various means that is 'scientifically' illuminated by Marx, with a view to making the choice between 'socialism or barbarism' as easy as possible. What matters in practice is still the active making of this choice, and the engaging in its consequences, as fully and confidently as we can. In a striking expression of their confidence in the movement of history, figures like Trotsky or Gramsci saw, in Marx's anticipation of the necessity of socialist revolution, no more of an infringement upon the political liberty of their class than Cromwell and other militant Puritans had found in their own affirmation of divine predestination.[16]

Trotsky and Lenin rely here, however, on a sub-voluntary alignment with historical momentum that is foreign to Rousseau and a broadly 'Jacobin' conception of political action. Although Lenin always privileged strategic decisions based on careful analysis of the specific constraints posed by the 'concrete situation', his indomitable belief in socialism's 'necessity and inevitability' is thoroughly informed by Marx's analysis of the inexorable growth and revolt of the proletariat as a class 'trained, united and organised by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production' (Marx, 1990, p. 929). Guided by the indisputable 'fact of increasing impoverishment and proletarianisation', Lenin would always remain convinced of socialism's 'necessity and inevitability from the point of view of the materialist conception of history' (Lenin, 1960b, p. 353; cf. Lenin, 1965, p. 500). But while Lenin and his Bolshevik contemporaries never seem to have worried about the alignment of 'advanced' proletarian consciousness, emerging popular interests, and the general movement of capitalist development, the increasingly obvious divergence of these three factors, in the wake of Russia's civil war, prompted a crisis in orthodox

[16] Trotsky, *Where is Britain Going?* (1925), ch. 3, http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch03.htm; see also Trotsky, 'May Day in the West and the East', 25 April 1924, https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/04/mayday.htm; cf. Gramsci (1997, pp. 337, 369).

Marxism from which it still hasn't recovered. As thinkers as different as Gramsci and Benjamin would soon understand, 'the gravest mistake of the socialist movement' had been to assume it was following the historical current and could allow itself to go with rather than against the prevailing flow of development.[17] Trotsky was the most prominent early casualty of this divergence, of course, but his most incisively anti-vanguardist critics, figures like Pannekoek or CLR James, suffered their own variants on political marginalisation, each compounded by their unrepentant investment in historical necessity. Today, such neo-Menshevik investment in the inevitable collapse of capitalism amounts to little more than a call to wait for capital's contradictions to mature still further, in the hope that a definitively insurmountable crisis might finally erode rather than renew capitalist relations of production.

But time is a luxury we no longer have, and the prospects of collapse and erosion, on their own, offer scant grounds for hope. To address the question of socialism or barbarism via Rousseau *together with* Marx, by contrast, is to foreground the positive work of consolidating a general class consciousness and of organising and sustaining a common purpose, without tacitly relying on anything resembling economic necessity or historical momentum to get these jobs done. Rousseau accords nothing but corruption and decay to the movement of historical time as such. If one day socialism replaces capitalism, it will only be because enough people are willing and able to make this happen; if left to play out on its own terms, capitalism's own further development promises little more than an acceleration of our current race to the bottom. 'Workers of the world unite!' remains an exhortation, a summons to participate in a world-embracing project, rather than the description of an involuntary process that might somehow proceed all by itself.

II

Although he did not invent it, the name of Rousseau's signature concept is well chosen.[18] From his voluntarist perspective, it is indeed the work of *generalising* a will that characterises distinctively political action and that invests a political actor with its actual authority or power of command.

[17] Gramsci (1994, p. 110). Or in Benjamin's formulation, 'Nothing has corrupted the German working, class so much as the notion that it was moving, with the current' (Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", §11).

[18] Cf. Riley (2016); Keohane (1980), Farr and Williams (2015).

'Sovereignty consists essentially in the general will' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 114 [SC 3:15]), and 'sovereignty, which is only the exercise of the general will is, like it, free, and is not subject to any kind of engagement' or supra-sovereign constraint (Rousseau, 1994, p. 24 [3:11]).

This equation of sovereign power with the general will of an association means, first and foremost, that the scope or extent of such power varies positively with the extent of its generality. As Rousseau explains in the *Discourse on Political Economy*, 'every political society is made up of other, smaller societies of different kinds, each one of which has its interests and maxims', all serving to 'modify the appearance of the public will by the influence of their own'. Within the narrow limits of these sub-societies, any 'given deliberation may be advantageous to the small community, and most pernicious to the large one', such that one of their members may well be 'a courageous soldier or a zealous lawyer and a bad citizen'. The great and abiding question of politics is thus whether the particularising interests of these smaller societies can be fruitfully and durably aligned with the general civic interests they all share, such that every member of the largest association thinks of themselves as citizen first and lawyer (or priest, soldier, senator, property-owner…) second (Rousseau, 1997b, p. 7).[19]

On that condition, it follows that 'the more the State expands, the more its real force increases' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 88 [SC 3:2]). The more its force increases, the more it enlarges and 'ennobles' the perspectives of its members. Far from regretting the lost innocence of a vanished 'state of nature', Rousseau understands that 'good social institutions are those that best know how to denature man, to take his absolute existence from him in order to give him a relative one and transport the I into the common unity, with the result that each individual believes himself no longer one but a part of the unity and no longer feels except within the whole' (Rousseau, 2010, p. 164). The more this unity widens and broadens, the more its members are transformed and empowered. Participation in the new association may deprive someone of the 'independence' they might have enjoyed in isolation, but 'he gains such great advantages in return, his faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas enlarged, his sentiments ennobled, his entire soul is elevated to such an extent' that he becomes an altogether new person. From a 'stupid and bounded animal'

[19] Cf. Vargas (2014, pp. 91, 92, 98).

he is transformed 'into an intelligent being and a man', finally equipped with 'moral freedom, which alone makes man truly the master of himself' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 53, 54 [SC 1:8]).

Other things being equal, then, 'the most general will is also the most just', such that 'the voice of the people is indeed the voice of God' (Rousseau, 1997b, p. 8). In keeping with this logic, a staunch Rousseauist like Robespierre will consistently frame the revolutionary project as 'the great cause of humanity', 'the common cause', the 'people's cause', and so on; once this cause came under enormous pressure both from within and without, it was saved by nothing less than 1793's *levée en masse*, a general mobilising of people and resources across the full expanse of the nation. Although Rousseau's own concern is with the constitution of sovereign peoples, or with national-liberation movements (of the kind he associates with the Corsica and Poland of his own day, or that Che and Fanon will later associate with the Cuba and Algeria of their day[20]), the sort of generalising he has in mind also applies to the formation of a trade union, a worker's council, or a political organisation, for instance the Social Democratic parties that took shape in some European countries in the final years of the twentieth century, or the various attempts at an international organisation of working people. Other suggestive examples would include the mobilising of appropriately-named 'general strikes', insofar as these can only succeed (as anticipated by those mobilised during the 1905 revolution in Russia) if they manage to expand in breadth and depth beyond the limits of any merely minoritarian organisation, 'to become a real people's movement', one that can win over and 'draw into the struggle the widest circles of the [hitherto hesitant or] unorganized workers'.[21] The wider a strike can spread the more force it exerts, and to this day, there is arguably no more forceful an expression of a general will than a mass strike. [22]

[20] On this association, cf. Gordon (2014), Hallward (2011, 2019).

[21] Luxemburg, 'The Mass Strike', in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 158; cf. Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, pp. 68–76.

[22] Cf. Luxemburg, 'The Mass Strike' pp. 180–181. 'Extension of the strike to ever larger masses, the only tactics appropriate to wrench concessions from capital, is fundamentally opposed to the Trade Union tactics to restrict the fight and to put an end to it as soon as possible. Such wild strikes in the present times are the only real class fights of the workers against capital. Here they assert their freedom, themselves choosing and directing their actions, not directed by other powers for other interests' (Pannekoek, 'Theses On The Fight Of The Working Class Against Capitalism', 1947).

In broad terms, the generalising of a will proceeds on the basis of three conditions. First, as an exercise of the *will*, it must be grounded in a free decision and a free act, rather than suffered as a constraint, internalised as a custom, or received through an inheritance. Though shaped by the circumstances that frame it, the 'act by which a people is a people' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 49 [SC 1:5]) is 'the most voluntary act' in the world (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 123 [SC 4:2]). Rather like the working class in E.P. Thompson's celebrated account, what qualifies as 'a people' here makes itself, or wills itself into being—not ex nihilo, of course, and not as the sort of fully mobilised actor that will *result* from this willing, but nevertheless always as an actor and not only as acted-upon.[23] What's at stake is less a process of gradual evolution or slow accumulation than a re-orientation that begins with a relatively punctual commitment or engagement, in roughly the same way that someone might join a union or party, or be won over to a political programme, be 'converted to the revolution', and so on.

Second, as the *generalising* of a will, what's at issue is the clarification of shared or common interests, and the privileging of a collective project over and above any divergent or divisive particular interests. The priority is less the absolute extent or reach of the association than its relative density—its expanse coupled with a continuity of close and reliable contact, on the model, from Rousseau's agrarian perspective, of an evenly settled countryside, a social fabric with a minimum of 'wasteland' or gaps (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 104 [SC 3:8]). At the most basic level, as CLR James puts it, 'the general will is expressed when its political form makes the individual feel himself part of the community',[24] i.e. when this community is held together not merely by forms of market-mediated inter-dependence but through consciously organised relations of solidarity, mutual support, cooperation, communication, and so on. Countering a long series of arguments developed by his sceptical, mercantilist, and laissez-faire predecessors in absolutist France (to say nothing of their counterparts in Scotland and England), Rousseau makes no concessions to those who sought to harness avarice and the selfish pursuit of private interests to the cause of collective prosperity and social stability.

[23] Cf. Madeleine Davis, 'Edward Thompson's Ethics and Activism 1956–1963: Reflections on the Political Formation of *The Making of the English Working Class*' (2014).

[24] James, *Modern Politics*, p. 105.

On the contrary, the common good can be secured only by people who expressly act in common, as common and for the common; Rousseau's ideal would be a state in which 'each Citizen is nothing and can do nothing except with all the others' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 69 [SC 2:7]). The exception to this category of 'all others' will be any group or class that insists instead on retaining particular privileges or powers that set them outside the common or above everyone else, i.e. those whom Rousseau typically berates as *les riches*.

In order to ensure the priority of generalising over particularising interests as the guiding principle of a new *peuple* or association, in the first book of *The Social Contract* Rousseau adopts what are often read as extreme if not proto-despotic measures. He insists on the 'total alienation of each associate with all of his rights to the whole community' and accepts that 'whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body: which means nothing other than that he shall be forced to be free', since political freedom can only be secured through participation in the sovereign or law-making will (Rousseau, 1997c, pp. 50, 53 [SC 1:6, 1:7]; cf. pp. 61, 62 [2:4]). Rousseau's wilfully paradoxical recourse to 'force' here should not obscure the fact that he's appealing less to direct coercion than to a marshalling of all the various kinds of transformative and 'ennobling' social encouragement, education, and emulation that members of might draw on, in order to invite or incite their associates to engage as fully as possible in the common cause (Affeldt, 1999, pp. 305–308, , 2000, pp. 578–582). Although the implications may threaten liberal notions of property and individualist conceptions of autonomy, whenever anyone joins an organisation or project that operates on the principles of majority rule and 'one person one vote', they tacitly accept a version of Rousseau's conditions. The only way to ensure equality of participation within the association (or union, or party, or social movement) is to refuse to recognise all pre-associational entitlements or privileges, like those based on inherited wealth or status; only then are the terms of association symmetrical, consistent, and 'equal for all' (p. 50). 'The commitments which bind us to the social body are obligatory only because they are mutual' (p. 61 [2:4]). And the only way for a group to remain united, in the wake of a decision that involves disagreements and risks division, is for dissenting members to accept that, over the course of a deliberation, 'when the opinion contrary to my own prevails, it proves nothing more than that I made a mistake, and that what I took to be the general will was not' (p. 124 [4:2]). As a member of a

union, for instance, you may argue against a proposal to go on strike—but if the proposal prevails, you have a choice between respecting the will of the majority and the political equivalent of exile. Only a few short years after Rousseau's death, members of the hundreds and then thousands of Jacobin Clubs that constituted themselves in revolutionary France soon had plenty of opportunity to put this principle to the test, and the tension between party discipline on the one hand (at the risk of dogmatic conformity) and dissident factionalism on the other (at the risk of splits and schisms) has been a recurring challenge for revolutionary organisations ever since.

Third and final condition: the generalising of a will does not imply mere indifference to specific interests, but rather the composing of a common project that might come to be shared, each in their own way, by all the members of the situation. Our general will is only ever upheld as my will and your will, and tensions between interests that might unite or divide us are constituent of our association. Rousseau accepts that individuals and sub-groups of any association must always have their own particular concerns, and the relation between these particularising interests and common or generalising ones is something that needs to be worked out in each case. Rousseau acknowledges this contingency by recognising the need (between the initial moment of voluntary association that invests a group with its own sovereign power and the subsequent 'ordinary' exercise of this power through mass participation in legislation or law-making) for some sort of extra-ordinary figure or vanguard role—the role of his famous *législateur*, or constitution-maker, on the model of Moses or Lycurgus, or in other situations, of a constituent assembly or vanguard 'precursor' (Rousseau, 1997c, pp. 68–72 [SC 2:7]). He further recognises the persistence of this tension between particular and general interests by embracing the principle of majority rule, not as a liberal-individualist means of respecting merely numerical preponderance (the mere 'will of all' as a tally of the most widely held opinions on this or that question) but because deliberations regulated by the principle of 'one person one vote' offer the best available means of *collectively* clarifying a genuinely common project, and the best means of reconciling a dissenting minority to an emerging consensus.

Whether it's a matter of its initial orientation or its routine continuation, the priority is to find a way whereby the shared or common interest might durably prevail over any particularising one, always on the basis of

free or voluntary assent. Whether this is best done by enabling particular groups to organise their own specific contribution to the common project (again at the risk of separatism and division) or by framing the common project in terms wide enough to align everyone involved is a question that cannot be answered in advance. The Jacobin clubs that spread rapidly throughout France in the years after 1789 invented one set of answers to this question, and the Social Democratic parties organised in late nineteenth-century Germany and France experimented with others; the Russian party famously split on this point, in 1903, and never managed to properly re-unite.

The improvised recourse to worker's councils or soviets in the course of the Russian Revolution of 1905, and then, their subsequent reinvention and multiplication all through the Russian empire in 1917 is another familiar case in point. Reflecting on their role in the 1905 sequence, Trotsky stresses how

> the Soviet came into being as a response to an objective need – a need born of the course of events. It was an organization which was authoritative and yet had no traditions; which could immediately involve a scattered mass of hundreds of thousands of people while having virtually no organizational machinery; which united the revolutionary currents within the proletariat; which was capable of initiative and spontaneous self control [… and of acquiring] authority in the eyes of the masses on the very day it came into being. (Trotsky, 1905, ch. 8)

Reflecting on the 'astoundingly effective' operations of the Soviets in both 1905 and then especially in 1917, and noting the way that all sorts of groups were accorded delegates on the basis of proportional representation and 'subject to recall at any time', John Reed concluded that 'no political body more sensitive and responsive to the popular will was ever invented' (Reed, 1918; cf. Reed, 1977, 11). As the vehicle for a collective will that eventually came to see itself as the sole legitimate source of sovereign authority, from the moment a popular strike council was first established (in Ivanovo-Voznesensk) in the spring of 1905, 'the Soviet really was a workers' government in embryo',[25] the nucleus of a 'new

[25] Trotsky, 1905, ch. 22, MIA.

type of state power'.[26] In the context of 1917, to argue in favour of 'all power to the Soviets!' was to argue in favour of mass sovereignty, in favour of a *narodovlastie*, nothing more or less.

As they championed these Soviets or councils as a new potential basis for the exercise of mass sovereignty, Lenin and the Bolsheviks also confronted many of the questions that would repeatedly challenge that 'indivisible' unity Rousseau emphasised as so essential to sovereign authority. If different constituencies among the people (workers, peasants, soldiers, national minorities…) constitute themselves through different councils, how should these councils be coordinated? How far should dissent and criticism be tolerated within and between them, before these might threaten the generality of the people themselves? What is the best way to limit the spread and impact of factionalism? What kind of differences require specific if not separate forms of delegation or organisation?

This is the sort of question that divided Lenin from Luxemburg on the issue of national self-determination, for instance, and it's one that would recur in the arguments around more or less separatist conceptions of national autonomy all through the twentieth century. If Jim Crow or apartheid-style racialisation is a ruling class strategy designed to divide and disempower the working classes of countries like the US, South Africa, or Guyana, for example, how far should demands for black self-determination be limited to the special interests of a racialised group, and how far should they be understood as central to a mobilisation of working people as a whole?[27] Another variant of this question, regarding the need to organise women workers as women and not solely as workers, again divided Luxemburg (or Vera Zasulich) on the one hand from more assertively feminist socialists like her friend Clara Zetkin (or Alexandra Kollontai). In the formative years of Russian social democracy, a similar

[26] Lenin, *The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, CW, vol. 30 (Moscow 1974), p. 264. Cf. https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/callinicos/1977/11/sovpower.htm; cf. Anweiler, *The Soviets; The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921* (1975); Ferro, *Des Soviets au communisme bureaucratique. Les mécanismes d'une subversion* (1984).

[27] On the need to forge cross-racial working class unity in Guyana see in particular Rodney (1981). Cf. Asad Haider, 'The Shadow of the Plantation', *Viewpoint*, 2017; cf. Gavin Walker (2011), 'Postcoloniality and the National Question in Marxist Historiography,' *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 13:1, 120–137; Nikhil Singh, *Black is a Country*, 2005; Teltumbde, *Republic of Caste*, 2018.

question divided those who, like Arkadi Kremer, defended the need for a specifically Jewish Labour Bund as a semi-autonomous party within the larger workers' party from those who, like Martov and Trotsky, came to insist on a single organisation with a single chain of command.

Rousseau himself tended to worry more about the dangers of factionalism than of under-representation, for either a 'will is general or it is not; it is either the will of the body of the people, or that of only a part' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 58 [SC 2:2]). If willing and able, an inclusive popular body can hold itself together in the face of powerful means of divide-and-rule, and it's telling that Rousseau considered the Jewish diaspora as an especially remarkable example of how a general will might sustain itself over time, in defiance of innumerable obstacles:

> It is an amazing and truly unique spectacle to see an expatriate people, without either location or land for nearly two thousand years; a people that has been modified, oppressed, and mingled with foreigners for even longer [...] a scattered people, dispersed over the earth, subjected, persecuted, scorned by all nations, and yet preserving its customs, its laws, its morals, its patriotic love, and its initial social union when all its links appear broken. The Jews give us this amazing spectacle. (Rousseau, 1994, p. 34 [4:24]; cf. Rousseau, 2005, pp. 171, 172)

III

Regardless of the way the members of a people or of an organisation might choose to address the tension between its general interests and specific concerns, they face a further and arguably more intractable tension between the generality of a will's extension, on the one hand, and the intensity or concentration of its exercise, on the other. This is perhaps the single most important and suggestive tension in the whole of Rousseau's work.

As Rousseau conceives it (along lines that are consistent with standard English usage), willing is bound up with acting or doing, or more precisely with the *capacity* to act. Again, we may be free to wish for whatever we want, but we can only properly *will* those ends that we may in principle achieve. Like Trotsky, Zetkin, or Gramsci, Rousseau understands perfectly well that 'whoever wills the end cannot refuse the means' (Rousseau, 1997b, p. 23; cf. Trotsky, 2017, p. 25; Zetkin, 1920; Gramsci, 1994, p. 99). The scope of any *vouloir* or will varies directly with its

pouvoir or power, and Rousseau distils the relation between the two in what he calls his 'fundamental maxim': 'the truly free man wills [or wants] only what he can do, and he does what he pleases' (Rousseau, 2010, p. 215). Individuals grow able to will and do more as they mature and become less dependent on parents, guardians, or tutors; peoples or groups likewise grow in power the more distant they become from the narrowly individualistic concerns that initially motivated their members. In either case, 'we do not know what our nature permits us to be' (Rousseau, 2010, p. 190) since 'it is only our lukewarm will which causes all of our weakness' and the power or 'warmth' of a will is never set in advance. '*Volenti nihil difficile* – nothing is difficult for those who will' (Rousseau, 2010, p. 494). What is decisive is first and foremost the scope and strength of the willing itself. Here again Gramsci follows directly (though only tacitly) in Rousseau's footsteps, when he distinguishes between 'empty, bombastic whim' and a will equipped with 'the means to act'.[28] While he recognises the 'importance of utopias and of confused and rationalistic ideologies in the initial phase of the historical processes whereby collective wills are formed',[29] Gramsci's particular neo-Jacobin concern, early and late, is always with the dynamics of 'concrete will, that is, the effective application of the abstract will or vital impulse to the concrete means which realize such a will'.[30]

As we have seen, other things being equal, 'the most general will is also the most just' (Rousseau, 1997b, p. 8). The next problem Rousseau confronts, however, is the fact that, as a will widens or generalises, other things do not remain equal. On the contrary, the more a will expands in scope the more its exercise tends to stretch and slacken. The capacity of a will varies both positively *and* negatively with its extension. Rousseau recognises that 'interest and commiseration must in some way be constricted and compressed in order to be activated, and it would seem that the sentiment of humanity dissipates and weakens as it spreads to the whole earth' (Rousseau, 1997b, p. 15). The intensity of a voluntary commitment is more easily sustained among a small and focused group, for instance within the sort of collective actor that Sartre will profile at length in his recognisably neo-Rousseauist account of a 'group

[28] Gramsci, 'Our Marx' (1918), *Pre-Prison Writings*, 57.

[29] Gramsci, 'The Modern Prince', *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 194.

[30] Gramsci, *Selections*, 360.

in fusion' (Sartre, 2023). The more coordinated a group or actor, the more forcefully and decisively it can act. The least forceful actors are the most scattered or fragmented, and as a general rule, 'the people's force acts only when concentrated, it evaporates and is lost as it spreads, like the effect of gunpowder scattered on the ground and which ignites only grain by grain' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 104 [SC 3:8]).

As anyone involved in a trade union or political organisation is likely to know, steps taken to generalise a will and to broaden its extension must therefore be compensated by steps taken to heighten its intensity and reinforce its density. This is the main challenge facing sustained practices of mass association, which must find a way simultaneously to generalise *and* concentrate their exercise. The need to get this balance right is what's at stake, of course, in the endless debates about the relative merits of 'horizontal' as opposed to 'vertical' models of organisation (cf. Nunes, 2021), about the difficulties of clarifying and sustaining a 'mass line', or of upholding the conflicting tendencies of a 'democratic centralism'.

In the French revolutionary sequence most directly influenced by Rousseau, the issue of mass concentration crystallised around its only available locus: the nation's capital city, Paris. It was the massed people of Paris, and in particular the inhabitants of its most politically concentrated districts like the Cordeliers, or the faubourgs Saint-Marcel and Saint-Antoine, who, in a series of decisive interventions (starting with 14 July and 5 October 1789), kept the revolution on a properly revolutionary course, at moments when its continuation or orientation was in doubt (cf. Burstin, 2005; Wahnich, 2008). By the time the revolution was celebrating its first anniversary, in the summer of 1790, the question 'where do you stand on the political role of Paris?' was probably the single clearest dividing line between the diverging left and right wings of the National Assembly. By the time Paris staged its most decisive intervention of all, overthrowing the monarchy on 10 August 1792, a gulf separated those who (like the Girondins on the right) sought to disperse the nation's political deliberations across its full geographic expanse, and those who, like Robespierre on the left (rising to refute Girondin critics who condemned the August insurrection as a minoritarian putsch), recognised that 'a great nation cannot rise in a simultaneous movement', and must rely on its capital as the only effective bulwark of the more general liberty. Since 'tyranny can only be struck by the portion of citizens that is closest to it', so then these latter 'ought to be regarded as justified by tacit

proxy for the whole of society', and on that score 'be approved or repudiated entirely'.[31] The Russian capital 'red Petrograd', and in particular its militant working-class neighbourhoods like the Vyborg, Narva, and Peterhof districts, played a similar role all through the twists and turns of 1917.[32] By contrast, thwarted urban insurrections like those in Paris of April and May 1795, or of June 1848, or in Moscow in December 1905, in Berlin in January 1919, and so on, foundered in part on an incapacity to rally the wider nation around a single centre.

Rousseau himself offered no a priori means of resolving conflicts between the centripetal and centrifugal forces at play in a mass mobilisation, and one of the great virtues of his approach is that it obliges confrontation with them as a permanent and unavoidable dimension of political life. Perhaps nothing was more fatal to the course of the Russian Revolution, by contrast, than the widespread belief among leading party members that such conflicts were only apparent, and should disappear along with the material bases of capitalist society. To his own eventual cost, Trotsky famously anticipated the likely dangers run by an organisation that (like the early Bolshevik party) trusted too much in an effectively sub-voluntary or historically-guaranteed alignment of its members' interests with those of its leaders, leading to a situation in which 'the organisation of the party substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally the "dictator" substitutes himself for the Central Committee'. In the case of apparent divergence of masses and leaders, any attempt to invest the latter with 'the power to liquidate and degrade' is bound to be counter-productive at best and disastrous at worst.[33] Twenty years later, caught up in the consequences of just such a divergence, Trotsky settled for a version of the dictatorial position he had initially condemned, concluding in 1924 that 'the party in the last analysis is always right' and so 'none of us desires or is able to dispute the will of the party'.[34]

[31] Robespierre, 'Answer to Louvet's Accusation', in Robespierre (2007, p. 43), trans. modified.

[32] Cf. S. A. Smith (1983).

[33] Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks* (1904), part 2, https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks/ch03.htm; cf. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed* (London, 1954), pp. 92–93.

[34] Trotsky, 3 Sezd RKP (b), pp. 165, 166, cited in Cliff, 'Trotsky on Substitutionism' (1960) https://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1960/xx/trotsub.htm.

Trotsky's frequent sparring partner Martov, after reluctantly accepting the irreversible fact of the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in 1917, quickly despaired of the new regime's reliance on another form of substitution—the replacement of the organised and politically 'advanced' urban proletariat, as the party's main base of support, by a relatively disorganised mass of 'peasants in uniform'. Animated more by a spirit of mutinous revolt than by the principles of scientific socialism, and hardened by years of exposure to the relentless violence of world war, the soldiers' 'pseudo-socialism of "trenches and barracks"' rapidly came into direct conflict with the real thing, opening the door to morale-sapping clientelism and gangsterism. 'One shudders to think how far the very idea of socialism will be discredited in the minds of the people', Martov confessed to a friend a couple of months after October: 'We are undoubtedly moving through anarchy towards some sort of Caesarism, founded on the entire people's having lost confidence in their ability to govern themselves'.[35]

IV

The obvious risks involved in the over-concentration or over-centralisation of a common will are compounded by the fact that the formation of any such will itself involves an irreducibly anticipatory or 'vanguardist' moment. The shift from 'what might this conglomeration of individuals happen to want?' to 'what is the common will of this organised group?' is a real qualitative shift, and like any exercise of the will it proceeds over time. If over time a large number of people start to mass together or make common cause, such a mass must come to have a more or less determined and resourceful 'leading edge', made up of its more activist or more zealous members, alongside more passive or hesitant ones. Even so emphatic an advocate for mass participation and mass struggle as Rosa Luxemburg regularly insists on the essential role to be played by the most committed, most highly organised, and most lucid members of a popular movement. She also understands that, however carefully they might try to prepare the ground, there will always be a sense in which, from the perspective of a detached observer, it will seem as if any attempt by the proletariat to take power will appear 'too early'. Given

[35] Martov, letter to Nadezhda Kristi, 30 December 1917, in Getzler, *Martov*, p. 172. Cf. Martov, *World Bolshevism*, 43–45; Savel'ev and Tiutiukin, 'Iulii Osipovich Martov (1873–1923), The Man and the Politician' (2006), pp. 69–70.

the existing balance of class power, 'the proletariat is not in the position to seize political power in any other way than "prematurely"', Luxemburg recognises, and 'since the proletariat is absolutely obliged to seize power once or several times "too early" before it can maintain itself in power for good, the objection to the "premature" conquest of power is at bottom nothing more than a general opposition to the aspiration of the proletariat to possess itself of state power'.[36] As Marx had explained in a famous passage of his *Eighteenth Brumaire*, long-matured bourgeois revolutions may seem to 'storm swiftly from success to success', but proletarian revolutions are initially compelled to improvise in the most hostile conditions and thus to 'criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh […, and] recoil ever and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible' (Marx, 2000, p. 332).

Again, Rousseau's recognition of the need for a vanguard 'legislator' or initial 'educator' figure, who helps to establish (without actually participating in) the basic or constitutional arrangements through which a newly associated people might work out their common will, has the virtue of recognising that this working-out process is indeed a *process;* that is, it begins in one place or moment and continues in another. Rousseau accepts that when people first decide to assemble together as a group, they don't yet already know what they will or what must be done to achieve it. They don't yet know what they are capable of, or how far they are prepared to go to achieve what they want. As Rousseau conceives them, legendary legislator-educators like Lycurgus or Moses first need to meet an emergent people where they find them, acknowledging their inherited limitations, credulities, superstitions, in short their current level of 'political immaturity', so as to be able to initiate a self-educating process that will soon eliminate any need for an educator figure—one in which legislative responsibilities pass over, as quickly as possible, to the sovereign or law-willing people themselves. Robespierre summarised this transformative logic when he acknowledged, during the crisis-plagued year of

[36] Luxemburg, 'Reform or Revolution', in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 95, 96.

1793, that during this transitional moment 'we poor devils are building the temple of liberty with hands still scarred by the fetters of servitude'.[37]

This is how Rousseau anticipates the perennial question of political education and political leadership that runs through Marx and then Lenin and the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Since the ideas that dominate a class-bound society are the ideas of its ruling class, any process of political education must begin with a more or less prolonged period of re-education. The initial demands and hopes of the workers' movement (the demands Marx and Lenin associate with trade unions and mere reformism, i.e. for higher wages, a shorter working day, etc.) can be formulated on the basis of everyday experience within the world as we find it; by contrast, an understanding of how capital's law of value operates, and of how capital exploits unpaid labour, involves acquiring knowledge and principles analogous to the learning of any science. While Marx's recognition (in his 1845 fragments on Feuerbach) that 'the educator must also be educated' highlights the fact that all civic or political education is socially situated, and part of an ongoing self-transformation, his conception of social transformation as determined by the 'maturing' and eventual exhaustion of a mode of production, the 'ripening' of its internal contradictions, further implies an essential distinction between relatively 'advanced' and relatively 'backward' locations, moments, and participants in such transformation.

If for Marx the proletariat is the most advanced segment of the working population as a whole it's because the proletarian perspective, as he understands it, is uncompromised by any residual investment in the status quo and is entirely oriented towards a post-capitalist future. If likewise the initial members of a 'communist party' are simply the most 'advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others', it's because they have the broadest and fullest understanding of 'the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement' (Marx, 2000, p. 256 [*Communist Manifesto*]). Once such a party becomes a more organised and substantial force, and slowly acquires the capacity to contest and eventually win 'the battle for democracy' that Marx identifies as its first task—'formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the

[37] Robespierre, 'Gouverner la République' (10 May 1793), in Robespierre (1958, p. 497).

bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat'—so then the alignment or 'merging' of the labour movement and its tendentially more reformist demands with the revolutionary principles of 'scientific socialism' on the other becomes the stuff of party programmes, on the model of Kautsky's 1891 Erfurt programme for German Social Democracy (which itself provides a model for Lenin and Martov's *Iskra* programme for Russian Social Democracy in the early 1900s).[38]

Lenin's notorious insistence, in early writings like *What is to Be Done*, that principled 'Social-Democratic consciousness […] would have to be brought to the workers from without' is the locus classicus of subsequent controversy and testifies to the irreducible tensions at play in the vanguardist perspective. From within the efforts and experience of the labour movement, Lenin argued, the working class 'can develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals', and so in Russia as in Germany or England the 'theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement' (Lenin, 1960, pp. 375, 376). As Lars Lih has shown in convincing detail, recognition of this independence needn't imply any lack of faith in the spontaneous or elementary determination of the working class, or any worries about their rapidly developing political capacity, or desire for empowering knowledge—on the contrary (Lih, 2005). But it does underline the point that the acquisition of this knowledge, and the organising of this capacity, i.e. the merging of the labour movement with scientific socialism, must be willed and pursued as a deliberate task. If this task is neglected in favour of 'worship of the spontaneity of the working-class', Lenin adds, this means 'belittling the role of "the conscious element," of the role of Social-Democracy'. And 'quite irrespective of whether the belittler wants to or not', this in turn means

[38] Kautsky: 'Social Democracy is the merger of socialism and the worker movement' (Kautsky, The Erfurt Programme [1891]; cf. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, 42, 102).

> *strengthening the influence of the bourgeois ideology over the workers*. All those who talk about "overrating the importance of ideology," about exaggerating the role of the conscious element, etc., imagine that the pure working-class movement can work out, and will work out, an independent ideology for itself, if only the workers "wrest their fate from the hands of the leaders." But this is a profound mistake. (Lenin, 1960, pp. 382, 383; cf. 374).

Insofar as the mission of a revolutionary organisation, 'guided by a genuinely revolutionary theory, relying upon the genuinely revolutionary and spontaneously awakening class' is to help 'revolutionaries […] rise to full stature in all their giant strength!' (ibid., p. 448), so then immediate task of Social Democracy is to counteract the effectively pre- or subvoluntary limitations of the existing labour movement, and '*to divert* the working-class movement from [its] spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy' instead (p. 384). The very real danger remains, of course, that the organisation responsible for this diverting may in time exchange its role as temporary and transitional educator for one of permanent leader or guide. As Martov and other Menshevik Internationalists saw with particular clarity, this is indeed the danger that Lenin's party faced in the autumn of 1917, and over the following years, proved unable to overcome.

V

Rousseau anticipated this looming danger too, by acknowledging the irreducible need for government or executive power on the one hand while warning about the dangers of usurpation and representation on the other. In addition to predicting aspects of the sort of 'state capture' that have long been all too familiar to the subjects of global capital, Rousseau here addresses head-on the tendency that would be so thoroughly illustrated by the history of revolutionary movements over the twentieth century, starting with the history of Bolshevik hegemony in Russia.

If a sovereign people is one that invests itself with the power to issue laws or commands that are equally binding on all its members, it still requires an agent (i.e. a government) to execute these commands and apply these rules; the more complex a society becomes, the more pressing the need for such an agency. From this perspective, vague expectations

that, under socialist conditions of production, the need for a state or government apparatus might eventually 'wither away' appear naïve at best. Martov's critique of the more anarchist members of the Paris Commune retains a general validity—'they did not see that capitalism had created such a grandiose mechanism of concentrated production and exchange that the working class cannot master it without having at its disposal an equally grandiose administrative machinery, extending over the entire economic sphere embraced by capital' (Martov, 2021, p. 108). Meaningful autonomy is no longer possible on a simply or one-sidedly local scale.

The more immediate danger is also more intractable. The more powerful a government needs to be, if it's to perform the tasks demanded of it by the people, the more difficult it becomes for the people to retain their control over it and to ensure that it does indeed follow the orders they give it. This problem can be addressed more or less effectively but never eliminated, since the same tendencies that invest a government with the organisation and capacity required for it do its job also encourage it to nurture 'a will of its own that tends to its [own] preservation' and advantage. A properly constituted government should be animated by nothing other than the popular or 'public force concentrated in it', but its routine operations will always encourage it to cultivate its own 'absolute and independent' capacity for action. The challenge then is how to keep 'this subordinate whole within the whole, so that it does not weaken the general constitution by strengthening its own' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 86 [SC 3: 1]). As a rule, the 'personal interest' of kings, or of anyone who acts on behalf of a government rather than the people, is 'first of all that the People should be weak, wretched, and never able to resist them' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 95 [3:6]; cf. 1997b, p. 4). In the end, a sovereign people has no choice but to do their best in what's likely to prove, eventually, a losing battle. 'Just as the particular will incessantly acts against the general will, so the Government makes a constant effort against Sovereignty', i.e. against the people, and unless they find a way to resist the will of the government or Prince,

> it must sooner or later come to pass that the Prince ends up oppressing the Sovereign and breaking the Social treaty. This is the inherent and inevitable vice which relentlessly tends to destroy the body politic from the moment of its birth, just as old age and death destroy a man's body [...]. All governments of the world, once they are invested with the public force, sooner

> or later usurp the Sovereign authority. (Rousseau, 1997c, 106 [SC 3: 10]; p. 119 [3:18]).

Only the unflagging efforts of organised popular oversight over its government, in other words, offer any chance of preserving the proper relation between sovereign and executive. In practice, this involves maintaining the constant pressure of mass association (combining the concentration and generalisation of collective power) over government agencies. Rousseau concedes that contemporary social conditions may make mass assembly difficult, but as a matter of both principle and practice, 'where right and freedom are everything, inconveniences are nothing'. In a virtuous state 'everyone flies to the assemblies' as a matter of course; by contrast, 'as soon as someone says about affairs of state, What do I care? the state has to be considered lost' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 114 [SC 3:15]).

Drawing on the short-lived example set by the Paris Communards of 1871, Marx and then Lenin identified some of the main conditions that a genuinely democratic government must meet—that the people participate as fully as possible in the making of all political decisions, that armed force remains in the hands of the people themselves, that the state or government be stripped of separate coercive powers of its own, that all state officials be elected and liable to permanent recall, that they be obliged to act on their constituents' wishes, that they be paid only regular workers' wages, etc. Luxemburg builds on this agenda when she points out that

> The essence of socialist society consists in the fact that the great labouring mass ceases to be a dominated mass, but rather, makes the entire political and economic life its own life and gives that life a conscious, free, and autonomous direction. From the uppermost summit of the state down to the tiniest parish, the proletarian mass must therefore replace the inherited organs of bourgeois class rule – the assemblies, parliaments, and city councils – with its own class organs – with workers' and soldiers' councils. It must occupy all the posts, supervise all functions, measure all official needs by the standard of its own class interests and the tasks of socialism. Only through constant, vital, reciprocal contact between the masses of the people and their organs, the workers' and soldiers' councils, can the activity of the people fill the state with a socialist spirit.[39]

[39] Luxemburg, 'What Does the Spartacus League Want?' [December 14, 1918], in *Selected Political Writings*, p. 368.

If Lenin's party (as Luxemburg herself was quick to point out) then failed to follow through on most of these measures when they set about establishing their own government in what became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it's not only because of the extreme dangers that confronted a Russia ravaged by class conflict and exhausted by war, economic collapse, and famine—and certainly not only a matter of cynical *real politik* or a lust for power: it's also because they failed to address Rousseau's related and more far-reaching warning about representation.

Precisely because it's a matter of *will*, so then a popular sovereign power is unalienable and unrepresentable by definition. The sovereign 'can only be represented by itself; power can well be transferred, but not will' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 57 [SC 2:1]). This disarmingly simple point is the essential principle of Rousseau's conception of popular sovereignty, and it's one that Luxemburg and Martov understood better than Lenin. Since 'sovereignty consists essentially in the general will, and the will does not admit of being represented' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 114 [3:15]), so then any actors who claim to 'represent' or stand in for the will of the people—whether this be the British Parliament or the Russian Communist Party—are in fact guilty of usurping and thus dissolving it. Rousseau certainly recognises that even the smallest and most concentrated peoples will need to delegate the actual execution of their decisions to particular agents; that is, they will need to elect or appoint the operatives of a duly constituted government, but when it comes to its sovereign or law-making power, 'the instant a People gives itself Representatives, it ceases to be free; it ceases to be' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 115 [3:15]). For the same reason, whenever a 'people promises simply to obey' an authority it erects over it, i.e. whenever it recognises an effectively supra-sovereign authority, 'it dissolves itself by this very act, it loses its quality of being a people; as soon as there is a master, there is no more sovereign, and the body politic is destroyed forthwith' (Rousseau, 1997c, p. 57 [2:1]).

Although mass participation and resolve enabled the Bolshevik seizure of power in the autumn of 1917, the eventual consolidation of this power usurped the sovereign authority that had established it. In the run-up to taking power on 25 October, Lenin's promise to transfer 'all power to the Soviets' was consistent with his exhortations (in opposition to the compromising SRs and vacillating Mensheviks) to trust 'the people's initiative and independence', to rely on the 'strength, majesty

and invincibility of the workers and peasants',[40] and to be confident of 'the greatest revolutionary enthusiasm on the part of the army and the majority of the people'.[41] For Lenin, it remained axiomatic that a revolutionary party could only take power if they could be assured of 'the support of a majority of the people'[42]; in particular, 'only if power is based, obviously and unconditionally, *on a majority* of the population can it be stable during a popular revolution, i.e., a revolution which rouses the people, the majority of the workers and peasants, to action'[43] (Lenin was equally clear, in 1917, that since peasants or 'small proprietors constitute the majority of the population', so then 'the objective conditions for socialism are lacking'—and 'who can say anything or who says anything about establishing socialism against the will of the majority?'[44]).

In 1917, in short, Lenin framed his pitch for Bolshevik hegemony by positioning them as the leading edge of a mass movement in legitimate and long-obstructed pursuit of popular sovereignty. In the autumn of that year, his party won decisive majorities in the key urban Soviets on that basis. Lenin and Trotsky could further justify insurrection in October in terms that were reminiscent of Robespierre's justification of the one that had prevailed in August 1792. In the climactic hours of 25 October 1917, Trotsky could retort to Martov and others who accused the Bolsheviks of pre-empting the will of the Congress of Soviets by launching their insurrection in advance of its deliberations with an insistence that 'the will of the second Congress of Soviets has already been predetermined by the fact of the workers and soldiers uprising', and that such an uprising finds its justification in itself, i.e. in the expression of its own sovereign will. 'Insurrection is the right of all revolutionists. When the downtrodden masses revolt, it is their right'. By this logic, a 'rising of the masses of the people requires no justification', says Trotsky in response to Martov, and 'what has happened is an insurrection, not a conspiracy. We hardened the revolutionary energy of the Petersburg workers and soldiers. We openly

[40] Lenin, 'One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution', 1917 [MIA].

[41] Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Revolution' 1917 [MIA].

[42] Lenin, 'The Crisis has Matured' 1917 [MIA].

[43] Lenin, 'One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution', in *Revolution at the Gates*, 106.

[44] Lenin, 'A Basic Question', 17 April 1917, https://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2017/08/15/lenin-refutes-a-misreading-of-the-april-theses/.

forged the will of the masses for an insurrection and not a conspiracy. The masses of the people followed our banner and our insurrection was victorious'. It is now tasked with executing what the people demand: peace, land, bread, workers' control, and so on.[45] Initial recourse to repression, then, whether it's a matter of ending press freedom or instituting a new secret police, can be justified as transitional means to these abiding aims.

The new government's claim to legitimacy still squarely depends, however, on its pledge to act with and through 'the will of the masses'. For the Lenin and Trotsky of 1917, no less than the Robespierre of 1792 or the Rousseau of 1761, this massed will still remains the ultimate and self-evident source of sovereign authority. But if Trotsky wins the argument on 25 October, he will have no convincing rejoinder to Martov's subsequent condemnation of the new Bolshevik regime as one that had rapidly degenerated into a 'minoritarian dictatorship' and thus into a betrayal of Marx's own conception of proletarian rule.[46] Martov understood the dangers very well, when as early as January 1918 he condemned Bolshevik restrictions on political liberties and political participation, their dissolution of the long-promised but short-lived Constituent Assembly, their closure of opposition parties, as so many ways of 'breaking the mirror' in which 'the people's will' was reflected.[47] Once securely under Bolshevik control, the Soviet state did not follow through on Lenin's neo-Communard pledges to disband the police, to generalise the electoral principle, to minimise the power and status of the bureaucracy, and so on. On the contrary, from its first months in power, it tended 'toward the utmost possible strengthening of the principles of hierarchy and coercion'.[48] Pannekoek's critique of state capitalism and of revolutionaries-turned-despots, on the Bolshevik and then Stalinist model, continues in this line of thinking: 'an exploited class cannot be liberated by simply voting and bringing into power a group of new governors' who might promise to act on their behalf. 'Freedom can be won by the working masses only through their own organised action, by

[45] Trotsky, in Miéville (2017, pp. 298–299); cf. Reed (1977, p. 98).

[46] Martov (2021); cf. Luxemburg, 'The Mass Strike', in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 177–180; Luxemburg, 'The Russian Revolution', in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, pp. 389–391.

[47] Martov, in 'The First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions, 7 to 14 January 1918', cited in Getzler, *Martov*, p. 174.

[48] Martov, *World Bolshevism*, p. 67.

taking their lot into their own hands, in devoted exertion of all their faculties, by directing and organising their fight and their work themselves by means of their councils'.[49] Lenin, by contrast, faced with the practical challenges of retaining power after taking it, soon came to downplay talk of mass initiative and participation in favour of the discipline required to ensure '*unquestioning subordination* to a single will' in the domain of industry[50] and comparably unconditional submission to the party's central committee in the domain of politics.[51] Since Trotsky and Lenin took the alignment of proletarian demands with the Bolshevik party's monopoly of power for granted, once this monopoly was secure they could exchange the regulating principles of mass or participatory democracy (e.g. the electoral principles adopted by the Paris Commune) for the apparent requirements of world socialist revolution. These requirements need not include respect for the quaint conventions of 'formal' i.e. 'bourgeois' democracy. The new historical end appeared to justify abandoning the old democratic means.

What for a long time was taken to be the great strength of Marx's scientific socialism, its conviction that the 'the will of the proletariat' would and must be determined by '*what the proletariat is*' and is thus 'compelled to do', is from a Rousseauist perspective simplistic and evasive. It's an evasion because it attributes much of the sheer work of organising and empowering a collective purpose—the work that Rousseau himself approaches in terms of the deliberate practice and laborious cultivation of 'virtue'[52]—to the unfolding of historical development, in the misplaced hope that capital would find itself compelled, willy-nilly, to exploit its workers in ways that also served to concentrate, educate, and motivate them. And it's a simplification because, unlike those 'virtuous' patriots or partisans of a general will, in their confrontation with the myriad and

[49] Pannekoek, 'Theses On The Fight Of The Working Class Against Capitalism', 1947.

[50] Lenin, 'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government' (28 April 1918), https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/mar/x03.htm.

[51] Lenin, 'Report on the Party Programme', 19 March 1919, *Collected Works* vol. 29, p. 183; cf. Chattopadhyay, 'Did the Bolshevik seizure of power inaugurate a socialist revolution?', https://libcom.org/article/did-bolshevik-seizure-power-inaugurate-socialist-revolution-marxian-inquiry-paresh.

[52] Since 'virtue is only the collection of the most general wills' (Rousseau, 1994, p. 22 [3:6]) and since every person is 'virtuous when their particular will conforms in all things to the general will', then if you want to ensure that a general will prevails your task is simply 'to make virtue reign' (Rousseau, 1997b, p. 15, 13).

irreducible tendencies towards particularism that structure any complex social situation, the scientific socialist on the Leninist model downplays the ever present risk of differences and divisions that might emerge from within the revolutionary class itself, starting with the division between its leadership and its rank and file. The orthodox Marxist wager on world revolution stands or falls on the assumption that proletarianisation *must* indeed develop and 'mature' as a homogenising force, one that will thoroughly and permanently erode all distinctions based on occupation, nationality, ethnicity, gender, and so on. What Rousseau contributes to this picture is a frank recognition that such egalitarian erosion will only proceed if enough people will it so, and do what is required to overcome the compensating particularisms (patriarchal reactions, ethnic chauvinisms, imperialist predations…) that our ruling classes can be trusted to foster in order to contest it.

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Whether the path ahead of us leads to socialism or barbarism depends entirely on the choices we make. The powers that be understand this very well, and it's no accident that so many of their efforts are directed towards controlling not only the actions but the wills and desires of their subjects and their employees. Recognising that there is no avoiding *some* degree of generality or collectivity, over the past two centuries ruling classes and their state apparatuses have gone to enormous lengths to ensure that the generalising of any collective will might be confined with its apparent national borders. Against the initial momentum of each project, they succeeded, first and foremost, in containing the revolutionary uprisings in France, Haiti, Russia, China, and Cuba within their territorial limits. The containment of Haiti's slave rebellion within the island of Hispaniola set the wider cause of abolition back several decades, not least in the USA, and the long-term fall-out of this containment continues to play an important role in preserving that racialised division of labour that is so basic to capital's world system. The eventual confinement over 1918–1921 of 'world proletarian revolution' within an isolated Russia served not only to preserve its capitalist rivals but also dealt the revolution a blow from which, as it retreated to the logic of 'socialism in one country', it would never recover. The third world project, as Vijay Prashad has amply documented, succumbed to a version of the same assault (Prashad, 2008).

This is where the limits of Rousseau's own unabashedly patriotic orientation are at their most apparent. For the time being, the nation remains far and away the most concentrated and most 'capable' locus of political power, and the achievements of the national revolutions that ushered in the modern world speak for themselves. But in one place after another, Luxemburg's warnings about the limits of national self-determination have been proved right. Nationalist mobilisations that don't contribute to a 'world-making' internationalism remain an integral part of the neoliberal status quo (cf. Getachew, 2020). Merely nationalist appeals to popular unity or cultural authenticity are perfectly compatible with the persistence of class rule. In the divisive and exploitative conditions dictated by international capital, merely national-popular forces remain incapable of over-powering the powers arranged against them, and today the prospects of transformative internationalist coordination on urgent questions like social equality, economic justice, climate, migration, disarmament, and so on appear as remote as ever.

The past several centuries have also been witness to an unparalleled investment in a paradoxically general 'de-generalising' of the will, i.e. a systematic privatising and atomising of volition (a process anticipated, in many ways, by the systematic attack on mass political capacities in the wake of Thermidor 1794). From the moment he first wrote in defence of a general will, Rousseau's liberal critics and rivals, from laissez-faire Physiocrats to modernising free-marketeers, have done all they can to reinforce long-standing strategies for restricting the will to a merely introspective domain. The will is free, from this distinctively capitalist perspective, in the domains of commercial exchange and consumer choice; market freedoms are open to all so long as everyone respects the outcome of 'market forces' and 'market discipline'. Some of the intellectual roots for this way of thinking about private freedom and public coordination, however, run very deep.[53] In keeping with a tradition of thinking about free will and responsibility that can be traced all the way back to the Stoics and the early Christians, market actors are authorised to enjoy (or suffer) the freedoms at play in their 'inner citadel'—to do what they will with the property at their disposal, to invest their 'human capital' this way or that, to earn what they deserve and to spend it as they like, etc.—so long as they accept market outcomes as the social equivalent of fate (cf. Whyte, 2019). This

[53] Cf. Keohane (1980); Hallward (2024).

logic helps to sustain what is arguably the most far-reaching contradiction of capitalism and of the whole modern order of things, between the collective way that we produce wealth and the largely individualist way we distribute it, and between the thoroughly shared or global scale of the most pressing problems we face and the narrowly chauvinistic and class-bound ways we still approach them. Nothing has done more to preserve widespread acceptance that 'there is no alternative' than the quintessentially neoliberal valorisation of private liberty alongside public submission and civic impotence as the price to be paid—and willingly paid—for membership in one's local branch of 'market-conforming democracy'.

This parody of democracy has helped to reinforce the rule of *les riches* by all the means feared by Rousseau, and it has helped to secure their grip on society precisely on the foundation he identified as essential to the preservation of absolute authority—the grounds of *voluntary* consent. There is no more stable a basis for the convergent commands of capital and the state. There is no faster a race to the bottom than one run by willing and 'motivated' participants, and a society that is unwilling to challenge the priorities of capital and to defy the prospect of 'capital flight' has already tied its hands behind its back. By the same token, however, we remain free in principle, as Rousseau puts it, 'to draw from the ill itself the remedy that should cure it' (Rousseau, *Political Fragments* II:12, OC 3: 480). Our reigning sovereign came to power through a protracted and intensive 'battle of wills'; further such battles will decide our future.

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Althusser, Rousseau and the Politics of the Encounter

Panagiotis Sotiris

Introduction

The dialogue between Marxists and Rousseau is long. Many of the questions that Rousseau's work raised, from the critique of inequality and alienation to the possibility of a revolutionary 'general will', have also been central to Marxist debates. Curiously enough, despite the much-discussed debts to Rousseau, especially in his early works, Marx made few references to Rousseau. In *On the Jewish Question,* Althusser uses a passage from the *Social Contract* to criticise the bourgeois 'abstract idea of a political man'.[1] However, Lucio Colletti has suggested that the passage in question[2] refers to 'the 'de-naturalization' that society must

[1] MECW, vol 3, p. 167.

[2] 'Anyone who dares to institute a people must feel capable of, so to speak, changing human nature; of transforming each individual who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole into part of a larger whole from which that individual would as it were receive his life and his being; of weakening man's constitution in order to strengthen it; of substituting a partial and moral existence for the independent and physical existence we have all received from nature. In a word, he must take from man his own forces in order to give him forces which are foreign to him and of which he cannot make use without the help of others' (Rousseau 1997, p. 69).

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carry out on man to transform him from a mere 'natural' man into a truly 'social' being'.[3] Similarly, as Colletti points,[4] Marx in the 1857 *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* treats Rousseau in a manner similar to the 'Robinsoniades' of the classical political economists.[5] In contrast, Engels refers to Rousseau very positively in *Anti-Dühring*, insisting that:

> Already in Rousseau, therefore, we find not only a line of thought which corresponds exactly to the one developed in Marx's *Capital*, but in detail, too, a whole series of the same dialectical turns of speech as Marx used: processes which in their nature are antagonistic, contain an internal contradiction; transformation of one extreme into its opposite; and finally, as the kernel of the whole thing, the negation of the negation.[6]

Marxists would offer important readings of Rousseau. Galvano della Volpe offered a reading that stressed the importance of Rousseau as a thinker whose work confronts the question of an egalitarian liberty, itself the very challenge Marxism set to face:

> Thus, the problem uncovered by Rousseau, of the *social* recognition of the *individual* himself, or of the universal proportionality in social values and individual merits described above - the problem, in short, of *egalitarian liberty* - remains a real *problem* even after the bourgeois revolution, and still awaits its complete solution. We must see how, in the complex context of the historical-ideal development of modern democracy, this problem can be completely solvable by virtue of a method very different from that of Rousseau's rationalist-voluntarist-abstract, or spiritualist-humanitarian, method. This alternative method, expressed above as that of a concrete or materialist rationalism, is that of scientific socialism, Marxist-Leninist

[3] Colletti (1972, p. 188).

[4] Colletti (1972, p. 188).

[5] 'The individual and isolated hunter and fisherman, who serves Adam Smith and Ricardo as a starting point, is one of the unimaginative fantasies of the eighteenth century. Robinsonades which, contrary to the fancies of the historians of civilisation, by no means signify simply a reaction against over-refinement and a reversion to a misconceived natural life. No more is Rousseau's *contrat social,* which by means of a contract establishes a relationship and connection between subjects that are by nature INDEPENDENT, based on this kind of naturalism. This is an illusion and nothing but the aesthetic illusion of the small and big Robinsonades' (*MECW*, vol. 28, p. 17).

[6] Engels (1976, pp. 178–179).

> sociological method, which replaces the useless principle of interclassism as justified by traditional, Rousseauean humanitarianism.[7]

For Della Volpe, the Rousseauean conception of popular sovereignty as the political corollary of his emphasis on egalitarian liberty is further elaborated in the democratic impulse of communist politics and the conception of equality inscribed in it:

> How can it be denied that Marxism-Leninism's meticulous attention to the problem of the economic *proportional* recognition in truly communist *society* of the *diversity* of *individuals* and their abilities and needs expresses the continuity and development on a new historical plane of the authentic Rousseauian spirit of democracy?[8]

Lucio Colletti has stressed that in Rousseau's conception of sovereignty we find the basic elements of a critique and supersession of the bourgeois mode of politics.

> It is not particularly difficult now to understand the meaning of these theses of Rousseau's. The theory of popular sovereignty as inalienable and indivisible, carries with it the abolition of the *pactum subjectionis* as the transmission of sovereignty from the people to the government; the elimination of this contract of domination implies in its turn the downgrading of government from the 'supreme power' it was traditionally understood to be to a mere 'commissarial' organ of the people. The meaning of the theory, in short, is that of a direct resumption, on the part of society, of the power or sovereignty which, in natural-law contractualism, was alienated to the separate and independent sphere of 'politics'.[9]

For Colletti, Rousseau can be considered the main reference of the revolutionary conception of politics that would later be developed by Marx and Lenin:

> My thesis is that revolutionary 'political' theory, as it has developed since Rousseau, is already foreshadowed and contained in The *Social Contract*; […] so far as 'political' theory in the strict sense is concerned, Marx and

[7] Della Volpe (1978, p. 44).

[8] Della Volpe (1978, p. 61).

[9] Colleti (1972, p. 184).

> Lenin have added nothing to Rousseau, except for the analysis (which is of course rather important) of the 'economic bases' for the withering away of the State.[10]

For Jean-Jacques Lecercle, '[i]t is Rousseau's merit to have sketched a method that is already dialectical, the history of society'.[11] From the current of 'analytical Marxism', Andrew Levine has insisted that a Rousseauean conception of the general will is fully compatible with a Marxist Perspective on communism.[12] From her part, Ellen Meiksins Wood has stressed the radical democratic character of Rousseau's conception of the Social Contract and the way it is only compatible with a perspective of struggle against exploitation.

> For the general will to represent an expression– not an unnaturally (and impossibly) virtuous or forcible violation – of their own self-interest, people must actually, objectively, have interests in common. The common ground shared by interests in society as it is actually constituted is simply too narrow. To widen the scope of commonality requires the removal of those social relations and institutions, most especially inequality, that render people in reality and necessarily enemies by interest. Democratic sovereignty, it appears, is the necessary condition for a state based on 'public reason', rather than on the private interest of the magistrate; and social equality, the breakdown of the division between appropriators and producers, is the condition of democracy.[13]

Althusser's Courses on Rousseau

One of the most interesting Marxist readings of Rousseau has been offered by Louis Althusser. For him, Rousseau was a constant reference point. In 1975, on the occasion of his defence of his doctoral thesis '*sur travaux*' at the University of Picardy, he explained that:

> […] 26 years ago, in 1949–50, I did place before Mr Hyppolite and Mr Jankélévitch a project for a *grande thèse* (as it used to be called) on politics

[10] Colletti (1972, p. 185). For a critique of the positions of della Volpe and Colletti, see Chrysis (2018).

[11] Lecercle (1971, p. 42).

[12] Levine (1993).

[13] Meiksins Wood (2012, p. 209).

> and philosophy in the eighteenth century in France with a *petite thèse* on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Second Discourse*. And I never really abandoned this project, as my essay on Montesquieu shows.[14]

Althusser's research on Rousseau mainly took the forms of coursers that were part of his duties as *caiman* at the École Normale Supérieure de la Rue d'Ulm. These courses enable us to see the evolution of Althusser's reading of the work of the philosopher from Geneva.

In the 1955–1956 course, Althusser dealt with Rousseau in the context of a course on philosophy of history, insisting that the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Men* dominates eighteenth century's view of its own history, in the form of a 'conceptual history' of the progress of civilisation and the decadence of the human species, with 'abstract concepts, in appearance so far from real history and in truth so close to it' and 'revolutionary concepts' that can produce a 'new and infinitely more profound understanding [*intelligence*] of history'.[15] For Althusser, in the eighteenth century, the petty-bourgeois mass found its philosophical representative in Rousseau, who was both a representative of the Enlightenment and an '*interior enemy*'[16] because of the 'plebeian accent' of his conception.[17] Consequently, Althusser treats Rousseau as a precursor of historical materialism, the first philosopher who 'systematically conceived the development of history, the development of society, as a development dialectically linked to its material conditions'.[18] By considering human reason as 'the product of historical development',[19] Rousseau refused the fundamental position of Enlightenment that 'reason is the motor of history'.[20]

Regarding the state of nature, Althusser insisted that for Rousseau the forest 'gives at the same time fruits and refuge'[21] prefiguring the social contract: 'demand of a general accord of man with his surroundings:

[14] Althusser (1976, p. 165).

[15] Althusser (2006b, p. 108).

[16] Althusser (2006b, p. 110).

[17] Althusser (2006b, p. 111).

[18] Althusser (2006b, pp. 112–113).

[19] Althusser (2006b, p. 112).

[20] Althusser (2006b, p. 113).

[21] Althusser (2006b, p. 116).

nature already the role of general will'.[22] What initiates the transition from state of nature to state of society is the institution of property. This is the 'product of an historical development' that is 'a *necessary* development […] produced by a series of *accidents* [*hazards*]'.[23] First, there is a man-nature scission leading to the development of reason and the emergence of self-conscience. At this stage, forms of association are temporary and common interest equals 'the encounter of particular interests' since there is always the forest as refuge.[24] This leads to the first forms of property, the 'huts', to the emergence of families, of language, of nations and of values. This is the ideal state of human sociality: An 'economic independence' superimposed by an 'abstract universality of mutual recognition', leading to an ideal artisan economy, 'before the division of labour'.[25] In contrast, the 'accident' of the discovery of agriculture and metallurgy led to the division of labour creating in the first instance a state of 'relative independence'.[26] However, there is a limit to this relative independence because there is the '*end of earth*, the end of the forest' leading to new human relations: 'A new possession cannot be established at the expense of the forest but at the expense of another possession'.[27] This leads to a state of war, to servitude and domination, to struggles between poor and rich, and consequently to the social contract. In contrast to Hobbes, for Rousseau, human beings are forced to enter a state of war; it is the effect of specific human relations. The social contract is a solution to this problem. However, the content of the contract depends upon 'existing determinate relations',[28] thus leading to recognition of possession: 'possession becomes property'.[29] Althusser's conclusion is that Rousseau is 'at the crossroads'[30] of a materialist and an idealist conception.

[22] Althusser (2006b, p. 117).
[23] Althusser (2006b, p. 119).
[24] Althusser (2006b, p. 121).
[25] Ibid.
[26] Althusser (2006b, p. 124).
[27] Althusser (2006a, p. 125).
[28] Althusser (2006b, p. 126).
[29] Althusser (2006b, p. 127).
[30] Ibid.

Thanks to a book by Émile Jalley,[31] we also have access to notes from Althusser's 1958–1959 course on Rousseau. Althusser insisted that in Rousseau there are 'radical discontinuities' and a 'new structure of genesis',[32] leading to a 'double denaturalization of man'.[33] Althusser stresses that in Rousseau's state of pure nature, 'men are animals',[34] distinguished from other animals only in their perfectibility, living in the empty space of the forest where encounters are avoided. This state of pure nature could go on perpetually were it not for natural disasters, leading to the emergence of reason, arts and language ('because of encounters'[35]). All ends up in the state of war that goes along with 'the progress of human faculties'.[36] This makes the development of humanity 'precarious, contingent',[37] thus marking Althusser's objection, even from the 1950s, to any teleological or finalist conception of human history.

The course of the 1965–1966 was entitled 'Political Philosophy in the seventeenth century before Rousseau',[38] but a large part was dedicated to Rousseau. Althusser refers again to Rousseau as an 'opponent from the interior' of the ideology of the Enlightenment,[39] by means of his references to 'radical discontinuities'. The first discontinuity 'separating the state of pure nature from that of the youth of the world and the second separating the state of the youth of the world from the state of the contract' because of accidents, first natural accidents and then the accidental discovery of metallurgy,[40] again stressing the absence of teleology.

For Rousseau, the state of pure nature is a 'state of radical solitude', thus making it impossible for Natural Law to 'reign in the state of nature'. The 'state of war […] does not exist in the origin but at the end of the

[31] Jalley (2014).

[32] Jalley (2014, p. 82).

[33] Ibid.

[34] Jalley (2014, p. 84).

[35] Jalley (2014, p. 85).

[36] Jalley (2014, p. 87).

[37] Ibid.

[38] Althusser (2006b, p. 255).

[39] Althusser (2006b, p. 301).

[40] Ibid.

state of nature […] the state of war is a product',[41] suggesting a 'real history of the development of human society'.[42] Consequently, 'Rousseau gives *the concept of its concept and the concept of the non-concept, namely the theory of the error of his predecessors*'.[43] This implies a radical critique of the attitude of philosophers to project onto the state of nature their own preoccupations.

For Althusser, Rousseau's conception of human society as denaturalisation of human essence remains within the circle of alienation: 'he affirms the necessity to go to the state of nature and the impossibility of arriving there by pure reflection'.[44] Rousseau's solution is to resort to the 'heart' and to a 'conjectural reasoning […] of conjectural hypotheses'.[45] Althusser stresses that Rousseau offered a different conception of genesis, a '*constituent, productive genesis*', a '*dialectical genesis*' and a '*genesis of differences*'; consequently 'every genesis is a transformation of a contingency into necessity'.[46] Regarding the state of nature, Rousseau refers at the same time to the animality and non-animality of man. 'Pity, perfectibility and liberty' are aspects of the heart, which are already there but will serve man later, in the establishment of the contract, technical progress and natural law.[47] There is a fundamental 'human solitude of man',[48] since physical needs disperse people in contrast to social needs. This means that we are dealing with *encounters*. The imagery of the encounter re-emerges at a period when Althusser started rethinking his conception of social 'structures' as lasting encounters. The '*forest is a plain space*'[49] that enables the necessary non-teleology of the encounter:

> *The forest is an empty space*. It is the infinity of the void. It is what responds to the condition of nothing of society: in order for men not to be constrained to encounter each other, the forest has to be an infinite

[41] Althusser (2006b, p. 302).
[42] Althusser (2006b, pp. 302–303).
[43] Althusser (2006b, p. 303).
[44] Althusser (2006b, p. 304).
[45] Althusser (2006b, p. 305).
[46] Althusser (2006b, p. 308).
[47] Althusser (2006b, p. 310).
[48] Ibid.
[49] Althusser (2006b, p. 311).

> space. Condition of possibility of the human non-relation of the encounter. It is a space without a place, a Cartesian space.[50]

Althusser stresses the importance of pity as a foundation of morality, marking along, with the theory of needs, Rousseau's critique of the thesis of natural sociability of man and of the utilitarian conception of society. The passage from the state of nature to the youth of world is the result of accidents and catastrophes. A change in space leads to the emergence of the huts and then of villages and the gradual disappearance of the forest. The disappearance of the forest means that human beings have to settle their problems amongst themselves, and this leads to a state of war. Although it is the rich who start to think of the contract in terms of their interest, in the end the contract opens up a space well beyond its initial conception, the space of 'juridicity'.[51] The contract entails two moments: one of civil laws, conventions, and the right of property, and one of the establishments of government. Regarding the theoretical status of history in Rousseau, Althusser sees a 'problematization of fundamental concepts',[52] not only in the second discourse, but also in the *Social Contract:* 'the essence of the contract would not be in its purity but in its very impurity. The *Social Contract* would be the purity of a concept containing impurity within itself, to think the death, the decline that larks and which contemporary society realizes'.[53]

The Discrepancies in the *Social Contract*

Althusser chose to publish only the part of the 1965–1966 course that dealt with the *Social Contract*. As the French editors of the full version of the course indicate,[54] it was somewhat separate from the rest of the course. Althusser focuses on Book 1, chapter 6 of the *Social Contract* treating the social contract as a philosophical object that can only be articulated through a 'chain of theoretical discrepancies [*décalages*]'.[55] For

[50] Ibid.

[51] Althusser (2006b, p. 320).

[52] Althusser (2006b, p. 326).

[53] Althusser (2006b, p. 329).

[54] Althusser (2006b, p. 330).

[55] Althusser (1972, p. 114).

Althusser, in Rousseau, the contract emerges as a result of the obstacles posed by the 'generalized state of war'.[56] The obstacles are human and internal and not external, which leads Althusser to describe the state of war as a 'universal state of *alienation*'.[57]

For Althusser, 'total alienation' is a nodal point.[58] This leads to the first discrepancy: between the two recipient parties of the social contract, the individual in a state of total alienation and the individual as part of the community, of the people. It is a discrepancy 'between the content of the juridical content of the contract, which Rousseau imports into his problematic to give a cover, and the actual content of the contract'.[59] This seemingly contradictory insertion of total alienation into the social contract is Rousseau's way to deal with Hobbes' legacy:

> Rousseau's theoretical greatness is to have taken up the most frightening aspects of Hobbes: the state of war as a universal and perpetual state, the rejection of any transcendental solution and the 'contract' of total alienation, generator of absolute power as essence of any power. But Rousseau's defence against Hobbes is to transform total alienation in externality into total alienation in internality: the Third Recipient Party then becomes the Second, the Prince becomes the Sovereign, which is the community itself, to which free individuals totally alienate themselves without losing their liberty, since the Sovereign is simply the community of these same individuals.[60]

The second discrepancy refers to the difference between total alienation and an advantageous exchange. For Althusser, the answer is the insertion of interest into the whole schema of total alienation. Interest acts as the self-regulation and self-limitation of total alienation.

The third discrepancy has to do with the relation between particular interest and general interest, *particular will* and *general will*. These notions are for Althusser interrelated in the conceptual architecture of the *Social Contract*. Althusser stresses that Rousseau assigns primacy to

[56] Althusser (1972, p. 118).

[57] Althusser (1972, p. 121).

[58] Althusser (1972, p. 127).

[59] Althusser (1972, p. 131).

[60] Althusser (1972, p. 136).

general interest and the general will in the sense that '[e]ach particular interest contains in itself the general interest, each particular will the general will'.[61] However, a contradiction emerges because particular interest is both the essence of general interest and the main obstacle to it. For Althusser, there is a play of words here because particular interest as obstacle to the general will refers to the particular interest of social groups, not individuals. In reality, although Rousseau refers to the general interest as real, it appears as a myth in relation to its real 'double' the 'general' interests of social groups. The community is composed 'of the same individuals who appear as *individuals* in the Recipient Party 1, i.e., at the other pole of the exchange'. For Althusser in 'the Recipient Party 2 they appear, too, but no longer as individuals, but all in their 'corporate capacity', i.e. in a different form, in a different 'manner of existence', precisely the form of a 'whole', of a 'union', and this is the community'.[62]

This is a discrepancy 'introduced into Rousseau's conceptual system by the emergence of the following irreducible phenomenon: the existence of the interests of social groups'.[63] In this sense, it is a 'Discrepancy of the theory with respect to the real'.[64] However, this confrontation with the reality of social inequality, at the heart of the attempt of the social contract to resolve it, means that Rousseau, in the end, reaches the conclusion of the *Discourse on Inequality*:

> It is that in the object involved in the denegation of Discrepancy III (social groups, orders, classes, etc.), Rousseau has finally reached what he began with as a problem: the result of the *Discourse on Inequality*. […] The true Social Contract, now a 'legitimate' one, thus finds at the end of the displacement of its concepts the very same realities whose existence and implacable logic had been described in the *Discourse on Inequality*.[65]

According to Althusser, Rousseau's answer to these theoretical difficulties was a resort to ideology in order to counter the effects of social inequality by means of education, social manners and morals. Although Rousseau realised the importance of economic inequality, for Althusser

[61] Althusser (1972, p. 151).

[62] Althusser (1972, p. 129).

[63] Althusser (1972, p. 153).

[64] Ibid.

[65] Althusser (1972, p. 154).

his solution remains with the circle of an insufficient regression to the economy:

> Rousseau invokes as a practical solution to his problem (how to suppress the existence of social classes) an *economic regression* towards one of the phenomena of the dissolution of the feudal mode of production: the independent petty producer, the urban or rural artisanate […]. But to what saint should one entrust oneself for the realization of this impossible regressive economic reform? There is nothing left but moral preaching, i.e., ideological action. We are in a circle.[66]

For Althusser, this fourth discrepancy can explain Rousseau's turn towards literature, by means of a *transfer*, 'the transfer of the impossible theoretical solution into the alternative to theory literature. The admirable 'fictional triumph' of an unprecedented writing (*écriture*): *La Nouvelle Heloïse*, *Émile*, the *Confessions*'.[67] This can also account for the admirable writing of these texts: 'that they are unprecedented may not be unconnected with the admirable "failure" of an unprecedented theory: the Social Contact'.[68] And this discrepancy points to the limits of the practice that Rousseau points to as a solution and how it ends up like a flight into ideology: 'Flight forward in ideology, regression in the economy, flight forward in ideology, etc.'[69]

This notion of *discrepancies* enables Althusser to both reconstruct Rousseau's argument and explain how this had to deal with crucial 'theoretical obstacles' and contradictions that could only answered by the theoretical transformations that Althusser describes as 'discrepancies', contradictions, obstacles and limits that in the end could only be solved by a certain exit towards ideology (the other impossible solution being historical materialism). This is also a more general comment on the limitation of social contract theories in general; but also, of any attempt to ground such a general philosophical proposition that in fact negates the very complex historical reality of the *people*, the complex articulation of relations of production and class antagonisms. As Alberto Toscano notes:

[66] Althusser (1972, p. 159).

[67] Althusser (1972, p. 160).

[68] Ibid.

[69] Althusser (1972, p. 159).

> The group is thus the *point of the real*, the disavowed obstacle, of Rousseau's construction of the people. The echoing or specular *myths* of the individual and general interest, have their condition of (im)possibility in the disavowal of the existence of groups (orders, estates, classes, etc.). And they reveal the functioning of a (bourgeois) ideology that can present class interests to particulars (the dominated) as general interest. This disavowal or denegation is for Althusser no longer simply theoretical, it is practical: "to denegate the existence of human groups (orders, classes) is to suppress their existence practically".[70]

Rousseau and the Rejection of Teleology

In the 1972 course, Althusser used the reading of Rousseau to think the problematic of *the encounter*. For Althusser, Rousseau offers a critique of both the justification of contemporary societies and 'of the utopianism that hopes to justify the future of the society it desires by projecting it onto the origins.[71] Again, Althusser treats Rousseau as a critic of the ideology of the Enlightenment, suggesting that in his attempt to offer a critique of the *'false origin*', Rousseau offers a 'critique of the concept of the origin'.[72]

In the light of this reading, Althusser treats Rousseau's references to the disappearance of nature and the state of nature. It is a forgetting of nature as the result of a process of alienation: '*nature is alienated, […] it no longer exists except in the other-than-itself,* in its contrary, the social passions, and even in reason subject to the social passions'.[73] Rousseau, in contrast to the other philosophers, does not project reason in the state of nature: 'reason is a product of human history'.[74] Sciences are part of this loss of the state of nature exactly because they are a product of reason: 'Science […] has been caught up, from its birth, in the forgetting that constituted it'.[75] Consequently, sciences are part of the process of denaturation and alienation, and for Althusser, this offers a 'general

[70] Toscano (2020, p. 173).

[71] Althusser (2019, p. 44).

[72] Althusser (2019, p. 45).

[73] Althusser (2019, p. 48).

[74] Althusser (2019, p. 49).

[75] Althusser (2019, p. 50).

theory of the human sciences' political determination'[76] and a conception of philosophy as a 'socially necessary mystification of thought'.[77]

For Althusser, the singularity of the pure state of nature is that without the intervention of cosmic accidents it would have remained unchanged and even the various forms of savagery that the eighteenth century used as traces of the state of nature are in fact already a 'form of denaturation'.[78] The unobservability of the state of nature implies that only the heart can pose its existence. In contrast, the history of denaturation can be based upon observable facts and conjectures, the use of reason. That is why the heart in Rousseau is not just a faculty. Rather, it 'is a philosophical power, the power that resolves the antinomies of reason and of society, the power of the true origin'.[79] For Althusser, this brings forward a radically different conception of origin:

> Rousseau opposes an origin as a different world, separated from our world by something like a distance or an *abyss* [*abîme*], an insurmountable distance: an origin whose purity and separation are reflected, or would be reflected, precisely, in this abyss.[80]

For Althusser, Rousseau at the same times insists on the importance of origin to understand what follows, namely its loss, and on the fact that we cannot understand contemporary society, government, inequality by reference to the origin. This brings forward the importance of the void created by this 'radical separation of the pure and the impure'.[81] Althusser recapitulates the difference between the notion of the origin in Rousseau and his predecessors as follows: In them, 'it is not a real genesis […] it is not an historical genesis […] [it is] a philosophical – juridical justification of the established order'.[82] In contrast, Rousseau begins with the state of pure nature, which could be prolonged perpetually, were it not for cosmic accidents. Men were dispersed into the vast forest but were

[76] Althusser (2019, p. 52).
[77] Althusser (2019, p. 52).
[78] Ibid.
[79] Althusser (2019, p. 69).
[80] Althusser (2019, p. 70).
[81] Althusser (2019, p. 71).
[82] Althusser (2019, p. 74).

subsequently forced to come together. This leads to a second stage of the state of nature, which includes the development of human faculties as a process of denaturation, the emergence of social relations, the invention of language, what is designated as the 'youth of the world'. The second big accident—'something which is not precipitated by previous developments, and which changes everything'[83]—was the invention of metallurgy that leads to the state of war, making necessary the intervention of the social contract. What is important for Althusser is the absence of any teleology and of any essential continuity between the pure state of nature and the developments that lead to the social contract; rather, it is a process based upon discontinuity:

> This genesis, however, will be a discontinuous genesis, and this genesis will be a genesis whose cause is not contained in the state of pure nature. More exactly, it will be a genesis of which the state of pure nature, that is, the state of origin, is not the beginning. In other words, things begin [*ça commence*] after the origin.[84]

In the same anti-teleological perspective, the effect of the social contract is not 'to redistribute forces deriving from natural law', but a 'constitution of a radically new reality'.[85] If the state of pure nature represents the 'radical absence [*néant*] of society, the radical absence of social relations, the radical absence of sociability',[86] if it means that no encounter can last, no encounter can repeat itself, then the forest in the *Second Discourse* is not an object or an image of man's solitude in the state of pure nature; it is 'the concept of the state of pure nature, the condition for realizing the solitude and the condition for realizing the non-society that define man'.[87] The forest emerges as the void *par excellence*, the 'zero-degree' of social relations, the absence of any teleology and the space for encounters that may lead to the emergence of forms and social relations.

[83] Althusser (2019, p. 77).

[84] Althusser (2019, p. 80).

[85] Ibid.

[86] Althusser (2019, p. 84).

[87] Althusser (2019, p. 85).

However, the state of pure nature lacks 'an internal logic of self-movement or self-development'.[88] This leads to the appearance of new concepts, 'the concept of the accident, the concept of contingency, the concept of event'.[89] The importance of physical nature as a constraint re-emerges, in the form of 'catastrophic nature'[90] that leads to the first accidents. For some time, there is still the forest, but when the forest no longer exists, this marks the passage to the state of war.

For Althusser, denaturation marks a line of demarcation with any teleological reading: Denaturation 'is the separation of the origin from itself; it is the non-identity of identity; it is the developed contradiction from the origin as the other of its result in the result, as the other of the origin'.[91] Consequently, Rousseau can be considered 'the first theorist to have thought history in the category of the negation of the negation, the first to have thought the historical process as a process of antagonistic development in which nature is negated, the negation is negated and originary nature is re-established upon new foundations'.[92] However, we are not dealing simply with a process of internal dialectical development:

> The radical interiority presupposed by the process of the negation of the negation, or denaturation of denaturation, is contested in Rousseau himself by the following idea: one must posit an exteriority in order to think the process of interiority. An idea of exteriority is required to make the process of pure interiority possible.[93]

Reading Rousseau through the problematic of the 'materialism of the encounter'.

What form does this non-dialectic of exteriority take in the work of Rousseau? According to Althusser, it takes three forms of 'beginnings without origin'.[94] First, accidents mark the 'absence of an internal

[88] Althusser (2019, p. 90).
[89] Althusser (2019, p. 91).
[90] Althusser (2019, p. 92).
[91] Althusser (2019, pp. 94–95).
[92] Althusser (2019, p. 96).
[93] Althusser (2019, p. 97).
[94] Ibid.

dialectic of development'.[95] Then, we have the emergences that occur within what Rousseau describes as circles, such as languages or inventions. Finally, there is the 'creative nature of time'.[96] Moreover, contingency is what necessity is based upon: 'Contingency is transformed into necessity, but the necessity created by a new contingency is not the same as the old one'.[97] The social contract, as an answer to historical contradictions, is not just a contract; it is 'a veritable change of regime, a veritable constitution'.[98] Since the contract is itself the outcome of a '*human* contingency',[99] it is a risk and a 'leap in the void […]so much so that we can say that the whole edifice of the social contract is suspended over an abyss'.[100]

Althusser insists on Rousseau's 'rejection of man's natural sociability'.[101] In the state of nature, human beings have 'no moral relationships'.[102] The solitude of man in the state of nature 'is not founded on a negative *de jure* condition alone; it is also founded on a positive de facto condition'.[103] For Althusser, the notion of the encounter in Rousseau has a broader significance.

> This category of the *encounter*, which we have just seen emerging in connection with sexuality – the encounter as chance event without duration or sequel, as instantaneous chance event – is the category in which Rousseau thinks, in general, everything that can transpire between men in the pure state of nature. Men live dispersed, they live in solitude, but it sometimes happens that they encounter each other by chance, and it is by chance by definition, it is by definition that it does not last, it is by definition that it never has consequences, that it has no sequel.[104]

[95] Ibid.

[96] Althusser (2019, p. 98).

[97] Althusser (2019, p. 99).

[98] Althusser (2019, p. 100).

[99] Althusser (2019, p. 101).

[100] Ibid.

[101] Althusser (2019, p. 118).

[102] Althusser (2019, p. 123).

[103] Althusser (2019, p. 124).

[104] Althusser (2019, p. 128).

This is one of the clearest indications that Althusser's reading of Rousseau is part of Althusser's elaboration on the *materialism of the encounter*. The state of pure nature is like the pre-Cosmos situation, the situation of the rain of atoms and the chance encounters that do not last, are not lasting encounters. This conception of non-lasting, chance encounters becomes the basis for a broader anti-teleological and anti-metaphysical conception. However, this requires certain conditions: First, man must 'be an animal who realizes the concept of generic animality'; second, 'nature must stand in immediate proximity to man'.[105] Consequently, the forest becomes the space of non-socialisation, of encounters that do not last, because they do not become relations:

> [the forest] is the space of men's dispersion, an infinite space, a space such that it prevents all encounters from producing the least tie. The forest is the space of non-recognition, of non-identification, of non-identity.[106]

However, this implies a radical separation between origin and what follows. For Rousseau, it is an origin because something followed, even though it did not emanate directly from this origin. In the light of the above, we can think about the faculties of man in the state of pure nature. Pity 'is the relation of non-relation; it is the community of abstention in suffering. Hence it is inactive or even non-existent in the state of nature'.[107] Freedom 'as intellectual power or intellectual awareness […] is inactive and non-existent in the state of nature'. At the same time, 'perfectibility, the general principle of the possibility, of the virtuality, of the development of all the human faculties […] is by definition inactive in the state of nature'.[108] Consequently, only animality is actually active in the state of nature. This is how the origin is separated by what follows, and for Althusser, this means that Rousseau can be spared the accusation that he projected in the state of nature social qualities from a later phase. In fact, pity and liberty only intervene in the social contract: 'It is in the contract – hence at the end of the risky process constituted by the process

[105] Ibid.

[106] Althusser (2019, pp. 130–131).

[107] Althusser (2019, p. 135).

[108] Ibid.

of socialization – that freedom and pity intervene as origin'.[109] This intervention of the origin in reality comes for Althusser under the form of a '*reprise,* that is, the form of a new beginning of a beginning; but, nota bene, of a beginning that has never taken place'.[110] Consequently, for Althusser, there are three forms of origin in Rousseau: origin as separation; origin as virtuality; and origin as reprise.[111] For Althusser, there is also another way of describing origin as separation, virtuality and reprise: the notion of *loss*.

> If the origin has never taken place, it is because it is lost. If it is reprised, if it is the repetition of something definite that has never taken place, it is because it is lost. If it repeats that which has not taken place, it is because it repeats what is.[112]

For Althusser, there are two contracts in Rousseau: one that is the closure of the *Discourse on Inequality* and another which is the subject of the *Social Contract*. In the *Second Discourse*, it is the cunning of the rich that leads to the instauration of laws and political power leading to despotism and the state of war. This is 'how the reprise of the origin is lost, to be reprised again and lost again, without end'.[113] Althusser argues that in the *Social Contract* behind the dialectic of alienation there is 'another dialectic […] the dialectic of the death that stalks every political body and precipitates it in despotism – hence the same loss'.[114]

For Althusser, this means a particular relation to politics that is different from all other philosophers of natural law. Making a comparison to Machiavelli, whom he had discussed earlier that academic year, as a thinker of the *fact to accomplish*, he suggests that Rousseau is also a thinker of the fact to accomplish:

[109] Althusser (2019, p. 136).

[110] Althusser (2019, p. 137).

[111] Ibid.

[112] Althusser (2019, pp. 137–138).

[113] Althusser (2019, p. 138).

[114] Ibid.

> That is, he does not think this fact to be accomplished as a practical act to be accomplished, with certain essential political premises. Rather, he thinks it as a moralist and a philosopher who tries to adjust theoretical notions in an attempt to take the measure of a possible essence.[115]

For Althusser, all these attest to a certain utopianism in the politics of Rousseau, regarding the fact to accomplish, based upon 'an extraordinarily acute awareness of its necessity and its impossibility, that is, of its precariousness'.[116] What distinguishes Rousseau from other utopian thinkers is this critique of utopia within the very thinking of utopia, a constant critical self-conscience: 'It is the criticism brought to bear on the thought of utopia itself at the very moment in which the thought of utopia is thought'.[117]

In the 1972 course, we are not just dealing with a close yet idiosyncratic reading of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*. We see Althusser in one of his most important attempts to think the importance of the notion of the encounter and its implications for the materialism of the encounter. The analysis of the state of pure nature as an open terrain of non-lasting encounters, the conception of human relations as encounters that may or may not last, the imagery of the forest—and here, it is important to keep in mind Yves Varga's observation that the forest is presented here as being much more important in comparison with the 1966 course[118]—as the open space, the necessary void, for these encounters. Moreover, we have to stress the importance of this non-teleological reading of the notion of the origin. This is important, because for Althusser, the notion of the origin increasingly becomes the defining feature of metaphysical thinking.[119] Origin is presented as epitomising the teleological and idealist conception of history, the conception of history as having an orientation and consequently a *telos*. Moreover, Althusser's reading of Rousseau's state of pure nature as an origin that is separated by whatever follows offers an opportunity to think the centrality of the encounter and

[115] Althusser (2019, p. 139).

[116] Althusser (2019, p. 140).

[117] Ibid.

[118] Vargas (2019).

[119] Althusser (2017a).

a more aleatory conception of social reality. For Althusser, it is important not only to view social relations as encounters—and not as essential connections—but also to suggest the possibility of non-lasting encounters, of encounters that do not create social relations and forms. The forest, as the space that is not place, the void that is necessary for this interplay of encounters, is one of the most forceful images that Althusser finds in order to think this empty space of—in the last instance—political practice. It does not matter that the forest is in reality full of trees, of animals and of human beings. It is empty and void in the same sense that the Italian conjuncture for Machiavelli was empty, lacking the constitutive political intervention (or the constitutive accident) that would initiate a sequence of new encounters that could last and consequently of new social and political configurations. This explains inclusion of Rousseau in the genealogy of the materialism of the encounter in the post-1982 texts.

> The forest is the equivalent of the Epicurean void in which the parallel rain of the atoms falls: it is a pseudo-Brownian void in which individuals cross each other's paths, that is to say, do not meet, except in brief conjunctions that do not last. In this way, Rousseau seeks to represent, at a very high price (the absence of children), a radical absence [*néant*] of society prior to all society; and – condition of possibility for all society – the radical absence of society that constitutes the essence of any possible society.[120]

Moreover, for Althusser, this can account for the importance of the constant threat of the abyss in the theory of the Social Contract, the threat of an encounter that fails and there is a relapse into the state of pure of nature, a relapse into social and political death.[121] This reading of Rousseau as a theorist of the encounter and the non-encounter leads Althusser to insist that it is in this conception of the social contract that we can find a conception not only of the *contingency of necessity* but also of the *necessity of the contingency*, of the constitutive role of the absence of any teleology in the historical process, as the only means to think of concrete conjunctures in their singularity.

The 1972 course marked a very important turning point in the evolution of the thinking of a potential materialism of the encounter. Along

[120] Althusser (2006a, p. 184).

[121] Althusser (2006a, p. 186).

with *Machiavelli and Us*,[122] *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*[123] and *How to be a Marxist in Philosophy*,[124] it is one of the most important texts unpublished during his lifetime that attest to the elaboration of the conception of a materialism of the encounter, as part of a broader theoretical research programme that covers the whole period of his post-1966 work, especially in the 1970s, and is contemporaneous with his whole attempt in the second half of the 1970s to provide a left-wing critique of the crisis of the communist movement.

Conclusion

Althusser's courses on Rousseau offer a way to see the evolution of Louis Althusser's thinking and some of his turning points. In the 1956 course, Althusser reads Rousseau as a critic of the tradition of Natural Law—a position he repeats in all three courses—and as a precursor of a historical materialist position, in the sense of history as a material process, based upon material constraints that lead to historical change and development. Teleology or 'materialist' metaphysics are absent but, at the same time, there are obvious references to the possibility of historical causality and in general social and economic determination of the historical process in sharp contrast to any idealised conception of human nature. Rousseau is presented as a thinker of history as a dialectical development of material conditions and constraints, of 'history as a process', based upon an internal material logic or dialectic, 'immanent necessity'.[125] It is a reading in a long Marxist tradition that looks 'for Marx in Rousseau'.[126] In the 1965–1966 course, we can see two complementary tendencies at work that mark that transitory phase in Althusser's work. On the one hand, the whole reading of the *Social Contract* seems like an application of the Althusser's symptomatic reading upon Rousseau's text to bring forward the discrepancies that traverse the text in order to find its underlying tensions and dynamics in order again to find elements of a historical materialist conception and a critique of the idealism of the Natural Law

[122] Althusser (1999).

[123] Althusser (2017a).

[124] Althusser (2017b).

[125] Althusser (2006a, p. 111).

[126] Vargas (2019, p. 21).

tradition. On the other hand, we have Althusser's preoccupation with the notion of the encounter and the imagery of the void, which is also part of his broader theoretical self-criticism, after the moment of 'High Althusserianism' of the 1960–1965 texts, an evolution that led to the full emergence of the materialism of the encounter by 1972 and a series of important manuscripts such as *Machiavelli and Us* and the 1972 course on Rousseau.[127] In the 1972 course, we have the full employment of the conceptual framework of the materialism of the encounter, along with all the imagery of the void, the space of encounter and non-encounter, exemplified in the forest, and the radical absence of any teleology.

In his courses on Rousseau, Althusser experimented with evolving conceptions of an anti-metaphysical historical materialism until the full emergence of the materialism of the encounter. The political significance of this endeavour is evident. The radical anti-teleology of encounters and social forms is a way to rethink the possibility of new social form and thus the essence of a transformative politics. There are no guarantees or inescapable historical dynamics towards emancipation, but there is always the possibility of new encounters and forms.

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The Ambivalence of Human Sociality: Rousseau and Recognition

Onni Hirvonen

Contemporary theories of recognition typically take their lead from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel or Johann Gottlieb Fichte and put a major emphasis on the constitutive side of human sociality. Recognition from others is something that builds us as human beings, enables freedom, and as such is a vital human need (Taylor 1994; Honneth 1995; 2014; 2021). Recognition is a term that describes positive relations between persons: to recognize someone is to take her as a person and relate to her in a normatively appropriate manner. Recognition constitutes persons, but it is at the same time a normative response to relevant features, achievements, and feelings of other persons. As social beings, relating to others in an appropriate manner is an essential part of human life.

Although Jean-Jacques Rousseau does not use the term "recognition" in the sense that it has been known since Fichte and Hegel, he has

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had an influence on various theorists of recognition.[1] Undoubtedly, the reason for this is that his insightful writings deal with various aspects of human sociality. As human beings, we are affected, moulded, and changed through our relations to others, and any philosophical reflection of human life must make some sense of this phenomenon. Rousseau, so it is here claimed, has a decidedly double-edged view on human sociality. In the first two main sections of this chapter, I will reconstruct some key elements of Rousseau's work to highlight how he understands our desire for social recognition. The second task of the chapter is to highlight the meaning of Rousseau's insights to contemporary recognition theory and the role that his work has in the recent discussions on recognition. Ultimately, the chapter finishes with a short reflection on the possible lessons that recognition theorists might learn from Rousseau's thinking about human sociality.

The aim of this chapter is not to give a definitive interpretation of the exact details of Rousseaus's possible theory of recognition.[2] Instead, the aim is to give an overview of Rousseau's view of human sociality and highlight those ideas from Rousseau's work that could be fruitful for the contemporary debates on recognition and within social philosophy more broadly.

Amour-propre and the Negativity of Sociality: *Discourse on Inequality*

Rousseau, famously, gives a bleak picture of human sociality. Whereas Hegel and Fichte emphasize seeing oneself in the other and the constitution of self-consciousness through the other, Rousseau takes his lead from preceding French moralists and sees living through others—caring about their judgements—as a problem (Shaver 1989, p. 261). Rousseau is well known for his scepticism of modern social life. This shows especially in his analysis of *amour-propre*, a self-love that appears as a desire for

[1] It is unclear how much of a direct influence Rousseau had on the early theorists of recognition. However, he was known to at least to some of them: "We can note that at least Hegel, though not Fichte, was intuitively aware of the origins of his own theory of recognition in the heritage of Rousseau's thought" (Honneth 2016, p. 201).

[2] Interpretations analysing Rousseau's position in more depth and in more historical manner have been presented by Robert Shaver (1989), Frederick Neuhouser (2008; 2014), and Axel Honneth (2016; 2021).

social recognition and distinction from others. Unlike recognition theorists, Rousseau focuses on the unequalizing force of pride and search for esteem. This thought is present especially in his *Discourse on the Origins and Foundation of Inequality Among Mankind* (2012a [1755]).[3] In this section, I will outline the negative account of recognition present in the *Discourse*, before moving onto more positive side of human sociality that can be found in *Social Contract* (2012b [1762]) and *Emile* (1979 [1762]) in the next section.

In the *Discourse*, Rousseau aims to explain the causes of moral or political inequality, which results from social conventions, as opposed to natural inequality. These can be related as natural inequality "must increase through instituted inequality" (Rousseau 2012a, p. 88). However, Rousseau makes it clear that the main reasons for the inequality are found from the human social life, which makes new forms of comparisons possible, and its effects on the natural desires of individuals.

The *Discourse* presents a hypothetical scenario of the natural state of man—a scenario that Rousseau proposes to turn "right side up". The evils that, for example, Hobbes saw in the natural state of humanity are, for Rousseau, instead products of civilization. The state of nature is solitary and more serene. Although Rousseau does not advocate the view that we could shed off civilization and return to the state of nature, he presents a damning analysis of the condition of the civilization in his times, going as far as to say that society degenerates not only people but even domesticated animals (Rousseau 2012a, p. 70). As such, the starting point on sociality and social life is clearly much more negative than in Hegelian recognition theories, in which social life is a necessary constitutive elements of human flourishing.

A key distinction that Rousseau makes in his description of human nature is between *amour-propre* (pride and desire for social esteem) and *amour-de-soi-même* (self-love).

> [*Amour-propre* and *amour-de-soi-même*] – two passions very different in their nature and their effects – must not be confused. Self-love is a natural feeling that inclines every animal to look after its own self-preservation and that, directed in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. Pride is only a relative feeling, fabricated [or "artificial"] and born in society, that inclines every individual to attach more importance

[3] Hereon, I will refer to this as the *Discourse* for the sake of brevity.

> to himself than to anyone else, that inspires in men all the harm they do to one another, and that is the true source of honor. (Rousseau 2012a, p. 147 note XV)

Rousseau describes a "philosophical anthropology". In the state of nature, humans are mostly driven by the natural passion for self-preservation—*amour-de-soi*. However, when groups get larger and societies develop, it gives rise to personal pride—*amour-propre*. This is the social passion for esteem or being considered better than others, and it is a central notion throughout all of Rousseau's work. As the oft-quoted passage shows, free social life amongst others sows the seeds for the rise of social comparison and the desire for the esteem of others.

> Each began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had a value. The one who sang or danced the best, the most beautiful, the strongest, the most clever, or the most eloquent became the most highly considered – and this, then, was the first step toward inequality and at the same time towards vice. From these first preferences arose vanity and contempt, on the one hand, and shame and envy, on the other. (Rousseau 2012a, p. 96).

Amour-propre is an emergent, relational, and unsatisfiable passion. Firstly, it is not present in the state of nature but only appears in a social context. It is a historically emergent need to appear superior to others (Honneth 2021, p. 21). Secondly, as Frederick Neuhouser (2008, pp. 32–33) argues, *amour-propre* is relative in two senses: something is desired *in relation to* others. The desire is comparative but not necessarily in terms of better-or-worse—equal standing works in some cases as well. It is relative also in the sense that recognition is wanted *from* others. However, as Rousseau states in *Emile*, this desire is impossible to fully sate:

> Self-love, which regards only ourselves, is contented when our true needs are satisfied. But *amour-propre*, which makes comparisons, is never content and never could be, because this sentiment, preferring ourselves to others, also demands others to prefer us to themselves, which is impossible. This is how the gentle and affectionate passions are born of self-love, and how the hateful and irascible passions are born of *amour-propre*. (Rousseau 1979, pp. 213–214)

The social dependency from others is striking for Rousseau partly because he considers the natural human being as free: life and freedom are "essential gifts of nature" (Rousseau 2012a, p. 108) that should not be squandered. As he also states in *Social Contract*, to renounce freedom would be to renounce the rights and duties of humanity (Rousseau 2012b, 168). Here we can see both a parallel and a difference between recognition theorists and Rousseau. Rousseau, like Hegel, is an advocate of freedom. However, he does not have a concept of social freedom—seeing others as a condition for my own freedom (see, e.g., Honneth 2014)—but instead he opposes the dependency from others and emphasizes the individual freedom (Rousseau 2012a, p. 89). Although the picture is very individualistic, there are still social drives or passions such as pity that soften the selfish desires of *amour-propre* or mere self-preservation (Rousseau 2012a, p. 83). However, these passions are easily forgotten. Even things such as reasoning and philosophising can make us insensitive towards natural virtuous passions: "it is reason that engenders pride" (Rousseau 2012a, p. 84).

Although Rousseau describes *amour-propre* as an artificial passion, it emerges already in very simple social formations. He argues that "inequality of prestige and authority" become "inevitable among private individuals as soon as, being united in the same society, they are forced to make comparisons among themselves and to take account of the differences they discover in the continual use they have to make of one another" (Rousseau 2012a, p. 113). In short, *amour-propre* is a passion that emerges with social life, and, once born, it also surpasses other natural desires (Shaver 1989, p. 265).

Importantly, however, *amour-propre* alone does not drive us into massive inequality. To get to it, certain external conditions need to be in place. Rousseau sees that the division of labour and the institution of private property escalate *amour-propre*'s negative effects. In a more complex society, there are more dependencies and less individual freedom. Rousseau (2012a, p. 97) laments the revolution in metallurgy and agriculture that were the basis of more complex division of labour and more complex interdependent societies. Dependencies are bad because they lessen individual freedom. Rousseau (2012a, pp. 100, 106) goes as far as to state that the mutual dependencies between individuals and their life in an ordered society constitute slavery. Dependencies also encourage dishonesty. In complex societies, our social reputation matters and when reputation in others' sights becomes a need, this encourages deceit: "To

be and to appear to be became two entirely different things, and from this distinction came ostentatious display, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their wake" (Rousseau 2012a, p. 100).

The *Discourse* also includes pessimism towards the possibility of achieving equality in the institutional world. Differences in wealth and the desire to protect the unequal status quo lead into institution of the legal system of protections (Rousseau 2012a, pp. 102–103). However, the same vices that make these protections necessary make also the abuse of those institutions necessary (Rousseau 2012a, p. 112). Although getting from *amour-propre* to massive inequality and suffering might require certain institutions (such as private property and law), it is notable that *amour-propre* has a key role as a background driving force that "excites and multiplies the passions" (Rousseau 2012a, p. 113).

The picture of human sociality offered in the *Discourse* is decidedly negative. In social life, we are driven "outside" of ourselves through a passion to be esteemed better than others: "the savage lives within himself; sociable man, always outside himself, knows how to live only in the opinion of others, and it is from their judgment alone that he, so to speak, derives the feeling of existence" (Rousseau 2012a, pp. 116–117). Being outside of oneself results in loss of freedom, dishonesty about self, and material inequality. Society twists the natural savage and creates a different humanity—even the supreme happiness of a savage and a man of society can be completely different (Rousseau 2012a, p. 116). As a solution, Rousseau (2012a, p. 117) recommends an inwards turn: we should ask ourselves what we are, and not ask that only from the Other.

However, the *Discourse* does not give a full picture of human sociality. It focuses on the negative side and, as such, gives a view of the evil inherent in social life. As much as *amour-propre* drives the negatives described above, it can also lead to good: "this frenzy to distinguish ourselves that almost always keeps us outside ourselves, to which we owe what is best and worst among men, our virtues and our vices, our sciences and our errors, our conquerors and our philosophers – that is, a multitude of bad things as against a small number of good ones" (Rousseau 2012a, p. 113). In the next section, I will aim to tease out some features of Rousseau's analysis of social life which ameliorate the negative picture.

Learning to Live with Others: *Emile* and *Social Contract*

Although Rousseau is highly sceptical of the possibilities of respect and freedom in (early) modern society, in *Emile* he outlines how freedom could be achieved through an upbringing that invites (or even forces) one to be free—not unlike Fichte's idea of *summoning* [*Aufforderung*] one to realize one's own agency. Similarly, the *Social Contract* offers a solution for how to set up a society without the already described loss of freedom.[4]

In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau aims to provide a solution to the issue of how to retain freedom in a social context. The fundamental problem is the following:

> How to find a form of association that defends and protects the person and goods of each associate with all the common force, and by means of which each, uniting with all, nonetheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before? (Rousseau 2012b, p. 172)

The answer to this problem requires a shift in the quality of freedom that is available: a shift from the natural freedom of the savage into the civil freedom of a citizen (Rousseau 2012b, p. 176). Rousseau's solution is that, in forming a social contract, each participant of a society abstains from oppressing others, and they form a general will, which constitutes a new person with its own life—a will that has the preservation and the freedom of the contracting individuals as its aim (Rousseau 2012b, p. 173).

There is a form of acknowledgement (or vertical recognition) at play in this context as the social contract needs to be "recognized" by participants for it to be binding (Rousseau 2012b, p. 172). However, it is notable that for Rousseau (2012b, pp. 169–170) there cannot be true relations between states (or institutions) and individual humans as they are beings of a different nature. Thus, what has become called a vertical (institution/state—human) relationship in later recognition theories is

[4] Mäki (2020, p. 41) condenses the relationships of Rousseau's key works in the following fashion: *Discourse on Inequality* shows how freedom and recognition cannot be reached in the modern world, *Social Contract* shows how freedom could in principle be realized in a society, and *Emile* provides an instruction for education to freedom and reciprocity.

for Rousseau an impossibility. Nonetheless, in forming a social contract, individuals generate a general will and get a new role as citizens who are at the same time subjects and sovereigns (Rousseau 2012b, p. 233). Here Rousseau struggles with the central challenge of modern political systems: how to balance freedom with the equality of citizens. The named end of any legal system should be the preservation of both, freedom and equality (Rousseau 2012b, 200). Rousseau believes that the social contract is a solution to this. All are equal as "no one has the right to require another to do something that he does not himself do" (Rousseau 2012b, p. 237).

Although later criticism (see, e.g., Taylor 1994, p. 50; McBride 2013, p. 18) has aptly pointed out the problems in Rousseau's solutions (the general will's homogenising and oppressive role),[5] here the interesting part is that despite the negative prospects outlined in the *Discourse*, it seems possible to form such a social order that does not directly result in the loss of all forms of freedom.

The book *Emile*, in turn, provides a story of the education of a young man called Emile. The strategy that Rousseau adapts in his imaginary project of education is to keep young Emile on a "natural" path and avoid enforcing such habits (or sociality and social comparisons) that would feed *amour-propre* too early (Rousseau 1979, p. 68). Such an education aims to temper Emile's pride, to limit his imagination, and to enforce self-sufficiency (Rousseau 1979, p. 81). Rousseau (1979, p. 92) sees that *amour-propre* is a neutral passion that can be moulded through its application, although the aim of education is to keep the child part of nature as long as possible. If having a social standing becomes his motivation, "he has already left nature" too early (Rousseau 1979, p. 160).

The education of Emile aims to make him a free and independent man who is self-sufficient and whose (social) needs are limited. "No imaginary need torments him. Opinions can have no effect on him. His desires go no farther than his arms" (Rousseau 1979, p. 165). However, the effects of *amour-propre* and social comparison cannot be indefinitely postponed as with the onset of puberty, *amour-propre* necessarily awakens (Neuhouser 2008, p. 173). The awakening of sexual desire unavoidably drives people into social relations.

[5] However, see also Neuhouser (2008, p. 210) for a different reading—defending the non-oppressive nature of Rousseau's idea.

From the point of view of recognition, the education could be stated to aim for a sufficiently strong self-relationship, freedom, and personal integrity. These are needed to moderate *amour-propre*'s negative effects when Emile is introduced to civil society. In a sense, Emile is taught first to be a self-sufficient man and only after that he is introduced to citizenship. The story includes also interesting elements of learning reciprocal respect.[6] First, while Emile is taught through hypothetical incidents about possessions and property, he "learns that his claims to it will be respected to the same extent he himself respects the ownership of others" (Mäki 2000, p. 83). More importantly, the respect for the educator comes to the fore when Emile becomes an independent man but gives his authority back to the educator by his own will: "Make me free by protecting me against those of my passions which do violence to me. Prevent me from being their slave; force me to be my own master and obey not my senses but my reasons" (Rousseau 1979, p. 325). Here, Emile, on the one hand, recognizes the role of the educator in making him a free person and, on the other hand, respects the authority of other's reason. The education starts from the exploitation of Emile's ignorance, but it grows towards him taking full responsibility of his own life. When the manipulation is made transparent, the relationship shifts into one based on "fully equal or symmetrical recognition" (Mäki 2000, p. 82).

To summarize, *amour-propre* is a relational and comparative passion that makes us strive for social esteem. Although it cannot be avoided, it can be cultivated through education and bespoke social arrangements. Rousseau presents a philosophical anthropology of desire for recognition that is also plastic and malleable (see also Kolodny 2010). As we are not savages, we have to learn to be citizens and to develop the reciprocal skills that are needed in a civil society. At the same time, Rousseau presents a diagnosis of the society of his times: of how the institutional and social world fails to engender freedom.

In comparison with the Hegelian idea of recognition, which emphasizes the constitutive side of interpersonal relations and the necessity of the relations with others, Rousseau emphasizes individuals' self-sufficiency and their relationships to things and nature. It is as if for Rousseau basic self-sufficiency has to be learned first so that the interpersonal skills can be

[6] The reciprocity in human relations comes apparent also in the case of pity where one needs to be able to put oneself in the shoes of the sufferer and see the similarity in between one and the other, between human beings (Neuhouser 2008, p. 176).

rightly developed afterwards. There seems to be oscillation between the view that humans are constituted in relations with others and that they should be self-sufficient and individually free. Rousseau seems to support the idea that we have some kind of internal identity—we ought to stay true to ourselves—that does not get such a key role in more intersubjectivistic accounts of the self. But what is the relevance of Rousseau's views today? In the next section, I will provide two examples of how Rousseau's ideas of human sociality have been received in contemporary theories of recognition.

Contemporary Recognition Theory and the Reception of Rousseau

In this section, I will outline two distinct and partly opposing interpretations of Rousseau's work and significance. The first is Axel Honneth's interpretation of Rousseau as a theorist of negative recognition, and the second is Frederick Neuhouser's more optimistic view of Rousseau's implicit theory of recognition.

Honneth: Rousseau as a Theorist of Negative Recognition

Honneth is one of the theoreticians guiding contemporary recognition theory and whereas he commonly frames his theory as Hegelian, he has also recently commented Rousseau's work on intersubjectivity. According to Honneth (2021, p. 18), Rousseau inherits a generally negative anthropology from his French moralist predecessors—especially La Rochefoucauld and Montaigne. As mentioned above, for French moralists "the problem of life in others" (Shaver 1989, p. 261) was a persistent problem. That is, they spent effort to conceptualize and make sense of the others' effects on us and our self-understanding. And indeed, the French moralists' suspicion towards others is reflected in Rousseau's overencompassing suspicion towards human sociality and assumed human excellency.

Honneth interprets Rousseau's reliance on *amour-propre* in the *Discourse* as his "negative theory of recognition" (Honneth 2021, p. 21). Honneth sees that the self-relations rising from *amour-propre* and *amour-de-soi* are of a different kind. Part of the trouble with *amour-propre* is that relying on it—and relying on others as judges of our actions—does not guarantee the quality of our judgements. Rather, it enhances "our

desire to be superior to our peers" (Honneth 2021, p. 23). However, although relying on *amour-propre* is relying on external judges, what really matters is the relation to oneself. And here the social gallivanting presents a danger of self-deception. As Honneth formulates it:

> The more individuals' need for esteem leads them to display their own advantageous attributes, the more they will be tempted to deceive themselves about their own true personality. (Honneth 2021, p. 26).

We do not want to be seen as superior only for social reasons and benefits, but also for the sake of our self-relations. What matters is self-worth (Honneth 2016, p. 195)—although in the case of *amour-propre* the self-worth is directly derived from the others' judgements. As Rousseau stated, the social man lives outside of himself, in the opinion of others.

Honneth (2021, p. 30) asserts that Rousseau never abandons his reservations about *amour-propre*. For Honneth's Rousseau, living through others is a problem which cannot be fully solved. The problem with *amour-propre* is for Honneth mainly a cognitive problem, from which the various social harms such as inequality follow. Craving recognition from others creates a problem of not adequately recognising ourselves: "Either we feign a kind of excellence we do not truly possess […] or public opinion is wrong from the start about our attributes, in which case it is nearly impossible get rid of such errors, because we have made them our own" (Honneth 2021, p. 33). With these difficulties of self-understanding, we could end up in a wrong position in a social hierarchy or face an epistemic danger of not being able to break the public image, and thus losing our true selves. In Honneth's interpretation, the latter is the greater danger for Rousseau. The key of the negative theory of recognition is that "our dependence on social recognition is so harmful and deserves our full philosophical attention because of the resulting uncertainty about our true individual nature" (Honneth 2021, p. 34).

Nonetheless, Honneth sees Rousseau as a theorist of recognition in the sense that Rousseau agrees with the constitutive role of recognition. Social humans "can only view themselves as subjects with unique attributes if they are confirmed as such by their peers" (Honneth 2021, p. 37). In other words, humans become what they are only through social recognition. However, Honneth (2021, p. 37) sees that Rousseau's view on recognition is limited to esteem-recognition of socially competitive characteristics, instead of moral respect and the struggle for equal

normative status with others. Contemporary recognition theories, in turn, are commonly formulated to include both of these sides of recognition (see, e.g., Taylor 1994; Honneth 1995; McBride 2013). However, it could be argued that Honneth's analysis underplays the role of respect in Rousseau's work. Not everything that can be interpreted as social recognition falls under "inflamed" *amour-propre* or desire for personal esteem in Rousseau's *oeuvre*. Besides social worth and esteem, there is also respect. In Honneth's (2016, p. 191) interpretation, Rousseau remains, however, constantly wary of the meaning of intersubjectivity for human life, and thus, it does not make such a basis for his social theory as it gets in the more positive formulations of likes of Fichte and Hegel.

As a practical historical development, Honneth (2021, p. 45) argues that Rousseau's ideas of factual affirmation of individual features are passed on to the French tradition of recognition, such as Sartre's work, where "intersubjective encounters necessarily entail a kind of self-loss on the part of the recognized subject" (Honneth 2021, p. 47). Honneth's condemning end-result is that for Rousseau-inspired French philosophy intersubjectivity is a problem—unlike for, for example, the Hegel-inspired recognition theory. Honneth sees that the so-called negative and positive theories of recognition are in fact so far apart that they are not mere "contrasting accentuations" (Honneth 2021, p. 141) but rather theories that are looking at different phenomena altogether.[7] Whereas the negative tradition focuses on social ascription of properties (and its potentially harmful effects), the Hegelian tradition sees recognition as a way of relating between subjects that constitutes and enables acting as a subject (Honneth 2021, p. 142).

[7] In his earlier work, Honneth does discuss the role of reciprocity in Rousseau. Rousseau's idea of extension of *amour-propre* to other humans (besides only oneself) seems to work as a reciprocal solution to the problems caused by *amour-propre*. Honneth (2016, p. 196) sees this as a reciprocal realization of the dependency of each other's recognition, which would in turn lessen the competition for social reputation. However, despite the possibility of this realization, the desire for social worth and better status remains—and even democratic societies need to ensure "a sufficient scope for the satisfaction of the individual's desire for reputation and esteem" (Honneth 2016, p. 198).

Neuhouser: Rousseau as an Inherent Theorist of Recognition

Compared to Honneth's view, Frederick Neuhouser provides a much more optimistic interpretation of Rousseau's inherent theory of recognition. According to Neuhouser (2008, p. 2), *amour-propre* includes an important constitutive element—humans would not become subjects without it. "Developmentally the esteem of others is a necessary condition of self-esteem, and Rousseau fully appreciates this fact" (Neuhouser 2008, p. 35).

Like Honneth, Neuhouser (2008, p. 4) sees that Rousseau is more pessimistic on the prospects of social recognition than Hegel. In Rousseau's account, the drive for recognition is not directed by any inner dialectic that would lead into its positive development and the realization of its inner *telos*, development of self-consciousness and freedom. Instead, we might not really be able to escape the conditions of inequality and the lack of freedom in which we live.

For Neuhouser (2008, p. 39), *amour-propre* is something that human beings cannot exist without. Nonetheless, how the desire for esteem plays out and how it is socially realized is variable and dependent on the particular social and institutional arrangements.

> *[A]mour-propre* is a form of self-love that is the source of the enduring, though malleable, need human beings have in society to count as someone of value, both in the eyes of others and relative to the value of others. (Neuhouser 2008, p. 45)

In a stark difference with Honneth's interpretation, Neuhouser (2008, p. 34) emphasizes that *amour-propre* does not in fact seek a form of self-relation, self-esteem, but rather social esteem in the eyes of the others.

In Neuhouser's (2008, p. 46; 2021, p. 241) reading, Rousseau's account provides a psychological account of human nature that outlines the basic elements of human life-form. *Amour-propre*—although clearly a cause of inequality and suffering—is also a good in the sense that it enables other goods and has a part in realising human capacities (Neuhouser 2008, p. 53). In this sense, Rousseau clearly has a constitutive element in his theory of recognition. *Amour-propre* is a strong passion, a biological feature of human life that cannot be reasoned away or ignored (Neuhouser 2008, p. 71). However, it is artificial in the sense that it does not appear in the idealized life of a solitary noble savage. Its artificial nature also means that it can be moulded (Neuhouser 2021, p. 243).

Indeed, while following *amour-propre* might result in a loss of freedom or integrity, that is not an unavoidable result in Neuhouser's interpretation. It is only when the mitigating social conditions and right education are missing, that the desire for esteem takes its most likely form: "*seeking to be recognized as the best*" (Neuhouser 2008, p. 65). In short, whereas it is an important constitutive part of human life, *amour-propre* provides simultaneously a multi-faceted danger to human flourishing (see Neuhouser 2008, p. 92).

The loss of self looms as a constant danger. If we desire recognition, we are always in the danger of being "dictated by the values and preferences of others" (Neuhouser 2008, p. 79), in which case their will supplants our own will and freedom. Thus, there is a need for balancing acts, such as education, that make it possible that even if in a society we necessarily exist outside of ourselves, we are not solely at the mercy of others' opinions (Neuhouser 2008, p. 84). In fact, Rousseau seems to propose that we ourselves should be setting the standards of esteem. Mere approval from others is not good enough (as it might be based on me cheating or others being bad judges), but instead it is good to rejoice from social approval of having done something that is good (as judged by my own standards). If the others correctly judge my deed as esteemable, there is no problem in obtaining that external esteem (Neuhouser 2008, p. 97).

What sets Neuhouser's account apart the most from Honneth's is that Neuhouser sees Rousseau as aiming to provide a roadmap for overcoming and taming the negative effects of *amour-propre*. He reads *Social Contract* and *Emile* as "two-pronged attempt to find both political and educational remedies to the many problems posed by the human need for recognition" (Neuhouser 2021, p. 243; see also Neuhouser 2008, pp. 157–158).

On the one hand, Neuhouser argues that with an optimal form of social organization, and a targeted upbringing, *amour-propre* can be cultivated so that recognition is achieved in a socially constructive way. On the other hand, there is no need to completely fade out *amour-propre*. It is a direct source of various goods and without it "a large part of what gives human lives meaning and value would be lost" (Neuhouser 2008, p. 188). To quote Neuhouser in length:

> *[A]mour-propre* furnishes humans with a substantial part of the subjective resources they require if they are to become rational beings, attain moral excellence, and realize themselves as free. In other words, subjects who

> lacked *amour-propre* (and who would therefore not be human subjects) would also lack a substantial portion of the cognitive and conative capacities necessary for rationality, morality, and self-determination; indeed, they would not be subjects, or selves. (Neuhouser 2008, p. 189)

Neuhouser argues that in their search for recognition, driven by *amour-propre*, individuals establish such relations with others that make us the subjects that we are. A large part of this picture is that to become rational beings requires that we take respect-recognition attitudes towards other rational beings (Neuhouser 2008, p. 209). A rational subject considers the other as a rational subject, she needs to occasionally bracket her own desires and adopt a universal perspective, she needs to consider others as moral equals, and she needs to recognize, with certain limits, the authority and the reason that is present in the opinions of others (Neuhouser 2008, p. 218). Furthermore, Neuhouser (2008, p. 225) argues that it is precisely *amour-propre* that provides individuals with an incentive to consider themselves from an external perspective.

In the optimal case, recognition is mutual. Neuhouser describes Emile's development taking the direction in which he is able to truly enjoy the recognition from others because he does in fact possess the esteemable qualities and because these qualities are deemed esteemable by himself. However, this also means that Emile needs to accord a certain standing to the external observes for their recognition to count as recognition (Neuhouser 2008, pp. 242–243). This is especially the case with rational agency as individuals learn to see themselves as rational "only by internalizing the point of view of an originally external authority" (Neuhouser 2008, p. 250) who has deemed them as rational.[8]

In contrast to Honneth's pessimism, Neuhouser gives a positive reading of Rousseau's view on recognition. However, he argues that ultimately Rousseau's theory falls short of its aims of explaining human evil and of retaining the possibility for good (Neuhouser 2008, pp. 266–270). First of all, as the description of the harms caused by *amour-propre* is

[8] "According to this view, human beings are able to 'subject themselves to the yoke of reason' only because they can be educated to find a kind of honor or esteem in doing so. The honor at issue in rational agency is of the sort one wins in giving expression to a practical identity — as, say, a man of reason, a citizen of Rome, or a sovereign member of the republic — where having such an identity implies a normative commitment, an allegiance to some standard of what is good, or worthy of honor" (Neuhouser 2008, pp. 260–261).

so strong, the task Rousseau sets for himself is almost insurmountable. Secondly, the theoretical aim of finding a singular element in humanity that can explain everything that Rousseau aims to explain is perhaps too ambitious.[9] The "monocausal" explanation of evil is theoretically suspicious as it is questionable whether all bad acts can be drawn from a singular feature of the human psyche.

In the end, Rousseau remains a divisive figure. He could be read as an important precursor to the Hegelian theory of recognition. Or as a theoretical misstep, which leads us to see human sociality as a problem. In the next section, I want to consider the lessons that contemporary recognition theorists might draw from Rousseau—even if they would not adopt his philosophical anthropology as such.

Lessons from Rousseau

To conclude, in this section, I want to go a step further than just showing possible interpretations of Rousseau's work in the light of contemporary recognition theory. The question is: is there something that contemporary recognition theorists should learn from Rousseau? The answer is a double-edged "yes" and "no".

Starting with the latter, it is clear that Rousseau is not a recognition theorist as such. He does not use the term, and some of the elements (e.g. constitutive, normative) that are present in the Hegelian strand of recognition theory require strong interpretation and are easily buried under the negative effects of *amour-propre*.

Although Rousseau inspired at least some of the early recognition theorists, his analysis is limited and he does not make the required conceptual distinctions that are available now—like the distinction between moral and epistemic understanding of recognition (Honneth 2016, p. 206). He does not explicitly distinguish between respect and esteem either, but incorporates both in his analysis of *amour-propre* (Neuhouser 2008, p. 64). The differentiation between modes of recognition as well as between horizontal and vertical institutional spheres of recognition are some of the cornerstones of the current recognition literature, which cannot be directly found from Rousseau's work. Quite unsurprisingly,

[9] Interestingly, this sort of ambition can be found from Honneth's recognition theory as he can be taken to defend theoretical monism, which is built around the concept of recognition.

Rousseau's account is not as clearly conceptualized and analytically differentiated as contemporary views are.

Perhaps more importantly, Rousseau's depiction of the savage man in the state of nature and of the strive for self-sufficiency is very much in opposition with the more intersubjective accounts of the self that prevail in recognition theory. Achieving self-esteem works as an apt example here. *Amour-propre* can be interpreted as a desire for self-esteem (Shaver 1989, p. 263; Honneth 2016; 2021). Self-esteem is often achieved through a struggle for recognition with (and against) others, but Rousseau does not see that this is necessarily so—and in fact, for him it would be better that it was not so. Hegelian recognition theorists, in turn, see the social struggle as an ontological requirement: self-esteem would not be possible without relations to others. For Honneth, whose evaluation of Rousseau's worth for today's recognition theory is a weighted heftily on the negative, the negative and self-centred formulations of *amour-propre* form "a Trojan horse" (Honneth 2016, p. 206). Those who try to rely on Rousseau in their work on recognition are in danger of getting a much more individualistic view of human beings than held by "positive" theorists of recognition.

Rousseau, nevertheless, is a philosopher of social life. He is not blind to the negative side of the ascendant bourgeoisie society and highlights the human weaknesses and vulnerabilities in social relations. *The first lesson* that we can learn from Rousseau is that recognition and its practical realizations are ambivalent. Although we might need recognition to flourish, our basic passions can be also exploited and turned to support superficial, unjust forms of social life. This is an element that was not present in the early days of contemporary recognition theory,[10] although more recent studies (see, e.g., Ikäheimo et al. 2021) have acknowledged the need to analyse the darker side of recognition. Any positive theory of recognition needs to also make sense of such phenomena as well and the potentially negative power of interpersonal relationships.

The second lesson concerns the justifiability of esteem. In the Rousseauian picture, social competition for esteem is highly likely to end up in exaggeration and inflammation of natural inequalities. According to Cillian McBride (2013, p. 86), the question of creating a stable order of social esteem is an ongoing, relevant question, and Rousseau's focus on

[10] An exception to this rule is Judith Butler (1999) who has always been conscious of the negative power of recognition.

the institutionalization of esteem-based inequality is something that had, until recently, slipped under the sights of recognition theorists.

The desire for esteem causes competition, which in turn may cause institutionalized inequality. The competitiveness of esteem is still very much part of the contemporary everyday self-understanding and sits at the core of meritocratic systems. Although recognition theorists commonly agree on the competitive nature of esteem, their theories need also to make sense of when and how the competing claims for esteem are justifiable and whether the biases and injustices that are built into the frameworks of esteem can be dismantled. Rousseau gives us a reminder of the centrality of social esteem and of the pitfalls that the struggles for esteem could lead to. In contrast to a person seeking esteem from others, a self-secure person knows her worth and is not easily swayed by the potentially misplaced social standards of esteem. The justifiability and the scale of recognition claims ought to be taken seriously because the competitive search for positive esteem-recognition can have disastrous effects.

Following directly from the previous, we get *the third*, and final, *lesson*, which is the importance of resistance for recognition. On the one hand, Rousseau aptly highlights the dangers of being at the mercy of the others and the inner psychological temptations that we have for social esteem. However, mirroring this, there is a lesson to be learned about personal resistance for social recognition: we are individuals who—even if constituted in relations with others—can reach certain levels of self-security and self-sufficiency. Rousseau highlights the importance of reaching this threshold and being resistant to the opinions of others. For Rousseau, the uncritical acceptance of the opinions of others is a major problem (Shaver 1989, p. 275). We are easily habituated into accepting the opinions of others—even if the motivation for seeking their attention would be an internal desire for self-esteem. Rousseau's work can function as a critical reminder of holding one's own head up high and not conforming to the will of the others. Our identity and sense of our worth should not be completely at the mercy of others. It is precisely because we are vulnerable to others' opinions of us that we need to also develop resistance to recognition. This is one of the major insights from Rousseau that has yet to be fully taken up by contemporary recognition theory.

Ultimately, Rousseau is not a developed recognition theorist as such, but he has certainly inspired the theory of recognition. Without question,

he is interested in the same phenomena of human sociality as contemporary recognition theorists—although his analysis retains a much more negative tone towards the search for recognition. There are elements in his work that are later developed further by Hegel and his followers, but Rousseau's *oeuvre* also includes themes that have, until recent years, been underanalysed in recognition theory. What Rousseau manages to highlight better than many others who come after him is the ambivalence of human sociality. The ambivalence he himself lives through. In *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Rousseau famously states to have finally shed the burdens of society, he is "now alone on earth" (Rousseau 1992, p. 3). Although one could think that this loneliness would finally pacify *amour-propre*, the passion is not easily escaped and it is evident in almost every page that what Rousseau is most concerned about is his own reputation!

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Transgression and Resistance

Complex Relations: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Olympe de Gouges on the Sexes

Martina Reuter

Introduction

Since the earliest interpretations by his contemporaries, readers have considered Jean-Jacques Rousseau a paradoxical thinker. This is true not least because of his writings on women. How was it possible that the great defender of the equality of men argued for the natural obedience of women? Due to the seeming inconsistency of Rousseau's paradoxes and the abundance of his autobiographical writings, critics since the eighteenth century have searched for psychological explanations of Rousseau's contradictions. In 1790, we find Catherine Macaulay, for example, commenting on Rousseau's double standards for men and women and writing that Rousseau's "understanding was too good to have led him into this error, had he not been blinded by his pride and his sensuality" (Macaulay 1996, 212–13). The tendency to search for psychological explanations lives on in modern scholarship. Quite recently, we find Emanuele Saccarelli claiming that Rousseau was "notoriously incapable of sustaining any passably normal relationships with women" and

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"wounded by his personal inability to deal with women" (Saccarelli 2009, 483). Saccarelli's remarks illuminate the risks of anachronism involved in attempts of psychological explanation. Rousseau's relationships with women were arguably quite typical for a man of his occupation and rather precarious financial means. He was indeed not the only seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosopher who did not marry, had children out of wedlock and benefited from the favours of female patrons.

My aim in this chapter is to give a philosophical account of Rousseau's views on women, which does not rely on psychological explanations. Rousseau may very well have suffered from an extraordinarily amount of inner conflicts, but I hope to show that we do not need to refer to his personality in order to make sense of his thought. I argue that we can best understand Rousseau's views on women when we interpret them as part of an ongoing discussion about the equality, similarity and differences between the sexes. The chapter consists of three sections. In the first section, I examine Rousseau's early writings on women from the latter part of the 1740s and compare his arguments with those of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors discussing women and men. I argue that Rousseau never defended a view of the equality of the sexes based on their similarity. In section two, I develop a close reading of the first pages of book five of *Emile*. I argue that in these passages, Rousseau is positioning his view of sexual difference against previous views on the equality, superiority or inferiority of women. I conclude that the main difference between Rousseau's view on women in the early and later writings is that he drops the early view that men's rule over women is a form of tyranny. In section three, I examine Olympe de Gouges' critical dialogue with Rousseau's views. I argue that she radicalizes rather than reject his views on sexual difference. I conclude that when we perceive Rousseau's views from the point of view of women's emancipation and equality, the problem is not gender difference as such, but rather his claims that as opposed to women, men are sexed men only at certain moments and that women must rule indirectly.

Rousseau's Early Writings on Women

Scholars often acknowledge that the young Rousseau, while working as a secretary in the household of Louise and Claude Dupin ca. 1745–1751, assisted the former in the composition of her *Ouvrage sur le femmes* (Thielemann 1983, 318; Hunter 2009; Botting 2017; Wilkin 2019, 228).

Rousseau's involvement in the preparation of *Ouvrage* gives evidence of his familiarity with ongoing discussions about women and their capabilities. Most importantly, it shows the high likeliness that Rousseau was familiar with the Cartesian philosopher and theologian François Poulain de la Barre's analysis of the subjugation of women and arguments for the equality of the sexes (Stuurman 2004, 286–289). Dupin cites Poulain several times in her *Ouvrage* (Thielemann 1983, 321, 325). In addition to Rousseau's involvement in the preparation of Dupin's *Ouvrage*, he left four textual fragments discussing the capacities of women, which scholars nowadays date to the period when he was working with the Dupins (Rousseau 2012, 15–16; Rousseau 2006, 319–20). Following Susan Okin's classical study of Rousseau on women, scholars tend to contrast these early fragments with Rousseau's later views (Okin 1992, 104, 121). Eileen Hunt Botting has recently argued that Rousseau gradually abandoned his early "egalitarian feminism" in favour of excluding women from the social contract of his later works (Botting 2019, 463–4).[1] My perspective is different. Though not disregarding the differences between Rousseau's early and later views, I am particularly interested in the continuities that connect these views. I argue that a focus on these continuities makes Rousseau's views on women less paradoxical.

In order to examine what features of Poulain's seventeenth-century feminism we find echoing in Rousseau's early fragments on women, it is important to distinguish two different arguments presented by Poulain in his *On the Equality of the Two Sexes* (1673). First, he offers a detailed historical exposition of how women, whom God had created free and equal to men, were subjugated by acts of male power. Poulain summarizes that men "realizing that they were the stronger and physically superior sex, imagined they were superior in all respects" (Poullain 2002, 56). The subjugation of women is portrayed as part of a general establishment of an illegitimate tyrannical rule of the strongest, where the "greatest empires of Asia owe their beginnings to usurpers and brigands, and the inheritors

[1] Like so many others, Botting attempts to give a psychological explanation for why Rousseau changed his mind on women. She hypothesizes that one reason for the "shift away from a purely egalitarian view of the relationship between the sexes may have been Rousseau's inability to cope with his young, unmarried sexual partner's fertility" (Botting 2019, 466). She also suggests that Rousseau's description of Emile's relation to his tutor is a way of grappling "with the ghosts of his dead children" (Botting 2019, 467).

of the ruins of Greece and Rome were upstarts who thought they could resist their masters and dominate their equals" (Poullain 2002, 56).

Second, Poulain argues that women and men are equal because they are in all relevant respects similar. Here, Poulain relies on René Descartes' dualist and mechanistic metaphysics and points out that considered "independently, the mind is found to be equal and of the same nature in all humans" (Poullain 2002, 82).[2] Poulain aims to show that the cognitive and moral capacities of women and men are the same also when we consider the human being as a union of mind and body. He argues that the relevant bodily organs that affect the mind, i.e. the senses and the brain, are identical in both sexes (Poullain 2002, 83). It is important to note that Poulain's discussion of the subjugation of women and his claims about the similarities of the sexes are conceptually independent of each other. It is quite possible to criticize violent subjugation without claiming that the involved parties are similar to each other. We will see that Rousseau agrees with the first argument, but his early writings on women do not adopt an account of the similarity of the sexes.

Rousseau develops his most explicit defence of women in a one and a half-page fragment titled "On Women". He describes the subjugation of women as follows:

> Let us consider at first women deprived of their freedom by the tyranny of men, and the latter masters of everything, for crowns, offices, employments, command of armies, everything is in their hands, from the earliest times they have taken hold of them by I know not what natural right which I have never been able to understand very well and that might very well have no other foundation than superior force. (Rousseau 2006, 245)

Poulain's detailed description of how men usurped power over women is a likely immediate source of inspiration for this passage, but not Rousseau's only possible source. The claim that men's power over women is a form of tyranny was an established theme already in the Renaissance *querelle des femmes* tradition (Deslauriers 2019a). In 1529, Agrippa von Nettesheim wrote that "since the excessive tyranny of men prevails over divine right and natural laws, the freedom that was once accorded to women is in our day obstructed by unjust laws, suppressed by custom and usage,

[2] For a detailed discussion of the different aspects of Poulain's Cartesianism, see Reuter (2019a).

reduced to nothing by education" (Agrippa 1996, 94–95). Agrippa did not combine his criticism of male tyranny with claims about the equality of the sexes. Instead, he argues that women are in many respects more excellent than men. Woman have "been endowed with a dignity of virtue not granted to man" (Agrippa 1996, 54).

In "On Women", Rousseau continues by entering "into the details of the comparison [between women and men]" (Rousseau 2006, 245). He writes:

> [P]ut into parallel Mithridates with Zenobia, Romulus with Dido, Cato of Utica with Lucretia one of whom gave himself death for the loss of his liberty and the other for that of her honor, the Count de Dunois with Joan of Arc, finally Cornelia, Arria, Artemisia, Fulvia, Elisabeth, the Countess de Tekli, and so many other Heroines of all times with the greatest men, […]. (Rousseau 2006, 245)

These kinds of lists were commonplace in Renaissance defences of women. The bulk of Agrippa's *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, for example, consists of examples of virtuous women and the point is to show that women outnumber men in all possible respects. Rousseau's argumentative strategy is considerably different, though. He concludes that when we put great women and men in parallel, we find that "the number of the latter outnumber infinitely" (Rousseau 2006, 245). Due to a history dominated by men's tyranny, we find numerically less heroines than heroes (Rousseau 2006, 246), but "in recompense we shall see in the other sex models as perfect in all sorts of civic and moral virtues" (Rousseau 2006, 245). Rousseau's point is that though men outnumber women, those women, who have been given a possibility to rule or in other ways distinguish themselves, do it at least as well as men. The point is elaborated in the fragment "Idea of Method in the Composition of a Book", where Rousseau uses the question of women as an example to distinguish between good and bad argumentative uses of examples. He writes:

> Let us assume that I wanted to prove that in general women have as much merit as men, or more. If I cited Semiramis, Alexander would be cited to me, to Judith, Scaevola would be opposed to me, to Lucretia Cato of Utica, Anacreon to Sappho, and so on from example to example the list of great men would soon exhaust that of women. But if one established a proportion between the number of persons on each one side who

> have governed States, commanded Armies, and cultivated Letters, and the number of those who shone in these different Genres, then it is evident that the side in which the relative quantity outweighed would really deserve the advantage. (Rousseau 2006, 242)

Here, Rousseau's focus is on the criteria for solid argumentation, not on women as such, and he leaves the conclusion undrawn. Rousseau is not arguing that when relative quantity is taken into account, women do equal or outweigh men, but when the fragment is read together with "On Women", this seems to be his view. Simultaneously, the passage from "Idea on Method" is a methodological criticism of earlier attempts to defend the perfections of women by listing examples.

Rousseau traces the historical subjugation of women and emphasizes their worth, but nowhere in his early writings on women does he claim that women are similar to men. When comparing the sexes in "On Women", Rousseau writes that if "women had had as great a share as we do in the handling of business, and in the governments of Empires, perhaps they would have pushed Heroism and greatness of courage farther" (Rousseau 2006, 245–6). The sentence is interesting, because Rousseau originally wrote and then crossed out "an equal share" (Rousseau 2006, 319n11; Rousseau 2012, 31). He may have had many reasons to avoid the word "égalité" and its derivatives, which were still rather new and lacking established meanings. One reason may have been the close connection between equality and similarity in seventeenth-century defences of the equality of the sexes. We saw above that Poulain connects being "equal and of the same nature" (Poullain 2002, 82) and the connection between equality and identical nature is even stronger in Marie le Jars de Gournay's treatise *The Equality of Men and Women* (1622).[3]

As we saw, Rousseau holds that women may display "models as perfect in all sorts of civic and moral virtues" (Rousseau 2006, 245), but, as Rousseau will later argue in *Emile*, being as perfect does not rule out differences between the sexes and their virtues (Rousseau 1979, 358). In none of the early fragments does Rousseau claim that either the virtues or the vices of the sexes are the same. The less than a half-page fragment "A Household on rue Saint-Denis" describes a quarrelling couple, where the

[3] See in particular Gournay (2002, 86–87). For a detailed discussion of Gournay's arguments for the identity of the sexes, see Deslauriers (2019b).

"woman makes more noise, the man does more harm" (Rousseau 2006, 247). The aim is to show that neither sex can claim moral superiority. Rousseau describes how "the wife spewed out torrents of insults against her husband with frightful shouts" until "he coolly took up a stick, rained blows on her, left her lying for dead, and calmly went to drink with his friends" (Rousseau 2006, 247). We can indeed find a feminist twist to Rousseau's brief description. The effects of the husband's behaviour are worse than those of the wife's and can be related to Rousseau's criticism of male tyranny in "On Women", but the feminist twist is not related to the similarity of the sexes. On the contrary, it explicates sexual difference.

The fourth of Rousseau's early fragments on women is titled "Essay on the Important Events of Which Women Have Been the Secret Cause". The two-page fragment consists of a brief introduction and an outline for the planned contents of the essay. The third and final part is to consist of "some observations on the great men who let themselves be governed by women. Themistocles. Antony, etc." (Rousseau 2006, 249). Rousseau is not arguing that women have acted exclusively as a secret cause. He refers to the existence of "all the affairs that women have managed by themselves, either by virtue of their birth, or even by virtue of the posts to which their merit and their talents had raised them", but he explicitly plans to restrict his discussion to "the secret instigation of women" (Rousseau 2006, 248). In this fragment, Rousseau presents no demand that women should be enabled to manage affairs on their own. This early fragment is most evidently continuous with Rousseau's later writings on women, where he repeatedly discusses women's benevolent as well as malevolent effects on the actions of men (e.g. Rousseau 2002, 79).

Rousseau's early fragments are indeed feminist in the sense that they defend women and criticize male power, but they are not egalitarian in the sense of propagating equality based on the similarity of the sexes. Neither does Rousseau use the term inequality in his discussion of the oppression of women. He claims that tyranny has deprived women of their original freedom, but he does not conceptualize the loss of freedom as a form of inequality. When we compare Rousseau's and Poulain's views on women, we find that they share a criticism of male tyranny, but Rousseau does not at any stage of his intellectual career adopt Poulain's account of equality based on the similarity of the sexes.

Emile and Gendered Perfectibility

Right at the beginning of book five of *Emile*, Rousseau positions his own views on the similarity, difference and equality of the sexes. Scholars have rarely interpreted these passages in relation to Renaissance or seventeenth-century discussions about the nature of the sexes. In this section, I argue that when contextualized, we find a striking continuity between Rousseau's views in the early fragments and the position he defends in *Emile*. As we know, book five of *Emile* is dedicated to the education of Sophie, who is to become Emile's companion in marriage. The book is subtitled "Sophie or the woman" and Rousseau emphasizes that in order to find the ideal woman for the task, it is "necessary to know her" (Rousseau 1979, 357). Before discussing the proper education of Sophie, one must know the proper nature of woman. Rousseau begins by distinguishing between species and sex. He writes:

> Sophie ought to be a woman as Emile is a man – that is to say, she ought to have everything which suits the constitution of her species and her sex in order to fill her place in the physical and moral order. Let us begin, then, by examining the similarities and the differences of her sex and ours. (Rousseau 1979, 357)

Rousseau continues by stipulating that in everything "not connected with sex, woman is man", that is, the two sexes belong, in Aristotelian manner, to the same species and this brings about numerous similarities. He continues:

> [Woman] has the same organs, the same needs, the same faculties. The machine is constructed in the same way; its parts are the same; the one functions as does the other; the form is similar; and in whatever respect one considers them, the difference between them is only one of more or less. (Rousseau 1979, 357)

Here, we find reminiscences of both Poulain's Cartesian and Gournay's Aristotelian arguments for the similarity of the sexes. Following Descartes mechanistic account of the body, Poulain claims that when considering the brain, for example, a "most minute anatomical study reveals no difference […]; a woman's brain is exactly the same as ours" (Poullain 2002, 83). The organ is the same and so are its functions: "Sense perceptions

are received and assembled there in the same way" (Poullain 2002, 83). Following Aristotle's conception of the species form, Gournay argues that

> the human animal, taken rightly, is neither man nor woman, the sexes having been made double, not so as to constitute a difference in species, but for the sake of propagation alone. The unique form and distinction of that animal consist only in its rational soul. (Gournay 2002, 86–7)

Rousseau's metaphysics were not Aristotelian, but it is interesting that when accounting for the similarity of the sexes, he refers to the similarities of the machine as well as of the form. We see then when considering women and men from the point of view of species, Rousseau agrees with seventeenth-century arguments about similarity. His departure from this tradition becomes all the more evident when we consider what he has to say about women and men with respect to their sex. Whereas Gournay and Poulain argued that the difference between the sexes is a physiological detail meant for propagation alone, Rousseau claims that in "everything connected with sex, woman and man are in every respect related and in every respect different" (Rousseau 1979, 357).

The problem, Rousseau argues, is that we cannot know with certainty what in the constitutions of women and men is due to sex and what is not. "The only thing we know with certainty", he continues, "is that everything man and woman have in common belongs to the species, and everything which distinguishes them belongs to the sex" (Rousseau 1979, 358). It is important to note that this statement takes the form of a conceptual definition rather than an empirical knowledge claim. We know *that* the sexes are constituted differently, but we do not know the exact physiological causes of these differences. By refusing to claim knowledge about the physiological constitution of sex, Rousseau refuses to participate in the ongoing debate about women's physiology. Poulain's view of the similarity of the cognitive organs of women and men was by the eighteenth century a minority view, while most authors discussing the topic followed the lead of other late seventeenth-century philosophers and anatomists, who like Nicholas Malebranche argued for the existence of cognitive differences between the sexes (Malebranche 1997, 130–31). It is noteworthy that Rousseau does not engage in ongoing attempts to explain differences between the sexes by physiological causes. In this sense, he was not a biological reductionist (also Reuter 2014).

He brackets physiological knowledge in order to give way to a proper understanding of the moral relations between the sexes.

Rousseau continues by arguing that the relations and differences between the sexes "must have a moral influence" (Rousseau 1979, 358). He writes:

> This conclusion […] is in agreement with our experience; and it shows how vain are the disputes as to whether one of the two sexes is superior or whether they are equal – as though each, in fulfilling nature's ends according to its own particular purpose, were thereby less perfect than if it resembled the other more! In what they have in common, they are equal. Where they differ, they are not comparable. A perfect woman and a perfect man ought not to resemble each other in mind any more than in looks, and perfection is not susceptible of more or less. (Rousseau 1979, 358)

This passage includes Rousseau's most explicit criticism of earlier discussions of the relations between the sexes. He distances himself from authors such as Agrippa, who defend the superiority of women, as well as from authors such as Gournay and Poulain, who argue for the equality of the sexes. The passage is first and foremost a criticism of the Aristotelian roots of the comparisons between men and women, according to which woman is a lesser man. Rousseau uses a strikingly teleological language in his reference to each sex "fulfilling nature's ends according to its own particular purpose", while introducing two separate standards for human perfectibility, one for women and one for men. Whereas Aristotle tied telos or perfectibility to species and held that men and women have the same telos even though they fulfil it differently, Rousseau argues that the sexes have different moral ends to fulfil. Woman is perfect in her own right: she is not an imperfect man. The difference between the sexes is qualitative, not numerical, and this means that they cannot be compared. Interestingly, in the passages in question, Rousseau diverts from the usual practice of referring to "men and women" and often puts women first, as in the above reference to a "perfect woman and a perfect man". The reversion of the traditional order is found also in Olympe de Gouges' writings, for example in *The Rights of Woman. To the Queen*, where she refers to "the natural and imprescriptible rights of Woman and of Man" (Gouges 2011, 31). Though not necessarily a reflected upon choice in

either author, the order "woman and man" revises the tendency to define woman in relation to man.[4]

So far, there is nothing in these passages from *Emile* that would contradict the views Rousseau held in his early writings on women. Whereas the early Rousseau avoided referring to either the equality or the similarity of the sexes, the mature Rousseau spells out in some detail in what respect the sexes are similar and in what respect they are different. In the early writings, Rousseau referred to women's ability to display "models as perfect in all sorts of civic and moral virtues" (Rousseau 2006, 245) and his later account of different standards for moral perfectibility can be read as an elaboration on the idea of "models as perfect". The divergence between Rousseau's early and later views grows though, when he begins to elaborate on the implications of what it means that in "the union of the sexes each contributes equally to the common end, but not in the same way" (Rousseau 1979, 358). Now Rousseau introduces his notorious view that "One ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak. One must necessarily will and be able; it suffices that the other put up little resistance" (Rousseau 1979, 358). The transition here is indeed paradoxical: immediately after having pointed out that the perfectibility of the two sexes must be guided by two incomparable standards, he compares them and draws the thoroughly Aristotelian conclusion that the man must be the active and able part.

However, there is an immediate connection between Rousseau's distinction between active men and passive women and his account of women as indirect and even secret causes, which was present already in his early writings. Rousseau directly connects the idea that woman is the passive party, who merely needs to put up resistance, with the claim that "woman is made specifically to please man" (Rousseau 1979, 358). Women rule by pleasing. Rousseau first elaborated on the idea of women's indirect influence in the "Dedication to the Republic of Geneva", which prefaces *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Mankind* (1755). The "Dedication" presents a highly idealized picture of Geneva as a republic whose "citizens, long accustomed to a prudent independence, were not only free, but worthy of their freedom" (Rousseau 2002, 74). Towards the end of the text, Rousseau turns to "that precious half of the republic, which makes the happiness of the other; and whose

[4] I am indebted to Erika Ruonakoski for pointing out the significance of Gouges revising the traditional order "man and woman" into "woman and man".

tenderness and prudence preserve its tranquillity and virtue" (Rousseau 2002, 79). He writes:

> Amiable and virtuous daughters of Geneva, it will be always the lot of your sex to govern ours. Happy, so long as your chaste influence, solely exercised within the limits of conjugal union, is exerted only for the glory of the State and the happiness of the public. (Rousseau 2002, 79)

Rousseau describes the benevolent effects of women, but behind the surface lurks also the risk that women's influence becomes malevolent if exercised outside conjugal union. Like in *Emile*, women are supposed to govern men by pleasing them. Women exert virtue within the family, but their virtues are explicitly civic virtues, exerted for the benefit of the republic. Women are citizens, who constitute the "precious half of the republic", but Rousseau divides citizenship according to gender and implies that women do not play the same roles in managing public affairs as men do. Women govern by indirect means.

We need to ask if Rousseau's descriptions of women and their tasks in the "Dedication" and *Emile* are compatible with the criticism of "the tyranny of men", which he presents in "On Women" (Rousseau 2006, 245). Rousseau would answer yes. The women of idealized Geneva do not live under tyranny since they "live and die free […] subject to the laws that neither I, nor any other body else, should have it in our power to cast off their honourable yoke" (Rousseau 2002, 73). Following the republican distinction between the legitimate rule of law and illegitimate rule of arbitrary individual wills, Rousseau describes idealized Geneva as a state where women and men share the same freedom under law. Still, there is one significant difference between Rousseau's position in "On Women" and his later views. In "On Women", when Rousseau describes the consequences of male tyranny, he lists men's usurpation of "crowns, offices, employments, command of armies" (Rousseau 2006, 245). In the later writings, men's exclusive right to these positions is not conceptualized as tyranny since Rousseau assumes that women's governance over men restores the balance. We are now at the very core of the feminist republican criticism of Rousseau and his followers: is a gendered order, where women rule indirectly compatible with a truly republican state?

Critics such as Catherine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges' answer is no (Macaulay 1996, 215; Wollstonecraft 1995, 138, 157; Gouges 2011, 35). They all argue that women's indirect rule goes

against the essential republican idea of freedom as non-domination and self-governance.[5] Before proceeding to a study of Gouges' understanding of the relations between the sexes, we may note that the tension between Rousseau's demand for women's public rule and his defence of their indirect rule is present already in his early writings. "On Women" defends women's public rule whereas "Essay on the Important Events of Which Women Have Been the Secret Cause" favours indirect rule. The question of women's public rule is not a dividing line that can be used to distinguish Rousseau's early and later views on women.

Olympe de Gouges on Women and Men

Olympe de Gouges develops her most explicit exchange with Rousseau's ideas in the essay *Le bonheur primitif de l'homme, ou Les rêveries patriotiques* (1789). Like many of Gouges' writings, this essay consists of parts that are rather loosely tied together. It begins with three chapters on the development of human society and the loss of original happiness, continues with a discussion of the role of the theatre in French society and a proposal for its improvement, and finishes with a polemic against some Parisian intellectuals. The first two parts are closely related to topics discussed by Rousseau and give good insights into similarities and differences between Gouges' and Rousseau's views on women. Right at the beginning of her text, Gouges refers to "the art and genius of Rousseau, who comprehensively portrays educated man and natural man" (Gouges 1789, 2).[6] She laments the disrepute Rousseau's writings faced and names his critic, Voltaire, but withholds from taking sides on their dispute over the value of enlightenment (Gouges 1789, 2). Later in the work, she explains: "I do not disdain the sciences, […]; it is the abuse I condemn" (Gouges 1789, 22). The abuse is often related to ambition, which is one of the main causes for the loss of primitive happiness. The "happiness of man", Gouges writes, "is no longer practicable after it has been eroded by ambition for so many centuries" (Gouges 1789, 8).

Gouges' analysis of the loss of original happiness shares Rousseau's analysis of the turmoil of ambition (e.g., Rousseau 2002, 122–23), but

[5] For a detailed study of Wollstonecraft's republican feminism, see Halldenius (2015).

[6] There exists no modern edition or published English translation of *Le bonheur primitif*. My citations mostly follow Clarissa Palmer's English translation available at www.olympedegouges.eu.

her understanding of the original state of humanity is different from his. She sides with those who argue like John Locke that human beings have since the very beginning lived in families, and describes how these families organically grow into larger social groups. She criticizes Rousseau, who did "not differentiate, throughout entire centuries, […] men from animals" (Gouges 1789, 31). This is, according to Gouges, a degradation of human origin, which "means not accepting the existence of God" (Gouges 1789, 32). Gouges also describes sexual difference as originating in God's design. She writes that "if God himself moulded man and woman, those two models must have been perfect" (Gouges 1789, 5). Here we find an idea of two separate models for perfection, which is quite similar to Rousseau's description of gendered perfectibility, even though Rousseau does not give his distinction between the sexes a divine origin. Gouges' descriptions of the original happy society are also gendered. Gouges lets a dying elder from the first generation of humans guides his offspring in these words:

> Strong, robust, humanity will always succour suffering humanity; […] All men, indiscriminately, must work for the public good […]. Women breastfeeding their children will be exempt from public works; young girls will go to the fields, minding the livestock. (Gouges 1789, 13–14)

This description shares features with Rousseau's descriptions of a robust people with a sound differentiation between the sexes (e.g. Rousseau 2002, 117), but it is noteworthy that we find no descriptions of the indirect influence of women in any of Gouges' descriptions nor are women excluded from the public realm. The very mentioning of breastfeeding women being exempt from public works indicates that at other times, women do work for the public good at more or less the same terms as men, even if their specific tasks may be different. Whereas Rousseau argued that women fulfil their civic duties "within the limits of conjugal union" (Rousseau 2002, 79), Gouges acknowledges the demands of motherhood and considers marriage to be a sacred tie based on reciprocal feeling, essential to the state of original happiness (Gouges 1789, 18–19), but does not limit women's lives to the roles of mother and wife.

Gouges' views on the legitimate public roles of women become evident in the latter parts of *Le bonheur primitif*, where she discusses the theatre. Whereas the first chapters of the essay are explicitly commenting on Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality* (see

Gouges 1789, 6), Gouges is not explicitly addressing Rousseau's most famous writing on the theatre, the *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758). Despite the lack of an explicit commentary, a comparison between the two texts shows important differences between Gouges' and Rousseau's views on the theatre and on women. Rousseau wrote the *Letter* as a criticism of Jean le Rond d'Alembert's article "Geneva", published 1757 in volume VII of the *Encyclopédie*, edited by d'Alembert and Denis Diderot. Intertwined with his praise of the republic Geneva, d'Alembert suggests that the city would profit from a theatre, enabling it to "add to the wisdom of Sparta the civility of Athens" (d'Alembert 2016, 220).

Rousseau replies in great detail and argues that rather than profiting, Geneva would be ruined by a theatre. His main argument rests on the claim that the theatre is unable to improve morals, since its success is intrinsically dependent on prevailing taste and values (Rousseau 1968, 19). In addition to his analysis of this intrinsic problem, Rousseau reflects on the ill effects a theatre would have on the finances, happiness and morality of the Genevans. One of these effects is related to the morals of actors, a hot topic, which d'Alembert also commented on (d'Alembert 2016, 220). Due to women's claimed influence over men's morals, Rousseau is particularly concerned about actresses. Drawing on the claim that women are out of place in the public, he asks "how an estate, the unique object of which is to show oneself off to the public and, what is worse, for money, could agree with decent women and be compatible with modesty and good morals?" (Rousseau 1968, 90).

Gouges disagrees with Rousseau on the moral potential of the theatre as well as on the role of women. Arguing against the dominant role of the *Comédiens français*, she suggests nothing less than a revolution of the theatre. Contrary to Rousseau, Gouges thinks that the theatre has potential moral value:

> But the taste has gone and a revolution is needed to return the French to their true character. Preserve the arts, and rein in the excesses of luxury; abolish, mercilessly, a half of all performances; create one that can purify manners, make prejudice disappear, and become the source of noble emulation and usefulness to Society. (Gouges 1789, 69)[7]

[7] For a discussion of Gouges' belief in the beneficial effects of emulation, see Bergès (2022, 19–24).

Gouges' wish to reform the theatre is not unrelated to the debate over the malevolent influence of actors. She claims that actors have gained too much power over the theatre and suggests that the new theatre she wants to establish must "be accorded, by right, to Authors" (Gouges 1789, 69). It is here that women must step in. Gouges suggests that the new theatre should be named *Le Théâtre national*, ou *celui des femmes* and it should specialize in plays written by women. "In all times women have written", Gouges points out, "they have been allowed to compete alongside men in theatrical careers but they should be given proof of greater encouragement" (Gouges 1789, 72). Such encouragement will create "a noble emulation", which will make both sexes distinguish themselves (Gouges 1789, 71).

As Sandrine Bergès has pointed out, Gouges is not arguing that women authors will improve the theatre because of natural moral superiority (Bergès 2022, 25). Rather, as Gouges puts it, when women are included, "the emulation would be only the more pleasing and this different competition would uplift women's souls and make men more polite, more genuine, and more considerate" (Gouges 1789, 79). Gouges' distinction between good and bad competition is crucial. She distinguishes between destructive rivalry related to ambition and noble emulation, which creates true distinction. Her description of the conditions for noble emulation gives interesting insight into her understanding of the ideal relation between the sexes. She writes:

> So that nothing could interrupt this noble emulation, I would like there to be a committee of Writers of both sexes. The men would judge and pronounce upon their texts; the women would do the same for theirs. These precautions would prevent a spirit of rivalry and cabal. (Gouges 1789, 79–80)

Here we see how fragile the distinction between emulation and rivalry is. Whereas including writers of both sexes creates noble emulation, Gouges indicates that men judging the works of women and women judging the works of men would easily lead to unsound rivalry between the sexes. A productive relation requires a certain degree of separation. When discussing the theatre Gouges does separate the sexes, but there are crucial differences between her and Rousseau's models of separation. Most importantly, Gouges emphasizes that the spheres of women and men must function on equal terms and be in the same respect public.

Gouges elaborates on the public role of women in her most famous work, *The Rights of Woman. To the Queen* (1791), which includes her "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of Citizen". The pamphlet has often been read as a criticism of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" laid down by the National Constitutional Assembly in 1789, but as Erica Harth was one of the first to argue, Gouges' immediate target is the new constitution of 1791, not the original declaration (Harth 1992, 219). The constitution introduced a distinction between active citizens with full political rights, and passive citizens, who were not able to vote or run for political office (Smart 2011, 133–34). Gouges' main aim is to criticize the exclusion of women from full active citizenship and she argues that when correctly interpreted, the original declaration did include both sexes.

Asking "Man, are you capable of being just?", Gouges aligns herself with the criticism of male tyranny and contrasts the "tyrannical empire" among humans with natural harmony (Gouges 2011, 30). In *Le bonheur primitif*, she emphasized that originally humans were part of "a perfect natural harmony" (Gouges 1789, 18) and now she asks man: "distinguish, if you can, between the sexes in the workings of nature. Everywhere you will find them intermixed; everywhere they cooperate in this immortal masterpiece with a harmonious togetherness" (Gouges 2011, 30). Gouges emphasizes that woman "has also been given every intellectual faculty" and she is "born free" (Gouges 2011, 30, 31). Her declaration is a demand for full equality of rights, liberty and duties. She is an explicit critic of the indirect "nocturnal administration of women" (Gouges 2011, 35). Still, it is important to note that Gouges' demand for equality of the sexes relies on the ideal of their harmonious togetherness rather than their similarity. Her text is constantly distinguishing between the sexes and as in her discussion of the theatre, she seems to think that harmonious collaboration requires a certain level of separation.

Joan W. Scott has famously argued that Gouges' attempt to combine sexual difference with equal rights is doomed to fail because the "universalist discourses" of rights have themselves evoked "'sexual difference' to naturalize the exclusion of women" (Scott 1996, 16). There is much to be said about Gouges' attempt to combine equality and difference and about Scott's interpretation (see Reuter 2019b), but here I want to briefly focus on one aspect of Gouges' approach, which may well be its most subversive feature. Gouges is not trying to include women into a pre-given discourse of universal rights, but rather arguing that we can have equality only if we

realize that humankind consists of two sexes. When defining sovereignty in article III of her declaration, for example, she adds to the formulation of the original declaration that "the Nation […] is nothing but the union of Woman and Man" (Gouges 2011, 31). No citizen can speak for the whole nation since every citizen is either a woman or a man.

Rousseau famously claimed that there "is no parity between the two sexes in regard to the consequences of sex. The male is male only at certain moments. The female is female her whole life" (Rousseau 1979, 361). He held that man is most of the time a representative of his species rather than his sex and able to represent both sexes. Gouges shows that men are just as much representatives of their own sex as women are (e.g. Gouges 2011, 31). She radicalizes rather than rejects Rousseau's understanding of sexual difference and does away with the idea of gender-neutral humanity rather than tries to apply it to women.[8] In *Emile*, Rousseau wrote that in "the union of the sexes each contributes equally to the common aim, but not in the same way" (Rousseau 1979, 358). Whereas Rousseau continues by describing "equal contributions" consisting of men's activity and women's passivity, Gouges is genuinely prescribing a harmonious union characterized by equality and mutual liberty. She does this, not by de-gendering women, but by gendering men. This insight is of lasting importance for feminist theory and resembles, we may conclude, twenty-first-century advancements in critical studies of men and masculinity.

[8] It is important to note that neither Rousseau nor Gouges bases their understandings of sexual difference on biological explanations. Sandrine Bergès has recently claimed that Gouges does not argue for "difference feminism" since "it is unlikely that she would have had a view of feminine virtues as tied to a biological woman's essence" (Bergès 2022, 8). Gouges did not do the latter, but this way of putting it begs the question. Gouges relates sexual difference to the two models created by God (Gouges 1789, 5) and her ideal society—original or revolutionary—depends on harmony of these two sexes. She may very well allow for a woman making herself a man in order to say what she wants to say (Gouges 1790, 13–14; Bergès 2022, 7), though she would think this is unnecessary in a good society. Rousseau and Gouges both held that sexual difference is a moral rather than a biological given.

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Toward a Feminist and Queer Ecology in Rousseau

Rosanne Kennedy

In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton argues that in order to form a more expansive ecological perspective, we must do away with the idea of nature. As he states, nature "a transcendental idea in a material mask" is "getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art" (2007, 14, 1). More specifically, we need an ecology that forgoes reliance on binary oppositions and naturalized identities if our ecological imaginary is to accommodate feminist, queer, and anti-racist leanings (Morton, 2010, 274). Rousseau, I argue, is an early and unlikely advocate of an "ecology without nature" and thus provides an ecological perspective that is potentially feminist and queer. In order to elaborate this, I focus on two key texts in Rousseau's *œuvre*: The *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, or *Second Discourse* (1755) and his last unfinished autobiography, *Rêveries of a Solitary Walker* (written from 1776–1778). Though these two texts bookend Rousseau's literary career, there is a complement of themes and preoccupations that lend

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themselves to thinking the two together, especially in thinking about an ecology without nature.

What both the *Second Discourse* and *Rêveries* suggest is the idea of nature itself is a fiction: it is always already caught up in language and as such "nature is history" (Morton, 2007, 21). In the *Second Discourse*, for example, Rousseau describes the state of nature as a fantasy. We can only approach "nature" as a fiction, a hypothesis, and in its negativity (its absence). Rousseau's state of nature has a lot in common with what Michel Foucault terms the "thought of the outside." As Michel Foucault writes, "The outside cannot offer itself as a positive presence—as something inwardly illuminated by the certainty of its own existence—but only as an absence that pulls as far away from itself as possible, receding into the sign it makes to draw one toward it, as though it were possible to reach it" (1998, 154–155).[1] The state of nature Rousseau puts forward is an impossible thought (we cannot think nature in itself, it has no essence), yet he thinks it, in its absence, as the fictive outside of human history.

The *Rêveries* might strike one as conventional nature writing (what Morton [2007] calls "ecomimesis") and thus seems to participate in and produce an understanding of nature as "out there," separate from humans. In other words, it might appear then that the *Rêveries* returns us to the idea of nature as a static, regulatory ideal. However, although there are quite a few beautiful and lyrical passages devoted to the natural world, Rousseau challenges the conventions of nature writing by bracketing each bit of nature writing with an acknowledgment of its aesthetic frame and thus its fictive quality. Also, unconventional (at least from the perspective of normative nature writing) are Rousseau's renderings of the natural world and his relation to it. Rather than portraying pristine, untouched nature, Rousseau emphasizes the entanglement of the natural and the artificial: there is no pure nature "out there." Rousseau writes of a relationship to the natural world that is meditative but also immersive, blurring the lines between subject and object, observer and observed. We are embedded or entangled with the natural world rather than separate and distinct from it. His botanical practice is also instructive. Predicated on the enjoyment of plants rather than seeking their potential medicinal use-value, Rousseau's practice is concerned with "surfaces" rather than depth or meaning; the performance (*spectacle*) of flora and fauna is what

[1] T. Nyong'o's (2012) essay on Samuel Delany and queer ecology reminded me of Foucault's essay and particularly this quote. See p. 765.

interests him. The sexual parts of plants and their reproduction, especially their possible queerness (sporulation, asexual reproduction), in particular, is noted and fascinates Rousseau. In short, the *Rêveries* performs a complex form of nature writing which can be productively thought of as feminist and queer precisely because it puts nature (as an idea) under erasure at the same time as it celebrates the natural world and our entanglement with this world.

Reading these two texts together reveals two modalities of Rousseau's ecological thought: the first critical and the second more positive. Another way to put it is to invoke Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2002) distinction between paranoid and reparative readings: the *Second Discourse* can be thought of as Rousseau's paranoid reading/interpretation (it is almost completely negative, even cynically so) whereas the *Rêveries* can be seen in the reparative mode. That is, the *Second Discourse* provides us with a critical narrative of how the Anthropocene (prior to its naming) came about, while the *Rêveries* offers us some provisionary methods to think and live within the unfolding ecological disaster.

In the following, I will outline both of these modalities of Rousseau's thought: the critical and the reparative in the *Second Discourse* and the *Rêveries*, respectively. The *Second Discourse* provides a critique of Nature (with a capital N). It is also the story of human hubris, the development of exploitative practices and ideologies (of nature and of human others) through the invention of private property, industrialization (including agricultural production) and commodification. What makes this story singular as an early ecological text is that Rousseau refuses the Enlightenment narrative of progress and the superiority of humans (the nature/culture divide). Instead Rousseau tells a story of regression and disaster in which humans accidentally (through a bumbling and unwitting series of discoveries) come to think of themselves as superior and distinct. Rousseau's tale counters this hubristic narrative by insisting that the history of the natural world *is* the history of the human world: the two are so deeply imbricated and entwined that we can only think both together.

The *Rêveries*, on the other hand, works mostly in the reparative mode. I say mostly because I am not sure that any text can be completely reparative or innocent. Or perhaps better put, in the *Rêveries* Rousseau both acknowledges the disaster and his own positionality—as being squarely within the disaster (the first two Walks), as well as alluding to possible remedies or alternative perspectives. This remediation is one that is both

affective and material. Attentiveness, attunement, enthusiasm, humor, touching, playing, writing, collecting plant life, and crafting herbaria are the affective and material practices that Rousseau engages in during his walks and in subsequent reflections and activities. Reading the *Second Discourse* and the *Rêveries* together sheds light on how we might formulate a critique of the ecological disaster as well as how we might reorient or reimagine our relations in/to our worlds.

Though I focus primarily on Rousseau's writings and secondary texts that actively engage his writings, there are many other thinkers that inform my reading of Rousseau. In addition to Morton's frame of an "ecology without nature," my reading of Rousseau is indebted to numerous others whose work engages and traverses feminism, queer theory, ecology, science studies, literature, and artistic practices. There are many—too many—names to cite, so I will just note two key figures that have been the most influential but pop up only intermittently in my reading of Rousseau's ecology. Feminist scientist (and storyteller), Donna Haraway (2016) is one of these key figures. Haraway tracks our embeddedness and entanglements with unlikely kin (both human and non-human) and encourages "response-ability" to our world as key to "staying with the trouble." "Staying with the trouble" means acknowledging both our past and living as best as we can in the present, eschewing narratives of Progress, linear time lines, and futurist techno utopias. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015) is another central interlocutor. Her insistence on cultivating "arts of noticing"—being attentive to the what happens besides, underneath, alongside, and in the aftermath of the linear story of progress encourages us to notice complex assemblages of the human and the non-human that puncture this narrative.

Let us turn to the *Second Discourse*. What if we were to read *The Second Discourse* from the perspective of ecology? That is, what if we were to displace the story of the fall of "man" and center the story of ecological catastrophe? Certainly, Rousseau thinks both of these stories together because they are, of course, the same story. In the following, I will try to shift the focus so that the story of ecological disaster is a bit more in the foreground. Rousseau's story starts from a state of nature, that is impossible to "know" since we cannot access the time before history. In fact, Rousseau argues, we cannot be certain that such a time ever existed. In other words, there is no pure "nature" outside of or prior to culture. Nevertheless, and this is the central aporia of the *Second Discourse*: we need to think the impossible—the state of pure

nature in its very unknowability—in order to think about the present. What is clear though is that the story Rousseau tells is the opposite of Genesis: humans do not have "dominion" over the natural and animal world. But it is this thought—of human superiority (that paradoxically comes about as an effect of changes in climate and geography that force humans to change)—that is condemned in Rousseau's writings. This is perhaps his most ecological insight: that humans are not superior and not in control.

Rousseau begins the *Second Discourse* with rebuking previous descriptions of the state of nature by natural law theorists (especially Hobbes's and Locke's accounts) for failing to get back to a "true" state of nature. "The philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all felt the necessity of going back to the state of Nature, but none of them has reached it" (1992, 18). Their failure, Rousseau argues, is due to having "carried over to the state of Nature ideas they had acquired in society: they spoke about savage man [sic] and they described Civil man [sic]" (ibid., 19). The problem with earlier philosophical treatises is that they assume that the present resembles the past, or rather they start from the present and work backwards, making their present political and philosophical commitments find justification retrospectively.

Just after complaining of the failure of philosophers to get back to a "true" state of nature, Rousseau then inserts doubt that such a quest is even possible. "It did not even enter the minds of most of our philosophers to doubt that the state of Nature had existed…" (ibid., 19). Rousseau's doubt is double: doubt that there ever was a state of nature and doubt that even if there ever was such a state, it is doubtful that we could know it was since our world has changed so much. "[F]or it is no light undertaking to separate that what is original from what is artificial in the present Nature of man [sic], and to know correctly a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have precise Notions in order to judge our present state correctly" (ibid., 13). Kevin Inston rightly understands this paradoxical quest (to have "precise" views of an imaginary or even non-existent state) as drawing its "critical force…from its undecidability, being simultaneously real and imaginary." In other words, the undecidability of foundations opens up the possibility

of questioning the idea of the foundations itself. "It takes the possibility of knowing for sure what grounds society as the very possibility of investigating the question of grounding itself" (2010, 18).[2]

After expressing doubt about the possibility of reaching the state of nature, Rousseau then makes the oft-cited statement that he will proceed anyhow by "setting aside all of the facts." This might seem at first astonishing but it fits the logic of his argument: if the state of nature wavers in between the real and the imaginary, fiction and truth, then it will not be possible to approach it "scientifically" or with epistemological certainties ("facts"). Rousseau writes, "Let us therefore begin by setting all the facts aside, for they do not affect the question. The Researches which can be undertaken concerning this Subject must not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings better suited to clarify the Nature of things than to show their general origin" (1992, 19). Rousseau's investigations into the state of nature do not need to depend on facts or truthfulness, nor is the story he tells teleological (Rousseau's history is relentlessly recursive and circular). And contrary to many of his colleagues in the eighteenth century, Rousseau does not tell a colonizing, earth wrecking story of progress and civilization. Instead he tells a story of contingent events, catastrophes, disfigurement, lies, and exploitation. It is a cautionary tale; "to whatever country you belong and whatever your opinions, listen: here is your history as I believe it to read (*telle que j'ai cru la lire*) not in the books of your Fellow-men (*semblables*), who are liars but in Nature, which never lies."

One might wonder how exactly Rousseau "reads" Nature? The reference to "reading" first of all opens up the fictive quality of the state of nature—is it a text? And, if so, what kind of text? Rousseau distinguishes his reading from his colleagues' (because they "lie"). It might be tempting to claim that Rousseau's text is also a "lie" since he has already stated that it is "fictional" (conjectural, imaginary, hypothetical) wholly without factual evidence. Yet Rousseau insists that fictions are not lies, but are important in reframing narratives (with some fictions better than others). Rousseau places particular stock in his "reading" of nature since it is based in feeling and sensation. (Rousseau always insists that feeling

[2] Inston's reading is quite similar to Jacques Derrida's (1997) reading of Rousseau. The difference though is that Derrida claims that Rousseau flees from this insight of a groundless ground and seeks closure in a metaphysics of presence. I, of course, am more convinced by Inston's reading.

precedes reason.) Louis Althusser calls this Rousseau's "heart" (2019, 56–61). Although, Rousseau does not speak about his "heart" in the *Second Discourse*, he does frequently in other texts (e.g., "I feel my heart" in the first page of the *Confessions* [1995]). But in addition to the "heart," one might also reference Rousseau's "ear" or "eye." The heart, the ear, and the eye are importantly biological and metonymic: Rousseau feels, hears, and sees the state of nature through the biological organs and a sensorial openness that allows him to tell a different story that is not factual but paradoxically faithful and reasonable because it moves us. Wang Wei calls this "imitative novelty" (Wei, 2021, 453).

So, what is the story Rousseau tells? Despite all of Rousseau's warnings of the difficulties attached to his task and unusual method, he plunges forward with a description. This description though is noteworthy in that it is not a positive description but one that is predicated on negation. Rousseau's state of nature is one of negativity, a stripping bare of the social and cultural accretions that have hardened and become "naturalized." It might even be argued that humans are less "developed" than animals lacking for example the sociality and cooperation of bees or ants, the building skills of beavers, or the song of birds (to cite the most obvious examples).

Rousseau describes humans in the pure state of nature as solitary, indolent, peaceful, and nomadic. "Let us conclude that wandering in the forests, without industry, without speech, without domicile, without war and without liaisons, with no need of his fellows, likewise with no desire to harm them, perhaps never even recognizing anyone individually…" (1992, 40). It is noteworthy that this solitary and independent existence is possible because of the natural environment. The vast and lush forest covering the earth makes shelter and food readily available; a sense of place is irrelevant as any place in the vast space of the forest is equally welcoming. Or as Althusser states: "*The forest is the truth of the state of nature,* the concept of the state of pure nature, the condition for realizing the solitude and the condition for realizing the non-society that define man [sic]. It is a nourishing, protective forest, full because it offers men all they need, instantaneously, immediately, without labour; yet it is simultaneously empty—above all empty because it is a space without places"

(2019, 85, emphasis in the original).[3] The placelessness of the forest means that one is at home everywhere: one is cared for and provided for in the forest. At the risk of essentialism, one might even go so far as to think of the forest as a sort of Winicottian holding environment (and like all "mothers" eventually throws her children out into the world). This might seem to propose what some ecofeminists and also some misogynists claim—that nature is always already feminine and specifically maternal. But what if we rethought the misogynist conception of nature as passive materiality to that of an agentic holding environment? Certainly, this is preferable to the construction of nature as passive materiality waiting for inscription?

In decentering the hero/human, Rousseau not only makes nature agentic (and as we will see the prime force in enacting historical change) but asserts that humans are not particularly special. Humans like all animals have two innate traits: self-preservation (*amour de soi*) and compassion (*pitié*). These two traits prevent one from doing harm to oneself or unwarranted harm to their fellow creatures. Humans though Rousseau suggests have a unique characteristic—the freedom or the ability to change the given and it is this freedom that accounts for the faculty of perfectibility (or improvability). The ability to change, to alter one's course is specifically, Rousseau argues, a human trait. The other traits, self-preservation and compassion, Rousseau claims are traits shared by all animals. This ability to choose is the ability to implement changes, to alter one's desires, habits, and especially one's environment. But in the infinite and abundant forest space, freedom remains dormant. "There was neither education nor progress; the generations multiplied uselessly; and everyone starting from the same point, Centuries passed in all the crudeness of the first ages; the species was already old, and man remained ever a child" (1992, 40).

I suppose a comment on how reproduction occurs is warranted, especially for such a solitary creature. Rousseau sidesteps the dilemma of reproduction with the notion of the "encounter" or stranger intimacy. In the forest, one intermittently encounters others and the sexual encounter is given priority. Sexual encounters though are brief and without lasting

[3] I am struck by how Althusser's idea of the "forest" corresponds to Ursula Le Guin's (1976) science fiction novel, *The Word for World is Forest*. What if we interpreted Rousseau's writings, particularly *The Second Discourse*, as really works of speculative fiction even science fiction?

affect or entanglement. It can be argued that Rousseau assumes that these encounters are heterosexual (since he speaks from the position of the male: "any woman is good" [ibid., 39] and with the sole aim of accounting for reproduction), but of course other couplings seem possible, even likely. By his own admission sexual difference does not exist, so it seems that a plethora of stranger intimacies might ensue not solely directed at reproduction. But more importantly, if sexual difference is not natural but an effect of the social and cultural arrangements, then heteronormativity is itself contestable and open to revision. This is key to thinking of a feminist and queer ecology without nature.

What becomes difficult to explain, the biggest stumbling block, is how the human species left this stagnant state. Of course, there are biological rhythms and intervals (of hunger, sleep, sex) but for the most part daily life is perpetually the same. The end of this pure state of nature does not notably come about through human efforts, but from the natural world: climate change and the breaking up of continents causes the first "revolution" in human existence, ripping the human species out of the state of nature. The withdrawal of the solicitous protective forest and the creation of islands, shorelines, and mountains, push people together forming the first communities. Rousseau calls this stage "nascent society" or the "golden mean" between pure nature and "civilized" society (ibid., 48).

This stage has both positive and negative effects. Most positively, it brings groups together in cooperatives of survival but also of pleasure (dancing, singing, eating). Rousseau argues that sexual difference and gendered roles are produced whereas the state of nature was characterized by the absence of sexual difference and "identical" roles. The introduction of sexual difference at this stage highlights that it is not "natural." Sexual difference, though, is still almost negligible and certainly not mediated or under patriarchal rule (this will have to wait for the introduction of agriculture, metallurgy, and the imposition of political rule—to be discussed soon). Life in these small communities is pleasant and "softer" than in the pure state of nature.

But there are also some negative consequences to living in groups—most of which are only latently negative. For example, living together awakens *amour-propre* (usually translated as self-love, but suggesting pride, egotism, and narcissism). With only intermittent contact with others in the state of nature, there was no sense of "self" since this self only emerges in contact with others and in comparison, with others.

Comparison to others (other humans but also animals) leads to wanting to appear better, to self-pride. In the first instance, comparison leads to an assertion of human superiority. "Thus the first glance he directed upon himself produced in him the first stirring of pride, thus, as yet scarcely knowing how to distinguish ranks, and considering himself in the first rank as a species, he prepared himself from afar to claim first rank as an individual" (ibid., 46). Rousseau also argues that the ease of communal living awakens what might be considered an early form of consumerist desire. "In this new state, with a simple and solitary life, very limited needs and the implements they had invented to provide for them, since men enjoyed great leisure, they used it to procure many kinds of commodities unknown to their Fathers" (ibid., 46). As people became habituated to new "commodities," desires soon turned into needs.

Although Rousseau suggests that living in groups precipitates the emergence of pride and egoism including human superiority and the production itself of the nature/culture divide (in short, the activation of *amour-propre*), as well as proto-consumerist desires (for decorative clothing and objects, a nice hut, canoes, and crude tools and musical instruments), it was still a time characterized by mutuality, pleasure, and leisure. The real disaster arrives with the discovery of metallurgy. Metallurgy—an accidental discovery—enables large-scale agricultural production and the idea of private property. Rousseau's description of the effects of metallurgy, agriculture, and private property is prescient. For him, these developments are not merely technological, political, and social innovations but inaugurate new relations to oneself, to others, and especially to the natural world. It is a world historical event and Rousseau is one of the first to exhibit an ecological awareness of all that it entails. It is what Morton has named "agrilogistics."

Let's step back a moment and recount how Rousseau understands the implications of the "inventions" of agriculture and metallurgy. Rousseau assumes that small gardens were planted outside and around individual huts, but it takes the discovery of metallurgy for full-scale industrial agriculture to be launched. Rousseau can again only conjecture what would lead to this development. Perhaps, a volcano eruption suggested what lay beneath the earth's surface? What else would induce humans to descend into the "entrails of the earth" risking one's health and even life? (2000, 62). Regardless of how it was discovered, it allows for the development of the plow and leads to massive agricultural developments, the institution of private property, and the entrenchment of inequality. This for

Rousseau constitutes a "revolution": "equality disappeared, property was introduced, labor became necessary; and vast forests were changed into smiling Fields which had to be watered by the sweat of men, and in which slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow with the crops" (1992, 49).

Rousseau's description is extraordinary in that he sees the implications of agrilogistics prior to its full implementation. Large-scale farming, industrialization, mono crops, and the domestication of animals ("cattle") lead to the ideas of private property, establish inequality, mark off boundaries of city and country, nature and culture. And not incidentally, establish and perpetuate patriarchy (in which the patriarch extends his "dominion" over the natural world, women, children, and slaves). The fight over the earth's resources (after of course first qualifying the earth as a resource) leads to continuous wars which finally end with the rich convincing the poor to enter into a "false" social contract to consolidate their power with unkept promises of support. The endpoint is despotism which Rousseau famously remarks "closes the circle" of history. "Here is the last stage of inequality, and the extreme point which closes the Circle and touches the point which we started. Here all individuals become equals again because they are nothing" (1992, 65).

If we turn to Morton's definition of agrilogistics as the disaster that Rousseau indexes, it becomes even more catastrophic in our contemporary world. He writes, "Agrilogistics: an agricultural program so successful that it now dominates agricultural techniques planetwide…Agrilogistics promises to eliminate fear, anxiety, and contradiction—social, physical, and ontological—by establishing thin rigid boundaries between human and nonhuman worlds and by reducing existence to sheer quantity. Though toxic, it has been wildly successful because the program is deeply compelling" (2016, 45, emphasis in the original). Indeed, Morton tells a similar tale as Rousseau with similar consequences. "Agrilogistics led rapidly to patriarchy, the impoverishment of all but a very few, a massive and rigid social hierarchy, and feedback loops of human-non-human intersection such as epidemics. Despite the misery and disaster, agrilogistics continues to run. For all intents and purposes, agrilogistic boiling is performed *for its own sake*—there have been no other great reasons…Yet in practice, it is as if humans became fascinated with maintaining the program at whatever costs to themselves" (2008, 45, emphasis in original). This loop in which the program of agrilogistics becomes automatic (even naturalized) despite its misery inducing effects resonates with the

recursive structure of Rousseau's history. We have become attached to our own destructive tendencies.

What are we to do? One strategy would be to give up and to do nothing. But this nihilistic death drive is not the only response. Another possibility might be one of massive revolt—which The *Second Discourse*'s screeching cry of indignation at the end of the text seems to suggest as the way out.[4] A third response though can be found in the *Rêveries*. The *Rêveries* rather than revolt proposes a quieter (but just as intense) response. Reverence, humility, attentiveness ("arts of noticing" as Anna Tsing [2015] might say), and care for the natural world are foregrounded as enabling strategies for a different ecological consciousness. The *Rêveries*, I argue, indicates an environmental consciousness that doesn't denigrate traits that might be deemed as "feminine" but actively celebrates them. Queerness and queer relationality are also hinted and intermittently foregrounded: "unnatural" reproduction, cross-species enjoyment and kinship, relationality in non-relation.

The *Rêveries* is divided up into Ten Walks—though this is somewhat misleading since not every Walk actually entails walking (though some do). Instead the Walks are mostly figurative, a retracing and wandering around past ideas, thoughts, reflections, descriptions of botanical adventures, and of course, some beautiful lyrical passages on the natural world. Contrary to the immediacy performed by most nature writing, Rousseau rarely writes from his present (with the exception of the first Two Walks). Instead, his descriptions are mostly memories or recollections (sometimes of the day before, or the week before, some decades ago, or in the most extreme case, fifty years in the past in Tenth Walk). Rousseau goes so far as to say that he is not sure if his memories are true or if he made them up. The fictive status of Rousseau's reveries are underscored in that many of his descriptions have appeared in his early works or are references to other writers. (For example, parts of the Fifth Walk appear in *Émile,* and the Second Walk's Great Dane episode is so close to Montaigne horseback riding accident that it is unlikely coincidental.) We are from the start caught up in intertextual space in which there is no external, stable referent.

[4] I have always found it perplexing that the *Social Contract*. rather than the *Second Discourse* was seen as the revolutionary text of the French Revolution. See James Miller (1984). *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy*, p. 1.

The first Two Walks set up the conditions of the text: Rousseau's total estrangement from society.

> I am now alone on earth, no longer having any brother, neighbor, friend, or society other than myself. The most sociable and the most loving of humans has been proscribed from society by a unanimous agreement. In the refinements of their hatred, they have sought the torment which would be cruelest to my sensitive should and have violently broken all the ties which attached me to them. I would have loved men in spite of themselves. Only by ceasing to be humane, have they been able to slip away from my affection. They are now strangers, unknowns, in short, non-entities to me—because that is what they wanted. (2000, 3)

Readers of course cannot help feel that this opening description is a bit hyperbolic: for doesn't Rousseau live with his wife and spend time with friends (that are indeed mentioned in later Walks)? It seems though that his estrangement is not from people (though there are some proper names outed), but a general estrangement, a universal misunderstanding between Rousseau and the rest of society (or his "generation") (ibid.). Again a few pages later, Rousseau ups the ante, writing: "Everything external is henceforth foreign to me I no longer have neighbors, fellow creatures, or brothers in this world. I am on earth as though on a foreign planet onto which I have fallen from the one I inhabited" (ibid., 6).

Undoubtedly, the first two Walks exhibit an extreme position. But rather than interpret this as a critical stance, many of his readers have understood this as a sign of his increasing madness or at the very least a sign of intense paranoia. For example, one of Rousseau's most influential critics, Jean Starobinski (1988, 254–267) suggests that the opening pages of the *Rêveries* reflect an encroaching insanity. The rest of the text (especially the nature writings) are an attempt to stave off this looming madness with pleasant reveries and forays into the natural world. That is, Rousseau substitutes social contact with compensatory pleasure in nature. Starobinski finds this attempt to be shot through with bad conscience. Rousseau, Starobinski argues, is the first example of what Hegel pejoratively called the "beautiful soul" (*belle âme*), that romantic figure who retreats from a corrupt world in order to keep their pristine soul intact. The Fifth Walk, Rousseau's lyrical and beautiful account of his short stay on the Island of St. Pierre in the Lake Bienne, is according to Starobinski, a bizarre attempt to replace his alienation with "immediate pleasure,

direct contact with himself and nature…" In a startling image, Starobinski suggests Rousseau compensates for the lack of social contact by "throwing himself on the breast of Mother Nature" (ibid., 264). Rousseau's turn to the natural world in Starobinski's interpretation is nothing less than infantile regression.

In other words, Starobinski interprets the *Rêveries* as compensation (Derrida [1997, 249–250] will follow this interpretation and extend it with the notion of the supplement) for his lack of sociality (his estrangement from the world). That compensation takes the form of an impossible desire to return to the state of nature, of pure presence (before alienation), if only in the form of intermittent reverie. This interpretation of course is difficult to dislodge since it has hovered over much of subsequent Rousseauian scholarship. Thinking though from an ecological perspective—as the environmental metaphor of applying a "barometer to the soul" invites us to do—opens up another interpretation (2000, 7). That is, what if instead of a fantasy/dream of absolute transparency of self and world (a return to the state of nature), the *Rêveries* instead insists that this is impossible while at the same time encouraging us to dream of a better relationship with the natural world.

The Fifth Walk (the exemplary one for both Starobinski and Derrida) ends with the famous description of Rousseau's reveries as he floated on the Lake Bienne. Rousseau describes the pleasure of these particular reveries as the God-like enjoyment of self-sufficiency. "As long as this state lasts, we are sufficient unto ourselves, like God" (46). Rousseau's description of happiness as the state in which we enjoy "nothing external to ourselves" but the "sentiment of existence" would seem to confirm Starobinski's and Derrida's reading. However, the status of these reveries are called into question in the surrounding paragraphs. First Rousseau puts into question the possibility that such a "state" is even possible with the conditional "if": "But if there is such a state" (ibid.) Second, he ends the description with questioning whether his reveries were real or fictions. "I could not mark out the point separating the fictions from realities" (ibid., 47–8). The structure of his reveries on the Lake Bienne echoes the structure of the *Second Discourse* in that they are conditional, hypothetical and waver between fiction and truth.

What is perhaps most significant is that Rousseau claims that his reveries are only possible because of his situation. That is, his exile has worked to diminish his *amour-propre*. Cast out from society, Rousseau has given up all hope of worldly fame, and returns to a simple life and

pleasures (his daily life on Island of St. Pierre). The attenuation of *amour-propre* gives Rousseau the space to dream and rethink his place in the world.[5] Rousseau, though, doesn't recommend meditative dreaming for the general public. In fact, he cautions that given the "present structure of things," it could be dangerous. "It would not even be good in the present structure of things that avid for these sweet ecstasies, they should become disgusted with the active life their ever-recurring needs prescribe to them as duty" (ibid., 46). In other words, if one retains a narcissistic and egotistical positionality, then the pleasures in reverie could indeed lead to beautiful soul syndrome.

One of the positive effects of Rousseau's exile is that it reawakens in him the passion for botany. In the Fifth and Seventh Walks, Rousseau devotes large portions of the text to descriptions of his practice. Botany is relevant in that it hones in on the particulars of the natural world rather than seeing nature as an undifferentiated mass "out there." Rousseau brings the natural world up close. As he remarks in the Seventh Walk, his "misfortunes" made him "consider in detail for the first time the spectacle of nature which until then [he] had hardly contemplated except in a mass and in its wholeness." In the Fifth Walk, Rousseau takes on the ambitious project of naming each plant of the Island of St. Pierre. He states that he "did not want to leave a blade of grass or a plant particle which was not amply described" (ibid., 43). Rousseau's botanical practice is one in which the liveness, diversity, and specificity of the natural world is centered (he rails against the instrumental uses of botany).

Notably, this documentation and observation gives him a great deal of pleasure. "Nothing is more singular than the raptures (*les ravissements*) and ecstasies a (*les extases*) I felt with each observation I made on plant structure and organization, as well as on the role of the sexual parts in sporulation which was then a completely new system for me" (43). It might be a stretch to infer that Rousseau's relation to the natural world in this instance is bordering on sexual enjoyment (rather than a retreat to a maternal embrace), but his focus on the "sexual parts" of plants invites us to do so and so I risk it. That is, can we read the pleasure he takes in observing and playing with plants (he takes cutting back to the house to "amuse" himself in case of rain) as itself one of queer sexual pleasure—a queer love for plants? His "enchantment" and "joy" with the "thousand

[5] I don't think it is coincidental that Rousseau decided just before moving to Island of St. Pierre in 1762 to "become a woman." See Kennedy (2011, 3–4).

little games of sporulation" reminds us that the natural world itself is "queer." Rousseau has been chastised for his emotional attachment to and enjoyment of plants as a poor substitution for human company—but isn't this the most ecological act? To find company and delight in the natural world: isn't this exorbitant trans-species enjoyment precisely a deep ecological perspective?

Having said this, it must also be noted that Rousseau exaggerates the solitariness of his practice. Alexandra Cook in "The 'Septième promenade' of the *Rêveries:* a peculiar account of Rousseau's botany?" notes that Rousseau's botanical practice is much more social than he allows. Despite claims of being a "solitary walker," Rousseau's botanical excursions were often with others or shared with others in letters and other writings (indeed *The Reveries* itself is an example of this). And despite Rousseau's claim that his botanical excursions were random and haphazard deflects his investment and the seriousness of his scientific and artistic practice. As Cook argues, Rousseau was a dedicated botanist who devoted immense time and energy to the material practices of collecting plant specimens and the fabrication of herbaria. Rousseau's deflection of his expertise as a botanist (and the hard work it demanded) in the Seventh Walk is undercut, Cook explains, by his extensive botanical writings and exchanged letters (many pedagogical) and his many meticulous herbaria. This deflection Cook muses is most likely a result of Rousseau's refusal to be considered an expert or a scholar in scientific knowledge (15). That is, Rousseau implies that botany (unlike chemistry) is a democratic practice available to all: no expensive equipment is needed. It is also practice based since one learns to botanize by doing it rather than reading about it. This is not to say that Rousseau did not have scientific knowledge, but that his knowledge was gained from interacting with the world rather than only reading about it. Relationality is foregrounded not only in his field work but in his documentation practices: Rousseau often documented the specimen but situated it in its locale and temporal framework (this also explains his great enthusiasm for lichen and mosses or *cryptogamia* as well as his interest in reproduction); his practice of documentation was itself always contextual (Cook, 26–27).

Rousseau's preference for the vegetal world rather than the mineral is because it is "alive" (it moves, sways, chirps, rustles, and babbles). "Trees, shrubs, and plants are the attire and clothing of the earth. Nothing is so sad as the sight of a plain and bare countryside which displays only stones, clay, and sand to the eyes. But enlivened by nature and arrayed

in its 'nuptial dress' (*sa robe des noces*) amidst brooks and the song of birds, the earth, in the harmony of the three realms, offers man [sic] a spectacle filled with life, interest, and charm—the only spectacle filled with life in world of which his eyes and his heart never weary" (ibid., 59). With this strange metaphor that plants are the clothing of the earth, we are again directed away from not only thinking about nature in the abstract, but as playful and decorative: is nature itself "performative" to cite Judith Butler (1999)? To say that might seem strange, but to do so questions substantialist understandings of nature (as inert substance) and highlights its agentic properties. The specific reference to wedding attire (or dress) is particularly evocative in that it suggests "marriage," a love relationship between humans and plants. The natural world is teeming with activity and movement and pulls us (and non-humans) toward it through flowering, flowing, singing, and shimmering. Activities that call to mind both the "feminine" and the "queer"; nature as *poesis*.

Interspersed, however, with Rousseau's "positive" descriptions of his walks in the countryside are also some negative examples. Rousseau's account of an excursion on Mount Chasseron near Môtiers is a humorous but also critical rendition of normative nature writing. In the first few lines of describing this mountain hike, a sense of foreboding takes hold. Rousseau states: "I was alone; I went deep into the winding crevices of the mountain; and passing from wood to wood and boulder to boulder, I arrived at a retreat so hidden that I have never seen a more desolate sight in my life" (ibid., 65). This vignette, starting with the "I was alone" and segueing into a description of untamed wilderness echoes normative masculine nature writing. But with a small twist, Rousseau is not the conquering hero, but is afraid of the "desolate sight." As the description continues, Rousseau feels entrapped. "Black pines were interspersed with prodigious beeches, several of which had fallen from old age and become interlaced with each other, thereby closing off this retreat with impenetrable barriers. The few openings left from this somber enclosure gave on to nothing but perpendicularly cut boulders and horrible precipices, which I dared to look over only by lying down on my stomach" (ibid.). Entrapment gives way to a brief bit of humor with Rousseau lying on his stomach to look over the edge (a familiar image for anyone afraid of heights). The "dreadfulness" of his "solitude" is "tempered" by the sound of birds and then finally by some recognizable foliage that "charmed" and "absorbed" him (ibid.). That Rousseau finds company with birds and plants is altogether unsurprising.

As Rousseau rests on "cushions" of moss, he finds himself dreaming. Rousseau imagines that he is in a "refuge" completely isolated from all human society. However "a flash of pride soon inserted itself into this reverie" (ibid.). *Amour-propre* shifts his day dream from refuge to imperialist fantasies of *terra nullius* as Rousseau imagines himself in the role of masculine conqueror and adventurer. "I compared myself to those great travelers who discover an uninhabited Island, and I said to myself with self-satisfaction: 'Without a doubt, I am the first mortal to have penetrated thus far' (ibid.). I saw myself almost as another Columbus." The language ("penetration") and comparison to Columbus underscores that this day dream replicates the fantasy of the male adventurer who enters the "wild" as conqueror. Rousseau while enjoying this fantasy ("I preened myself with this idea") is brought back to reality by a familiar "clanking" sound. He discovers that the sound is coming from a stocking mill just a few yards away on the other side of a hedge.

Rousseau's fantasy of conquering adventurer is an effect of *amour-propre* (egotism, pride). *Amour-propre* leads us to imagine that we "discover" and control our environment. It is precisely the wrong fantasy if we are to develop a better ecological relationship. Rousseau's reaction to the realization that he is not alone (there is a factory right there) is instructive. First, he feels relief (he is not alone!), then fear (some of the workers might have participated in the stoning of his home in Môtiers), to finally self-deprecating laughter at his own hubris ("puerile vanity") and the humorous way in which it was deflated. Humor and self-deprecation is one way in which *amour-propre* can be displaced, since egotism and pride are always deadly serious. The experience that Rousseau describes on Mount Chasseron also indexes a key insight that needs reiteration: there is no pure nature. The fantasy of an outside, of an untouched wild nature waiting to be discovered is a western, male conceit.

Derrida argues that the story that centers the conquering "male" (or "*mal*" in a clever wordplay which links the male with evil) is predicated on western "carnophallogocentrism" (2008, 104). Science fiction writer, Ursula Le Guin, also tells us we must do away with the "ascent of Man, the hero story" or the "killing story" and tell new and better fictions: stories of gathering rather than killing, holding containers rather than spears (2020). All of this is to say that the stories we tell are important. As Donna Haraway says, "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what

stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (2016, 12). In both the *Second Discourse* and the *Rêveries*, Rousseau tells stories that challenge the dominant narrative of his time (and even of ours). The *Second Discourse* displaces the hero story who conquers and presides over the natural world. There are no man-heroes in *the Second Discourse*. Replacing the hero story, the story of progress, is the story of accidental natural events and human egoism that leads to a sense of superiority over one's fellows and the natural world with all kinds of destructive consequences and events. That is, the *Second Discourse* reverses the story of progress and Enlightenment to that of regression, exploitation, and destruction. The *Rêveries* in contrast indicates how we might become more humble (and how difficult this is since both the role of conqueror and adventurer and the narrative of progress hold so much sway). This humility though takes practice and patience. We must (re)learn humility and reverence for the natural world through immersion and attentiveness (botany is a good way to go about this). By paying attention and noticing how enmeshed our worlds are with other species, landscapes, and manifold histories, we can begin to tell other stories and thus begin to live more gently in the present. This is not the thrill of utopia, but a start. But before we start, we have to give up the idea of Nature (with a capital N) and its death dealing essentialism and move toward an ecological orientation that is feminist and queer.

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Sovereignty and Economic Democracy

Sovereignty as Responsibility

Matthew Hamilton and Cody Trojan

Introduction

It was once natural to follow Jean-Jacques Rousseau and conceive of popular sovereignty as the animating force of democracy (Pateman, 1970). More common among democratic theorists of late is the view that sovereignty constitutes an anti-political attempt to subdue the vibrant, unruly, pluralistic lifeblood of democratic contestation (Wolin, 2016; Honig, 2007; Rancière, 1999; Habermas, 1998). Sovereignty, it is asserted, seeks to impose its ideal of mastery upon the recalcitrant substance of political life—to disastrous effect. Democratic theorists in the twenty-first century now set themselves the task of defanging or eliminating sovereign power altogether. In place of popular sovereignty, they

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offer substitute ideals such as 'dispersion of power' (Bagg, 2017), 'contestatory citizenship' (Pettit, 2012), 'non-sovereign agency' (Krause, 2015), or 'world building' (Zerilli, 2005; Myers, 2013; Trojan, 2016).

Contemporary democratic theorists who seek to cleanse our conceptual vocabulary of sovereignty lean toward one pole of the old dilemma in Rousseau scholarship that Ernst Cassirer (1989 [1932]) described as the 'Das Problem Jean-Jacques Rousseau.' Cassirer has in mind the seemingly antithetical prescriptions of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* and *Social Contract* that divided interpreters. Some, such as Joseph De Maistre and Louis Bonald, privileged the *Discourse* and understood it to be advocating an unruly individualism. Others, such as Henry Maine, privileged the *Social Contract* and concluded from it that Rousseau commends an illiberal 'collective despot' (Cassirer, 1989 [1932]: 4, 8). The task of sympathetic critics such as Émile Faguet, Cassirer noted, is to save the benign Rousseau of the *Discourse* from the illiberal collectivism of the *Social Contract*.

We argue that Rousseau's concept of sovereignty needs to be understood as one side of a fissure of freedom that divides the two continents of Rousseau's political thought. On the one side, Rousseau approaches freedom as a normative theorist, positing a vision of freedom as self-legislation and imagining the counterfactual institutional and moral dynamics necessary to achieve this vision. On the other side, Rousseau approaches freedom as a genealogist and takes his project to be the elucidation of the historical production of unfreedom. The *Social Contract* takes up the first task, the *Discourse on Inequality* the second.

Taken separately, Rousseau's genealogical critique and normative vision of freedom remain essential tools for disclosing the persistence of social pathology and unfreedom. Our task is to see whether we can build a bridge between the backward-looking critique of human reason enchained to amour propre and the forward-looking articulation of a redeemed, self-legislating moral reason. How might we, from within our condition of historical unfreedom, begin to take responsibility for the creation of the disharmonious social system that perpetuates moral inequality? How can we transform ourselves into autonomous citizens given the heteronomous history that has made us what we are? The reading of Rousseau that follows, far from repudiating the concept of sovereignty, suggests that it must be reconceptualized as taking responsibility for the production of unfreedom as the condition of making ourselves anew.

Legislative Freedom

> Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. (Emerson, 1983: 8)

Political theorists abjure sovereignty by misapprehending the question to which sovereignty responds. Sovereignty is presented as a problem of how an individual might lay hold to mastery in a world of plurality. The liberal impulse is to forgo all but minimalist considerations of collective sovereignty to make room for individual sovereignty. John Stuart Mill (1863: 23) writes, 'In the part which entirely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.' Sovereignty, on this account, consists solely of the reality principle of liberalism: the self-imposed curtailment of passionate desires that arises from the anticipation of inevitable conflict. Collective iterations of sovereignty, on the contrary, are inherently injurious: the act by which I lay claim to sovereignty in the public sphere is the very act by which I deny my fellows sovereignty over their minds and bodies. In this sense, the problematic remains unchanged in the century and a half since *On Liberty*.

The liberal critique of sovereignty requires its own fantasy, namely, that the assignment of sovereignty to legal individuals is adequate to the problem that it intends to solve. This self-limiting goal assumes that safeguarding freedom means simply ignoring the expansive question of collective sovereignty and the ills it aims to redress. The encounter with reality persuades the liberal to give up the dream of a collective political subject capable of self-legislation. The liberal agrees to this concession at the price of a new fantasy: that he be made sovereign not of the outer world but of his own inner world of mind and body.

The dilemmas of public policy and popular politics reflect the difficulty of sustaining this fantasy. For creatures constituted by their sociality, there are no forms of self-legislation free from excess, free from spilling over into the lives of others. The sovereignty of the individual to legislate for herself when to terminate the embryonic life within, the sovereignty of the individual to legislate for himself when to vaccinate against a plague, the sovereignty of the individual to legislate for themselves how many

firearms to keep on their person—the liberal circumscription of political sovereignty only begs the question. Judgments about how a society is to affirm the safety and projects of individuals are forsworn by the lie that there is no other, only me.

Rousseau's staging of the problem of sovereignty is fruitful because it takes leave of the liberal problematic. The liberal account of individual sovereignty grounds itself on a primary separation, one that estranges me from what Emerson called the 'NOT ME.' The liberal problematic finds its constitutive activity and the never ceasing—and, one always fears, ad hoc—line drawing between the *me* and the *not me*. Rousseau does not avoid having to make such distinctions. His strategy is one of engulfment. The other me that frustrates me is—and isn't acknowledged to be—another me:

> In an instant, in the place of the particular person and each who is party to the social contract, this act of association produces a moral and collective body composed of so many members of the assembly that have a voice. It receives from this same act its unity, its common me, its life, and its will. (Rousseau, 1964b: 361 [1.6])

This passage comes from the chapter in which Rousseau describes the creation of the public person—the 'common me.' On the one hand, the public person that is the state is certainly not me, as the 'me' that I am both precedes and succeeds its creation. It would be tempting to read the second person as something wholly other, one whose size and non-natural origin might make it seem a cold, impersonal, and domineering force that threatens to overwhelm the 'me' that cowers before it. Such intuitions act as leading strings for a host of interpreters who, especially following the experience of the Second World War, were eager to find the origins of a democratic theory of totalitarianism in Rousseau's work (Russell, 2004 [1946]; Talmon, 1952; Berlin, 1969).

Philip Pettit stands as our contemporary heir to this totalitarian intuition. Pettit imagines that when the concept of sovereignty is added to the idea of the creation of a public person of the state, the result can only be a sacrifice of the individual to the behemoth of sovereign omnipotence. Pettit (2013: 187) writes that 'Rousseau…totally betrayed the earlier [republican] tradition in espousing the idea of popular sovereignty.' He maintains that Rousseau sacrifices the individual to the practice of popular sovereignty:

> In Rousseau's idealized republic…individuals are confronted by the single powerful presence of 'the public person'...he thinks that this mutual independence is attainable only at the cost of a form of submission to the public person…the totally novel, consciously outrageous assumption introduced by Rousseau is that 'each, by giving himself to all, gives himself to no one'. (Pettit, 2013: 187)

Rousseau, we're told, bites the bullet by choosing sovereignty over the individual. He does so because he imagines that sovereignty in the form of an assembly of the total citizenry is adequate compensation for the total submission of the individual before the community. Pettit's neo-republican project styles itself as breaking with the Cold War blackmail of Isaiah Berlin, the either/or proposition between negative liberty and positive liberty (Pettit, 1997: 17–27; 2011). Pettit's treatment of Rousseau, however, emphasizes his continuity with Berlin's framework. Affirming popular sovereignty means endorsing positive liberty, a freedom that relishes sharing in public power (Berlin, 1969: 208). For (negative) freedom to live, sovereignty must die.

The problem with the totalitarian reading of Rousseau is that it insists on the very separation that Rousseau seeks to overcome. What fuels this anachronistic reading of Rousseau as totalitarian is the belief that the *common me* created by the associative act, the creation of a people and not just a multitude, eliminates and acts as substitute for the prior me who preceded the act of association. It is as if Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) has come to political theory, dispossessing us of our real selves and leaving a drone simulacrum to live our life for us by committing us to some alien purpose.

The textual evidence of the *Social Contract* suggests a different reading. The vision of politics Rousseau offers aims at facilitating the achievement of our moral reason, freedom as self-legislation, through the integration of our divided selves. In the paragraph that follows Pettit's tendentious quotation, Rousseau explains that the association 'Takes collectively the name of *People*, and calls its particular members *Citizens* when participating in sovereignty, and *Subjects* when submitting to the laws of the State' (Rousseau, 1964b: 362 [I.6]). My rotating statuses as citizen and subject reflect the two me's constitutive of who I am. If the particular me is what our market society often privileges as our true self, the one characterized by excessive desire to satisfy bodily appetites of enjoyment and intersubjective appetites for esteem, the general me signals

the part of our self that is able to rationally scrutinize our immediate desires and reflect on their contribution to our ultimate ends.

The recourse to our dual statuses as subjects and citizens reflects the difficulty of integrating our dual selves, the fact that we need help in ordering our desire in accordance with reason. At its worst, politics can intensify our acquisitive and vainglorious selves. At its best, politics can be the mediating force that helps us to soften the drive of our base inclinations by making them self-conscious. The citizen-subject distinction does the work of integrating our drives and our reason by formalizing these psychological tendencies into political roles. Book II of the *Social Contract* theorizes the activity of the citizen: the collective process where citizens come together to self-consciously employ their moral reason to legislate their normative order. Book III theorizes the activity of the subject: how individuals, striving for satisfaction and engaged in various life projects, can be reminded of the moral commitments they made as citizens and be required to harmonize these abstract commitments with their concrete endeavors. Rousseau gives the name of 'sovereignty' to the promise-making activity of the citizen; he gives the name 'government' to the promise-reconciling activity of the subject.

The free determination of political ends requires consistency between these two moments of sovereignty (citizenship) and government (subjecthood). It is necessary to distinguish the larger function of sovereignty—of salvaging a connection between freedom, reason, and the possibility of a transformed future—and the specific means Rousseau proposes to realize this connection. Rousseau's unsympathetic critics collapse these two dimensions. Political theorists such as Benhabib (1992) and Habermas (1989: 96–97; 1994: 4; 1998: 472–473) are right to take critical distance from the moments when Rousseau's politics sacrifices difference for homogeneity.[1,2] If it turns out that Rousseau's method of synthesizing

[1] Benhabib's (1992: 164–170) critiques abstract moral proceduralism, the generalized other underlying John Rawls original position and Rousseau's general will (Rawls, 2007: 191–248). Benhabib identifies the crux of the Rawls-Rousseau approach: it subsumes democratic practice under the binding demands of normative consistency. It treats difference—the concrete other—as a contingent element to be overcome by the discipline of universal normativity, rather than as an integral dimension of democratic activity capable of contributing to normative insight.

[2] Our resistance to reading Rousseau's concept of sovereignty as the bearer of totalitarianism echoes the same concern Adorno (2005: 44) once voiced against 'ruthless' cultural criticism: 'to act radically in accordance with this principle would be to extirpate, with

sovereignty and government, citizen and subject, contain the same instrumentalization of the individual that his theory aspired to avoid, then the task his project bequeaths remains as vital as it once did for his German inheritors: might it be possible to realize not just fragmentary moments of freedom that do not add up into an integral whole but a 'moral image of the world' (Henrich, 1992)?

The possibility of salvaging sovereignty turns on reconceptualizing self-legislating freedom as a horizontal, political practice that nonetheless makes itself responsible for its practical failures and achievements, rather than a vertical, abstract moral procedure.[3] However, rather than turning to directly to Rousseau's heirs for solutions to this problem, we argue that Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, insofar as it provides a genealogical account of historical unfreedom, offers a valuable resource for re-situating the starting point of self-legislation: not 'taking men such as they are' (Rousseau, 1964b: 352) but as they have become.

Historical Unfreedom

Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains'—Rousseau (1964b: 351[I.1]) begins the first chapter of his treatise on political legitimacy with this now clichéd supposition. 'How did this change come about?', Rousseau (1964b: 351[I.1]) asks and mutters simply, '*Je l'ignore*.'

If it is impossible to identify the precise moment of transition from harmonious nature to a world of conflict-ridden inequality, it is because there can be no structural explanation for the emergence of artificial needs in a human condition that lacks the power to formulate abstract desires. How could the need for language, for example, have arisen out of a language-less world? Historically, the only possible answer is an unhappy accident. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations*

the false, all that was true also, all that, however impotently, strives to escape the confines of universal practice, every chimerical anticipation of a nobler condition, and so to bring about directly the barbarism that culture is reproached with furthering indirectly.'

[3] Bernstein (2003) follows Hegel in contrasting a vertical morality to a horizontal ethics. A self-defeating ideal of the mastery of nature that strives for the domination of nature and self-love by a transcendent reason is exchanged for an ethics of radical responsibility. As Benhabib (1992: 146) notes, the fundamental question addressed to deliberative democrats is whether the ideal of communicative action reduplicates all the problems of subsumptive, vertical reason or whether it has internalized the lessons of the 'Hegelian critique of Kant.'

of Inequality Among Men (1756), however, is a text about responsibility. It is a diagnostic text that assigns normative responsibility for the state of human social conditions—'*l'inégalité morale*' (Rousseau, 1964a: 126)—by questioning inherited distinctions of the natural and the historical. Rousseau offers a genetic account of the evolutionary relationship between a basic set of natural human faculties and the artifacts and institutions they give rise to, which in turn continually reshape human nature by altering its needs and desires.[4] In short, Rousseau denaturalizes social inequality, assigning to humankind responsibility for the beliefs and desires underlying existing visions of collective life. The radical thesis that emerges from Rousseau's genealogy is that inequality, and the unfreedom that follows from it, are *not* natural. They are neither inevitable nor justifiable. Moral inequality and unfreedom are the sedimented products of a self-defeating form of reason. This form of reason is responsible for language, luxury, the division of labor, private property but not, as yet, freedom.[5]

The duality that structures Rousseau's genealogy is that between humanity's physical and metaphysical components, which might be redescribed as a tension between *original* nature and *human* nature (Rousseau, 1964a: 141).[6] The distinction is analytical rather than historical. As Rousseau (1964a: 123) concedes, original nature is 'a state which no longer exists, which perhaps did not exist, which probably never will exist.' Admittedly, a world devoid of technology—of language, tools, and reproducible systems of meaning—would scarcely seem 'human.'[7] This,

[4] Neuhouser (2004: 19) explains: 'Social inequalities are normative in the sense that they are embedded in human.'

[5] 'If nature has destined us to be healthy, I almost dare to affirm that the state of reflection is a state contrary to nature and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal' (Rousseau, 1964a: 138).

[6] Our redescription is itself a redescription of Neuhouser's (2004: 23) contrast between 'original human nature' and 'original human nature plus *amour propre*' or 'human nature in the expanded sense.'

[7] Stiegler (1998) argues that the relationship of the human and technology is one of co-originality. He shows how Rousseau's aporia of the origin of inequality—neither emerging from natural nor social need—is a necessary product of Rousseau's attempt to separate factual history from nature. Rousseau's necessary concession that original nature is itself merely a fiction, an artifice, evinces Rousseau's struggle to contain this division. See also Roberts (2006).

however, is just Rousseau's point. The distinction makes it possible for humans to become responsible for their actions.

Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* teaches us when, in the course of human events, our desire became a problem. There is no account of a human being—or any living creature—that does not include the satisfaction of needs. What changes, and this change makes all the difference, is when humanity's needs begin to exceed the object's ability to satisfy them. In the beginning of original nature, the world was adequate to our desire: 'I see him [original man] eating his fill under an oak, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that furnished him his meal, and, voilà, his needs were satisfied' (Rousseau, 1964a: 135). The world, in short, is adequate to his desire. Original nature is biologically *necessary*, the product of an immediate and unmade fitness between the human body and the natural environment. Original nature constitutes a harmonious whole, a condition within which the satisfaction of the necessary drives of each accord with the independence of all. Nature's imperative 'Satisfy your needs with the least possible harm to others' describes a biologically *necessary* state of affairs rather than normative condition whose realization depends upon the voluntary will of each. The harmony of nature, however admirable, is not something for which original nature is, or could be, responsible.

Responsibility only emerges when history—the domain of choice, contingency, and artifice—irrupts onto the scene and alters human nature by introducing new and unnecessary needs and desires reproduced and amplified by human institutions and technologies.[8] After which, existing cultural norms and political institutions provide merely an 'air of apparent concord while sowing the seeds of real division' (Rousseau, 1964a: 190). Unlike the harmonious design of original nature, man-made laws and institutions—the sedimented products of human free will and reflection—legitimize social passions of 'mistrust and mutual hatred' (Rousseau, 1964a: 190) that have blindly taken hold as a by-product of technological development. Desire becomes human when we begin to desire psychic satisfactions that only our fellows can satisfy. When we anchor our sense of self in our fantasy of the appraisals in the minds of our fellows, we have

[8] Rousseau (1964a: 185, 139) writes: 'nature had to be altered' in order for society to develop laws reproducing social inequality, in short, that 'most of our ills are of our own making, and we could have avoided almost all of them if we had retained the simple, uniform and solitary way of life prescribed to us by nature.'

become fully human—beings captivated by what Rousseau calls *amour propre*.[9]

The crux of Rousseau's contribution is not merely that the human passions we take to be natural are in fact artificially cultivated by the species through its (mal)development. The real problem is that the mystification of these novel adaptations conceals the normative responsibility humankind bears for the world it has created and the ends it chooses to pursue. The mystificatory assumption that takes man's passionate and technological evolution as its essential condition makes man's particular past into his inevitable fate.

The problem of historical unfreedom develops from the germ of free will. Even though Rousseau holds that free will is part of humanity's original nature, there is little occasion to exercise this faculty. At this early point, resistance to the 'cry of Nature' (Rousseau, 1964a: 148) never occurs to anyone because social passions have yet to produce artificial objects of desire exceeding natural proportion and purpose, and whose realization depend on self-mastery.

This capacity to overrule instinct defines the *liberum arbitrium*: 'Nature commands every animal, and the Beast obeys. Man is tried by the same sensation, but he recognizes he is free to acquiesce or to resist; and it is especially his self-consciousness of this freedom that manifests the spirituality of his soul' (Rousseau, 1964a: 141–142). It is worth dwelling on the deep ambiguity Rousseau expresses for the impact of freedom of the will. On the one hand, it is the condition for taking responsibility for one's actions. Humanity takes leave of the 'ingenious machine' that coordinates all animals within the causal nexus of nature and ascends to his 'Metaphysical and Moral' station (Rousseau, 1964a: 141). Whereas 'a Pigeon would starve to death next to a Bowl filled with the choicest meats, and a Cat atop heaps of fruit or grain,' humans have the capacity to transform themselves beyond the law of instinct (Rousseau, 1964a: 141). On the other hand, the exercise of free will, which implies the self-conscious application of thought and rational design, *distances humankind from nature,* 'to his detriment' (Rousseau, 1964a: 141). Rousseau underlines that the same free will that elevates humanity above the pigeon and the cat is also responsible for 'the dissolute men whose excess drinking brings them fever and death' (Rousseau, 1964a: 141). It is important to see

[9] On amour propre, see Dent (1998), McLendon (2009, 2014, 2018), and Trojan (2021).

that distance from nature and responsibility emerge simultaneously. What is lost in taking leave of nature is not only instinct, but the harmonious natural system in which it had its place. The accumulated acts of free will in the context of ever-changing societal conditions *changes human nature*, and crucially, does so in a blind and contingent fashion. The responsibility for the global conditions in which discrete acts of freedom take place now shifts from nature to humankind.

Rousseau's concept of perfectibility explains the historical process whereby sedimented acts of first-order freedom (free will) redound upon both malleable human nature and its artificial milieu, reinforcing a global context of historical unfreedom within which future acts of first-order freedom take place. Rousseau (1964a: 142) describes perfectibility as 'a faculty, that, with the aid of circumstances, successively develops all the others, and resides among us as much in the species as the individual.' Perfectibility expresses the responsibility humans have for their own nature, the unconscious and potentially self-conscious ways in which they make themselves. It names the capacity of human nature to fundamentally alter itself over time depending on the relationship established with the external environment it creates for itself. The term perfectibility reads as a misnomer, in that this process, at least in the history tracked in the *Discourse on Inequality*, lacks a determinate telos. The task in both *Emile* and the *Social Contract* will be to reconstruct an artificial telos, namely freedom, through the educational project of instilling a love for freedom and the political project of reconceptualizing citizenship as a practice of self-legislation, respectively. The concept of perfectibility implies the need to distinguish between the exercise of first-order freedom (free will) and the structural conditions and inherited shape of human nature (second-order freedom) that mediate each discrete act of willing.

We can look to the specific transformations that the faculties of amour de soi, pity, and free will undergo throughout the text to grasp the mediating function of perfectibility. Amour de soi, the natural love of oneself that functions to ensure self-preservation, and which 'modified by pity' produces humanity and virtue (freedom), are replaced by amour propre 'a sentiment that is only relative, factitious, and born in society; Amour propre drives each individual to do more for his own cause than for the cause of every other, it inspires in men all the evils that inflict on each other, and is the true source of honor' (Rousseau, 1964a: 219). This transition from a life guided by *amour de soi* to a life obsessed with amour

propre breaks open the circuit of desire and satisfaction. Once deracinated, the socialization of desire establishes a global dependence whose gravitational center is the blind interplay of what Girard (1965) calls mimetic desire: the imitation of other people's desire.[10] In Rousseau's depiction of the origins of amour propre 'each began to gaze at others and to desire the gaze of these others, public esteem became a prize.' In short order the desire for the esteem of one's fellows hardens into need. The withholding of this new form of need, whose satisfaction rests upon the contingent will of the other, generalizes a condition of normative dissatisfaction that is, in part, responsible for the descent into what Rousseau conceives of not as a physical state of war but a metaphysical state of war—a condition of normative conflict that rends humanity and political power, and that is itself the product of human freedom.

Amour propre is closely bound up with reason and its extension as technology. For Rousseau (1964a: 156), 'it is reason that engenders amour propre, and it is reflection that fortifies it.' The development of tools and language are united in their shared power to abstract away from immediacy (nature) to project ideal uses that may be repeated indefinitely (control over nature) and, finally, in their power to construct an altogether human (unnatural) world. The external technologies that make luxury, private property, and agriculture possible mirror internal transformations of human nature: 'we find all our faculties developed, memory and imagination in play, amour propre agitated, reason rendered active, and the mind [*esprit*] approaching the limit of the perfection of which it is susceptible' (Rousseau, 1964a: 174). Despite the impressive technical virtuosity of modern society, and the cultivated nature of the individual who is both its products and author, we find 'man subjugated by a multitude of new needs, and thus we might say to the whole of Nature, and especially to his fellows to which he now becomes a slave even in the case when he occupies ostensibly the role of master' (Rousseau, 1964a: 174–175).[11]

[10] In his account of imitative desire in the modern novel, Girard (1965: 269) comes close to depicting the predicament Rousseau identifies as characteristic of amour propre: 'desires are never our own.'

[11] The parallel between Rousseau's argument here and Hegel's account of the causality of fate is striking. Hegel (1948) argues that the urge to dominate and control nature perpetuates the problem it intends to solve, an argument Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) reprise. The founding gesture of control—abstract opposition to nature or man's

Rousseau's concept of perfectibility explains how humanity could find itself seduced and repelled by its own unfreedom. Perfectibility explains how the historical unfolding of free will could result in universal subjection. Rousseau's genealogy and concept of perfectibility also contains something else, for the same malleability of human nature that explains historical unfreedom might yet be harnessed for the purpose of humanity's redemption.

Does the Rousseau of the *Discourse on Inequality* regard the exit from unfreedom as possible? Rousseau (1964a: 180) writes, 'Despite all the labours of the wisest legislators, the political state always remained imperfect, because it was almost the work of chance, and because it had been badly begun; time, in discovering faults and suggesting remedies, could never repair the vices of the constitution.' The distinction at work between the need for a wholly new political foundation and the contingent, deforming effects of human history, resembles the distinction between *original* nature and *human* nature. Both seem to oppose necessary to contingent, harmonious to blind, design to bricolage, superhuman art to technological artifice, true need to social passion. However, there remains a slight, but fundamental difference. Humanity bears no responsibility for the transition—often depicted as a fall—from original nature into human nature.[12] This is because, as Neuhouser (2004: 51) explains, 'it is but an unintended consequence of freely chosen actions directed at other ends.' The emergence of moral inequality may have been an unintended accident, but this cannot serve as an apology for the perpetuation of unfreedom. Rousseau's (1964a: 123) chilling genealogy discloses that the 'more we accumulate new knowledge, the further removed we become from the means of acquiring the most important knowledge of all.' The very diagnosis that discloses our condition also redirects us toward its cure in the 'inscription of the Temple of Delphi': know thyself (Rousseau, 1964a: 122).

The separation of the backward-looking genealogical project (judgment), from the forward-looking project on political legitimacy (willing), underlies the distinct claim to freedom articulated by each. The *Social Contract* theorizes legislative freedom, the self-conscious formulation

distancing from what Rousseau's 'cry of nature'—is responsible for producing unfreedom. In the formulation offered by Shell and Velkley (2017: 197), 'Liberation from primary material wants does not entail psychological or moral freedom.'

[12] On Rousseau and the fall, see Brooke (2001).

and commitment to moral ends. The *Discourse on Inequality* theorizes historical unfreedom, the mystification of our present psychological and sociological organization as if it were our natural condition. Rousseau offers no clear answer to the problem that will loom large for the inheritors of these ideas: how to synthesize backward-looking judgments of history that explain why we do not and cannot yet desire freedom, with forward-looking principles that demonstrate why we must. Ultimately, Rousseau offers two continents of political thought without an apparent bridge to link them. His genealogy discloses the world of historical unfreedom we continue to inhabit, while his normative prescriptions presuppose a world in which legislative freedom is possible and necessary.

The problematic of the *Discourse on Inequality* appears to bear no weight on the *Social Contract* because the latter suppresses the problems brought about by the unguided development of human perfectibility—'*Je l'ignore*.' The laws, institutions, and cultural norms that have arisen and given legitimacy to amour propre are shuttled offstage. The *Social Contract* begins from a counterfactual world in which the free will's (de)formation by amour propre is absent. Rousseau's enigmatic introduction to *The Social Contract*, which claims to be 'taking men such as they are and laws such as they might be,' brackets the genealogy of the *Discourse on Inequality*.

Autonomous Citizens, Heteronomous Conditions

The problem left unresolved by Rousseau is how to realize legislative freedom under conditions of historical unfreedom. The problem with Rousseauvian sovereignty is not that it seeks to impose a totalitarian will, but that it lacks an account of citizen formation. How can citizens self-consciously legislate moral ends given their historical conditions of unfreedom? We say unresolved rather than absent because Rousseau acknowledges this difficulty through the paradox of the lawgiver.

The figure of the lawgiver offers a faux synthesis of the procedural requirements of popular sovereignty and the substantive requirements of law in the public interest. It is one thing to empower the citizenry to legislate directly on fundamental laws and to select the governors charged with their enforcement, it is quite another to expect them to arrive at the general will rather than merely at the will of all. The perennial concern of popular participation in politics is that the greater numbers of the demos

will employ political institutions advantageously to secure their own interests (the will of all) over truly moral ends (the general will).[13] Rousseau (1964b: 380 [II.6]) summarizes the problem:

> Particular wills see the good and reject it; the public desires the good but does not see it. Both equally are in need of guidance: they must conform their wills to their reason; they must learn from an other who knows what they desire. Such public enlightenment [*lumieres publiques]* yields the union of understanding and will in the social body, achieves the precise alignments of the parties, and gives the greatest force to the whole. And here it is born: the necessity of a lawgiver [*Législateur*].

On the one hand, the would-be citizenry lacks the capacities to fulfill the moral ends they, at some latent level, desire. This lack necessitates the need for a foundational leader, say a Lycurgus or a Moses, to guide the citizens toward their true desires. On the other hand, the fundamental teaching of Rousseau's social contract is that true freedom can only mean self-legislation: 'To be moved only by appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself is freedom' (Rousseau, 1964b: 365 [I.8]). The paradox is how one can avoid the accusation of political slavery when another—literally called the *Législateur*—tells you what you should legislate for yourself, or alternatively, how one can affirm one's own moral action of self-legislation when one depends on the lawgiver for its enactment.

The introduction of the lawgiver (in Book II) appears to contradict the definition of freedom as self-legislation (in Book I), because it is often not understood to be Rousseau's response to the problem of heteronomy. How can autonomous citizens spontaneously emerge from heteronomous conditions? How can legislative freedom overcome, and take responsibility for, the historical unfreedom that constitutes humanity in its present state? Rousseau's answer, or placeholder for an answer, consists in the deux ex machina of the lawgiver. The situation is saved because there is a cultivation process, what Rousseau calls an enlightenment of the public (*lumieres publiques*). Citizens who lack the psychological and sociological

[13] On the distinction between the general will and the will of all, see Rousseau (1964b: 371–372 [II.3]). On the tendency of political theorists to talk past each other in thinking through this dualism see Dijn's (2018) response to Pettit (2012). Honig (2007) helpfully redescribes this dualism as the 'paradox of politics.'

equipment for freedom as self-legislation are guided toward actualizing these latent capacities.

But there are no gods, or lawgivers, to save us. In their place must the radical conception of responsibility first sketched in Rousseau's genealogy of historical unfreedom. Sovereignty is the moment where we take responsibility for our past—the sedimentation of normative injury that is our history of unfreedom—and self-consciously repair these wounds through new legislation. Taking responsibility for the humans we have become requires a forward-looking promise. This autonomous act can never be a spontaneous will ex nihilo, but an act of legislation that begins anew by repairing the past.

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Rousseau and the Workers' Co-operative: Property Rights, Firms and the Deliberative General Will

Robin Jervis

Introduction

This chapter aims to bring together a number of themes in Rousseau's thought in order to apply them to the rising contemporary interest in alternative and democratic economic structures—specifically worker co-operatives. The chapter essentially presents two distinct but related arguments—firstly, that the shareholder-owned firm prevalent in liberal capitalism presents an arena of arbitrary domination based entirely on

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property rights, and therefore we should consider alternative property arrangements. It does this by presenting Rousseau's views on property rights. The second argument looks at how firms can be managed democratically and highlights the co-operative as an appropriate arena for deliberative democracy amenable to the formation of a general will.

Rousseau's political thought is famously wide-ranging, from his deliberations on education, culture, on the origins of civilisation and the state of nature, through to his most famous work on democracy and the social contract, and the practical applications of his work in his prospective contributions to the constitutions of Corsica and Poland. Building on the thought of, notably, John Locke, he offers a radically different vision of society and what really constitutes the legitimate democratic state for the good of society. Instead of taking the state as something necessary for civilised society to flourish, as do Hobbes and Locke, and then justifying obedience to it, Rousseau constructs the state as something which can *only* be legitimate in very specific circumstances, radically declaring that 'man…everywhere is in chains' (1973: 165). It is his radical critique of statehood and domination and how it affects human flourishing that should make Rousseau of great interest to those concerned with alternative economic and social structures in the face of the economic and social crises of the early twenty-first century.

The goals and rationale for this chapter are threefold. Firstly, there is a demonstration of how Rousseau's thought can be meaningfully applied to economics and a return to the general will as a key principle of meaningful democracy. Those committed to his democratic visions may struggle to consider how they can be applied to large modern states. This chapter explores how the general will and democratic theory of Rousseau can be put into practice in smaller associations. Secondly, it offers an alternative justification for the democratic economy to those drawing on Marxism and anarchism. In my view, this strengthens the (already substantial) case that these approaches present and is not contradictory, but instead helps to bring together and intertwine complementary lines of thought. Questions of property and firm organisation have been addressed in these strands of thought but typically without direct reference to Rousseau (for example Gourevitch 2014; O'Shea 2020; Thomas 2021; Anderson 2015; Thompson 2019; Breen 2015). Finally, the chapter seeks to add to a focus in Rousseau scholarship on economic thought (for example Fridén 1998; Neuhouser 2014) and the importance of property, drawing attention to the works predating *The Social Contract* and highlighting the

radicalism of Rousseau's ideas through a modern lens. In so doing, it links Rousseau explicitly to the ideas expressed in labour republicanism, most notably and recently by Gourevitch (2014).[1] However, this chapter differs from republican accounts of structural domination in the labour market by constructing a critique of private property[2] drawing on *The Second Discourse* in which the firm itself is deemed as an illegitimate usage of the 'sacred right of property' described in the *Discourse on Political Economy* (2008: 15). This serves the purpose of drawing attention not only to republican arguments for workplace democracy, but more generally for worker ownership.

The chapter begins by discussing Rousseau's views on private property, linking them to Marxist arguments against the institution and making the radical case that capitalist firm structures based on private property lack legitimacy and instead that property regimes should be organised differently. Having accepted the need for a firm and presented the co-operative as a means to construct a legitimate one, the chapter then draws on the idea of a general will to discuss how a co-operatively owned firm can make legitimate but binding decisions in line with Rousseau's thought.

Rousseau and Property

Rousseau presented himself both in the tradition of, but also as a critic of, enlightenment philosophy, arguing that his contemporaries were essentially rationalising post hoc explanations and justifications for the extant social order. His critique of modern philosophy arose from him approach to the state of nature. For Rousseau, as expressed in *The Second Discourse*[3] (2004) theorists such as Hobbes had failed to understand that human nature was itself shaped by the society that we live in, so trying to understand human nature based on the observed behaviour of existing individuals within society and then working backwards to see what a pre-social era might look like would never produce a useful picture of the state

[1] This is linked to Neuhouser's work on Rousseau by Cotton (2016).

[2] This chapter uses the Marxist distinction between private property referring to private ownership of capital, rather than referring to personal property such as one's clothing. This is a blurry distinction but hopefully serves to clarify the arguments and is consistent with Rousseau's argument that 'Every man has naturally a right to everything he needs' in *The Social Contract*.

[3] Or *A Discourse Upon the Origin and the Foundation of the Inequality Among Mankind*.

of nature. The observable traits of humans, including their rationality, are in themselves products of society (Wokler 1995: 40). This critique, which rather than being a historical account is intended as a hypothetical which aims to highlight the influence of the development of society on the individual (Cole 1973; Neuhouser 2014; Levine 1993: 38–39) lends itself well to an analysis of political economy. Capitalism, and the free markets it rests on, are supposedly held together through appeal to the basic nature of humanity—to be a materialistic being and to have, as Adam Smith (2000) puts it, 'a certain propensity in human nature… to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another'. Rousseau, however, might argue that this 'natural propensity' exists as a product of a market society, not as a cause of it (Levine 1993: 42–50). The sociologist Karl Polanyi's (2002) analysis is instructive here, suggesting that the empirical foundations of Smith's claims are false, and that, in fact, market society arose as a construction—the wealthy, property-owning classes producing a set of rules and institutions to govern in their interest, casting this regime as a natural order. Looking towards a materialist reading of history,[4] we see a process of social change driven largely by the failings and contradictions of previous orders. There is no normative justification for the protagonists' roles in class conflict, such that who gets to be the feudal baron or capitalist factory-owner is decided purely by accidents of history resting ultimately on coercive force and the transference of 'strength into right' (Rousseau 1973: 168). Pikkety (2020), for example, notes that inequalities in modern capitalism are explained by historical circumstance and crisis, and thus are not justified normatively by theories of liberal political economy. Property rights, closely related to the social construct of the firm, fall into this category (Landemore & Ferreras 2016: 65). Lockean (Locke 1980) interpretations of the inalienable right to property have become dominant, spread around the world and adopted in no small part because they have been backed up and reinforced by a coercive world

[4] A historical materialist approach requires an assumption that human conflict is ultimately driven by the contradictions inherent in property relations at any given point in history. Rousseau's thought seems compatible with this approach, arguing that it is the introduction of private property which turns civil society into a sphere of coercion, rather than freedom. There was no materialism in the state of nature as there was no property, but the formation of society and creation of property as part of this process creates 'history' as Marxists understand it—there is no history without class conflict, or, in other terms, without property.

order, enshrined in constitutions and established in customary practice, contributing to what Polanyi (2002) refers to as the 'liberal creed'.

The only natural process of acquisition of property that Rousseau identifies in *The Second Discourse* is that in which the application of labour grants a right to output (2004: 35). Rousseau effectively locates a snowballing effect in which the necessity of ownership for the purposes of socio-economic development, especially in agriculture and later in other industries, translates into 'a new kind of right; that is, the right of property different from that which results from the law of nature' (ibid.: 35; Siroky & Sigwart 2014: 14). Later in history, the processes of enclosure reinforced private property rights and began the transformation of the feudal system of hierarchical social and political obligation into a capitalist system of private property rights (Polanyi 2002). Rousseau argues that the forcible formation of states can never create a legitimate system of rights and therefore cannot create a justification for the status quo (1973: 168; 2004: 40). Rousseau himself introduced a powerful critique of private property but it is one which is contradictory, and it would be incorrect to argue that he rejects the institution completely (Pierson 2013). For Rousseau, property is an inevitable, yet undesirable, aspect of the formation of a society. As he states in *The Second Discourse* (2004: 33–34):

> …but from the moment one man began to stand in need of another's assistance; from the moment it appeared an advantage to one man to possess the quantity of provisions requisite for two, all equality vanished, property started up, labour became necessary, and boundless forests became smiling fields, which it was found necessary to water with human sweat, and in which slavery and misery were soon seen to sprout out and grow with the fruits of the earth.

Whenever people come together, their unequal access to resources allows some to turn others to their will, and to claim ownership of what was previously unowned (or commonly owned). Property itself changes people's relationship to one another, creating dependencies (Fridén 1998: 107). In a world without property, and indeed without society, people's lives are valued and mediated by *amour de soi même* or 'self-love', in which people value their lives based on a sense of pleasure and well-being. This precludes comparison with others. Although it is a pre-social form of well-being, it is not irrational, and allows individuals to consider their

future and restrain their impulses—the very thing which, for Rousseau, makes humanity different from animals. *Amour de soi même*, although self-regarding, also contains within it some form of morality. Because interests are inward-looking, there is no reason to compete with others or sabotage others' efforts at happiness—their happiness is independent of one's own, and one might feel a natural altruism, or a natural sadness if actions towards others are not reciprocated. After property, lives are lived in a competitive fashion, and well-being becomes based on interpersonal comparisons. The currency of the good life becomes *amour propre* or a form of pride or vanity based on how much one has in relation to others, with reciprocity replaced by competition and inequality (Pierson 2013: 421). A society is created which consolidates the position of the property owners in the name of stability and security for all. Rousseau does not understate the consequences (2004: 39):

> Such was, or must have been had man been left to himself, the origin of society and of the laws; which increased the fetters of the weak, and the strength of the rich; irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, fixed for ever the laws of property and inequality; changed an artful usurpation into an irrevocable title; and for the benefit of a few ambitious individuals subjected the rest of mankind to perpetual labour, servitude, and misery.

On the other hand, the *Discourse on Political Economy* (2008: 14) clearly supports private property rights:

> It is certain that the right of property is the most sacred of all the rights of citizenship, and even more important in some respects than liberty itself; either because it more nearly affects the preservation of life, or because, property being more easily usurped and more difficult to defend than life, the law ought to pay a greater attention to what is most easily taken away; or finally, because property is the true foundation of civil society, and the real guarantee of the undertakings of citizens.

This contradiction is a challenge although it is important to recognise that Rousseau is making a normative case in *The Second Discourse* and a more pragmatic one about actually existing society in the *Discourse on Political Economy* (Fridén 1998: 120–121; Siroky & Sigwart 2014). The purpose of the latter is to show that private property rights guaranteed by the government make people dependent on the government. There is no 'unconditional, deontologic right' to property (Fridén 1998: 121)

and instead it is a means to a common good, something which allows for the formation of societies which bind people together. Rousseau does not necessarily crave a return to his pre-social state of nature but wishes to create societies of mutual dependence (ibid.: 122) that ameliorate the problems he describes that have arisen from the distinct historical trajectory outlined in *The Second Discourse* (Siroky & Sigwart 2014: 18). Rousseau continues to support the idea of property in *The Social Contract* but in an ideal sense. Only in his vision of the well-ordered republic in which property rights are transferred to the sovereign and then reprivatized does private property become legitimate (ibid.), and in such an environment gross inequalities and exclusions would not be legitimate (ibid.: 32–33). The co-operative property regime outlined later in this chapter appears consistent with this vision. Rousseau continually attacks the institutions creating inequalities and argues that the property rights system must be managed for a common good (Pierson 2013: 411).

Rousseau contended that the correct form of institutions of government was a means of restoring freedom to modern societies. A reconfiguration of government and property was necessary to create societies in which people were their own collective sovereign and in which government served a general will of these sovereign people. The need for coordinating institutions able to make binding decisions over people, such as the state, is to Rousseau something of a necessary evil. We cannot undo the degrading effects of civilisation and return to the state of nature, but we can look to organise the society we have created to ensure that all are kept as free as possible. However, existing social institutions do not do this. Instead, existing inequalities are entrenched, dependencies fostered and power consolidated at the expense of meaningful individual freedom.

Property and the Firm

In a system of private property, although all may enjoy *potential* private property rights, in practice the existence of these rights makes their provision exclusive rather than universal. In essence, a system of private property rights empowers property owners and disempowers those who do not own property (Macpherson 1980). The right may be neutral and universal in principle but due to its nature it must be exclusive in its application. This represents a failure of the Lockean system which holds this right to be morally primary (Locke 1980). The firm, in its contemporary form, represents an extension of private property rights in which the

residual claimant rights to capital belong to the owner of the firm. The owner of the firm possesses control of capital, whether owned or rented, which allows them to appropriate the surplus of the labour they employ. However, a justification for this model of the firm is lacking, and only post hoc reasoning can justify the firm structure—this justification is independent of the actual circumstances of the creation of the firm and cannot precede it. As a result, normative arguments end up constructing a justification of the status quo, since even a critique of the extant firm structure must take the actually existing as a starting point, hence reifying it as a legitimised form of social relations.

Capital and labour must at some point come together to create the means of production and there is some degree of coordination of production necessary in a large and complex firm which involves making and enforcing binding decisions (Anderson 2015: 60). A degree of division of labour is a valid principle for efficiency—although this is not the only active concern or the only means of division (Pagano 1991). The need for economic organisations is not the issue of concern, but instead this chapter seeks to point out that decision-making power and the exercise of management authority as put into practice in liberal capitalism are based on property rights to capital—as Anderson (2015: 59) notes, 'government of workers is dictatorial under laissez-faire capitalism. Its core principle is that private property in capital confers the right to govern employees by fiat'. Access to power is dependent on ownership of capital and the simple fact that there are some people who can become firm owners and some who cannot. Capital, as argued by Marx and Engels 'is, therefore, not a personal, it is a social power' (1964: 83 as cited in Thompson 2019: 407). Even if there was equal access to the means of becoming a capitalist, we cannot all exercise this right since an economy made entirely of capitalists would be a nonsense, and it is difficult to locate a just method for deciding who gets to run the firm as opposed to working in it. Romantic, Schumpeterian (1943: 132) visions of the entrepreneur as brilliant innovator may appeal, whereby the great mind who has an equally great idea forms a firm; but innovative, truly entrepreneurial firms are few and far between; and even if they were the norm, why should the originator of the idea have an a priori right to its profits when the production of their idea as a commodity requires a co-operative social process? This includes the right to sell a share of these profits to investors in return for the capital needed to run the business, but a similar privilege is not usually given to workers. Equally, we

could look towards the neoliberal approach whereby the capitalist is the risk taker who borrows, or invests their own money, and in turn creates employment that would not otherwise have existed, justifying their expropriation of surplus by a version of the Pareto principle—if the firm did not exist, all would be worse off. However, this has its failings also—partly because limited liability might make the risk taken relatively small, but also, more fundamentally, because of broader structural constraints which prohibit entrepreneurship and the original fiction that all can be entrepreneurs. Ultimately, a justification of private property, and a firm structure based upon it, requires a justification of a system where, by definition, some have greater rights than others. The Lockean system of property rights (Locke 1980) as inherent to the social contract mean that the rulers of the economic realm can only ever be the property-owning class. The same set of rights, although universal in principle, can only ever be exclusive in practice.

Economic democracy rests on the basic premise that there should be some form of popular control of economic structure. In general, this focusses on the firm although ideas such as 'Parecon' (Albert 2004), in which democracy is extended beyond firm structures to wider distributional systems and typically supplants the market, are also possible incarnations of this idea. This chapter focusses on the firm as the unit of production, recognising capitalist investor-owned firm structures as 'profoundly oligarchic, hierarchical, and unequal' (Landemore & Ferreras 2016: 54) and recognising the significance of productive, rather than distributional, mechanisms in Marx's (1968) critique of exploitation and alienation in capitalism. Workplace democracy can be arranged in various ways from codetermination through to worker ownership as a co-operative (Frega et al. 2019: 1) and, although this chapter focusses on the workers' co-operative model, many of the arguments for workplace democracy do not specify a specific institutional structure or directly address questions of ownership and many advocating systems workplace democracy are not advocating 'forcible expropriation' to create systems of worker ownership, instead arguing that capital allows labour some rights to control assets they do not own (Mayer 2000: 304).

There is a rich tradition in republican literature that highlights the importance of workplace democracy and the existence of domination

in labour markets.[5] This stems from a lack of access to the means of production removing the choice of workers to withdraw, and the arbitrary authority granted by the employment relationship (Kandiyali 2022). Pettit (1997) highlights how domination impinges upon a negative conception of freedom, in which one individual can exercise their will upon others. Pettit's more minimal argument though does not consider the ownership of assets to be the issue, considering basic income a sufficient means of providing independence for the worker, and so lacks the radicalism of labour republicanism which highlights the need for a complete rethinking of the institutions and ownership of work (Gourevitch 2013: 599). Because Pettit does not hold capital owners to account for their role in domination except when intentionally exerting agential power, property rights regimes in themselves are out of bounds of his theory (ibid.: 600). This invites a radical argument whereby domination is not only agential, such as a boss forcing their will upon an employee, but structural whereby an entire class has the power to dominate (Thompson 2019: 394–395). Labour republicanism highlights not only the fact that most individuals are not property owners and are therefore subject to the domination of business owners (Gourevitch 2013: 595) but also that there is no choice but to enter into this employment relationship (ibid.: 596). Cicerchia (2022) demonstrates how structural domination is reproduced through conscious decisions by agents since employers have a continued incentive to maintain their power in the labour market. The way in which existing arrangements of property rights create incentives to use power to protect inequality would, I contend, be of interest to Rousseau. Anderson (2015) argues the republican case for the insufficiency of exit and in arguing for governance reforms within firms notes the challenges of balancing employer's and employee's rights (ibid.: 68). I maintain that the problem described is solved at least in part by worker ownership and control, whilst others suggest universal basic income (Pettit 1997), the state acting as employer of last resort (Thomas 2021), or a broad system of public ownership (O'Shea 2020) as ways of emancipating workers within the labour market. González-Ricoy (2014) has similar scepticism of the value of exit rights and regulation, making a

[5] An excellent summary of these debates can be found in Frega et al. (2019). Broader critiques of capitalism and therefore the firm are also offered in the Marxist tradition, of which Erik Olin Wright (2010: 33–85) offers a convincing summary. González-Ricoy (2014) gives a succinct discussion of what makes this literature 'republican'.

case that workplace democracy is an appropriate way to protect republican freedom at work. Hsieh (2005) also argues that worker control helps to realise the basic right of freedom from arbitrary interference in the workplace by allowing workers to protect their interests, advance their ends at work, reduce uncertainty and to have equal standing rather than being controlled as if their interests do not matter. Freedom from this interference is, for Hsieh, key for the Rawlsian conception of self-respect. Down a more radical route, Ellerman's (2020) argument advocates a system of worker-owned co-operatives on the basis that human beings, when 'rented' in the employment contract, cannot lose their right to the fruits of what they have created. In such an approach, democratically organised groups of labourers rent capital assets—which possess no such inalienable right to property, a view paralleled in Pateman (1985: 150, as cited in Ellerman 2020: 92). By this argument, the hiring of labour by capital represents a breach of their rights to property that is theirs by virtue of their labour. Only in a democratic firm can control over the fruits of the worker's labour be exercised, since the residual claimant role is separate from that of ownership—it is a 'myth of capitalist ideology' that they are combined in the liberal capitalist firm (Ellerman 1975: 42) and normatively, the residual claimant role must lie with the party with the inalienable right to its work—the worker themselves (Ellerman 1990).

Democratic theory and arguments for legitimation of authority within political thought tend to take the state as their starting point and seek to demonstrate how and why the state should exist, how it should be controlled and how it can legitimately exercise its authority. In so doing, arguments for social contracts, for the protection of rights, and for the representation of affected interests are created. These can meaningfully be applied to the firm in what Breen (2015) refers to as the 'parallel case argument' for workplace democracy. Dahl (1985) forcefully poses the idea that the desirability of democracy within states logically leads to a case for democracy within firms. The decisions of a manger are binding upon the workers of a firm in an environment where exit holds personal cost (ibid.: 114; Breen 2015: 473–474; Hsieh 2005: 128–129; González-Ricoy 2014: 240–241). Individuals are not totally mobile, having social and financial commitments to particular areas, having built firm-specific human capital, and are not guaranteed a comparable job elsewhere. This shifts the balance of power towards the firm which can make decisions knowing that workers have little choice but to accept them (Hansmann 1990; Landemore & Ferreras 2016: 68). This is Marx's (1996) double

freedom in action—the worker is nominally 'free' to exit but in reality is bound to whatever conditions the firm chooses to impose within the limits of the law. The firm is, for those affected, a compulsory membership organisation—if not the *specific* firm, one must belong to a firm in general (Gourevitch 2013: 602) in much the same way that one must fall under political obligation to a state, even if not a specific state. Landemore and Ferreras (2016: 66) note that much of social contract theory, and the basis of consent as the source of legitimate authority, stems from a time when such participation was voluntary and living outside of the law was viable but generally undesirable such that the choice between submission to authority or living outside of the law was a foregone conclusion. Furthermore, the requirement for democracy in states grew out of the failures of consent theory—where there can be no meaningful consent to be governed, legitimacy instead must rest on there being mechanisms by which the governed to express some kind of voice. Even without considering exit costs, there is a case to be made that as a basic principle those affected by decisions at work should have some degree of voice (Archer 1995: 42–27). The idea of consenting to government in firms is equally problematic—there is little choice but to work for a firm and the level of choice is unequally distributed depending on, for example, skill level or personal characteristics as well as wealth and opportunity (ibid.: 66–67). Power is exercised in the name of the private property rights of the owners in an inherently authoritarian manner (Bowles & Gintis 1993: 89; Gourevitch 2013: 602; Breen 2015: 423). Power exercised in such a way by private interests would not be normatively desirable within the modern state and given the parallels we have drawn here between the state and the firm, should not be tolerable in the firm either.[6] As Thompson (2019: 386) points out, the structures of domination critiqued by radical republicans are strictly at odds with the Rousseauian idea of a society ordered for the common good. This presents worker co-operative models of ownership and control as a possible solution.

[6] There are some notable critiques of the firm-state analogy beyond those around consent and exit opportunities discussed above, evaluated in Landemore and Ferreras (2016) who note that Milton Friedman in particular makes several of these critiques. These include the difference in ends (firms exist to make profit for shareholders whilst states have, arguably, the responsibility of maximising welfare); the fact that the state is not 'owned' by anyone in the way that a firm is; the dependence of a firm's survival of the expertise of its managers; and the comparatively short-lived nature and small size of firms.

Looking at this problem through the Rousseauian lens, we have constructed so far gives us a response to the domination and dependence present in the capitalist firm. We have established that for Rousseau, property rights have value in as much as they produce dependence on government such that people can co-operate. The only natural source of property rights is the application of labour, and modern property rights go well beyond this natural source into usurpation—he clearly critiques the form they have taken in 'bourgeois society' (Siroky & Sigwart 2014: 19). The existence of private property itself creates a range of problems in which relations of dependence and domination are created between property owners. The way that conventional shareholder-owned firms are organised is based on property rights for which there is no meaningful normative justification. Frega et al. (2019: 8) note that the only intrinsic argument against workplace democracy is that forced democratisation is illiberal should it infringe upon pre-existing property rights. This is, generously speaking, a shaky foundation for an entire economic system. The ownership of a firm should not mean that it is controlled exclusively by its owners, leading Landemore and Ferreras (2016: 64–65) to argue that property rights are subject to change to serve the needs and context of society as, for example, communities and workers come to rely on firms and become key stakeholders despite not owning the capital itself. We do seem to need a firm in the sense of a distinct organisation of production. The question therefore is what does a firm look like that is not based on this model of private property? The answer, I argue, is an economy made up not of shareholder-owned firms, but instead of workers' co-operatives[7] in which voting rights and residual claimant rights are assigned based on working at the firm rather than ownership of capital (Ellerman 1990: 73). In such organisations, the firm is owned collectively by its workers with surplus divided between them. All workers are members of equal standing, and there are no non-worker members or external shareholders (Jervis 2022; Wright 2010: 238). Capital is 'hired', for example through external financing. The co-operative is managed democratically by its members to solve coordination problems, to enforce a degree of discipline where necessary, to balance fairness and efficiency in the division of labour (on this, see Pagano 1991), and to make investment decisions. In such an organisation there clearly are property rights protected by the

[7] Both Jervis (2016, 2022) offer a review of some of the potential advantages and costs of co-operative organisation.

state, but these property rights are organised differently with no individual exercising power over another based on their ownership of the firm. This draws parallel with Ellerman's (1990) co-operative model in which there is, as Thomas (2021: 539) points out, private property, but it is organised solely in terms of labour-based membership. Workers do not occupy a hybrid role as workers and capitalists in these firms as the rights they possess, although exclusive to membership of the firm, are membership rather than property rights. Their rights to surplus stem from the fact that they work at the firm and are granted membership, not that they own the firm as a capital asset (Ellerman 1990). The firm is not a piece of property but a social institution (ibid.: 75). This is consistent with Rousseau's ideas in *Discourse on Political Economy* that offer a defence of the idea of property as necessary for sustaining the good life but advocates different ways of managing property rights (Siroky & Sigwart 2014). On that topic, we now turn to how workplaces could be democratically managed in line with Rousseau's conception of the general will.

Rousseau, Democracy and Deliberation

If the firm is to be an organisation analogous to the state, with the ability to make binding rules over its members, it must be legitimate. Rousseau argued that 'the ruled should be the rulers' (Held 2006: 45) and thus argued strongly against a separation of the government from the people. In order to be fully free, individuals must govern themselves as a collective in accordance with a general will.[8] Following Rousseau's argument that a political community can only be truly free if it is a republican political community, this chapter advances the claim that a workplace can be free from arbitrary government if it is arranged in a comparable way—that is, a workplace in which people are only 'obliged to comply with a law they have prescribed for themselves and with a general good in mind' (ibid.: 46). Even in a democratic firm, rights to complete freedom of action at work are still surrendered since an individual can be dismissed or disciplined (Mayer 2000: 316) so there needs to be consideration of how authoritative order can be legitimate. Rousseau argued that the only legitimate authority is that which is exercised collectively by a sovereign

[8] This chapter aims to apply Rousseau's ideas and there is not space for a discussion of the normative value of his conception of democracy. For this, see amongst others Pateman (1970), Levine (1993), and Cohen (2010).

people over themselves in which 'political order is kept in being through the free creation of political obligations by its members' (Pateman 1985: 150). Other forms of authority, such as arbitrary rule or even elective democracy (such as the inclusion of worker's representatives on corporate boards) cannot be legitimate since they necessarily entail the surrender of sovereignty of the worker. In Rousseau's model, there is no individual or group who is sovereign exercising interpersonal power—instead, the general will as collectively agreed represents sovereignty and actions of authority are legitimate in as much as they advance the common good (Cohen 2010: 66–68). A co-op is an institutional structure which resembles the republican state and thus enables the legitimate presence of authority in the workplace.[9] For the promise of Rousseau's republican freedom to be fulfilled, a general will must be generated via a democratic means (Cole 1973: xxxvii) and we could consider it as the basic principles governing an association that all members have a common interest in (Cohen 2010: 66). Laws against theft, for example, might well be a part of the general will as it concerns personal property and seen as in the general interest even by thieves (Kain 1990: 320–321). In a workers' co-operative, protecting the norms of advancing and protecting the member's interests in various ways along with norms of reciprocity, solidarity, equality and co-operation are likely to form the basis of the general will and specific decisions made would be debated and deliberated upon in order to ensure their compliance with this will. How these ideas are manifest in each association is, in essence, the construction of the general will in that polity—it 'gives expression to that common interest upon the basis of which the social pact was established in the first place' (Oldfield 1990: 60).

Rousseau's challenge is to 'to devise a form of political association that reconciles the associates' need for social co-operation with their essential natures as free beings' (Neuhouser 1993: 367). All organisations within a society will express a general will (Fridén 1998: 98) which represents

[9] There are obviously wider relations of dependence in the economic sphere, such as government legislation, the power of large suppliers in the market for inputs of production for the firm or the housing market for individuals, which all constrain the individual or the firm and force them into various courses of action. These will constrain the choices available even in a perfectly institutionalised co-op. This is a concern but is outside the scope of this chapters' argument.

the shared interests of individuals as opposed to their individual interests. G.D.H. Cole's contribution to understanding Rousseau's thought enables us to identify how a worker co-operative could function as a polity with a distinct general will of its members. The general will of society could be fragmented into different organisations, each democratically managed on a small scale with reference to the most important matters for the individuals within them (Lamb 2005). There is already support for this concept in Rousseau and the 'hierarchy of wills' (Fridén 1998: 98) although Rousseau notes that it is important that these associations do not themselves become factions for deciding the general will at higher levels (Rousseau 1973: 185). For Cole, 'moral freedom and its realization in the associative will is a building block of sociality' (Masquelier & Dawson 2016: 6). Cole (1973: xxxiii–xxxiv) points out how Rousseau explains in the *Discourse on Political Economy* that every association contains within itself a general will and how, in a society made up of associations, each of these general wills becomes an individual will to those outside of it. Referring to deliberative democracy, this echoes Cohen's (1997: 85) concern that deliberation at a sectional organisation such as the co-operative cannot be expected to produce the common good for society at large—however, it is the common good of the members with regard to their work alone that is being addressed in this chapter.

Rousseau suggests that we can locate and apply this general will via majoritarian voting, provided that it truly applies to all of society and represents its interests (Rousseau 1973: 185; Fridén 1998: 101). Rousseau imposes a set of conditions on these referenda which make them viable. Firstly, he suggests that they should be taken with minimal public discussion to avoid 'intrigues' (Rousseau 1973: 185) such that individuals deliberate internally between their self-regarding and other-regarding nature to reach a decision (Gutmann & Thompson 2016: 417; Freeman 2000: 378). This is a confusing point in Rousseau and one with which Pettit (2001: 271) disagrees, arguing that this must be a misinterpretation of Rousseau since without deliberation, there is little point in voting in person, whilst Cohen (2010) makes the argument that Rousseau does not discourage deliberation as often believed, highlighting that communication is necessary for citizens to be fully informed and that not only does Rousseau avoid explicitly criticising discussion on politics, he explicitly links voting to the expression of opinion (76–77, 170–172). Manin et al. (1987: 346–349) posit that Rousseau assumes the common good

to be self-evident such that there is no internal or external deliberation but if this is the case, he places great faith in the ability of the citizen to think beyond their individual interests, to be able to discern information about other conceptions of the good, and to place themselves behind something akin to Rawls' veil of ignorance (Manin et al. 1987; Bertram 2012: 405). He also recognises that individuals will always look to their own interest to some extent (Fridén 1998: 100). It is an odd requirement that they vote in person if they are not to deliberate (Kain 1990: 317). Secondly, Rousseau is strongly opposed to the emergence of factions which attempt to sway the vote. He suggests these represent a grouping of similar individual wills (such as the interests of a particular industry) and would be able to use their power and resources to influence the vote (Rousseau 1973: 185). Thirdly, Rousseau believes in an active citizenry, with a responsibility to participate in the decision-making process (Fridén 1998: 131; Held 2006: 45). Rousseau believed that in ideal conditions, the general will emerge from a majoritarian decision (Cole 1973: xxxii). However, this chapter contends that deliberation is also necessary for the emergence of a general will. Firstly, whilst the lack of public discussion might prevent distortion of arguments, it also makes it difficult to imagine how people can form an other-regarding opinion with Rousseau's model of individual deliberation (Gutmann & Thompson 2016: 417). Miller (1992: 62) suggests that deliberation induces norms of co-operation, allowing people to put their self-regarding preferences aside, whilst Cohen (1997: 77) argues that the process of deliberation should encourage people to interrogate the reasoning behind their preferences to see if they are truly advocating a common good, especially given requirements that individuals defend their contributions to the discussion. Deliberation as defined by Pettit (2001: 270) rests on three constraints—that of inclusion as equals; of judgement in which there must be deliberation on common issues; and that there should be open dialogue. Whilst the open dialogue remains at best ambiguous in Rousseau, the inspiration for ideals of deliberative democracy drawing on Rousseauian ideals of equal citizenship and the common interest of the general will is clear (Freeman 2000: 376).

This chapter contents that a deliberative approach aimed at socially regarding preference-shaping (Gutmann & Thomspon 2016: 422) and the pursuit of (where possible) unanimous decisions can be the only means by which people in a republic can be authoritatively bound by social decisions. A truly general will, as well as any decisions about

its application to the specific case, has to be found through deliberation. Manin et al. (1987: 352) make a similar case, differentiating the general will from the outcomes of general deliberation. This chapter argues that the general will as an expression of common good and common purpose retains its validity but that Rousseau's mechanisms for locating and applying it are unconvincing. For example, there is a clear issue emerging when, if the majoritarian process is legitimate insofar as it delivers the general will, how those who voted in the minority are supposed to adapt (Estlund 1997: 199). We can argue that this could occur when information is incomplete such that different people do not share an understanding of the impact of decisions on others. Ironically, Rousseau seems to suggest that this emerges when there is too much communication and factions form representing sectional interests (Manin et al. 1987: 345) but as Cohen (2010: 76) points out, discussion must be necessary for Rousseau for voters to share the information used to judge the common good. Meaningful deliberation allows for preference-shaping (Manin et al. 1987: 351; Cohen 1997: 77) rather than mere deference and, the construction of consensus and agreement is the goal (ibid.: 75). Deliberative democracy is a process designed to generate socially regarding preferences when making social choices—or, in Gutmann and Thompson's (2016: 419) terms, to make choices which are 'mutually acceptable, generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions which are binding in the present on all citizens' which are in line with the common good rather than being an aggregation of individual wills (Freeman 2000: 375). As such, if we are to take Rousseau's republican ideal—that we should all make the rules which govern our own lives—we have to look for agreement and consensus on those rules which can only be sought through deliberation, and in which deliberation grants their legitimacy (Cohen 1997: 74–75). Where Rousseau discusses deliberation, he is considering the comparison of individual wills when discussing a specific case (Kain 1990: 320) and does not consider how deliberation might conversely create the general will and move people away from making decisions based only on their self-interest. This is not to understate its importance in making specific decisions in accordance with the general will to apply the broad principles of the association.

Application of deliberative principles is easily applied to the idea of the co-op as a republican workplace. Most co-ops make decisions through a form of deliberative democracy already, through meetings of the membership which discuss issues based on a collaboratively defined agenda. Voting

is often used, but consensus decision-making is not unusual (Jervis 2016). Close social bonds, combined with credible expectations of reciprocation, seem to create conditions amenable to the internalisation of other's concerns about the impacts of specific decisions, and there already exists ample empirical evidence of the ability of discussion of opposing views to raise awareness and understanding of the perspective of the 'other side' (see, for example, Mutz 2006). Deliberation is key to making sure individuals are fully informed about the effects of decisions on others which must be necessary to construct an idea of the common good. Bertram (2012: 405) highlights that the general will could not, for Rousseau, emerge without a sense of being part of a community, and in studies of co-operatives the significance of being a part of such an organisation and being able to shape its goals is significant (Gupta 2014; Cornwell 2012; Jervis 2016: 167–168). This is in line with Rousseau's (1973: 187) statement that the general will is about shaping the direction and nature of an association, and not necessarily about making very specific decisions which are best left to be judged in his republic by the magistrate and, realistically in a co-operative, by the workers concerned through the exercise of autonomy. Because of the time-consuming nature of deliberation, some co-operatives use a heavily devolved system of decision-making where individuals, although accountable for their decisions, are given the freedom to use their judgement where possible (Oliver & Thomas 1990; Jervis 2016: 124, 166). It is important that larger collective decisions are made in the interests of the co-operative itself rather than individual interests to avoid degeneration in which the co-operative becomes a capitalist firm employing wage labour.[10] This is possibly the clearest application of a clash between the individual wills (for more personal income) and the general will (this would not be in line with norms of co-operation) and González-Ricoy (2014: 249) notes this very possibility as a potential failing of workplace democracy. The general will in the form of this preference for the co-operative structure of the firm maintains Rousseau's logic that 'men are to be ruled by the logic of the operation of the political situation that they had themselves created' (Pateman 1970: 23) such that such decisions cannot be legitimately taken, for example by enshrining the general will of co-operation in decision-making rules such that decisions made by deliberation must accord with it.

[10] See Jervis (2022) for discussion of degeneration.

Furthermore, co-operatives offer a practically appealing arena for deliberation. Many co-ops have below 50 members, very few have more than 150. It is reasonable for each member of a co-operative to expect to know every other member. This means that firstly, there can be effective other-regarding decision-making, and secondly that collective decision-making is practical. Rousseau shared these concerns, being an advocate of a form of politics in which there could be regular assemblies of the community in which people would know, or at least identify, one another (Held 2006: 44). Their competence on decision-making is well defined and well bounded, which draw parallels with Cohen's (1997: 72) requirement that members share a view on the legitimacy of the terms of their association and the binding nature of their deliberations as equals. There are conditions to entry which would include a willingness to participate in decision-making, as well as a general sense of shared values and culture. Many co-ops have a flat management structure (Macfarlane 1987; Oliver & Thomas 1990; Jervis 2016: 141, 160, 189) in which all members have an equal say in decision-making and nobody has the right, by seniority, to give orders to others. There is therefore no arbitrary authority granted by ownership status (as in a conventional firm), longevity of service or other consideration. This also means that the idea of equal status within the firm is an accepted institution. Within co-operatives, there is an emphasis on free flow of information for informed decision-making, and Rousseau (1973: 185) recognises the challenge of making sure all voters have the relevant information.

Rousseau requires that citizens be similar to one another in terms of occupation, wealth and worldview. This means that they are more likely to find common interest to form a general will which has a similar impact on all individuals and does not unduly burden some people whilst advantaging others (1973: 204). In the co-op, there is naturally a similarity of occupation and institutions such as task rotation (Cornforth et al. 1988; Thornley 1981; Jervis 2016) in which everyone performs a selection of roles help others to understand the burdens their decisions may place upon others. Furthermore, the close ties gained in a small community will help individuals to understand the personal impact on other member's situations that their decisions might have and make them feel responsible for those decisions. We would also expect financial situations to be similar for those in comparable jobs, especially where wages are horizontally structured. This helps to foster the sense of belonging and political equality, which 'attaches the individual to his society and is instrumental

in developing it into a true community' (Pateman 1970: 27). There are still likely to be some inequalities—highly trained members of a co-operative could be better able to exit and therefore leverage power in discussions—but it is likely that deliberative democracy would prevent use of this strategy since such threats will firstly begin to lose credibility if repeated and will also lead to the disapproval of the wider group. Furthermore, deliberative decision-making in a co-operative is hard to manipulate since the preservation of social capital could outweigh incentives to lie or carefully manage the agenda to arrive at certain decisions (Dryzek & List 2003: 10). On a related note, since votes are taken on multiple issues with the same people, to make a case when deliberating that is inconsistent would be to undermine credibility for future decisions (Miller 1992: 61). In repeated decision-making processes with the same people, there is a clear incentive to engage in deliberation truthfully and authentically, and in a small organisation where people know one another this effect could be stronger.

Regarding the possibility of making business decisions through deliberative democracy, we can consider that in a workplace all would have similar interests in, amongst other things, balancing the profitability of the firm and the burden of work upon the member. This argument is mirrored in Rousseau's work where he recognises the importance of creating aligned interest (Fridén 1998: 123) and the importance of relatively homogeneous grouping of citizens (Oldfield 1990: 65). Habermas (1997: 45) highlights how 'the assumption of republican virtues is realistic only for a polity with a normative consensus that has been secured in advance through tradition and ethos' or, in our case, pre-determined and carefully fostered co-operative values. Here Cohen (1997: 72) raises a concern that deliberative democracies should contain diverse preferences; and this may be a concern given the ideological nature of some co-operatives and the fact that commitment to co-operative principles may be a condition of working at them. However, there is evidence (Jervis 2016) that co-operatives can contain disagreements both on specific policies but also in terms of general direction, such that there are disagreements to deliberate on as well as an openness to different ideas. There is a general shared interest in the survival and profitability of the co-operative and a commitment, perhaps to a lesser or greater extent, to its principles including those necessary for deliberative democracy (e.g. equality and inclusion of all workers, legitimacy of democratic decisions).

Cohens' (2010: 85–86) interpretation of Rousseau's thought sees agreement on these common interests and associational goals as key to people truly ruling themselves. In practice, these norms may not always manifest perfectly in how people participate and make decisions. There is a need to learn how to co-operate, and how to make decisions democratically within co-operatives (Jervis 2016: 136), perhaps mirroring the way in which for Rousseau, 'individuals are gradually educated to think in terms of the general will' (Pateman 1985: 156) as people begin to adopt and apply these principles.

The shared interests of members are likely to aid in the construction of consensus. If there are radically different aims for the co-operative, then there is little common ground. However, picking spots on a continuum of, for example, wages versus investment, contains within it the potential for agreement since there would be, at the very least, agreement on the terms of the decision which Dryzek and List (2003: 13) refer to as 'agreement at a meta-level'. Deliberation may also highlight the irrationality of multi-peaked preferences (that is, preferences in which someone prefers two points on a dimension more than they prefer the space between them) as people are forced to justify their choices. However, a meta-level agreement on the common dimension to be used is required first for this to make sense—preferences single-peaked on one dimension will be multi-peaked on other dimensions (Dryzek & List 2003: 14). There are unlikely to be questions of taste in which no meta-level agreement can be reached (see Aldred 2004) in a business environment. Finally, the individual autonomy offered to individuals within the co-op minimises the number of social choices which need to be made (in some co-ops, individuals have the autonomy to make decisions unilaterally or within a smaller team but must then defend these proposals before an assembly if necessary—see Jervis 2016). In short, deliberation allows decisions to be made effectively and coherently, avoiding some of the concerns expressed most notably by Riker (as cited in Cohen 1997: 81) that democracies will struggle to make decisions in a non-arbitrary way (Dryzek & List 2003; Miller 1992).

In summary, this section has extended Rousseau's arguments for the just governance of a republic into the workplace, arguing that the same set of principles must apply for the exercise of power. This echoes Cole's arguments that 'men must participate in the organisation and regulation of their associations' (Pateman 1970: 36). Just as nobody specifically 'owns' the state, and yet all are responsible to it and have inputs into

it, nobody 'owns' the co-operative either, in accordance with Ellerman's (1990) model. The citizens of the republic are here analogous to the members of the co-operative. As a result, the same principles apply—for power to be exercised in this association, there must be a general will governing decision-making. Whilst this might be extremely difficult to find in a large state, it is relatively easy, for the reasons given above, for this to emerge via mechanisms of deliberative democracy in a co-operative. This means that individuals can enter the co-operative 'obey [themselves] alone, and remain as free as before' (Rousseau 1973: 174) in a way which would not be possible in other, non-democratic models of the firm.

Conclusions: Rousseau and Economic Democracy

This chapter has used Rousseau's analysis to highlight how existing property rights regimes in firms face problems of legitimacy and are based on a problematic lineage of the association between possession, property and power. By opening them to this Rousseauian critique, it has highlighted the possibility for alternative systems such as the workers' co-operative outlined by Ellerman (1990). The need for this reconsideration of the status quo rests on critiques of the liberal capitalist firm from two interlinked perspectives—firstly, a republican one outlining the firm as an arena of domination and dependence, and secondly an argument that democratic theory needs to apply to the firm in much the same way as it does to the state given the weaknesses of consent theory and the difficulties of exit. It has then posed that the firm remains an essential unit of organisation for the coordination of production efforts, including co-operation between workers, but that the authority wielded by such an organisation must be legitimate. It can come only from the members themselves in the form of a general will. Building on Rousseau's theories of the democratic construction and application of the general will, it suggests that this general will can be put into practice through deliberative democracy within the co-operative. This form of democracy allows for discussion of what the common good might look like for the members. The section concluded by suggesting that features of the co-operative, notably its small size, established norms and principles, and broad agreements on its terms of reference, allow for deliberative consensus to be reached and for decisions to be made in accordance with a general will.

Further explorations of this topic could focus on the ways in which workplace democracy might allow for more meaningful democratic citizenship, applying Rousseau's thought the 'psychological-support' argument, and the significance of self-determination in the workplace, both explained by Breen (2015). In *Guild Socialism Restated*, G.D.H. Cole highlights the advantages in terms of working life of democratic control and republican freedom, as outlined in Masquelier and Dawson (2016). Broader links to the entire systems of government, including worker-managed enterprises, are explored in Muldoon (2021) who draws together radical republican and socialist ideas to consider how these institutions can erode and equalise class power. Cole's vision of an alternative society, evaluated at length by Persky and Madden (2019), could be considered in light of the economic context of the twenty-first century. Ongoing debates about systems of government and about the role of markets in coordinating inter-firm behaviour (Jervis 2022) raise concerns as to how the general wills within each association can be made coherent such as to provide the common good for the society whilst those associations and their members remain autonomous and free. As our economic system struggles to meet social needs whilst billionaires fire themselves into space for fun, exploration into alternative ways of organising society feels timelier than ever.

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Rousseau and Intellectual History

Rousseau in Thai Constitutionalism

Ployjai Pintobtang

Introduction: Globalizing Rousseau

Scholars of Rousseau studies and Thai studies have not yet crossed paths (Kaufman-Osborn, 1992; Wu, 2009). This has been a loss for both. For the former, despite recent attempts in telling his story as a "global thinker" beyond the Anglo-American and European contexts (Armitage, 2011, inter alia), any discussion of Rousseau's legacy in Asia is typically limited to East Asia, especially to Japan and China. In the field of Thai studies, with the notable exception of Suphachai Suphaphol's Ph.D. thesis (2013),[1] Rousseau's legacy remains underexplored, which constitutes a significant gap within intellectual history. In part, this may be caused by the lack of English language work on this topic. Moreover, although this doctoral thesis covers crucial findings that pave the way for the study

[1] This thesis is in Thai and there is no available English translation as of yet. I thank Associate Professor Dr. Suphachai Suphaphol for his pioneering archival work on the Siamese reception of Rousseau, without which this book chapter would become impossible.

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of Rousseau's influence on Thai intellectual history, his main argument centres around the attempt to prove that early receptions of Rousseau in Siam consist largely of misinterpretations which were used as "the tool to mobilize the people" (Suphaphol, 2013). He argues that the Thai reception of Rousseau post-Democratic Revolution erroneously presents popular sovereignty *à la vox populi, vox dei*, as if the people can do no wrong. In this chapter, however, I attempt to go beyond the issue of "misreadings" of Rousseau. Instead, I seek to explore the ways in which Rousseau's work has been read in response to different political challenges to argue that Rousseau's rich understanding of constitutionalism was appealing to readers during the democratic revolutionary era and its aftermath because it was able to fill the social vacuum which emerged with the absence of royal absolutism.

In doing so, this chapter also sheds light on Rousseau's role as a global constitutional thinker whose influence was crucial to early political critiques of the old regime as well as the new regime in Siam and later, Thailand.[2] While Rousseau was many things, a constitutionalist thinker might not be the first thing that comes to mind when one ponders over his many legacies. However, one of his most celebrated and scrutinized works, *The Social Contract*, is first and foremost a constitutional project in the sense that he aims to sketch out an ideal republic. This political aspiration would manifest itself again through his engagement with the constitutional debates in both Corsica and Poland (Daly, 2017, p. 2). Rousseau's understanding of a constitution is a rich one because he does not limit himself only to the institutional designs of the political community but also includes what Eoin Daly calls "socially directive" features of a constitution which includes social conditions required for freedom to thrive that go beyond the design of political institutions (Daly, 2017, pp. 2–3). In post-Democratic-Revolution Siam, these features of the constitution were welcomed by the ruling class and the "Handbook for the New Regime" reflects this political aspiration.

[2] Siam changes its name to Thailand in 1939 under Phibun's leadership. "Thai" is argued to mean "free", reflecting the aspiration of the administration to bring about their vision of political modernity which includes the country's internal as well as external sovereignty.

Double Reception: Rousseau in the French Revolution in the Siamese Democratic Revolution

In 1936, four years after the Democratic Revolution, the newly founded Ministry of Propaganda launched the *Handbook for the New Regime*. The *Handbook* argues that since Siam:

> has changed its form of government from absolute monarchy to democracy, which is a government of citizens and by citizens, it is therefore their duty to be knowledgeable about government. Moreover, according to this form of government, citizens have stakes [in the country] and are directly responsible. They, therefore, must be aware of their rights as a citizen under the democratic regime. They can support and partake in governing in accordance with their duty [and] for the advancement and the stability of the country. (*Handbook for the New Regime*, 1936, p. ก)

While the Democratic Revolution was a milestone in Thai history, it was also unprecedented, and *Khana Ratsadon* or the People's Party was aware of the need to communicate the nature of the new regime to the common people and shape modern Siamese citizenship. In this regard, the new regime was not at all liberal in its character if liberalism includes the distinction between the public and the private with the emphasis on the latter being protected by legal means and the function of the government. The new regime did not hesitate in promoting social, political, and moral values it saw as fit for the modern Siam it hoped to create.

It was in this same period that the work of Rousseau was first published in Thai through a textbook written for students at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, by Prince Aditya Dibabha, who despite being a royal, was supportive of the Democratic Revolution. He taught the history of the French Revolution and wrote a great deal about Rousseau which appears in a textbook titled *The Era of the French Revolution* (first published in 1934). The book consists of references he came across as a student at Cambridge University. Among others, it includes lecture notes by Professor John Holland-Rose, *The French Revolution* by John Carlyle, *Souvenir par Mirabeau* by Étienne Dumont, and *Robespierre* by Belloc, among others. The textbook is described by one scholar of Thai studies as an attempt to tell the story of the French Revolution in parallel with the Siamese Democratic Revolution (Anathanatorn, 2022). This is congruent with Dibabha's own opinion on the history of French Revolution as timely for the nation of Siam.

What is intriguing about the work lies not in the historical facts that it presents but the plot of the story that he tells. In his historical narrative, the chaos at the beginning of the French Revolution was caused by an argument between those who endorsed Rousseau's political philosophy; such as Petion, Buzot, and Robespierre, and those who preferred the English system. I begin the analysis, first, with Dibabha's interpretation of Rousseau's philosophical grounds before moving on to his understanding of the French Revolution because, according to his understanding, there was a discrepancy between the theory of Rousseau and the practice of it which caused the atrocity of the Reign of Terror. This understanding is crucial to his perception of the Siamese Democratic Revolution.

Dibabha pointed to Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755) to explain the need for a new form of constitution to resolve this problem of inequality inherent in civilization. Dibabha, paraphrasing and interpreting Rousseau, described the institution of private property as the cause of inequality: "Since a man needs help from another man and sees that the way he possesses enough wealth for two is justified, since then equality vanishes, and property appears. Work becomes necessary and soon vast forest becomes farms which man's sweat keep bountiful with crops. Suddenly, slavery and famine emerge, branch out, and become ripe the same time as those crops". He then annotated this passage, emphasizing how "agriculture and industry caused the nadir of humanity. Philosophy renders man separated and alone and when he sees another suffering, he thinks 'if you have to die, then death be it as long as I am safe'".[3] This is likely to be one of the first textbooks in Thai which addresses the theoretical relation between the institution of private property and inequality.

According to Dibabha's reading, this origin of inequality inherent in the fabric of civilization is proposed to be resolved in Rousseau's *The Social Contract* via his constitutional programme. In the work, Dibabha, interpreting Rousseau, argued that "to fix humanity, by going back to the state of nature when man enjoyed liberty and equality to the fullest is impossible". However, "the problem remains: what form of government that can secure and protect the members of the society as well as their property, using the power of all combined, yet maintain their individual independence and enjoy their original freedom? This is a difficult

[3] Cited in Suphapol's Ph.D. Thesis, 2013, p. 72. The Thai to English translations which appear in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

question. Yet, Rousseau answers it with ease: 'let all of us give our lives to the highest command of the general will and at the same time, still respect everyone as a part of the society. This is because under the new social contract, we enter it voluntarily and equally. This is how liberty, equality and fraternity emerge'" (ibid.). He highly praised Rousseau for the constitutional programme proposed to solve this dilemma of freedom under a government.

Although the prince was impressed with Rousseau's philosophical innovation in the form of the general will, he was critical of Rousseau's legacy during the French Revolution.

In *The Era of the French Revolution*, Dibabha described the constitutional dispute post-Revolution as a more serious problem than the financial situation left by the royal government. This dispute centred around the fact that "It became apparent that Rousseau's political philosophy is more popular than the English or the American principles". The decision to remove the royal veto and to opt for unicameralism proved to be unsuccessful in securing stability and it was not long until *Le Comité de salut public* under the leadership of Robespierre became a force of terror. This remark is particularly important for the early development of Siamese/Thai constitutionalism as the most of the country's leaders including the supporters of the Democratic Revolution opted for the English model of constitutional monarchy. Rousseau's first reception that is found in this history book for Chula students therefore only serves to strengthen this political argument rather than to offer a republican alternative to the constitutional question. This reception also resonates with the dominant trend in the study of Western political history and philosophy in Thailand which often serves to justify the constitutional monarchy as the form of government that values stability and gradual changes over the chaos of Republican Revolution.

For Dibabha, although Rousseau "was the first philosopher who gave humanity the hope of the People's Regime [*Raborb Prachakom*] which gives birth to general and absolute welfare", it is not "without flaws". The choice of word "Raborb Prachakom" interestingly was translated with no reference to the vocabulary associated with the People's Party (*Khana Ratsadon*). This linguistic choice is congruent with Dibabha's verdict on Rousseau's political influence as dangerous and has little to do with what the Siamese Democratic Revolution hoped to achieve.

For Dibabha, Rousseau's state of nature's "perfect equality" is not the political ideal that a society should aim for. This idealistic state of perfect

equality "inspired the revolution and caused the use of violence by the disciples of his teaching such as Saint-Just and Robespierre whose reign was titled the Reign of Terror…Rousseau's work has many followers all over Europe because it is inspiring, so Europeans became passionate". While this interpretation of Rousseau is not accurate as it is not the aim of *The Social Contract* to create such an idea condition for liberty, what is more interesting here is how Dibabha emphasized Rousseau's influence on the French Revolution and its meaning for Siam. In this regard, although it is true that Dibabha felt that a textbook on the French Revolution was timely for Siamese Society after the Democratic Revolution, he only did so because Siam then can learn not to repeat the same mistake, rather than to emulate the French.

However, where he found Rousseau's work useful for Siamese society is in Rousseau's concept of the general will that theoretically reconciles the perpetual problem of individual/particular wills versus general will with ease. More importantly, Dibabha's positive reception of Rousseau's idea of the general will might be a part of the reason why he approved of the People's Party's socially directive programmes such as the publication of the *Handbook for Citizens* after the revolution and its later attempts at basic education, to name a few. Moreover, given the uniqueness of the Siamese Democratic Revolution in Siamese history as the first successful attempt to put an end to absolute monarchy and the revolutionaries' self-perception as the modernizer of the nation, Dibabha's choice to publish the book on the French Revolution and Rousseau's philosophy was understandable as the Siamese public needed historical examples to help comprehend the revolution and set it apart from other political upheavals and *coup d'etats*. The burning question, which Dibabha failed to address, is how this positive account of Rousseau's general will can be reconciled with his own constitutional preference of the English model over the French republican counterpart? The book does not address the issue but the emphasis on the difference between Rousseau's philosophy and the consequence of it when put into practice is highlighted in the Foreword of the book.

Another historically important aspect of this textbook on the French Revolution is the book's foreword by Luang Praditmanutham [*Pridi Pranomyong*], one of the masterminds behind the revolution and later, a Prime Minister of modern Siam. In the Foreword of the book, Pridi compared the French Revolution with the Siamese counterpart, emphasizing how what happened in 1789 was a *Révolution imparfaite* because

the emphasis was on "liberty" and "egality" while "fraternity" was largely forgotten until much later. Moreover, Pridi criticized the French Revolution for its focus on the change of the regime rather than on the nobler end, namely to secure the welfare of the people.[4] The Foreword was written in 1934, two years after the Democratic Revolution and the People's Party was in power and attempted to reconcile with royalists by asking Rama VII to give a constitution to the Siamese people and peacefully turn the country into a constitutional monarchy. Pridi and Dibabha's criticism of Rousseau's political philosophy as leading to an imperfect revolution was used to make a comparison with the Siamese Revolution which, as Pridi argued, was a revolution for the welfare of the people first and foremost.

Rousseau's reception by Dibabha and Pridi reflects the *zeitgeist* of the first stage of the Siamese Democratic Revolution in which the People's Party, while presenting themselves as modernizers of the country, also wished to reconcile with the royalist faction by assigning a firm role of the monarchy in the new democratic constitution. This reconciliation attempt is reflected in the dual reception of Rousseau's philosophy as ideal, while his political legacy in France was an error to be avoided. This stance of the People's Party and its supporters on political theory and the alleged lack of practical values backfires themselves as it later supports the "Ching Sook Gorn Haam" narrative of the Siamese Revolution which is a metaphor about fruit being unnaturally and untimely "ripened".[5] The metaphor is used to criticize actions that are impulsive and therefore, untimely and in a way, unnaturally forcing later stages of the event before it is due. The metaphor becomes a mainstream perception of the revolution after the downfall of the People's Party.

[4] Ibid., p. 4.

[5] This vintage Thai metaphor is traditionally employed by elders to criticize young lovers who are too intimate to each other before they are married. It becomes the narrative of the Siamese Revolution that is found in Thai schoolbooks, perpetuating the belief that the Revolution was untimely and was conducted by a group of young students who lacked required political experience and were driven by their personal ambition rather than the public good.

Civic Education and the New Regime

Tiang Sirikhan was a prominent socialist politician and was elected as an MP several times. He was among the many who fell victim to extra-judicial killings during the military rule in Siam on the blanket charge of communism. Before embarking on his political journey, Tiang was trained as an educator at the Faculty of Arts and Science at Chulalongkorn University. His passion in pedagogy, I stress, is one side of the same coin as his socialist political aspiration.

Previously, Tieng's reception of Rousseau was associated with his training in pedagogy. However, at a closer look, his passion for civic education is part of his broader socialist and republican political standpoint. Although Tieng was not a founding member of the People's Party, he was a sympathizer and a staunch support of the new democratic regime. Unlike other receptions of Rousseau, which often focused on his democratic theory, Tieng's commentaries on *Émile* reveal his understanding of Rousseau's republicanism which extends beyond the realm of parliamentary politics. Tieng's reception stands out as it calls for civic education as an essential foundation of democracy.

Before Tieng, although there had been attempts by Siam to shape "good citizenship" [*Ponlamueng Dee*], he crucially made a much-needed theoretical explanation on the connection between democratic values which the new regime promotes and the demand for basic rights in education. Citing Rousseau, Tieng explains how the value of equality does not simply mean equality in political rights. For example, he stressed how equality in the right to education is a basic pre-condition for political rights.

> This principle should be applied to all regardless of their ethnicity and religious beliefs...we learn about educational discrimination in the history of humanity, citing difficulty in governing the people if commoners are educated. The more ignorant the people, the easier they are to be governed. Some even claim that those who have lifted the sword should not turn to pens because their arms would lose strength. Leave the pens to women! This idea is biased for those who wish to keep only their eyes open and others to remain blind". (Sirikhan, 1936, pp. 153–154)

Tieng promotes civic education as an important foundation of the new regime, not only through his academic work, but he also worked as a

teacher and an educator throughout his time in Sakonnakorn, a North-eastern countryside province. According to Suphaphol's research, Tieng crucially contributed to the handbook series titled *Friends of Teachers* (1935) which is a handbook for teachers in provincial areas to study for their teaching licence (Suphaphol, 2013, p. 140). While this has been uncovered before, there has not yet been an examination on his reading of Rousseau's civic republicanism, with its emphasis on the role of education in shaping republican citizenship. Tieng's well-rounded understanding of Rousseau's republicanism is also reflected in his position as an executive committee of the Saha-Cheep Party, the first socialist party in Thailand, founded in 1946, after political parties were allowed. The party's leader was Duen Boonnark who was both a legal scholar and a politician who introduced Rousseau to Thai readers as first and foremost a constitutional theorist.

Rousseau as a Constitutional Theorist

Rousseau's republicanism is often perceived as a radical political philosophy which aims at the overthrowing of the monarchy without much attention to his intricate and extensive social and political programme. This is due to the relative lack of academic interest in his work beyond *The Social Contract*. This gap in Thai literature leads to the overlooking of the important influence of his work on the formation of the first socialist political party in the history of Thai politics.

Tieng's close relationship to Duen Boonnark is well-documented as they both were politically active as founding members of the Saha-Cheep Party. However, at a closer look, one can see Tieng's devotion to civic education, to co-operative policies (both being at the forefront of the party's parliamentary discussions), and most importantly, Duen's promotion of Rousseau's idea of the supremacy of the legislature, are all linked by their enthusiasm in Rousseau's constitutional programme.

The Saha-Cheep party's leader, Duen Boonnark, finished his Ph.D. at the faculty of law at the University of Paris before the Democratic Revolution of 1932. He wrote a textbook on the theory of the separation of powers three years after the Revolution for law students at Thammasat University, Bangkok. Being a supporter of the new regime, Duen argued that the distinction between the old and the new regime is that in the former, sovereignty is wielded unitarily by the absolute monarch. Should the new regime ignore the doctrine of separation of powers, the head

of the government might not be different from the monarch in the old regime. Duen's argument echoes the constitutional debate in America after the War of Independence when Edmund Randolph at the Federal Convention argued that a powerful executive power vested in a single person although under the title of president would be a "foetus of a monarchy" (*Records of Constitutional Convention*, 1787).

Duen followed Rousseau in what Harvey C. Mansfield dubbed "an errand boy" interpretation of executive power. The government, in Rousseau's reading, is merely an administrator of the Sovereign which is the legislature. This reading focuses on Rousseau's book III of *The Social Contract*.[6] Earlier analysis of Duen's reception of Rousseau often regards this interpretation as a misreading since for some Thai academics the doctrine of the separation of powers is erroneously exclusively associated with Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). This misunderstanding leads to, for example, the argument that Duen purposefully changed Rousseau's constitutional theory to serve his political agenda in advertising the benefit of the new regime. However, at a closer look, it is congruent with arguments made in *The Social Contract* to claim, as Duen did, that for Rousseau, in a way, the legislative power is sovereign (Boonnark, 1935, pp. 13–14). In other words, Rousseau's focus is on the separation between the sovereign legislature and the limited, executive power of the "errand boy" government. Rousseau's version of the theory of the separation of powers is extensively discussed by scholars of constitutional theory such as in Christopher Moeller's *The Three Branches: A Comparative Model of Separation of Powers* (Moeller, 2013, pp. 4, 49, 50). In this regard, I diverge from existing scholarship on the topic which argues that Duen intentionally placed Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes' constitutional theory under Rousseau's entry in the aforementioned law text book

[6] "There is between these two bodies this essential difference, that the State exists by itself, and the government only through the Sovereign. Thus, the dominant will of the prince is, or should be, nothing but the general will or the law; his force is only the public force concentrated in his hands, and, as soon as he tries to base any absolute and independent act on his own authority, the tie that binds the whole together begins to be loosened. If finally, the prince should come to have a particular will more active than the will of the Sovereign and should employ the public force in his hands in obedience to this particular will, there would be, so to speak, two Sovereigns, one rightful and the other actual, the social union would evaporate instantly, and the body politic would be dissolved."

in order to promote the new regime due to Rousseau's popularity among supporters of the new regime (Suphaphol, 2013, p. 105).

Far from misunderstanding Rousseau's republican constitutional theory, Duen's being a founding member of the first Saha-Cheep party in Thailand, also reflects his sympathy with Rousseau's agrarian republicanism in his campaigning for the well-being of farmers and the party's promotion of co-operative schemes. The party's name consists of the two words, Saha, meaning, "plural" and "diverse", and Cheep, which means "life". The name promotes the belief that the well-being of each depends always on the well-being of all.

While it is unquestionable that the socialist movement in Thailand was largely dominated by Chinese communism with the " ปาล้อมเมือง" policy which is a political strategy to work with farmers in the countryside in order to gradually gain dominance over the city areas, Rousseau's legacy in the work of the founding members of the first socialist party in Thailand, including Tieng Sirikhan and Duen Boonnark, sheds light on the influence of Western philosophy on the movement beyond Marxist texts.

Rousseau and the Theory of Political Representation

Another royal sympathizer of the Democratic Revolution is Wan Waithayakon. Wan was President of the Eleventh Session of the United Nations General Assembly between 1956 and 1957. He translated and annotated Rousseau's political philosophy. Among others, his translation of the general will and the state of nature which can be found in the *Handbook for the New Regime* sheds light on early attempts at the formation of modern political representation in Siam.

With the help of Rousseau's philosophy, Waithayakon explained the modern theory of representation hitherto unknown to the Siamese public. While theories of modern representation associated with Pufendorf, Rousseau, and Hobbes, rely on the concept of the (artificial) person of the state, Thai legal history tells another story. Before the Democratic Revolution, theories of political representation in Thai political thought relies on the notion of "The Great Elected theory" or *Aneckchonnikorn Samosorn Sommut*. In short, it is a tool to reconcile the monarchy to the new political demand of modern politics. It holds that kingship "emanates from the invitation of the people, not from divinity, like other countries" (Suwanapech, 2022, p. 55). This notion has a lively political history as it

is sometimes claimed to be a Thai alternative to the Western doctrine of popular sovereignty and even a variation of social contract theory although no real academic endeavour has been offered to prove such an extensive claim.

This theory relies on religious grounds for the political legitimacy of the monarch while it lacks explanation concerning the origin of the state. While Wan's support of the Great Elected theory is examined in, for example, *Thoughts, Knowledge and Political Power in Siamese Revolution* (1990), here I shift the focus to his reception of Rousseau's the general will and its influence on Thai theory modern political representation.

On the contrary, Wan proposed a new theory of representation citing Western political philosophy. He wrote: "Rousseau, for example, regards the general will as supreme but the general will does not equal the will of all because the general will consists of reason but individual wills might not be, consequently, they are not the true voice. In other words, to collect everyone's will and render the majority to be the standard is not always correct" (*Handbook for the New Regime*, 1934, p. 88 cited in Suphaphol, 2013, p. 83). Wan exploited the difference between the general will from the will of all to promote the role of the representative in modern politics. Once they are elected, the representative in the new regime represents not the people who vote them in, but the nation. He insisted that a representative is not a trustee but a delegate. In the new regime, election as a new form of legitimization only functions when both the representatives and the citizens understand their roles. These representatives "represent the People" and are not bound by the political opinions of those who have elected them. In other words, representatives in the new regime should aim at representing the general will or what the Siamese people should want, rather than to please their constituency. He insisted that "Although the representatives are not legally bound to do so, this is a principle which all representatives should bear in mind" (ibid.).

The concept of the general will and the interpretation of modern political representation via Rousseau's reception in Siam after the Democratic Revolution are crucial to the development of Thai constitutionalism which only came into existence after 1934. Rousseau's work is cited as an authority to support the idea that modern representatives should be delegative of the general will of the people. While Rousseau's contribution to constitutional theory is often associated with Corsica and Poland, the Siamese case sheds light on his broader impact on political modernization in Asia.

Rousseau and the Reluctance for Democracy in an Enquiry into Comparative Constitutional Laws

This line of reception of Rousseau as a constitutional theorist appears again in a law textbook of Thammasat University. The university is one the manifestations of the Siamese Revolution and is renowned for its academic excellence as well as political activism.[7] Professor Pairoj Jayanam's *Enquiry Concerning Comparative Constitutional Laws* was published in 1950, three years after the 1947 coup which witnessed the cooperation between the royalist and the military leaders to oust the then Prime minister Pridi and the advocates for the cause of the People's Party. While Pairoj Jayanam's stance on the coup was not documented, the family's connection to the People's Party and to Pridi, was well recorded. Despite the coup, he still regarded democracy as *fait nécessaire* which Thailand could not escape (Jayanam, 1950, p. 101).[8]

The Foreword of his book makes an observation that even though Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1934, the general public still struggled to comprehend the centrality of the constitution to the regime. The comparative approach to the study of constitutional law, therefore, was introduced in the book for students of law, political science, as well as for politicians. This remark reflects the political instability of the decade which saw the reluctance of the military faction led by Phibun to embrace party politics amidst the Indochina Wars.[9] The textbook, in this regard, was written in anticipation of the end of the military dominance in Thai politics which never happened. Nevertheless, Pairoj's

[7] The official website of the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University states that "Thammasat University is the fruit of the Siamese Revolution in 1932. The University was founded on June 27th, 1935. Its establishment constituted the birth of the political studies in Thailand. Thammasat University—which held its iconic name at that time as 'The University of Moral and Political Sciences'—designated political science as a core subject for its undergraduates, while the Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees had three clearly separated programmes: Political Science, Law, and Economics". http://www.polsci.tu.ac.th/nw_polsci_en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=103.

[8] Siam became Thailand in 1939.

[9] Puli Fuwongcharoen, *Political Parties After the Siamese Revolution: Dynamism, Development, and the Fate of the Non-Party System*, Thammasat University Press, 2017, p. 209.

vision for the democratization process in Thailand is reflected in his dedication to explicate new kinds of political theories which underpin the new regime in the hope to provide the country with necessary foundational knowledge of constitutional democracy.

Rousseau was mentioned as one of the philosophers whose work inspired the French to revolt against absolute monarchy (along with Voltaire) under the entry titled "the Philosophical Doctrines of the Eighteenth-Century". Rousseau's notion of self-determination then appears again in the chapter on Sovereignty. Agreeing with Rousseau, Pairoj emphasized the doctrine of popular sovereignty as the constitutional manifestation of self-determination. Like Rousseau, Pairoj insisted that for this very reason, "democracy is compatible with reason which compels man to be their own leaders…This is why democracy which expects all citizens to be under their own command should be revered as it promotes humanity; allows them to understand [the value of] work, their own mind power, [and] to command themselves".[10] Citing Rousseau, Pairoj argued for the universal value of democratic regimes.

More importantly, as a constitutional law professor and a witness to the turbulence after the 1934 Revolution which was followed by coup attempts, Pairoj dedicated a whole section of his constitutional law textbook to explain the compatibility between representative government and democratic values. It can be interpreted as a counter-argument to the royalist-conservative narratives of the 1947 coup as partly an attempt to uphold constitutional principles (beyond their claim to bring justice to the investigation on the death of King Ananda Mahidol). Rousseau features again in "How Representative Government in which the People Use Their Sovereignty via the Representatives is Congruent with Democratic Principles". *The Social Contract*, Book III, Chapter 14 which famously criticizes the English system, is cited in order to discuss the constitutional debate on the compatibility between representative government and democratic values.

Using Rousseau as his strawman, Pairoj argued that those who disagrees with representative democracy claims that citizens cannot grant their ruling power to the representatives for two reasons. First, to appoint representatives of the general will forces the general will to be replaced

[10] Pairoj Jayanam, p. 99.

by the will of the representatives. However, the general will is not representable. Secondly, in representative politics, the citizens who use their governing power through their representatives practically surrenders that power. They only briefly exercise that power at the moment of their electing the representatives. The second reason given is supported by the direct quote from Book III namely the famous "The English subjects think they are free but they are mistaken…".

Pairoj then extensively commented on Rousseau's critique of the English system and modern representative democracy. He argued that Rousseau's critique is questioned because one does not completely relinquish political power to their representatives, but only temporarily. Pairoj employed Rousseau's criticism of the English representative system to respond to the argument that the representative system post-Democratic Revolution was merely a theatrical attempt to disguise the new and corrupted ruling class in the People's Party.

This reception of Rousseau in a law textbook also nuances his legacy in the formation of Thai constitutionalism. Here, Rousseau is caricatured as a supporter of direct democracy to start a debate on constitutional arrangement that is suitable for modern Thailand. It is possible that Pairoj who witnessed the inadequacy of theoretical debates on representative democracy namely its source of political legitimacy as well as its advantages over other forms government and the coup that put a halt to Thai democracy regard Rousseau's critique of the English system as a perfect starting point to re-visit the advantages of the English-style of constitutional monarchy and limited government which was set aside by the coup.

Conclusion: Rousseau as the "Boromma-Kru of Constitutionalist Government"

The 1934 Democratic Revolution gave birth to "*Raborb Rathathammanoon*", a constitutional regime whose implications extended beyond the fundamental principles in the body of laws that guide the government of the country. Rather, it changed Siamese/Thai society in every aspect with socially directive programmes initiated by the People's Party and later, by other politicians, before the democratization process was put to a halt after the 1950 coup which de facto saw the annihilation of the progressive People's Party.

The 1934 event, however, remains a landmark in Thai political history as the country begins to entertain different political ideologies of the left, namely socialism and *The Princes and Royal Officials Offer their Opinion on Reforming the Administration of the Kingdom* republicanism. The first attempt to create modern constitutionalism in Siam was in (1885). In the work, it was mentioned that Siam was in dire need of a constitution to put her on par with other civilized nations. However, the request was received with fury on the side of the palace. Kana Ror Sor 130, or, the Palace Revolt of 1912, attempted to end absolute monarchy and replace it with a constitutional one, with some rebels even adhering to republicanism. The Revolt did not come to fruition, but exactly fifty years later, another group of conspirators successfully put an end to absolute monarchy in Siam and, for the first time in history, the country was ruled under a modern constitution.[11]

Rousseau's republican constitutional thought has a lively reception in this period. This can be seen through the discrepancy between political theory and practice in Dibabha and Pridi's reception of Rousseau when the People's Party's political agenda was to reconcile with the royalist conservatives. It is also evident in Tieng's socialist interpretation of Rousseau's civic education and its centrality in the progressive movement through his reception of *Emile* which also reflects in the socialist Saha-Cheeb Party's promotion of basic education and co-operative policies. The party's founding member, Duen Boonnark, also emphasized the significance of the difference between the sovereign legislature and the limited government, the former being associated with the general will while the latter reflects the particularity in the exercise of executive power. Duen insisted that what he deemed to be Rousseau's doctrine of the separation of powers is crucial in preserving popular sovereignty in representative politics. Wan and Pairoj's reception of Rousseau further consolidates his reputation as a constitutionalist thinker in Siamese/Thai context. Wan employed Rousseau to popularize the idea of modern representation which is founded upon person of the state which is to be delegatory represented via the representatives in the *Handbook for the*

[11] More on the topic of the Palace Revolt and its republican tendency, see Jory, P. 2018. Chapter Five. Republicanism in Thai History. In: Peleggi, M. ed. *A Sarong for Clio: Essays on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Thailand—Inspired by Craig J. Reynolds*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 97–118. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501725937-007.

New Regime. Finally, Pairoj's, on the contrary, used Rousseau's critique of the English system to elaborate the theoretical explanation of the compatibility between democratic values and representative democracy, the latter, in his view, being a historical necessity that Thailand cannot escape.

Rousseau's role as a constitutional theorist in Siamese/Thai political history is lively and while more archival work needs to be done, it is beyond doubt a crucial story in global intellectual history. His constitutional thinking is adopted and interpreted after the Democratic Revolution in Siam to fill the political and social vacuums left by the annihilation of the long-standing absolute monarchy. For this reason, his colourful title of the "Boromma-Kru (or the grand master) of Constitutionalist Government" dubbed by the progressive publisher, Kana Yuwa Sarn, is not just a political marketing, but captures the spirit of the era in which intellectual exchanges were equal and on par with the highly active political and social changes.

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Rousseau in Modern Japan (1868–1889): Nakae Chōmin and the Source of East Asian Democracy

Eddy Dufourmont

Introduction

Rousseau's works were introduced in Japan in different periods. The first wave of translations corresponds to the years 1870–1880 with the focus on political writings namely *On the Social Contract* and the two discourses. This happened during a period of deep political struggle, in which the Movement for the Freedom and the Rights of the People (*Jiyū minken undō*) contested the authoritarian modernisation led by the State. One of the main figures of the Movement, the politician, philosopher and journalist Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901) played a central role in introducing Rousseau. Despite Chōmin being widely known, there is limited research on his translations and their links with Chōmin's thought. Most of these translations which were published as books and in the review *(ōbei) Seiri sōdan*, by him and his disciples at the French Studies School (Futsugakujuku), have been forgotten. Besides Rousseau, Chōmin introduced French republicanism, which was very particular since most of

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the "promoters of rights of the people" were in favour of constitutional monarchy and feared the French Revolution. The chapter presents the introduction of Rousseau and French republicanism in Japanese historical context, which contributed to the development of democracy not only in Japan but also in Asia.

Discovering Democracy: The Movement for the Liberty and Rights of the People (1874–1889)

Modernity Without Democracy: The Authoritarian Project of the Meiji Government and Its Contestation

Historians usually consider that modern Japan started in 1868 with the so-called "Meiji Restoration", i.e. the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate by the feudal clans of Satsuma and Chōshū. However, from the 1860s onwards, warriors such as Yokoi Shōnan and Yoshida Tōyō, whose school welcomed Nakae Chōmin as a child, called for the reform of the country based on the European model. The Tokugawa shogunate itself created institutions for the translation of European texts and, with the support of French advisors, began institutional reforms later on.

The winners in 1868 were themselves divided between those who favoured the idea of reforming Japan according to the European model while putting the emperor at the centre of political life, and those who wanted a relatively simple return to the imperial regime of antiquity. The new central government was first a recreation of the eighth-century institution, the Dajōkan, but they undertook radical reforms namely the replacement of feudal domains by departments, and the abolition of the four old social classes. Because of these reforms and the establishment of a national army based on conscription, most of the warriors had no purpose. The coup de grace came in 1876 with the banning of symbols marking the status of warrior. This policy provoked warrior revolts between 1874 and 1877. In addition to this, peasants also started uprisings, exasperated by the maintenance of serfdom and the doubling of the land tax, then the state's main resource. The revolts were even more numerous than in the Tokugawa period (Bowen: 90).

The Movement for the Liberty and the Rights of the People started with the opposition between the leaders of the new government and their allies in the minor clans, who felt robbed of the 1868 victory to which

they had contributed. They were motivated by personal ambition as much as by the desire to defend progressive political measures. Itagaki Taisuke became the main figure of the Movement. He was a student of Yoshida Tōyō and led the troops from the Tosa clan during the 1868 coup. On 17 January 1874, he and a few others jointly submitted a petition entitled "Memorandum for the convening of a deliberative assembly elected by the people". It was published in the newspapers and had a national impact.[1] Itagaki and his fellows argued that a constitution and a Parliament should be immediately established, even if Japan just started his modernisation. Their demand was ignored by the new government but thanks to this initiative many Japanese people started to hear about a new idea, freedom.

Itagaki and his companions formed a political society and, like the dozens of others created in the meantime, called for natural rights in addition to a parliament and a constitution. Itagaki tried to unite them, but he was not disinterested in the proposals of the government. As early as 1875, he suspended the Movement following the promise to set up a Council of Elders (Genrō.in) with the aim of drafting a constitution. But the leaders of the Dajōkan, inspired by Napoleon III, introduced political censorship of the press and gave an authoritarian tone to the Genrō.in the draft constitution. Itagaki finally resigned in 1878 and revived the opposition.

Itagaki was able to take advantage of the turmoil that was sweeping the country. Individuals and associations drafted their own constitutional proposals, most of which envisage bicameralism, suffrage by census and limited to men. Most of these proposals also endowed the central idea of the new government, the idea that sovereignty should be into the hands of the emperor, because he was supposed to come from a unique and divine dynasty, born from the Goddess of the Sun Amaterasu (therefore the emperor himself was considered as a god).[2] The most radical

[1] For recent works on the Movement for the Freedom and the Rights of the People, see Miura, Matsuzawa or Anzai.

[2] This idea takes its roots back to 672 with the creation of the imperial regime by Tenmu and his successors, inspired by Chinese model. To justify the preeminence of the emperor as unique chief of Japan, the emperors ordered the writing of the first historical chronicles, the *Kojiiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712) and the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan, 720). These texts centralised and remastered the old myths and the historical narrative to promote the divine character of the emperors as descendants of Amaterasu. The kings of the ancient dynasties of Yamato (V–VI centuries) were presented

was that of Ueki Emori of the Party of Liberty (Jiyūtō), who proposed universal suffrage, the abolition of the death penalty and torture, a "right of resistance" and a unicameral parliament.

In March 1880, the various political associations formed a League for the Establishment of a Parliament, which petitioned the emperor for a constitution twice. The year 1881 saw tension rising with the initiative of Ōkuma Shigenobu, who proposed the adoption of a liberal constitution based on the English model. The main politician of the regime, Itō Hirobumi, expelled him from the government and asked the emperor to issue a rescript promising the establishment of a parliament by 1889, which he agreed to. Itō, who preferred the authoritarian Prussian model, left for Germany to develop his own project. In October 1881, this declaration precipitated the formation of the first political party in Japanese history, the Party of Liberty with Itagaki at its head. In April 1882, Ōkuma formed his own group, the English-inspired Constitutional Party of the Reform (Rikken kaishintō).

The peasant revolts did not cease. The violence culminated in 1884 with several uprisings, notably that of Chichibu, near Tokyo, where several thousand peasants drove out the authorities, formed a Party of the Poor (Konmintō) and set up an autonomous government, which promulgated its own calendar, that of the era of "freedom and autonomy". The army stopped them marching on Tokyo. In the tumult of this revolt, the Party of Liberty decided to dissolve.

Chōmin, who until then had been primarily a writer within the Party of Liberty, became one of the main actors in the revival of the Movement at the end of 1886. He and former members of the Party of Liberty formed a "Union of those who share the same goals" (Daidō danketsu). Itō Hirobumi then sought the help of German advisers to prepare the constitution. In October 1887, the Union addressed a "Manifesto against

as emperors and fictitious emperors were imagined before these kings to put the origins of imperial regime in a remote past, as old as China and Korean kingdoms. All this discourse came back to life in XVIII century, with the so-called *kokugaku* (study of the country), whose scholars wanted to define a Japanese identity distinct from China and were the first to address scholarly the VIII century texts. The warriors who overthrown Tokugawa shogunate were followers of kokugaku and established the narrative of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as an indisputable historical truth. This taboo lasted officially until 1945 but far to be completely eliminated. See in English John Breen, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600–1945: The Age of the Gods and Emperor Jinmu*, University of British Columbia Press, 1998.

the three scandals" to the government, namely the lack of freedom of speech, high land taxes and unbalanced diplomatic relations with Europeans and Americans. The man who drafted the Manifesto was none other than Chōmin. The government responded with a new wave of repression and successful attempts to divide the Democrats. The constitution promulgated on 11 February 1889 was thus not a real victory for the proponents of the people's rights, because there was nothing democratic about the parliament and the constitution. One of the reasons for such a failure of democracy in early modern Japan may lie in the fact that contestation against the Meiji government focused on the constitution, popular rights and parliament, without paying attention to the idea of liberty itself.

Claiming Freedom Without Knowing Its Meaning: The Difficult Introduction of the Notion of Freedom

Although the Japanese word for "freedom", *jiyū*, appeared as early as the sixteenth century to translate Latin *libertas* and Dutch *vrijheid*, intellectuals in the modern period had the greatest difficulty in understanding the meaning of the concept. One reason is that *jiyū* began to be associated with the idea of egoism (*wagamama*) and brazenness (*katte*) through a mistranslation by the shogun's interpreters, when diplomatic relations were opened in 1853 with the United States and the United Kingdom (Howland 2001: 102–3). Japanese intellectuals, unable to understand the notion, used other words before preferring *jiyū* around 1875.

In the 1860s, with the first translations and presentations of European political regimes, Nishi Amane and Katō Hiroyuki faced the difficulty of choosing between two conceptions of freedom: freedom as a specific right and freedom as a general mode of action dependent on an individual will. The reader could not understand in Nishi's or Katō's texts whether he was free because of his own will (second conception), or whether freedom was granted to him by a third party for a specific case (first conception) (Howland 2001: 99). By linking liberty to the constitutional regime in their presentation, they implicitly showed that self-autonomy took place within that political regime, which amounted to setting external limits to liberty and defining a specific number of liberties. Thus, inspired by John Locke, Katō Hiroyuki recognised eight "private rights" (*shiken*) and two "public rights" (*kōken*), within the limit of not disturbing "the peace of the government". For these intellectuals, freedom was not an absolute right but a right to dispose of one's person, actions and property within

the framework of the law, a framework that could be restricted according to the will of the legislator. Far from being an instrument of liberation, the law was thus clearly first and foremost a tool of strict limitation, if not repression.

In the 1870s, Fukuzawa Yukichi and his counterparts in the Meirokusha claimed to have solved the problem of this confusion between freedom and egoism by relying on an external limit to freedom namely morality. Their presentation of freedom was linked to that of natural rights in the Lockean sense, being defined as the rights to life, liberty and property. Fukuzawa used the presentation of the recent history of the United States and France, the first accounts published in Japan at that time. Fukuzawa intimately linked freedom and independence and praised the American Revolution, while rejecting the French Revolution for its violence, making France "free on paper but not at all in reality". His presentation, which is dependent on the account given by Henri Guizot and Thomas Buckle, also denigrates the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 while it paints a positive portrait of Napoleon III.

The very popular translation of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, by Nakamura Masanao, provides another example. Following Mill, Nakamura introduced the idea of personal liberties and the reader understood that behind the different liberties there is one concept, freedom. Although Mill advocated a free constitution, he did not go into much detail in his work. In *On Liberty*, he advocates a republic where an aristocracy of intelligence and virtue would guide the people, with the latter supervising the former by voting (Howland 2005: 44). Nakamura himself in his translation emphasises the necessity of an external limit to freedom and for him that limit is the Christian God.

Thus, when the first texts from the supporters of the people's rights were published, between 1874 and 1881, the idea of freedom was far from being understood as an individual and absolute right. These texts share three remarkable points:

1. The demand for a parliament and a constitution,
2. The affirmation of the "rights of the people" (*minken*) and freedom (almost exclusively in the form of *jiyū*). The rights were defined as "natural rights" of more precisely as the "rights given by Heaven" (*tenpu jinken*).
3. The rights of the people are posited in addition to the "rights of the state" (*kokken*), the latter referring to the government as well as

> to the emperor and the country. Many authors and political associations suborned *minken* to *kokken*, freedom and individual rights continued to be limited from the outside.

Nevertheless, in such a context of political struggle and revolts, the discovery of *On the Social Contract* in 1874 made Rousseau and the topic of the French Revolution popular. Chōmin translated all the book up to Chapter 6 of Book 2. This translation was not published but circulated from hand to hand and gave him celebrity among the Movement for Freedom and the rights of the people. In 1877, Hattori Toku translated and published the whole book from the English, not the original French, version. In 1882, Chōmin published the second edition of his translation in classical Chinese in his *Seiri sōdan* which was a translation review. After the opening of diplomatic relations with European and American countries in 1853, Japanese realised they had very few information on these countries and the industrial civilisation. That is why the decades 1870–1880 saw an intense effort to master European languages and to translate as much as possible texts on various domains, starting with constitutional law. Chōmin was one of the few to master French language. A few months later, Harada Sen published a translation that largely reproduced Hattori's work with some modifications inspired by Chōmin's version. A significant discrepancy, if not a contradiction, exists between Hattori's and Harada's translations and Rousseau's original text, an issue which is not found in Chōmin's version. This discrepancy may have led to the distortion of knowledge about Rousseau's philosophy. For example, Fukumoto Nichinan, despite being the author of one of the first essays on the rights of the people in the 1870s, was careful to distance himself from an author who undoubtedly was Rousseau. He writes:

> On the subject of liberty, a scholar of the past says: the complete liberty of Men existed in the time of the savages. At that time, the people hunted in the mountains and plains for food and drank water from the springs. In a fit of anger, the people took up the spear to fight, but they had no government or laws and so were not controlled by others. In everything, they could do as they pleased. This thesis is correct in one respect, but it must be admitted that it is extremely erroneous. (Fukumoto 1877)

On the other hand, it is remarkable that between 1874 and 1878, the most radical speeches against the government and the expression of an

attraction for the French Revolution and Rousseau emerged in parallel with the warrior and peasant revolts without evidence of any mutual awareness. Sawa Taiyō revealed the existence of newspapers and speeches calling for armed revolution to overthrow the government and establish a republic, speeches marked by a French tropism (Sawa 1998: 161). Chōmin was not without links to the authors of these articles.

Rousseau and the First Political Debates on Sovereignty

It is not before 1881–1882 that the Japanese seriously discussed the political theory questions of the new regime to come. The first discussions on political institutions flourished in Japan at the end of 1881 and throughout 1882, i.e. after the imperial promise of a constitution and a parliament for 1890 had been obtained, after most of the draft constitutions had been submitted, and when the first parties were being formed.

The first debate, bicameralism and unicameralism took place between 25 October 1881 and 29 December 1881. Most of the supporters of the upper chamber justified it on the ground that it is an instrument of wisdom and balance in order to canalise and control the people. Some distrusted the people because of their numbers and lack of education, fearing a possible "tyranny of the rights of the people" to the detriment of the "rights of the emperor", while others felt that the French Revolution had demonstrated the failure of the unicameral principle.

The second debate between November 1881 and February 1882, was on sovereignty and was the most important, reflecting in its length as well as number of speakers. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Rousseau and the French Revolution were at the centre of the controversy. Indeed, Inoue Kowashi, the chief official in charge of drafting the constitution, was explicitly targeting Rousseau when he sponsored the creation of the Shimeikai (Purple Sea Society) in September 1881:

> Extremist theses in Europe say that the social contract [*min.yaku*] is at the origin of society, that sovereignty lies in the nation and that the law is constituted according to the wishes of the plebs. […] Our country, which was long isolated in the East, has established relations with foreign countries and, since then, these extremist theses have crossed the borders and spread with lightning speed in the cities and the countryside. […]

> We will not embrace the republican idea that sows unrest in the country, hijacks and insults the holy imperial rescript [of 1881]. (Inada: vol. 1, 600)

Once established, the Shimeikai continued its diatribes against "the Western theory of the social contract" (Shindō 1962: 216–217). The founding of the Shimeikai coincided with the translation of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), the classic of English conservatism, by the oligarch Kaneko Kentarō. The preface claims to find in the work a remedy against the dissemination of the social contract theses and the poison of revolution. It was Burke's idea that served as the credo of the party founded in March 1882 by Fukuchi Gen.ichirō, the Imperial Government Party (Teiseitō), with the blessing of the government.

The controversy began on 9 November 1881 with the article "Where is sovereignty?". The anonymous author considers that there are three possible choices: either it is in the hand of a single man (a king), or in the hands of the collectivity (a people), or in a place designated by a "just principle" (*seiri*) (Nagatsuba: 312–3). The author rejects the first choice because a monarch is no different from any other man, since Heaven has endowed men with identical bodies. However, the second possibility is also not possible because the desires of the people are constantly changing, and the government would perpetually be a slave to their whims, as illustrated by the American parliament, which allegedly is subject to a people "without wealth and education". Therefore, the author adheres to the third possibility. The article provokes several attacks on both *minkenka* and their opponents. One of those who responded explained that "the just principle" was in fact a concept coming from French politician François Guizot, who promoted the idea of sovereignty of the reason instead of sovereignty of the people. While he approved of popular sovereignty, he rejected Rousseau's theory of the social contract, because history has never offered an example of it. In January 1882, Fukuchi Gen.ichirō launched his own attacks, in the name of imperial sovereignty and national particularities, as follows:

> We must attack the root of these heretical theses, which come from the theory of the social contract. [For [Rousseau] the organisation of society is based on a contract, and in primitive times, there was neither a sovereign nor subjects. The members of the nation entered into this contract together, each in an identical position, organising society by one

> appointing the sovereign, the other the people. If the ruler violated his actions as a ruler and the people did the same as a people, then the contract was broken, the nation had to make a new one by returning to the primitive times. […] Today in our country, extremist and dangerous theorists claim this and these radicals base their discourse on it. (Nagatsuba: 332)

We can measure the extent to which the government and its advocates feared Rousseau (and Chōmin) while simultaneously being deeply ignorant of his ideas.

Other writers of the Party of the Reform proposed their own theories. Ono Azusa dismissed the idea of sovereignty in the hands of one man as tyranny, as well as denouncing Rousseau's *On the Social Contract*, which in his view proposes an unknowable general will. Fearing "popular tyranny", Ono preferred the American Theodore Dwight Woolsey, and took up the idea of "balance of powers". He proposed a fourth axis, "a constituent power of politics" (*seihon no shoku*) which would be made up of elected parliamentarians (representing the legislative power) and the emperor (representing the executive). Ono's position is almost identical to that of another member of the Party of Reform, Maruyama Namasa. In Maruyama's view, the constitution was the result of a "state contract" (*kokuyaku*) that divides sovereignty between the government and the people and places "government rights" (*kanken*) and "people's rights" (*minken*) on an equal footing. He thus also justified the "association of the people and the sovereign" (Maruyama 1882: 36, 43). Maruyama rejects the social contract theory on the grounds that, quoting Bossuet, if everyone possesses sovereignty everyone would be a slave (Maruyama 1882: 22–3).

Among the writers who were a part of to the Party of Liberty, like Chōmin, the defence of Rousseau was timid, even if all were convinced of popular sovereignty. For instance, Ueki Emori, who joined the debate between March and April 1882, stated, "Our credo is that, by an intangible rule, the social contract founds society and that sovereignty resides in the nation, even though we believe that Rousseau's theory, according to which society is established by a social contract, does not correspond fully to reality" (Inada: vol. 1, 601). Finally, it can be said that Chōmin began his intellectual career in the context of intense debate, where his contemporaries did not hesitate to argue about future Japanese institutions with knowledge acquired through translations that emerged simultaneously as the debates themselves took place. These debates were

therefore as much moments of learning as actual debates and, as Ueki Emori pointed out in his own way, there was a great risk of constructing draft constitutions without really knowing their philosophical foundations due to the lack of real philosophical knowledge.

Introducing Rousseau and French Republicanism in the Land of the Emperor: The Role of Nakae Chōmin

Translating on the Social Contract *and the Two Discourses: Rousseau and Confucianism in the Service of the Rights of the People*

Translating a text as complex as *On the Social Contract*, in a context of profound ignorance of European political philosophy, was a challenge. Chōmin tackled this colossal task with a specific strategy.[3] Chōmin sought above all to make Rousseau's text clear to the educated Japanese reader of the 1880s, even if it meant transforming it. First, Chōmin made numerous simplifications, deleting references unfamiliar to the Japanese reader. He also used a more compact lexicon, of Confucian origin. The choice of classical Chinese could be explained by Rousseau's own style, which tends to reason in a binary manner, for example in the opposition between the state of nature and the civil state. Yet Chōmin used the ideograms themselves in pairs of oppositions: suzerain/subject, public/particular, heaven/man and justice/interest. Although this made translation easier, some notions, such as the Sovereign, is a translation challenge for Chōmin. He translates it as *kun*, which usually designates the monarch. However, in his translation Chōmin defines the Sovereign as the whole of the assembled citizens, thus he made the Rousseauist notion understandable while at the same time proposing a new definition of *kun*.

Chōmin also carried out a real rewrite to make Rousseau's text understandable, in the first place by cutting all references to Roman and Greek antiquity which Japanese reader were hardly familiar with. He also displaces passages from the original text, in the very famous first lines of the preface: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in irons…". Chōmin chooses to begin the text with a sentence reusing two stanzas from the *Analects*. What the *Analects* puts as an assertion, Chōmin turns into a

[3] For this part, see Dufourmont (2018a).

question. Thus, the reader immediately understands that Chōmin uses the terms of Confucianism to better challenge it.

The second way in which the rewriting manifests itself is through additions, all of which aim to assert the sovereignty of the people and the role of parliament. In the 1874 version of *On the Social Contract*, Chōmin repeatedly chooses t to add the word "parliament" the word "sovereign" as he writes: "the Sovereign, that is to say the parliament". Considering that the demand for a parliament is the most explicit and constant demand by Chōmin, there is little doubt that Chōmin considers his translation work as an integral part of his political commitment. Nevertheless, does Rousseau not criticise the representative system in Chapter 15 of Book III of *On the Social Contract*? This is one reason why Chōmin refrained from translating the work beyond the second book. Indeed, Chōmin interrupted his translation at the Sixth chapter of Book II and this has not failed to confuse commentators. Another reason would be the interest Chōmin had in philosophy and his systematic choice of taking on texts expounding principles or else the theoretical part of the works (most often the introduction). The third reason is the civil religion proposed by Rousseau, which could not but offend the atheist that Chōmin was.

Let us now look at the translation of the two speeches.

The translation strategy of Chōmin was the same as for the translation of *On social contract*, the *Min.yaku yakkai,* explained above: Chōmin concentrates on the first part and the translation aims at clarifying a text. Where the historical references were not accessible to the Japanese reader of the time, he chose to delete them and employs Confucian terms instead. Yamada Hiroo points out four characteristics according to the translation of Chōmin: the attention to morals, the emphasis on progress and civilisation, the awareness of the role of the philosopher, and the construction of the state (Yamada 2009). Indeed, it is true that Chōmin uses vocabulary that does not exist in the original, notably the terms civilisation (*bunmei*) and progress (*shinpo*). He gives his translation an intriguing title: "On Non-Openness [to Civilization]" (*Hikaikaron*). Chōmin was deliberately going against the dominating emphasis on civilisation of his time. Opposition to Spencerian evolutionism, which was in vogue in Japan at the time, means, choosing the moral freedom of the individual over biological determinism.

One passage sums up Chōmin's enterprise and his aim to both translate Rousseau and criticise the society of his time. When Rousseau speaks of the loss of the "feeling of original freedom" through "the Sciences, the

Letters and the Arts", Chōmin adds a whole paragraph in which he writes: "Whether it be government or laws, all represent an advantage in that they ensure to each one the preservation of his person and his life and provide what is necessary for the body, but in reality, both government and laws often use violence. What is it that makes the people passively suffer the violence of government and unable to resist? Is it not the delights of letters and the arts, which delight the hearts and weaken their will? In the past, when reason was not yet at work, when the heart was not yet acting out of underhand calculation, men worshipped nothing but their freedom given by Heaven" (Chōmin 1883: 211). The "freedom granted by Heaven" is not only an attempt to render "original freedom", it is also the term commonly used in Chōmin's time for "natural freedom" in the sense of natural right. Here too, Chōmin places the *Discourse on Science and Art* in the highly politicised context of the 1880s in which he was writing.

This criticism extends to all the advanced societies, which were claimed at that time to be superior to the rest of humankind. When Rousseau attacks countries where idle men call others barbarians, Chōmin adds "and which proclaim themselves civilised countries" and makes a clear reference to Europe. Chōmin adds: "Is this not extremely rude?". In an article contemporary with *Hikaikaron*, Chōmin rejects the very idea of comparing races, because the "yellow and black races" are in no way inferior to the "white race". Thus, a universality is affirmed, in the name of which Chōmin sets the Japanese and Europeans on the same level.

The third translation of Rousseau in the Meiji Era is that of the second discourse, not by Chōmin but by one of his students, Nomura Yasuyuki, in the journal *Seiri sōdan*. In his translation, Nomura sought to make Rousseau an apostle of civilisation, presumably in order to suggest that any member of the common people can attain reason. But his translation is very incomplete, since it is limited to the beginning of the first part, which deals with man in his state of nature, on the physical and moral level. Nomura thus misses several essential aspects of Rousseau's thought (the origin of inequality, the question of property), but he also completely misunderstands the notion of the state of nature, making it a historical reality and not a heuristic fiction. Chōmin corrects this in the *Min.yaku yakkai*, with a commentary on *the Second Discourse*, where he attacks Bentham and reaffirms the heuristic dimension of the notion of the state of nature (Dufourmont 2018b: 91).

Reading Rousseau Through French Republicanism: The Liberal Socialism of Chōmin

Chōmin has been called the "Rousseau of the Orient" for having been the main translator of Rousseau. But previous research ignores the fact that Chōmin were also interested in other authors. They are exactly the following eight men (followed by their book translated): Etienne Vacherot (1809–1897, *La démocratie*), Jules Simon (1814–1896, *La liberté politique*), Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), Jules Barni (1818–1878 *La morale dans la démocratie*), Eugène Véron (1825–1889, *L'esthétique*), Emile Acollas (1826–1891, *Philosophie des sciences politiques et commentaire de la déclaration de 1793*), Alfred Fouillée (1838–1912, *Histoire de la philosophie*) and Alfred Naquet (1843–1916, *La république radicale*). They all have been rediscovered by recent research,[4] who

[4] Recent researches can be listed as following:

- Acollas: Audren Frédéric, «Emile Acollas libertarien de la République», dans A Stora-Lamarre, J-L. Halpérin, F. Audren ed., La République et son droit (1870–1930), Besancon, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2011, pp. 239–261.
- Fouillée: Jordi Riba et Jean Lawruszenko, dir., «Alfred Fouillée: au carrefour de la philosophie et de la sociologie», *Corpus*, 53, 2007.
- Barni: Mireille Gueissaz, «Jules Barni (1818–1878) ou l'entreprise démopédique d'un philosophe républicain moraliste et libre-penseur», dans Danièle Lochak, Danièle Mayer et Jacques Chevallier, dir., Les Bonnes moeurs, Paris, PUF, 1994, pp. 229–230; *Id*., «Jules Barni, l'homme qui a introduit Kant dans la morale laïque», dans Stéphane Baumont et Alexandre Dorna, dir., Les Grandes figures du radicalisme. Les radicaux dans le siècle 1901–2001, Toulouse, Editions Privat, 2001, pp. 35–45.
- Naquet: Damien Mollenhauer, «Radicalisme-opportunisme-boulangisme. Alfred Naquet et les divisions républicaines au début de la troisième République (1870–1890)», dans Paul Baquiast, dir., L'Âge d'or des républicains (1863–1914), L'Harmattan, 2001, pp. 73–89; Jean-Paul Chabaud, Alfred Naquet, 1834–1916: parlementaire comtadin, père du divorce, Mazan, 2002.
- Renouvier: Marie-Claude Blais, *Au principe de la République. Le cas Renouvier*, Gallimard, 2000; Fedi Laurent, «Philosopher et républicaniser: la *Critique philosophique* de Renouvier et Pillon, 1872–1889», *Romantisme*, 115, 2002, pp. 65–82.
- Simon: Philip Bertocci, *Jules Simon: Republican anticlericalism and cultural politics in France, 1848–1886*, University of Missouri Press, 1978; Sophie Fanelli, *La pensée politique de Jules Simon*, Mémoire de DEA «Histoire des institutions et idées politiques» non publié, Université de droit, d'économie et des sciences d'Aix-Marseille, 1995–1996.

followed the pioneering work Claude Nicolet[5] and started to clarify the intellectual foundations of French republicanism.

These authors' works were translated by Chōmin and his disciples with two related reasons: they were the godfathers of the French Third Republic and were disciples of Rousseau and Kant. Most of their works defend the heritage of the 1789 Revolution, they explain and theorise democracy, the republic and the separation between politics and religion. Their works were not only translated by Chōmin and his disciples but were also the basis of his intellectual education. The jurist Emile Acollas played a central role in introducing them and Rousseau to Chōmin, since they were part of the "selected bibliography of the law student" of his *Manuel de droit civil*. Acollas was directly linked to these authors: Jules Barni and Alfred Naquet were at his side during the 1867 Peace Congress, and, with Etienne Vacherot, Acollas founded the short-lived review *L'Avenir,* which was quickly banned by Napoleon III. Research on French republicanism questioned the filiation between Rousseau and the Third Republic and pointed out that despite this link, the filiation was real even though it was not uncritical (For instance, Audier 2006).

Indeed, Jules Barni[6] hesitates between admiration and concern: he recognises that Rousseau gave himself an ideal of political liberty but sees in Rousseauism a danger to this same liberty, in particular regarding the general will, which completely submits the individual to the community. Barni denounces "the total alienation of the individual to the State and the absolute omnipotence of the general will", a general will which is,

– Véron: Jean Colrat, «Eugène Véron: contribution a une histoire de l'esthétique au temps de Spencer et Monet (1860–1890)», *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*, 18, pp. 203–228.

[5] Claude Nicolet, *L'Idée républicaine en France (1789–1924). Essai d'histoire critique*, Gallimard, 1982. This work was introduced and developed in English by Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

[6] Jules Barni was one of the main intellectual fathers of French Third Republic and, with Renouvier, one of the two introducers of neo-kantism. He started first his career as secretary of Victor Cousin, the central figure of philosophy in French academics at this time. With Jules Simon, he became one of the main leaders of Free Thought with the creation of the review *La liberté de penser* and the association of the Democratic society of free thinkers. Opposed to the Coup d'Etat by Napoleon III in 1851, he created the review *L'Avenir* and started to translate all Kant's works. He was obliged to exile

in his eyes, nothing other than the will of the majority. For him, this is a "kind of socialism that sacrifices all freedom to the state". This is why he keeps the sovereignty of the people but leaves behind the general will. For him, the general will is only legitimate insofar as it respects individual rights and aims to secure them; otherwise it falls back into despotism. Similarly, Barni rejects civil religion for its infringement of the freedom of conscience. This position was largely shared by the other French republicans mentioned here.

This half allegiance of Barni and French republicans to Rousseau explains why Chōmin also translates the chapter on the sovereignty of the people by Benjamin Constant. In the work, Constant develops his criticism of *On the Social Contract*, writing that the general will can be a tyranny of the majority, and thus a way to justify all kinds of despotism and complete alienation of each individual in his rights.

The French republicans' distrust of the general did not mean a rejection of Rousseau. On the contrary, the French republicans organised the field of political philosophy in a binary way, in order to assert a third way that would be situated equidistant between the two poles of socialism and liberalism, which they defined as follows: they saw in the former the affirmation of equality and in the latter that of liberty. According to them, socialism (and Rousseau) is flawed by its authoritarian subordination of the individual to the community and liberalism by its total rejection of the state in the name of its radical individualism. One of Chōmin's French sources, Amédée Le Faure, summed up the problem: according to him, republicans militate for freedom, socialists for equality. Yet, it is in the reconciliation of these two principles that the truth lies. He explained the failure of the 1848 Revolution by the rivalry between the two camps (Le Faure: 17, 20).

What the republicans defined as "liberalism" and "socialism" were political choices before they were historical schools. In their eyes the equidistance between these two poles represented the possible and

to Genova, where he taught philosophy. From there, he published books to promote democracy and republicanism on neo-kantian grounds, such like *Les Martyrs de la libre-pensée*, *Histoire des idées morales et politiques en France* and *La Morale dans la démocratie*. In 1867, with Emile Acollas, he organised the first Congress for Peace and Freedom and created the International League for Peace and Freedom, the first pacifist organisation. With the creation of the Third Republic, he involved in politics and became closed to Léon Gambetta, who lead the republican group. Before dying, Barni published a *Manuel républicain*, which was widely read (see Mireille Gueissasz, op.cit).

necessary synthesis for the philosophical justification of the republican regime. With Barni, Renouvier and especially Alfred Fouillée the synthesis resulting from this third way became the quasi-official thought of the Third Republic in France, which Serge Audier calls "liberal socialism" and Jean-Fabien Spitz, "republican synthesis".

The works of Chōmin can be interpreted as an attempt to formulate in Japanese, through translation, such a "republican synthesis". Deeply concerned to make democratic ideas understandable to the Japanese, he introduces the notion of *rigi* (reason and justice) in all his translations and essays. This word, came from the Confucian philosopher Mencius, who was famous for advocating the overthrow of the tyrant. Chōmin deeply believes that the existence of Mencius in Asia and Rousseau in Europe was the proof that democracy was universal. By using *rigi*, especially in the chapters dedicated to Montesquieu, Rousseau and Kant, Chōmin tries to suggest a proximity between these thinkers. Chōmin was also interested in the psychology of Alexander Bain, with a view to defining Rousseau's moral freedom on materialist and atheist grounds (Dufourmont 2021). Chōmin develops his materialism and atheism at the end of his life, in *One Year and A Sequel* (1901), the first essay of its kind in Modern Japan. Before, throughout the 1880's, Chōmin had preferred to be involved in politics and to explain democracy and pacifism.

Being Republican in Imperial Japan: Individual Freedom, Direct Democracy and Pacifism

Through his radicalism in principle and the political themes he defended through translations and his writings, Chōmin clearly set himself objectives that correspond to French liberal socialism.[7] His thought can even be considered as a Japanese version of the "radical democratic program" of Belleville (whose authors participated in the Commune), which revives the Jacobin phase of the Revolution: transforming the state into federations of autonomous communes, direct government, imperative mandate, election of civil servants, secular education, the end of standing armies and progressive taxation. French socialists reused it in 1876 and they asked Chōmin's mentor, Acollas, to be their candidate to defend this

[7] All this chapter comes from Dufourmont (2023).

programme. Acollas, who had links with the Paris Commune, ran in the legislative elections, but failed.

In his defence of democracy, Chōmin had a very special position, much more progressive than many of his counterparts. First, he had an interest in the notion of citizen, contrary to all other Meiji intellectuals, who were preoccupied by the criticism of feudal society. Chōmin was the real introducer of the word "democracy", along with "*kokushi*", which systemically appears in the texts translated. In the translation of Jules Barni's *Morality in Democracy*, Chōmin even adds that the term refers to "the individual in a democratic nation". In his essay *On Parliament*, Chōmin celebrates the *kokushi* as a free individual who uses his reason and respects the freedom of others.

While the demand for a parliament was widely shared among the supporters of the people's rights, Chōmin differed greatly from the majority, who favoured a very high tax-based voting system. In *The Awakening of the Voter* Chōmin argued for the imperative mandate because he felt it was the closest to direct democracy and "commonerism" (*heiminshugi*). Chōmin clearly writes that with the representative mandate, voters are slaves of parliament, which brings to mind the famous phrase from *On the Social Contract* about English readers.[8] As Ida Shin.ya has shown, almost the entire essay is taken from the Republican Édouard Philippon's *Mandat impératif en France et à l'étranger* (1882).

Chōmin's political proposals cannot be understood without Etienne Vacherot's *La Démocratie*, because they take up its essential points and aim, like him, at a State limited to the defence of individual rights. Vacherot was one of the first to attempt a synthesis that would be characteristic of liberal socialism: a synthesis of individual liberties and state intervention as an agent of individual liberation, with a defined limit. His book was translated in its entirety by Chōmin and his students, which previous research works have never noticed.

If decentralisation was a theme widely defended in the Movement for Liberty and the Rights of the People, its defence in Chōmin appears in

[8] *On the social contract*, III, 15: "The English populace regards itself as free, but that's quite wrong; it is free only druing the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, the populace goes into slavery, and is nothing. The use it makes of its short moments of liberty shows that it deserves to lose its liberty!" («Le peuple anglais pense être libre; il se trompe fort, il ne l'est que durant l'élection des membres du Parlement; sitôt qu'ils sont élus, il est esclave, il n'est rien. Dans les courts moments de sa liberté, l'usage qu'il en fait mérite bien qu'il la perde»).

his writings but even more so in the translations of several republicans (Acollas, Vacherot, Naquet, Simon and Laboulaye) and other authors whose translated work appears in *Seiri sōdan* and *Ōbei seiten shūshi* (Odilon Barrot, Charles Dunoyer, Maurice Block).

If the criticism of the government's budgetary policy and the demand for a reduction in property tax is well known in the Movement for Freedom and the Rights of the People, the reflection on the nature of taxation and its political role is much less so. For his part, Chōmin devoted several texts to explaining the importance of taxes for a democratic state. He also questions the political character of taxes: should they be aristocratic or "commoners"? He gives his preference to progressive taxation, to correct economic inequalities. In another article, he opposes the pay-as-you-go tax (*buntōzei*), because it is, of all taxes, the one that opposes human desires and the one that is rejected by the supporters of commonerism.

The translations of *Seiri sōdan* precede these articles regarding the favour of progressive taxation. Indeed, except for Barni, French republicans also supported it, in order to correct natural inequalities and establish a balance between freedom and equality, in the perspective of liberal socialism. Chōmin may also have found inspiration in Rousseau himself, since in his *Discourse on Political Economy*, Rousseau argues for the introduction of a universal tax, which would be legitimately established, according to the principle of the general will, by the "consent of the people or their representatives". Consent is used here to replace the arbitrary and unequal nature of taxation under the feudal regime, and there is no doubt that Chōmin also had this in mind when he was writing his articles. Moreover, Rousseau supports progressive taxation both out of a concern to condemn luxury (in continuity with the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*) and to reduce inequality, in particular to ensure that a certain equality between citizens guarantees their respect for laws and institutions. In other words, Chōmin's choice of progressive taxation is entirely consistent with his Rousseau-inspired philosophy.

As for the abolition of the death penalty, Chōmin was the first to defend it with an article in 1889, where he mentions Cesare Beccaria, a reader of Rousseau and Montesquieu and the first to propose this measure in *On Crimes and Punishments*. In 1883, the introduction of the book was translated in *Seiri sōdan*, and Acollas and Barni also advocated abolition on the basis of Beccaria and Kant.

This support for abolition went hand in hand with Chōmin's pacifism, for which he is best known. He rejected war and was critical of the imperialism of his government as well as of the great powers. Chōmin also justified the abolition of standing armies, first by the possibility of ending war itself, citing the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Kant, and the mention of the 1867 Congress. Secondly, Chōmin defended the Swiss model of a citizen's reserve army. To this, Chōmin added an economic argument: permanent armed forces drain the resources of the country and the people. One wonders whether Chōmin did not adopt the idea of the *Discourse on Sciences and Arts*, according to which maintaining warlike qualities is neither imperialism nor militarism, but rather the preservation of defensive capacities and above all civic virtue. Rousseau was the one who made the text of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre known and re-launched the debate on "perpetual peace", arousing the interest of Kant. For him, tyranny and war are in reality only two sides of the same phenomenon and they feed off each other, because the internal structure of states and their foreign policy form a whole.

In the triumphing Imperial Japan, the heritage of Chōmin was short-lived, except with his disciple Kōtoku Shūsui (1871–1911), who was one of the main founders of the first Socialist Party and the introducer of anarchism. Abroad, Chōmin deeply influenced the first Chinese democrats led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, who tried to reform China in 1898 before going into exile in Japan, where they met Kōtoku Shūsui and created the republican movement, which overthrew the Imperial regime in 1911.

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Conclusion: 'Forced to be Free': Developmental Freedom Against Neoliberalism

Denis Bosseau, Neal Harris, and Ploypai Pintobtang

Throughout this volume, contributors across continents and disciplines have argued that Rousseau's work is not merely worthy of engagement as a historical artefact, but holds merit for thinking about the socio-political challenges that we face today. In this regard, the foregoing chapters have been almost uniformly positive about Rousseau's thought, and for this we make little apology. As our opening contribution by James Block declares, we hold that 'Rousseau's time has come'. The multiple crises of our era illustrate the contradictions at the heart of modernity, contradictions which Rousseau articulated while the new epoch was struggling

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to be born. When (re-)reading Rousseau, we realised that few aspects of our contemporary world would shock him. That our sophisticated information sharing technologies amplify the voice of the mob, rather than the moderate rationalist; that our cultural consumption impedes our critical thought, and that the environmental impacts of our technical progress are so disastrous… Rousseau has been proved right by the passing of the centuries: the rise of the arts and sciences has led to remarkable socio-technical achievements, but at terrifying human and environmental cost.

But, as the chapters gathered in this volume have demonstrated, Rousseau did not merely disclose the tragic consequences of the rise of modernity. Rather, Rousseau also presented a depth-psychological diagnosis of the emerging modern subject, and offered suggestions for a possible psycho-social 'cure' through his remarkable twin palliatives of *The Social Contract* [1762] and *Emile* [1762]. While Rousseau's solutions are imperfect, they too stimulated centuries of contemplation which melded into diverse interdisciplinary endeavours; birthing modern pedagogy, and providing foundations for psychoanalysis and critical theory (see Ferrara 2017). It seems unlikely that Rousseau's extraordinary impact on Western thought will be surpassed in the near future. Indeed, as the chapters by Pintobtang and Dufourmount here reveal, Rousseau's impact on the *Western* academy is clearly only one part of the story.

While polemics have always attracted both heat and light in reply, Rousseau's work generated remarkable ire and contempt. In this short conclusion, we turn to (arguably) the most famous criticism levelled at Rousseau's work, that advanced by Isiah Berlin (1952), that Rousseau's work represents an explicit support for totalitarianism. This charge arises out of the claim made in *The Social Contract* that people should be 'forced to be free'. This is of course, far from the only criticism made of Rousseau's work, the full list is long and varied. Feminists have long identified misogynistic and patriarchal values embedded in Rousseau's prose (Okin, 1979); critical race theorists have identified a dangerous primitivist essentialism in his fictive anthropology (Alpert, 2020; see Ellington, 2000), while philosophers have in turn criticised Rousseau's perceived romanticism (see Berlin, 2014), even his 'proto-Nazism' (Russell, 1935; see Akehurst 2010). Our decision to focus upon Berlin's criticism is not to diminish or downplay the other criticisms of Rousseau's work. Rather, we consider it most apt to engage with in light of the dominance of neoliberal conceptions of liberty, with which Berlin's criticisms hold a common

inflection. Unsurprisingly, in light of the previous chapters, we argue that Berlin is mistaken. It is possible that Berlin was himself blinded by the upsurge of nationalism in the UK at the time of his lectures (see Akehurst, 2013). Regardless, we hold that Rousseau in fact offers a timely corrective to the damaging unidimensional conception of negative liberty which free-market economics proliferates.

At the core of Berlin's criticism of Rousseau is a dispute over the meaning of 'freedom' (see also Brooke, 2016). If one operates within a strictly 'negative' definition of freedom, through which liberty is equated with limited interference in the citizen's life, Rousseau's *Social Contract* indeed seems, *prima facie,* despotic. And, importantly, a 'negative' understanding of freedom increasingly dominates today, which marries neatly with the neoliberal imperatives of market freedom and a limited state (see Pettit, 2006). Negative freedom prioritises the individual as an atomistic agent, capable of making their own rational decisions. From such a perspective, attempts to shape the subject's behaviour are viewed as dangerous, ethically partisan, coercive, and morally suspect. The classic definition of negative freedom is thus presented as a variation on the theme of 'people should be free to act as they see fit until it poses a harm to another subject'.

In contrast to the strictly negative understanding of freedom which proliferates today, an alternative notion of liberty also exists: 'positive liberty'. This has previously been framed as referring to 'freedom *to*', rather than the negative 'freedom *from*' (Berlin, 1969 [1958]). One thus has positive freedom to 'have an education', while also enjoying negative 'freedom from torture', for example. Rousseau's work has features of this more expansive notion of positive liberty, calling attention to the developmental aspects of freedom, rather than simply understanding liberty as the absence of constraints. This is in opposition to the notion of the subject of neoliberalism, for whom no further socially induced development is required to reach freedom. Rather, freedom exists through uncoerced market participation; indeed, for arch-neoliberals, there is no such thing as society which could serve to enhance the developmental possibilities of the subject in the first place. As such, for liberals, a fundamental tension between positive and negative conceptions of liberty comes to head with Rousseau's quote, in *The Social Contract,* that citizens may need to be 'forced to be free'.

Rousseau's more nuanced account of freedom will seem anathema to the ideal-typical, consumerist, atomistic subject of late neoliberalism. How

can having my desires impeded possibly serve to increase my freedom? For Berlin, such neoliberal incredulity would be philosophically justified. Surely the state, or any grouping, claiming to know what is best for the individual, and thus acting against their first-order desires, is fundamentally coercive and a route to tyranny?

Yet, this is exactly what Rousseau suggests, when he declares that people must, on occasion, be 'forced to be free'. It is useful to contextualise the quote. In *The Social Contract* Rousseau presents a fundamental boon of civilisation as being the possible attainment of 'moral freedom'. By this, Rousseau refers to being able to subject oneself to laws of one's choosing, rather than being a mere slave to the base passions and appetites of the species. Indeed, Rousseau is explicit that obedience to 'the mere impulse of appetite alone is slavery', while, in contrast, freedom is presented as being manifested through 'obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself' (Book I, Chapter VIII). In simple terms, to be truly free we need to think through our choices and come to our conclusion reflexively. If we are simply living as reactive, hormonally turbo-charged, pathologically socialised robots, we are not functioning as free humans. We are not choosing our desires, we are not in control of our *will*.

We hold that, in accord with Rousseau, simply embracing one's desires is not a meaningful conception of freedom. Rather, we hold it to be a terrifyingly reductive and consumerist debasement of the possibilities for self-realisation. We believe that the freedom to consume limitless Netflix, while anxiously and compulsively retweeting trending social media influencers, does not mark the apotheosis of human flourishing. It may, in short, be necessary to enable the positive development of the subject, to actively engage in fostering developmental capabilities. This requires both the absence of pathological forms of socialisation (features of 'negative' freedom) and the 'positive' freedom to develop the subject's epistemic capabilities and become attuned to, but not dominated by, one's sentiments. As such while we contend that it makes sense to speak of 'freedom to have an education', and 'freedom to think', rather than solely prioritising the atomistic isolation of market calculation, neither 'freedom to' nor 'freedom from' captures the complexity of Rousseau's imagination. Rousseau instead, teaches of the need for 'developmental freedom'.

As Block outlines in Chapter "From Fashioned to Fashioner: Rousseau and the Reclamation of History" of this volume, the basic idea that

freedom necessitates work and investment is integral to Rousseau's entire corpus. This can be hard work. It can be painful. It can mean consciously excluding oneself from the deracinating impacts of a debased society (fleeing to the Peak District, turning off the popular talent show, declining invites to watch the football). But it is a not a mere ascetic or nihilistic endeavour. In *Emile*, Rousseau demonstrated that sentiment needs to be balanced with reason; that one must be educated so as to see through the feverish passions of the day, but not to lobotomise the affective. Such a position offers a powerful counterpoint to the neoliberal myth of the abstracted, isolated individual, who, as arbiter of their instrumental rationality, is archetypically sociopathic.

Rousseau reminds us that the freedom to enjoy limitless consumption is no true freedom, just as the alcoholic is not free to choose water over whisky. Rather, freedom is complex and difficult to attain, requiring the nurturing of developmental faculties in conjunction with carefully organised socio-political structures. From such a view, unrefined market freedom, in short, is a mere variation on the slavery to the passions. It does not even begin to approximate the complexity of the developmental account of freedom essential to true human self-realisation. Such claims are polemical and must continue to be debated and discussed. We do not contend that Rousseau has all the answers or indeed that he asked all the necessary questions. Rather, we suggest that he succeeded in pushing beyond the confines of the emerging dynamics of modernity. Freedom is more complicated than the absence of constraint; we cannot let the deracinating effects of hyper-reification and post-modern ethico-relativism erase this crucial Rousseauian insight.

We thus conclude, reflecting that Rousseau can be read as liberalism's most strident critic, writing as the liberal world was coming into being. We contend that Rousseau laid the foundations for alternative socio-economic orders, and that he continues to offer the possibilities for new conceptualisations of freedom.

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