

Pride and Virtue in the Political Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
DPhil in Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the
University of Oxford

Submitted in Trinity Term 2014

Word Count: 98,049

“Je donne mes rêves pour des rêves, laissant chercher au lecteur s'ils ont quelque chose d'utile aux gens éveillés.”

– Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between political virtue and moral virtue in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. After critically engaging with Rousseau's compelling yet complex theory of human sociability, focusing more particularly on the seminal relationship between the two forms of self-love, the “natural” *amour de soi* and “social” *amour-propre*, it is observed that the culmination of Rousseau's moral theory in *Emile* sees him espouse a particular kind of moral excellence called *vertu*, defined as a striving to master one's passions, and a particular type of freedom named *liberté morale*, inherent in the act of obeying the inner law originating in man's conscience. After further exploring Rousseau's conception of *vertu*, and insisting upon the ambitiousness of his moral theory, the thesis argues that Rousseau's political theory differs from it in “taking men as they are”, and starting from the assumption that men are driven by their passions. That the hegemony of *amour-propre* is pre-supposed by Rousseau's political project is demonstrated through a detailed comparison of the civic education described in his prescriptive political writings with the moral education advocated in *Emile*. Finally, it draws the implications of the discrepancies between Rousseau's moral and political versions of virtue for his political theory, identifying a strong tension between two ideals that have generally been regarded as wedded within it, those of republican liberty and moral freedom.

Acknowledgements:

The author would like to express his deep gratitude to Professor Mark Philp, his D.Phil supervisor, with whom it has been a pleasure to work, and whose extraordinary expertise in the history of political thought proved invaluable in helping to situate Rousseau's thought in its historical context. He is also indebted to Doctor Elizabeth Frazer, who supervised his M.Phil thesis, and whose sharp, insightful comments helped enormously in the inaugural part of his work, and to John Cunliffe, whose stunning lectures on Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the problem of amour-propre sparked his interest in this topic. His thanks go in general to all those that supported his work.

A Note on References and Translations

In the footnotes of the thesis, the initials OC and CC refer to the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition of Rousseau's *Oeuvres Complètes* and to R. A. Leigh's critical edition of Rousseau's *Correspondance Complète* respectively. Passages from Rousseau's texts are reproduced in French as they appear in these editions. Translations of the Francophone literature on Rousseau are the author's own.

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Introduction

Je ne vois point comme les autres hommes; il y a longtemps qu'on me l'a reproché.

– Jean-Jacques Rousseau

I. The Unity of Rousseau's Thought

The political thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau divides into three key moments. Everything begins with the state of nature, in which man enjoys a solitary and peaceful existence, in harmony with his environment. Then comes social corruption, as man leaves this primitive condition behind him to enter society, where he loses his freedom, acquires a thousand vices, and experiences a multitude of unprecedented pathologies. The third and final phase of the sequence lies on the horizon: it is the *Législateur's* attempt to “change human nature” through an ambitious political project, in an effort to recover and recreate at a higher level the freedom that man enjoyed in the state of nature, but lost in society.

Two particular works have long been considered to offer the finest descriptions of this project. The state of nature, and man's ill-fated journey out of it, appear respectively in the first and second parts of Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité* (1755), while man's political renaissance, under the aegis of the *volonté générale*, is most cogently envisaged in his *Du Contract Social* (1762).

Yet, just how Rousseau imagined mankind progressing from the nadir of corruption to the apex of redemption remains a mystery. Indeed, the very relationship between the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* and *Du Contract Social* is problematic: the former

ends with thoroughly depraved human beings caught in the clutches of despotism, while the latter begins with seemingly virginal men on the cusp of leaving the state of nature to enter a well-ordered political community founded on the timeless “principes du droit politique”. The sinister portrait of man's debasement at the hands of society with which Rousseau haunts his readers in Part II of the *Discours* is conspicuously ignored throughout the hundred pages of *Du Contract Social*, as if those called upon to form the Republic were not actual, but imaginary, men, sprung from the earth like mushrooms. The latter text offers an inspiring exposition of the principles on which the new polis should be founded, but little if any description of the crucial transformative phase during which men are elevated to the status of citizens.

The question of the relationship between Rousseau's descriptive and prescriptive texts, between diagnosis and solution, undoubtedly constitutes the greatest challenge for those seeking to grasp his political theory. It is generally agreed that Rousseau rejects the idea of reversing the course of history in an effort to return to the state of nature. “(L)a nature humaine ne retrograde pas et jamais on ne remonte vers les tems d'innocence et d'égalité quand une fois on s'en est éloigné”, he affirms in *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*¹. Yet, such is the severity of Rousseau's diagnosis of society's ills in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* that it seems to undermine any attempt to construct a prescriptive political theory.

Rousseau portrays social man, and all of his vices, with an unforgiving verbal virtuosity. As man enters society, and the natural form of his concern for his own well-being, *amour de soi*, gives way to its social, artificial form, *amour-propre*, described by Rousseau as “un sentiment relatif, factice, et né dans la société, qui porte chaque

1 *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, III, OC 1, p 935

individu à faire plus de cas de soi que de tout autre, qui inspire aux hommes tous les maux qu'ils se font mutuellement”², he transforms into a servile being who exists only to be seen, a slave to the opinion of others, a vicious creature concealed behind a deceptively urbane appearance, characterised by a powerful proclivity for envy and hatred.

It is difficult to reconcile this uncompromising critique of existing society, which comes perilously close to condemning sociability itself, with the ambition to bring about a different kind of society. “The suspicion that is hard to dispel”, one eminent scholar has recently remarked, “is that Rousseau's powerful case for the malignant potential of *amour-propre* ends up formulating so enormous a problem that his remedial project cannot fully solve it”³.

Given his grim vision of man's actual social experience, how can Rousseau imagine conditions under which uncorrupted sociability is possible? Can Rousseau ultimately solve the problem of *amour-propre*?

In fine, the unity of Rousseau's thought hinges on the possibility of a positive, uncorrupted sociability.

II. Interpretations of Rousseau

The difficulty of reconciling Rousseau's diagnostic and prescriptive writings has led his readers to a variety of conclusions as to the character and goal of his philosophy, with many questioning whether it should truly be regarded as a call for change, or

2 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Note XV, OC 3, p 219

3 Neuhouser 2008, p 180

indeed whether it forms a coherent theoretical ensemble at all.

Rousseau's credentials as a major thinker have not always been recognised. In the past, many portrayed him as an inconsequential and inconsistent logician, a dreamer pursuing irreconcilable ideals, a philosopher in perpetual contradiction with himself⁴. Some even exploited the candour of his autobiographical writings in an attempt to suggest that Rousseau's philosophy reflected the activity of a pathological mind at war with society, and whose works constituted as many symptoms of an unfathomable illness. In depicting his archrival as “un étrange fou”⁵, and mocking “une brochure intitulée le *Contract social* ou insocial du peu sociable Jean-Jacques Rousseau”⁶, Voltaire was the earliest propounder of this vision, which many others subsequently revived⁷. Others, though less hostile to the *Citoyen de Genève*, implied that his merit lay chiefly in his uncompromising critique of social corruption rather than anything he proposed to remedy it. Nietzsche famously approved of Rousseau's vitriolic denunciation of modern man in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, but reproved the egalitarian ideal propounded in *Emile*⁸. The long list of those inclined to endorse Rousseau's critique of society while regarding his solutions as inadequate also includes many Marxists, for whom Rousseau ultimately proved insufficiently hostile to Bourgeois values⁹, and Feminists, who, from Mary Wollstonecraft onwards, contended that an

4 John Charvet, for instance, regarded Rousseau as a sophist, an attention-seeking charlatan, a shrewd merchant of enigmas and absurdities, who resorted to the most exquisite eloquence to create an illusion of profound thinking (Charvet 1974).

5 Lettre de François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire à Etienne-Noël Damilaville, 19/03/1761, CC 8, p 273

6 *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764), 'Pierre le Grand et Jean-Jacques Rousseau'

7 For J. L. Talmon, “Rousseau was one of the most ill-adjusted and egocentric natures who have left a record of their predicament”, an “abjectly self-conscious” individual (Talmon 1960, p 38). Many simply saw Rousseau as a man in the grip of sickness, whose theories reflected this pathological bent (Bensoussan 1974; Gardou 2005), while others portrayed him as a deeply eccentric thinker, constantly treading a thin line between genius and madness, and offering a fascinating blend of supreme insight and insane logic (Gilliard 1950, Weil 1952, Borel 1966).

8 On Nietzsche's reception of Rousseau, see Ansell-Pearson 1991; Ogrodnick 1995.

9 Althusser 1967, 2012; Della Volpe 1970, 1987; Lecercle 1982. On the ambivalence of Marxists towards Rousseau, see Spector 2011, ch. 1; Vincenti 2011.

underlying commitment to patriarchy culpably confined Rousseau's condemnation of oppression to the public sphere¹⁰. In each case, Rousseau stood accused of articulating a powerful critique of existing sociability, only to end up endorsing its most repulsive aspects, whether it be moralising egalitarianism, capitalist shallowness, or patriarchal domination. When his solutions were understood as significant departures from the existing social order, it was contended that Rousseau brandished ideals that he knew to be unattainable, and which served a purely critical purpose, providing him with disparate standards with which to condemn the present state of society from a variety of angles¹¹. Judith Shklar spoke for many in affirming that “(h)is enduring originality and fascination are due entirely to the acute psychological insight with which he diagnosed the emotional diseases of modern civilization”¹².

In recent times, however, the value of Rousseau's *œuvre* has received increasing recognition¹³, as both the quality and overall integrity of his thought come to be acknowledged.

On the first point, the old Staëlian perception of Rousseau as a writer who introduced nothing new but “set everything on fire” has long since given way to an appreciation of the genuine depth and originality of his philosophy. As John Plamenatz remarked, Rousseau did much more than breathe new life into old ideas: in combining them in the way he did, he transformed them, and used them to pose radically and

10 See Spector 2011, ch. 8; L'Aminot 1995; Morgenstern 1995; Butler 1995, 2001; Okin 1979, ch. 5; Pateman 1988; Kofman 1989.

11 See in particular Shklar 1969.

12 *Ibid.*, p 1

13 Speaking at the inaugural lecture of Oxford's Jean-Jacques Rousseau Society in 2010, Christopher Brooke pointed to Rousseau's inclusion in a list, compiled by the Chicago scholar Brian Leiter, of “the twenty most important philosophers of all time”, as revealing evidence of the author of *Emile's* rising eminence in academic circles (see Leiter 2009). The fervour of some of the recent celebrations of Rousseau's tricentenary constitutes further proof of the philosopher's current popularity.

revolutionarily new questions¹⁴. His strategic standpoint as both eminent member and denouncer of the *Philosophe* movement at the heart of the French Enlightenment is regarded as crucial in having generated a unique, both immanent and exogenous, critique of his society, and indeed of ours, which the 18th century did so much to shape¹⁵. Rousseau is increasingly regarded as a major source of inspiration for critical thinking about modernity¹⁶.

As to the second point, grounds for denying the overall coherence of Rousseau's thought have become fewer, as scholars recognise the remedial potential of his works as well as its critical potential.

For a long time, defending the integrity of Rousseau's work tended to involve strongly emphasizing one of its dimensions over—sometimes even to the quasi-exclusion of—others¹⁷. Such was the case of the so-called 'idealist' interpretation, originally articulated by Kant, and later prolonged by a long lineage of distinguished scholars, from Ernst Cassirer to John Rawls¹⁸.

According to Cassirer, Rousseau's originality resided in addressing the theological question of evil while jettisoning the dogma of original sin, proposing in its

14 Plamenatz 2012, ch. 11

15 See Mark Hulliung's remarkable 1994 study *Rousseau and the Autocritique of Enlightenment*.

16 On the Frankfurt School's fascination with Rousseau's dissection of corrupt society, see Spector 2011, ch. 7; Honneth 2007, pp. 5-18; Biro 2005.

17 On the successive editions of Rousseau's works, and the different emphasis placed on each part of his corpus depending on political agendas and historical circumstances, see Philip Stewart's excellent 2012 work *Editor Rousseau: Enjeux d'un Corpus (1750-2012)*.

18 Kant's *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786) most cogently sets out the idealist interpretation of Rousseau. Ernst Cassirer's 1932 essay *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* builds on Kant's luminous vision, and has contributed greatly to shifting the academic literature from a questioning of Rousseau's coherence to a search for his work's underlying unity (Cassirer 1989). John Rawls's acclaimed lectures on Rousseau further elaborate the idealist interpretation, taking into consideration more recent developments in Rousseau scholarship, in particular Nicholas Dent's work on the concept of *amour-propre* (Rawls 2007, pp. 191-248). See also Philonenko 1984; Levine 1978a, 2002; Cohen 1997, 2010; Goyard-Fabre 2001; Neuhaus 2008, 2010, 2014a, 2014b; Kolodny 2010.

stead a genealogy of corruption. By exposing how corruption came about and presenting its sources as exogenous rather than inherent to human nature, Rousseau was able to envisage a society devoid of it, in which man could employ the gifts bestowed upon him by God—in particular his capacity for self-determination—to achieve concord on this earth. This would require the establishment of a new kind of political order, in which citizens exercised their freedom by subjecting themselves to laws of their own making. Such laws were given by the *volonté générale*, a rational, omnilateral, and moral will oriented to the common good. Abiding by the *volonté générale* in spite of the contrary influence yielded by their irrational passions made citizens free in the highest sense, i.e. autonomous¹⁹.

Along these lines, the relationship between the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* and *Du Contract Social* becomes workable: humanity progresses from the corruption diagnosed in the first to the freedom championed in the latter through *education*. *Emile* (1762), Rousseau's great treaty on pedagogy, thus constitutes the missing link in the chain: it reveals the road to the ideal of citizenship by propounding a special kind of education that teaches freedom.

The idealist narrative has the merit of delivering a unified and coherent interpretation of Rousseau's philosophy. Alexis Philonenko, one of its advocates, typically emphasizes the systematic character of Rousseau's thought, speaking of “the architectonic technique of Jean-Jacques”²⁰. All the streams of Rousseau's philosophy converge into a single river, merging into a grand aspiration to construct a legitimate *polis* populated by rational, virtuous, and autonomous citizens. Thus, according to the

19 Cassirer 1989

20 Philonenko 1984, p 84

'Kantian' interpretation, Rousseau reinvents sociability around the ideal of autonomy.

Yet, Cassirer's reconstruction of Rousseau's political project, in particular the projection onto Rousseau's works of the Kantian dichotomy between reason and natural inclination, has been heavily criticised by those who quite rightly claim that he “absorbs Rousseau into the philosophical mainstream, but at the price of robbing Jean-Jacques of all that is distinctive in his intellectual position”. “A Rousseau who is German, Kantian, and willing to renounce happiness as an end, a Rousseau whose 'general will' is a warming-up exercise for the 'categorical imperative', is the result”, Mark Hulliung concludes²¹. The idealist vision of Rousseau suffers from two major flaws. Firstly, it rests on an erroneous assimilation of Rousseau's concept of “liberté morale” to Kant's concept of “Autonomie”: in reality, Rousseau's moral theory is far less rationalist than Kant's, positing that reason constitutes but one prong of a trident of faculties that guide “liberté morale”²². And secondly, it leaves the absence of the concept of “liberté morale” from virtually all of Rousseau's political writings entirely unaccounted for, overlooking the distinctive principles of his political theory in an unwarranted effort to subsume it under his moral theory.

An alternative to the idealist interpretation comes in the form of the Straussian 'invisible subtext' theory²³. Straussians argue that beyond the letter of Rousseau's texts lies a secret script accessible only to those who possess the correct reading grid. While Rousseau purportedly advocated political and domestic solutions to the problem of modern corruption, he never intended these as realistic options, favouring instead a

21 Hulliung 1994, p 3

22 “(Dieu) (n)e m'a-t-il pas donné la conscience pour aimer le bien, la raison pour le connoître, la liberté pour le choisir?”, Rousseau's *vicaire savoyard* asks in a capital passage of *Emile* (*Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 605).

23 On the Straussian interpretation of Rousseau, see Melzer 2011; Spector 2011, ch. 3; Smith 2011; Strauss 1947, 1953; Masters 1968; Bloom 1979; Kelly 1987a, 2003; Melzer 1990.

tactical withdrawal into the confines of the self of the kind described in his *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*. Summarising the Straussian interpretation in a recent article, Matthew D. Mendham writes that “(Rousseau) subtly indicates that his political solution—and with it, his many pronouncements in favor of virtue—ought to be read as merely intended for popular consumption” and that “(t)he one life which is currently available to moderns, and which receives true justification according to his most fundamental theoretical or philosophical principles” is the one Rousseau describes in his autobiographical writings, “one of spontaneous, sentimental delight, shorn of human attachments, transcendent moral principles, and their corresponding obligations and burdens”, and this Rousseau knows to be accessible only to “someone with extraordinary intellectual gifts”²⁴. Laurence Cooper insists that it is part of Rousseau's strategy not to render his theories easily accessible, in keeping with the belief he expresses in the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* that philosophy should be the preserve of an elite, beyond the reach of the “multitude”²⁵. Thus, Straussian scholarship depicts Rousseau as something of a 'Patrician' philosopher, who proposes readily accessible but ultimately vacuous models to a popular audience for the actual purpose of providing sufficient elements for reflection to the elite few truly capable of grasping his thought. The kind of sociability Rousseau truly endorses, from this perspective, remains very limited, confined to the small sphere of the *promeneur solitaire*.

Though its emphasis upon identifying which specific audiences Rousseau aims his works for, and the contention that the same text may simultaneously speak to different audiences at different levels, have yielded important insights into Rousseau's thought, the Straussian interpretation, like the idealist interpretation, falls foul of

24 Mendham 2011, pp. 172-173

25 Cooper 2002, pp. 123-124

sidelining vast parts of Rousseau's *œuvre*—particularly his political theory—to the benefit of others. And it does this on the basis of criteria drawn largely from outside Rousseau's own writings, rather than immanent criteria explicitly articulated within them.

Where the idealist interpretation accords priority to Rousseau's moral theory, and the Straussian interpretation to his autobiographical meditations, the republican interpretation focuses primarily on his political theory. Republicans generally consider *Du Contract Social* the centrepiece of Rousseau's thought, regarding it as a text that imagines with unprecedented acuity a political order centred around freedom, though they diverge as to what kind of freedom. While anglophone scholars such as Philip Pettit have shunned Rousseau, due to lingering suspicions of authoritarianism²⁶, continental scholars have, to the contrary, tended to endorse him. Maurizio Viroli, for instance, maintains that Rousseau's “well-ordered society” is designed to uphold a distinctly republican ideal of liberty, protecting citizens from subjection to the will of other men and enabling participation in the political process through which laws are made²⁷. Jean-Fabien Spitz likewise insists that freedom, for the author of *Du Contract Social*, solely involves living in a community of individuals required by law to abstain from imposing their particular wills on each other²⁸. “Rousseau is a passionate promoter of civic virtue, by which he means the strength of moral character to fight against corruption and oppression”, David Boucher writes. “In conformity with republican ideals Rousseau believed that liberty and law were correlative and consistent on condition that those who fall within their jurisdiction are also those who prescribe

26 See Spector 2011, ch. 6; Pettit 2011, pp. 715-716

27 Viroli 1988, p 11

28 Spitz 2007

the law, and sovereignty as a consequence resides in the people and not above them.”²⁹

Though unquestionably in tune with some of Rousseau's political writings, the republican interpretation accords importance to only one of the two great threats to freedom identified by Rousseau in his works, the *external* threat constituted by man's subjection to the will of others, underestimating the other, the *internal* threat represented by the empire of the passions, with which *Emile* is centrally concerned, a theme that cannot be overlooked given the importance accorded by Rousseau himself to that work, which he described as his greatest, as well as the cornerstone of his system. To present “republican liberty” as the only kind of freedom Rousseau seeks to defend is to ignore the philosopher's discussion of freedom in his moral writings. The “Virolian” interpretation thus neglects a considerable amount of the philosopher's treatment of the question of freedom (particularly that found in Book V of *Emile*).

Interpretations that have defended the unity of Rousseau's thought have thus tended to yield compelling but incomplete pictures of his positive ideal of sociability. And they have always been vulnerable to refutations that pointed to those parts of Rousseau's *œuvre* that they left unaccounted for.

By contrast, scholars as diverse as Robert Derathé, Raymond Bazowski, Timothy O'Hagan, Tanguy L'Aminot or Matthew Mendham, without relinquishing the belief in an underlying unity of Rousseau's texts, have sought to highlight the tensions that characterise them. They have identified a divide between the respective ideals of “homme” and “citoyen”, the first a self-sufficient whole, the latter a mere part of the

29 Boucher 2009, p 268

“corps politique”³⁰; or between the divided soul, characterised by inner conflict between duty and inclination, and the unified soul, defined by the convergence of the two³¹; or, still, between irreducible archetypes, such as the “idyllic primitive”, the “moral human”, and the “solitary dreamer”³².

Such efforts to navigate through the complexity of Rousseau's thought, while commendable, have yielded no systematic account of how the different ideals propounded in his works, and the parts of his work that stand in a relationship of mutual tension, might fit together within a coherent whole. This thesis aims to contribute to such an account.

The principle on which the latter must rest is that the unity of Rousseau's thought should be understood in terms of harmony, or consistency, rather than flawless integrity or singularity of purpose. One need not hold that Rousseau's work forms a single systematic project in order to recognise its unity. It will suffice to have demonstrated that the different projects his work articulates rest upon the same underlying principles and understanding of human nature, though, as we shall see, they differ in addressing contrasting political contexts.

III. Argument of the Thesis

“If the fecundity of a philosophy is measured by the number of debates its interpretation has generated”, Bruno Bernardi remarks, “few philosophies are as fecund as that of Rousseau”³³. As early as 1953, George Pire likened the scholarship on

30 Derathé 1962; Bazowski 1984; L'Aminot 2012

31 O'Hagan 1999a, ch. 1; 2004, p 75

32 Mendham 2011, p 184

33 Bernardi 2006, p 309

Rousseau's *œuvre* to a well-trodden archaeological site, where nothing obvious and easily accessible remained to be discovered. “The theories of Rousseau have been the object of thousands of studies of varying quality”, he wrote. “For a long time, the site has offered nothing new to those limiting their endeavours to hasty and random searches. As of now, only special researches, elaborated with perfect objectivity, are worthy of interest.”³⁴

Though laying no claim to “perfect objectivity”, this thesis aims to uncover a “special”, i.e. distinctive and original, area of research in the dialectical relationship between self-love and virtue in Rousseau's philosophy.

Reduced to its essence, the argument will be the following: Rousseau elaborates his moral ideal of virtue through an effort to imagine the very emancipation from the empire of self-love that his political ideal of virtue explicitly rules out, thereby creating a divide between his moral and political projects, and sundering his ideal of freedom into the two potentially irreconcilable goals of moral freedom and republican liberty.

Broadly speaking, there are three different conceptions of freedom articulated in Rousseau's works: firstly, *natural freedom*, which is found in the “sauvages” that populate the state of nature and involves a limited form of free agency, as well as a lack of ties to one's fellow creatures prior to the establishment of society; secondly, *republican liberty*, which denotes the kind of freedom enjoyed by citizens, freedom from oppression through obedience to laws emanating from a political process in which one is a participant; and thirdly, *moral freedom*, rational self-direction enabled by the virtuous mastering of one's passions, a rare achievement that Rousseau associates with

34 Pire 1953, p 57

the figure of the “sage”.

Many commentators assume that the two latter forms of freedom converge, and that the goal of Rousseau's political theory is to allow all citizens to achieve both of them within a well-ordered society. In this thesis, however, it shall be contended that civil and moral freedom may stand further apart within Rousseau's philosophy than has usually been thought. The pursuit of civil freedom is best understood as a collective and political striving, whereas the search for moral freedom should be regarded as an individual moral quest. While *Du Contract Social* provides the keys to civil freedom, *Emile* reveals the path to moral freedom, two quite distinct projects.

This divergence has its roots in Rousseau's treatment of *self-love*, understood as the source of the passions. In effect, the ethos of political virtue described in his political writings involves cultivating self-love to exalt certain kinds of passions, whereas that of moral virtue expounded in his moral writings requires mastering self-love to check the passions. As we shall see, the recent literature on Rousseau's theory of self-love, which arguably overestimates the positive potential of *amour-propre*, has further obscured this crucial distinction.

In fine, two distinct ideals emerge: the ideal of *man*, an independent being who is capable of moral virtue, and that of *citizen*, a fractional individual, integrated into a larger whole, who does not need to be virtuous in the same sense. Whether the author chooses to favour one model or the other in any given case depends largely on the political context, and it is clear that each of the models has its strengths and weaknesses.

The virtuous man experiences the highest form of freedom achievable (moral freedom) by cultivating the ability to govern his passions, but this freedom comes at the price of a certain detachment from the world, which can play into the hands of tyrants. By contrast, the citizen lives in a community designed by the *Législateur* to exempt its members from needing to rule over their passions. Yet, while the conduct of this individual, who carries out his duty out of inclination rather than through inner struggle, is less deserving of moral admiration than that of the morally virtuous man, the socialised inclinations to which he surrenders form the cement of his community, and his dominant passion, “amour de la patrie”, instils in him an ardent pride that fuels his political virtue and his willingness to uphold republican liberty by resisting oppression.

In fine, the citizen's subjection to patriotic passions precludes moral freedom but serves as a rampart against despotism, while the morally virtuous man's empire over his passions gives him access to moral freedom, but at the price of a certain detachment from worldly affairs that can result in the loss of worldly freedom.

IV. Plan of the Thesis

The discussion of these themes, which will constitute the most original part of the thesis, is found in the final chapter of the thesis. The earlier parts seek to highlight the importance and complexity of the question of self-love in Rousseau's political thought, exploring his theory of *amour-propre* (Chapters 1-3) through a series of studies focusing on particular texts (the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* in Chapter 1; the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* in Chapter 2; *Emile* in Chapter 3). This is followed by examinations of Rousseau's concept of *vertu* as well as its relation to *amour-propre* (Chapter 4), and of how this relation plays out in Rousseau's prescriptive political

writings (Chapter 5). These last two chapters prepare the groundwork for the more speculative discussion in the final chapter of the thesis, which advances a distinction between three distinct ideals of freedom found in Rousseau's works (natural independence, republican liberty, and moral freedom) and an explanation of how they relate to one another.

Chapter 1 focuses on Rousseau's earliest political writing, the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, a text which rests, to all appearances, on the idea that the development of the sciences and the arts corrupts a nation's morals. Yet, closer examination reveals that this flamboyantly iconoclastic theory serves merely as a façade designed to conceal a deeper and more sophisticated meditation on the question of social distinction. Even as Rousseau postures as a reactionary critic of the Enlightenment, he subtly points his readers to a more remote cause of corruption: *human pride* and its self-perpetuating socio-political symptoms. After presenting the *First Discourse* and attempting to explain why past scholars have tended to minimise its importance, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that the argument Rousseau seems at first sight to be articulating in the text, namely that the progress of the sciences and the arts has depraved morals, is a red herring that detracts readers away from a deeper argument. It then strives to shed light on the hidden chain of reasoning that lurks in the shadows of the *Discours*, showing that Rousseau actually regards progress in the sciences and the arts as symptomatic of a general desire for social distinction perverted by flawed political institutions. It then seeks to explain why Rousseau took the precaution of concealing his argument, and explores the implications for his political thought more generally. This discussion yields three important conclusions: (1) that the problem of human pride is central to Rousseau's thinking about society's ills from the very

beginning, (2) that the psychological and socio-political dimensions of this problem are inseparably linked in his analysis, and (3) that pride is identified by Rousseau as a complex phenomenon, from which spring both good and evil, both that which is best and that which is worst in human behaviour.

The second chapter examines the emergence in Rousseau's lexicon of the terms “amour de soi” and “amour-propre”, which denote two distinct varieties of human self-love. Rousseau's employment of the concepts of “amour de soi” and “amour-propre”, it is argued, constitutes a response to earlier theorists that both borrows and transforms their ideas. Rousseau rejects the optimism of *doux commerce* theories concerning the benefits of harnessed selfishness, endorsing much of the Augustinian diagnosis of the vices associated with self-love, but also seeks to distance himself from the Augustinians on two key points, in both cases drawing inspiration from other schools of thought. Firstly, he endorses the worldliness of *doux commerce* theories, focusing his moral concerns on relations *between men* rather than the fundamental relationship *between man and God* privileged by the Augustinians: for Rousseau, the problem of self-love is an *interpersonal* problem. Secondly, in an effort to undercut the Augustinian condemnation of (fallen) human nature as such, Rousseau reclaims and historicizes the distinction introduced by the Christian Humanists between different forms of self-love: to the corrupt “amour-propre”, which is a product of society, he opposes the natural “amour de soi”, a beneficent kind of self-love found in those human beings unsoiled by the social world, the primitive men of the state of nature. This allows Rousseau to explain how human nature, which he takes to have been initially good, evolved into its ghastly modern form, and why unbridled pride can be regarded as a contingent rather than a necessary feature of humanity.

The third chapter focuses on *Emile*, Rousseau's treatise on education. Having provided a genealogy of vice in the *Second Discourse*, which explained how human nature became corrupted (and how “amour-propre” played a pivotal role in this process), Rousseau now turns from a history of the species to a history of the individual, in an effort to explore the potential of human nature, raising the possibility that a proper education of the passions might render possible a life of happiness and freedom in the midst of society.

In *Emile*, Rousseau moves away from the stark dichotomy found in the *Second Discourse* between natural “amour de soi” and corrupt “amour-propre”, favouring instead a sophisticated conception of self-love reminiscent of the Stoic idea of “oikeiosis”, according to which each individual is animated by a single principle of self-love that evolves over time, progressing from a primitive concern with one's own preservation to an understanding of one's place within the cosmic order. Along these lines, “amour de soi” is recast as the single source of the passions, the origin and the principle of all the others, and “amour-propre” is re-imagined as a tool in the education of “amour de soi”, enabling its gradual blossoming into “amour de l'ordre”, a higher form of love, as the individual extends his being beyond himself.

To describe the development of “amour de soi”, Rousseau chooses a particular mode of narration: borrowing the Senecan idea that man has a different constitution for each phase of his life, he divides his work into five distinct books, each dealing with a particular age and defending a different treatment of the passions. Consequently, the passages dealing with the culture of Emile's passions need to be understood within the

context of the specific “constitution” to which they apply. Yet, the approach adopted by scholars adhering to the highly influential 'optimistic' interpretation of *amour-propre* relies almost exclusively on passages drawn from a narrow portion of *Emile*, the opening pages of Book IV, described as the treatment of *amour-propre* to which one should “attribute the greatest authority in (Rousseau's) work” and “(t)he decisive phase of Emile's education”. In reality, Rousseau's description of *amour-propre* in Book IV of *Emile* forms only one part of the work's overall treatment of the problem of self-love, only one ring in “the great chain of ages”, covering a particular phase of Emile's education, during which he enters society and experiences the awakening of his passions. As we shall see, Rousseau's enthusiasm with Emile's “seconde naissance” in Book IV is tempered by his recognition, in Book V, of the problems it has created. If Book IV reveals the constructive potential of *amour-propre*, Book V exposes its darker side. While the former explains how this “instrument” can be “utile”, the latter reminds readers why it remains “dangereux”.

Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the concept of “vertu”, scrutinizing its evolution in Rousseau's successive works. Beginning with a classical understanding of the virtues, Rousseau progressively crafts his own conception, incorporating Stoic and Christian elements. As it evolves, his theory posits an increasingly sharp dichotomy between *natural goodness*—characterised by spontaneity—and *moral goodness*—produced by the inner struggle between a higher and a lower self. Significantly, as his writings on the Abbé de Saint-Pierre make abundantly clear, Rousseau did not believe it was reasonable to expect most men to be virtuous; instead, he argued that the bulk of mankind is driven by passion, not reason, and to have overlooked this reality constituted Saint-Pierre's fundamental mistake, and the cause of his political naivety.

Chapter 5 seeks to demonstrate how the conviction expressed in the writings on Saint-Pierre manifests itself in Rousseau's prescriptive political works. A parallel is established between the models of ancient citizenship Rousseau admires above all others, those of Sparta and Rome, and the conception of citizenship outlined in *Economie Politique*, an article written by Rousseau for the *Encyclopédie*. The model citizen is here conceived as a fraction of a whole, and an individual who performs his civic duties by inclination. In his imaginary role as a *Législateur* in the texts on Geneva, Corsica and Poland, Rousseau applies the model articulated in *Economie Politique* to particular circumstances, and the conception of citizenship he espouses in them differs significantly from the conception of the virtuous man celebrated in *Emile*. This challenges a central tenet of the idealist reading of Rousseau, according to which the education of man presented in his pedagogic text constitutes a preparation for citizenship in the ideal society of *Du Contract Social*.

The final chapter brings the discussions of the previous chapters to bear on the important question of the place of “liberté morale” in Rousseau's political theory. Most interpreters of Rousseau have assumed that the Republic described in his political writings enables citizens to secure this higher form of freedom through their participation in the “volonté générale”, for, to quote a famous passage from Book I, Chapter 8 of *Du Contract Social*, “l'impulsion du seul appetit est esclavage, et l'obéissance à la loi qu'on s'est prescrite est liberté”. However, Rousseau in fact seems to associate “liberté morale” with individuals evolving outside the Republic, animated by “vertu” rather than “amour de la patrie”. Drawing a distinction between three different conceptions of freedom articulated in Rousseau's texts—natural independence,

republican liberty, and moral freedom—the chapter endeavours to reveal the complexity of the relationship between republican liberty and moral freedom, arguing that the first conveys an ideal of *political* self-rule and the second, by contrast, an ideal of *moral* self-rule. The tension between these two ideals is then highlighted with reference to Rousseau's deployment of distinct political languages in his texts, focusing on *Du Contrat Social* and its relationship to Rousseau's other political writings, and to specific passages of his *œuvre* that demonstrate the divergence in Rousseau's thought between the categories of “homme” and “citoyen”.

V. Questions of Methodology

Contributions to political theory generally—though by no means necessarily—fall into one of two categories. In a recent study, David Boucher and Paul Kelly rightly distinguish between, on the one hand, the crafting of political theories, and, on the other hand, interpretations of, or commentaries on, those theories³⁵. One might, along these lines, speak of a division between 'theory' and 'meta-theory'.

The present study falls clearly under the second category. This thesis constitutes a hermeneutic exercise, an attempt to interpret Rousseau's political theory and highlight both its quality and complexity. It derives its justification from the firm belief, defended with distinction by John Plamenatz, that intense engagement with the texts of history's great political thinkers can greatly enrich and expand our capacity for reflection on political matters³⁶.

Naturally, a study of this kind involves making certain decisions about how to

35 Boucher & Kelly 2009

36 See Plamenatz 1960.

approach Rousseau's works. Thus, in addition to the substantive political questions the thesis engages, there are a number of methodological questions to address. We can divide the discussion into two separate questions: *what* works to study, and *how* to interpret them.

1. *Texts Encompassed*

On the first point, the method chosen in this thesis for navigating through the labyrinth of Rousseau's copious, 6,000 page *œuvre* has been influenced by three considerations.

Firstly, Rousseau belonged to an intellectual culture that considered all areas of human knowledge as forming a whole. As Judith Shklar remarks, if Rousseau was so penetrating and convincing, it was partly because his philosophy was so comprehensive, encompassing psychological, pedagogic, artistic, ethical, religious, and of course political ideas³⁷. As Michael Sonenscher has remarked, the *Citoyen de Genève*—as Rousseau liked to call himself—played a preponderant role in shaping the perceptions of his contemporaries on an impressively wide array of subjects, exerting a powerful and multifarious influence, not only upon his followers, but also upon his critics, who were forced to rethink their assumptions in light of his philosophy³⁸. What is more, Rousseau deemed all of these different ideas relevant to his political theory, famously declaring in the *Confessions* that “tout tenoit radicalement à la politique”³⁹. Indeed, even his literary works and his writings on the arts contain numerous discussions of political questions⁴⁰. As such, none of Rousseau's texts should in principle be beyond

37 Shklar 1969, Postscript

38 See Sonenscher 2008, Introduction

39 *Confessions*, IX, OC 1, p 404

40 Examples include the long letter on the political economy of the Baron de Wolmar's domain in Part IV, Letter 10 of *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*; the thought experiment in which the author imagines

the purview of our enquiry.

Secondly, the thesis deals more particularly with Rousseau's political theory, and discusses other parts of his work only insofar as they have important implications for his political theory. Let us define political theory as systematic thought on the nature and purposes of government, as well, potentially, as reflection on the means of realising these purposes⁴¹. It is widely agreed that Rousseau's political theory is centrally concerned with promoting freedom, however one defines it. Accordingly, aside from his openly political writings, in which he deals directly with the question of how to govern a people, this thesis examines many of Rousseau's less openly political works, focusing specifically on their contribution to the promotion of freedom.

Thirdly, as explained above, this thesis aims to engage critically with the existing literature on Rousseau. This, perhaps inevitably, leads one to accord considerable importance to key works that have constituted fertile battlegrounds for scholars wishing to defend particular interpretations of Rousseau's theories. As a result, famous texts such as the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, *Emile* and *Du Contract Social* figure prominently in this thesis. In fine, there is—and should be—no getting round these monuments, in which Rousseau develops his ideas in greatest depth. However, texts that have traditionally been regarded as peripheral, such as the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne* or *Emile's* unfinished novel *Emile et Sophie*, as well as a plethora of shorter texts that invite the reader to understand

the socio-political consequences of establishing a theatre on the hill of the *Montagnons* in the *Lettre à D'Alembert sur les Spectacles*; and the frequent sprinklings of political theory throughout the twelve books of the *Confessions*. In a recent study, Jean-François Perrin highlights the political character of Rousseau's late autobiographical writings (Perrin 2011). Christopher Kelly has also shown how the *Confessions* portray Rousseau striving to embody the principles defended in his theoretical writings (Kelly 1987a).

41 This definition is loosely based on Plamenatz's description of political theory as “systematic thinking about the purposes of government” (Plamenatz 1960, p 37).

the arguments articulated in Rousseau's more familiar works differently, are also explored.

2. *Method of Interpretation*

As to the question of *how* to interpret Rousseau's texts, scholars who turn to the study of great thinkers of the past have tended to divide into two camps, between which fierce methodological wars have raged in recent decades⁴². Using Michael Freedon's typology, we might call these, respectively, 'the history of political thought' and 'analytical political philosophy'⁴³. The first holds that to understand a text requires placing it—and its author—in their historical context, while the second contends that great texts can be profitably read and mined for abstract arguments independently of the particular circumstances in which they were written. To these two kinds of approaches correspond two different visions of a thinker's *œuvre*: for the first, it is a historical artifact, which—if properly read and contextualised—reveals truths about the author and his time; for the second, it is instead an enduring source of inspiration for creative thinking about perennial political questions.

From the standpoint of the political theorist, the two enterprises overlap to a degree. On the one hand, it becomes a mystery why the student of political theory should invoke Rousseau's name at all if the purpose of his research is to discuss timeless questions with reference to Rousseau's texts without any regard for the accuracy of his interpretations of those texts. On the other hand, a purely descriptive account of

42 “The study of political thought”, Iain Hampsher-Monk observes, “is a kind of intellectual no-man's land, a subject of border disputes between (at least) the adjacent territories of politics, philosophy and history” (Hampsher-Monk 1992, p ix).

43 Freedon 2008, p 214

Rousseau's political thought, fully embedded in its 18th century context, devoid of any reflection on Rousseau's contribution to political theory in a broader sense, would undoubtedly constitute a project fit for historians, but the political theorist's purview must extend beyond this, and encompass a concern with theoretical issues that transcend, at least to some degree, the particular circumstances of an author.

Assuredly, without a grasp of a work's context, purely textual and abstract approaches may struggle to yield accurate interpretations. Firstly, the interpreter will lack criteria for comparing claims articulated in different kinds of texts. Should one, for instance, place on the same footing a claim made in one of Rousseau's early *Discourses*, an idea put into the mouth of a character of the epistolary novel *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, and a seemingly random musing included in the *Rêveries*? Surely the distinct character of a text needs to be taken into account when evaluating its content; it is difficult to fully understand it without an awareness of its particular texture and purpose. And this holds all the more true in the case of a thinker who operated on such wide and diverse a range of repertoires as Rousseau. Secondly, an author's philosophy is rarely the result of a single moment of epiphany; it is often, instead, a lengthy and sinuous intellectual journey that only gradually takes him to his final destination. Many of his texts will reflect intermediary steps along the path, and will thus contain only tentative claims and arguments, which may eventually be superseded by more sophisticated arguments developed in later texts. "Rousseau's thought", Marcel Raymond writes, "is ever in search of itself, it is perpetually in movement, and the modern concept of 'dialectic' alone describes with any degree of accuracy its succession of antagonistic options, which static logic cannot but interpret as contradictions"⁴⁴.

44 Raymond in OC 4, p xvii

There are also other obstacles to achieving an accurate understanding of Rousseau's thought, such as his *style*⁴⁵ or the major influence he has exerted on later authors, which can deceive us into attributing to him ideas and arguments that have merely been projected onto him by others: many layers of interpretation separate us from the real Rousseau⁴⁶. As Céline Spector's work has shown, interpreters of all stripes have sought to appropriate Rousseau's philosophy, refracting it through a considerable variety of prisms⁴⁷. In this regard, Rousseau's seemingly eternal relevance, the ease with which his work can be reactivated, plays to his disadvantage. As Jean Starobinski remarks, “every generation discovers a new Rousseau, in which it sees what it wants to be, or what it passionately refuses”⁴⁸.

For these reasons, historical approaches not only enrich the discipline of political theory considerably, but also constitute a precondition for gaining access to its great authors. They describe the matrix that endows texts with their original meaning and significance. They also alert us to the specificities of the intellectual universe in which these texts emerged, a universe that may be very different from our own. As Robert Darnton remarks, “(w)e constantly need to be shaken out of a false sense of familiarity with the past”⁴⁹.

This is not, of course, to imply that such texts should be deemed mere products of their time. Overemphasizing the importance of historical context may result in what

45 Indeed, Rousseau's concern with rhetorical effect is everywhere present. “(L)'art d'écrire n'est rien moins qu'une étude oiseuse quand on l'employe à faire écouter la vérité”, Rousseau writes in *Emile* (*Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 673). John Rawls commends the “unsurpassed” “union of literary force and power of thought” found in Rousseau's works, but warns that the “splendor of style” “can be a danger, attracting attention to itself, as it does in Rousseau” (Rawls 2007, pp. 191-192), while Victor Gourevitch speaks of the “dramatic form” of Rousseau's texts (Gourevitch 1997a, p ix).

46 Derathé 1950, p 7; Starobinski 1971, p 322

47 See Spector 2011.

48 Starobinski 1971, p 319

49 Darnton 2009, p 4

Iain Hampsher-Monk—himself an ardent advocate of contextual approaches to the history of political thought—describes as “the tendency for a text, and indeed an author, to be so securely located in their historical and intellectual milieu as to be submerged and overcome by it”⁵⁰. As Mark Bevir rightly argues, there exists a risk of portraying the history of ideas “in a way that reduces mind to a social construct”⁵¹. The more determinative one deems a political theorist's historical context, the less room one leaves for his agency as a creative thinker rather than merely a mirror of his society. “People accept different theories and say different things against the background of the same social structure”, Bevir insists, “and we can explain why they do so only by referring to the creative way they reason as individuals”⁵². Quentin Skinner, a leading light of the 'Cambridge school', which has placed a strong emphasis on the historical context of political thinkers, recognises that “agency deserves after all to be privileged over structure in social explanation”. “Language”, he continues, though “a constraint” that “shapes us all”, “is also a resource, and we can use it to shape our world”⁵³. It would make little sense to stress the originality of a political theorist if one failed to acknowledge that what made that thinker original lay precisely in the ability to overcome, to some extent, the determinisms of his context in order to articulate genuinely new arguments. As Hampsher-Monk rightly insists, recognition of the constraints exercised on an author by his or her historical context and emphasis on an author's capacity for creative thinking need not be antithetical: quite to the contrary, “the one is the very condition of the other”⁵⁴. Major political thinkers are constrained, but not imprisoned, by their historical context.

50 Hampsher-Monk 1992, p x. “(W)riter and text”, Hampsher-Monk adds, “can actually fragment and disappear into context, appearing no more than the sum of its hermeneutic parts” (Ibid., p xi).

51 Bevir 1997, p 169

52 Ibid., p 171

53 Skinner 2002, p 7

54 Hampsher-Monk 1992, p xi

In fine, recognition that Rousseau's political thought germinated in particular circumstances should not count as an obstacle to critical engagement with his arguments, but rather as a precondition for understanding them. As Jeremy Waldron rightly insists, historical contextualisation holds the potential to greatly enhance our understanding of major political thinkers, but also runs the risk of playing down the philosophical dimension of their texts, and overemphasizing their function as pieces written for particular political occasions. Knowledge of a work's historical context should be regarded “more as a complement to, than a substitute for, serious philosophical analysis”⁵⁵.

Rousseau clearly intended his own works to outlive his century and serve as a source of inspiration beyond his particular context. “Il y aura dans tous les tems des hommes faits pour être subjugués par les opinions de leur siècle, de leur Pays, de leur Société”, he affirmed in the preface of the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, insisting that “(i)l ne faut point écrire pour de tels Lecteurs, quand on veut vivre au-delà de son siècle”⁵⁶. As we have seen, readers of Rousseau's texts do indeed often feel that they possess an ageless resonance and an acute relevance to modern political questions. Rousseau, Claude Habib and Pierre Manent write, was “neither of his time, nor any other”⁵⁷. “Ours may not be an enlightened age, but it is one shaped by the Age of Enlightenment”, Mark Hulliung writes. “To the undeniable extent that we remain the children of the Enlightenment, both accepting and contesting its heritage, Rousseau's debate with the philosophes is inevitably a matter pertaining to the present no less than to the past.”⁵⁸ In the words of John T. Scott, “we wrestle with genies he let out of the

55 Waldron 2009a, p 207

56 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, Preface, OC 3, p 3

57 Habib & Manent 2013, p 8

58 Hulliung 1994, p 8

bottle”⁵⁹.

Three hundred years after his birth, Rousseau remains the object of countless studies and monographs. The ardour with which subsequent thinkers have continued to discuss Rousseau does not necessarily constitute evidence that we understand him; if anything, it is evidence of our perpetual difficulties in understanding him. But it is certainly strong evidence of his enduring appeal and influence, which, for better or worse, give his works a lasting relevance.

⁵⁹ Scott 1994, p 501

Chapter 1: Declamation and Deception in Rousseau's *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*

*Or maintenant voulez-vous, mes amis,
Savoir un peu, dans nos jours tant maudits,
Soit à Paris, soit dans Londres, ou dans Rome,
Quel est le train des jours d'un honnête homme?
Entrez chez lui: la foule des beaux-arts,
Enfants du goût, se montre à vos regards.*

– Voltaire, *Le Mondain* (1736)

Introduction

1. Rousseau's *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*

Despite his numerous productions as a novelist, playwright, and composer, Rousseau has often been portrayed as an enemy of the arts and of intellectual finesse in general. “For all that he was a composer and a musical theorist”, Isaiah Berlin asserted, “he detested the arts and the sciences; he disliked every form of sophistication, every form of refinement, every form of fastidiousness”¹. Rousseau's first major work, the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* (or *First Discourse*) is usually cited as evidence of this bent. A flamboyant text in which the author appears to equate intellectual progress with gradual moral corruption, the *Discours* has often been regarded as the antithesis of the Enlightenment's celebration of the sciences and the arts: a manifesto for stability over progress, simplicity over complexity, and virtue over urbanity.

Yet, the *Discours* is a text full of ambiguity, dilemmas and paradoxes, which resists such a simplistic reading. To fully understand its argument, caricature must be left aside in favour of rigorous examination.

¹ Berlin 2002, pp. 40-41

The *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* was written and submitted to the Academy of Dijon in 1749 as part of a competition² in which candidates were asked to answer the question “Si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs”. It was published with a few minor changes the following year, bearing the proud signature “Citoyen de Genève”³.

In a letter written to Monsieur de Malesherbes, a royal censor, on 12 January 1762, Rousseau vividly described the genesis of the *First Discourse*:

“J'allois voir Diderot alors prisonnier à Vincennes; j'avois dans ma poche un *Mercure de France* que je me mis à feuilleter le long du chemin. Je tombe sur la question de l'Academie de Dijon qui a donné lieu à mon premier écrit. Si jamais quelque chose a ressemblé à une inspiration subite, c'est le mouvement qui se fit en moi à cette lecture; tout à coup je me sens l'esprit ébloui de mille lumieres; des foules d'idées vives s'y presenterent à la fois avec une force et une confusion qui me jetta dans un trouble inexprimable; je sens ma tête prise par un etourdissement semblable à l'ivresse. Une violente palpitation m'opresse, souleve ma poitrine; ne pouvant plus respirer en marchant, je me laisse tomber sous un des arbres de l'avenüe, et j'y passe une demie heure dans une telle agitation qu'en me relevant j'apperçus tout le devant de ma veste mouillé de mes larmes sans avoir senti que j'en répandois. Oh Monsieur si j'avois jamais pû écrire le quart de ce que j'ai vû et senti sous cet arbre, avec quelle clarté j'aurois fait voir toutes les contradictions du systeme social, avec quelle force j'aurois exposé tous les abus de nos institutions, avec quelle simplicité j'aurois démontré que l'homme est bon naturellement et que c'est par ces institutions seules que les hommes deviennent méchants.”⁴

The text would change Rousseau's fortunes dramatically. Winning the Academy's first prize, it brought instant fame to this son of a Genevan clockmaker, who until then had largely failed in his efforts to distinguish himself on the Parisian scene. The philosopher would later claim that writing the *Discours* was the single most fateful act of his life,

2 On Rousseau's participation in the Academy of Dijon's competitions and the rivals he faced on each occasion, see Marcil 1995.

3 Rousseau first styled himself as a “Citoyen de Genève” in a letter written to Voltaire on 30 January 1750. It seems likely that proclaiming himself a citizen of his native city was initially less a political statement than a more prosaic attempt to distinguish himself from illustrious homonyms, in particular the renowned Parisian poet Jean-Baptiste Rousseau.

4 *Lettres à Malesherbes*, II, OC 1, pp. 1135-1136

embarking him on an ineluctable journey that would lead to the discovery of sublime philosophical truths, and end with his demise at the hands of a diabolical cabal of invisible enemies⁵.

Although it has contributed significantly to Rousseau's self-cultivated image as a unique figure on the intellectual landscape of 18th-Century France, a special kind of thinker, a man that was more "ardent" than he was "éclairé"⁶, and whose inspiration sprang from a certain warmth of soul rather than an efficient intellect⁷, the mythologisation of the episode on the road to Vincennes has cast a long shadow over the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*. Instead of according the text the attention it deserves in its own right, interpreters have all too frequently overlooked or marginalised it, treating it as an exciting but inchoate prelude to the author's mature political philosophy. Many scholars infer from Rousseau's startling story that the text was the effect (perhaps even the symptom) of feverish inspiration rather than the carefully elaborated product of serious reflection. Other interpreters point to the grandiloquent prose of the *First Discourse*, a text which one can nearly hear the author bringing to life to dramatic effect in a large and dark auditorium, to suggest that the text is above all else a rhetorical masterpiece in which style emphatically triumphs over substance⁸. By contrast, some readers have drawn on remarks Rousseau made in a few of his later works to argue that the *Discours* should be read in the light of his "system", an architectonic philosophical edifice configured around the idea of man's "natural

5 In the *Confessions*, Rousseau recounted that his friend Diderot encouraged him to compete for the prize. "Je le fis, et dès cet instant je fus perdu", he wrote. "Tout le reste de ma vie et de mes malheurs fut l'effet inévitable de cet instant d'égarement" (*Confessions*, VIII, OC 1, p 351).

6 *Lettre à Beaumont*, OC 4, p 928

7 *Confessions*, III, OC 1, p 113

8 Cassirer (1989) [1932], p 48. Abraham Keller writes that the *First Discourse* "could hardly fail to attract notice, by its enthusiasm and paradoxical nature, if not by any logical organisation or historical soundness" (Keller 1939, p 212). Timothy O'Hagan follows "Rousseau's judgement on (the *First Discourse*), that it is 'mediocre' and 'slight'" (O'Hagan 1999A, p 10). See also Hope Mason 1987, p 251; Wade 1948, p 511.

goodness”⁹.

Undeniably, Rousseau must carry some of the blame for this state of affairs. In the *Confessions*, after somewhat prosaically disclosing that the ideas contained in the *First Discourse* were conceived during the insomnia of his nights, he wrote that the text, though eloquent, was lacking in logic and order, and constituted his weakest work in terms of reasoning¹⁰. Yet these claims must be put into context; in the preface to *Emile*, a book he later proclaimed his greatest work, Rousseau equally affirmed that the ensuing text lacked order and coherence¹¹. One should probably not read too much into such statements. Moreover, while it is true that Rousseau retrospectively included the *First Discourse* in his “system”, whether it be in the instructive letters to Malesherbes¹² or the rancorous *Dialogues*, where he indicated that his first and second *Discourses* laid the preliminary foundations for a probing analysis of human nature that came fully to fruition only in *Emile*¹³, the actual evidence for interpreting the *First Discourse* as a prelude to *Emile* is certainly sparse. There is no explicit mention of the “natural goodness” of man in the *Discours*, and crucial themes that form the cornerstone of the author’s mature philosophy, such as man’s perfectibility, the transition from the state of nature to society, and the mutability of the passions, are conspicuously absent. There is little doubt that, in mulling over his prize-winning essay, and retrospectively situating it within a grand philosophical system, Rousseau was trying to make his own intellectual journey look more coherent and teleological than it had actually been. This is not to deny that there exists a connection between the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* and Rousseau’s later works, but as we shall see, the linkage is less obvious than the one he

9 Melzer 1990

10 “(C)et ouvrage, plein de chaleur et de force, manque absolument de logique et d'ordre; de tous ceux qui sont sortis de ma plume c'est le plus foible de raisonnement” (*Confessions*, VII, OC 1, p 352).

11 *Emile*, Preface, OC 4, p 241

12 *Lettres à Malesherbes*, II, OC 1, p 1136

13 *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, III, OC 1, p 933

indicated to his readers.

Past interpreters have read the *First Discourse* in a variety of ways; some have dismissed it as ornamental and devoid of philosophical content, while others have sought to integrate it within a larger theoretical structure. All have tended to share the assumption that the argument presented in the text itself is unsatisfactory and incomplete. Yet, both perceptions face obvious problems. On the one hand, those who take the *Discours* to be a mere rhetorical tour de force fail to explain why it made its author stand out, and achieve instant fame, in a century (and a country) where eloquence of the most exquisite kind was everywhere on display. They also fall short of accounting for Rousseau's own, repeated, assertions as to the text's importance. On the other hand, those who claim to have seen the seeds of Rousseau's later philosophy in the *First Discourse* struggle in vain to establish a linear theoretical continuity between this early work and philosophically richer writings such as the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* and *Emile*.

In order to achieve a firmer grasp of the argument presented in the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, and its significance within the wider context of the author's *œuvre*, one must therefore be prepared to pay closer attention to the text itself, and to do away both with the notion that it consists in a philosophically hollow declamation, and with the idea that it merely constitutes one wheel in the vaster machinery of Rousseau's complex system rather than a contribution that can stand on its own merits.

2. *The Tale of Prometheus*

One good place to begin our enquiry is on the title page of the work. As with

many of his later writings, Rousseau commissioned a frontispiece for the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, in which the overarching message of the text was symbolically conveyed through imagery. In this case, the illustration depicts the myth of Prometheus, a Greek titan famous for descending from Mount Olympus to offer fire to mankind. As Prometheus brandishes his glorious torch in the illustration, a satyr steps forward, lured by the bright flame, and foolishly attempts to embrace it. In a 1752 letter written to Claude-Nicolas Lecat, a scientist from Rouen, Rousseau—somewhat exasperated by his correspondent’s failure to grasp its meaning—explicated the symbolism behind the allegory:

“J’aurois cru faire injure aux Lecteurs, et les traiter comme des enfans, de leur interpréter une allégorie si claire; de leur dire que le flambeau de Prométhée est celui des Sciences fait pour animer les grands génies; que le Satyre, qui voyant le feu pour la première fois, court à lui, et veut l’embrasser, représente les hommes vulgaires, qui séduits par l’éclat des Lettres, se livrent indiscretement à l’étude; que le Prométhée qui crie et les avertit du danger, est le Citoyen de Geneve.”¹⁴

Rousseau’s irritation was quite unwarranted, since the story of Prometheus is one of the most ambiguous tales of Greek mythology, and has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Moreover, close inspection of Rousseau’s particular treatment of the myth reveals that he has altered the original story. The torch of Prometheus was traditionally said to give man the secret of new techniques initially oriented towards assuring his immediate survival. Disconcerted by humanity’s miserly condition on earth, the titan taught them how to use fire to heat their abodes, and subsequently inspired them to develop masonry, agriculture, metallurgy, and other useful crafts, ushering in a golden age of prosperity¹⁵. Yet, in Rousseau’s version of the story, the torch no longer symbolises useful crafts to be practised by common labourers, but instead theoretical sciences

14 *Lettre à Lecat*, OC 3, p 102

15 This early version of the tale is found in Plato’s *Protagoras* (320d-322a), and in Plutarch’s *Moralia*, II, 7-8.

suites to “great geniuses”. Furthermore, in the original tale the torch of Prometheus proves to be a blessing for mankind, bringing about wealth and happiness; the bliss of this golden age is only later spoiled by the wrath of Zeus. For Rousseau, however, the two moments of prosperity and demise converge into a single moment, the torch simultaneously representing both a blessing and a considerable hazard for humanity.



The frontispiece of Rousseau's *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*

Rousseau's rendition of the myth introduces two important elements. Firstly, the torch appears as a blessing for the gifted few and a danger for common mortals, which suggests that the underlying message of the *Discours* might be that the sciences and the arts, while beneficial to a closed circle of geniuses, are detrimental to the ordinary folk that constitute the bulk of mankind. They are indeed magnificent gifts bestowed upon

mankind, but they should be reserved to those who alone are capable of handling the sublime torch of Prometheus without burning their fingers. The benefits of Enlightenment may be universal, but its instruments are not for all. Secondly, and equally importantly, what renders the torch dangerous for the satyr is less its intrinsic properties than the fascination it exerts: it is hazardous not primarily because it can burn the satyr's beard, but because it *attracts* the satyr to it. The sciences and the arts are dangerous precisely to the extent that the vulgar are drawn to their “éclat”.

This chapter argues that it is the *attractiveness* of the sciences and the arts that constitutes the central problem of the *Discours*. What Rousseau's version of the ancient tale alerts us to is perhaps less the deleterious effects of the Promethean torch on the satyr than the process through which the satyr becomes seduced by the torch. It is the glory that accrues to those who study the sciences and cultivate the arts that Rousseau deems problematic, because of the envy it stirs among the multitude. The true purpose of the text is to critique the manner in which enlightened societies distribute social prestige among their populations. The primary subject of the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* is, paradoxically, neither the sciences nor the arts, but rather the complex psychology of social distinction of which they turn out to be both unconfessed products and perpetuating causes.

The discussion is divided into three parts: the first examines how Rousseau's flamboyant critique of the sciences and the arts appears to warrant a 'Philistine' interpretation of the *First Discourse*, according to which the text expresses a genuine loathing for culture, and strives to defend the simplicity of rural values against the ghastly complexity of urban sophistication, but argues that this impression is

misleading, and deliberately created by Rousseau to conceal a deeper argument which he had every reason to wish to articulate discreetly; the second points to a deeper argument in the *Discours*, which deals with the problems of inequality and social distinction; and the third explores why Rousseau concealed this argument behind a polemical façade.

I. The Prima Facie Argument of the *Discours*

1. *The Importance of Mœurs*

In addressing the question of the effect of the sciences and the arts on “mœurs”, the *First Discourse* was from the outset oriented toward political reflection. The word “mœurs” derives from the Latin *mos* (plural: *moris*), meaning “the customs and way of life of human beings”¹⁶. It designates the habits, mores and beliefs of a population, often considered from a moral point of view. Unlike modern political theorists, who focus their attention almost exclusively on political institutions and fundamental principles, Rousseau held that if a society was to live up to certain ideals, a sound constitution and just institutions were not enough: its population also needed to conform to a particular way of life. In this respect, Rousseau drew inspiration from the spirit of the Ancients, and the revival of ancient principles of statecraft by modern political theorists such as Machiavelli and Montesquieu¹⁷. In the *De l'Esprit des Lois* (1748), Montesquieu famously distinguished three types of political regimes, and contended that each rested on a particular kind of morals, defined by what he called a “principe”.

The *principe* of a republic, where citizens were taught to identify their own good with

16 The 1762 edition of the French Academy's dictionary defines “mœurs” as “(h)abitudes naturelles ou acquises pour le bien ou pour le mal dans tout ce qui regarde la conduite de la vie”.

17 “(I)t was above all Montesquieu from whom Rousseau took inspiration for his ancient orientation”, Jason S. Maloy notes. “Alongside Machiavelli, Montesquieu set the terms of the problem of *mœurs* for the likes of Mably and Rousseau by stressing the centrality of disposition and custom to political outcomes.” (Maloy 2005, pp. 241-242)

the common good, was *virtue*; that of a monarchy, where subjects strove to achieve personal glory, was *honour*; and that of despotism, where men lived in the formidable clutches of one all-powerful ruler, was *fear*¹⁸. These dispositions characterised the relations of individuals both to one another and to the state, and allowed the regime to function and perpetuate itself over time. Thus the question of *mœurs* was an eminently political question, on which hinged the very survival of polities. “To the extent that conduct depends on disposition”, Jason S. Maloy writes, “*mœurs* are the most fundamental element in politics”¹⁹.

In *Du Contract Social*, Rousseau was equally adamant about the importance of *mœurs*, describing them as the most important of all laws, those that were “inscribed neither on marble nor on brass, but in the hearts of the citizens”, and which “maintain a people in the spirit of its institutions”²⁰. However, Rousseau strongly disagreed with Montesquieu's vision of virtue as the principle of small republics alone, thus making it politically irrelevant in other circumstances: for Rousseau, virtue formed the cornerstone of any legitimate government, including monarchies²¹. This reflected a fundamentally different understanding of political legitimacy: both Montesquieu and Rousseau agreed that monarchical rule suited large states, and that democratic rule befitted small states²², but while Montesquieu systematically referred to republics as small political units, Rousseau described as republican any regime in which the private strivings of individuals were purposely oriented to the common good of society, i.e. any regime in which the “*volonté générale*” prevailed²³. Thus while Montesquieu deemed

18 *De l'Esprit des Lois*, III, 3-9

19 Maloy 2005, pp. 239-240

20 *Du Contract Social*, II:12, OC 3, p 394

21 *Ibid.*, III:4, OC 3, p 405. See Sonenscher 2007, pp. 222-228.

22 *De l'Esprit des Lois*, VIII:16; *Du Contract Social*, III:3, OC 3, pp. 403-404. See Levy 2006.

23 “J'appelle donc République tout Etat régi par des loix, sous quelque forme d'administration que ce puisse être: car alors seulement l'intérêt public gouverne, et la chose publique est quelque chose. Tout Gouvernement légitime est républicain” (*Du Contract Social*, II:6, OC 3, pp. 379-380). Indeed,

the self-serving aspirations of a king's subjects legitimate and beneficent, because in conformity with the *principe* of the monarchical regime, Rousseau, at the opposite, held that selfishness and indifference to the public good invariably spelt ruin for society²⁴. Only through virtue, and the sound *mœurs* that sustain it, could a community live together in concord and freedom. Republican *mœurs* provided the indispensable foundation for any legitimate government. By fostering public spiritidness as well as solidarity, and inducing individuals to acclaim virtuous acts, they caused the convergence of interest and justice, of inclination and duty.

It is in the light of these considerations that the claims advanced in the *First Discourse* need to be understood.

2. Rousseau: Enemy of the Sciences and the Arts?

The question initially posed by the Academy of Dijon seemed designed to elicit a positive answer, and, predictably, most pretenders responded to its suggestive phrasing in the affirmative. They concurred with Turgot in affirming that Europe's exit from the nocturnal ignorance of the Middle Ages, and the rapid progress of the human spirit that this development had occasioned, were most certainly to be celebrated²⁵. This claim very much captured the spirit of the French Enlightenment. "La nature", Condorcet would later write, "lie par une chaîne indissoluble la vérité, le bonheur et la vertu". But Rousseau, inspired by the revelation on the road to Vincennes, expressed an altogether different vision.

Rousseau proclaims, in a characteristically paradoxical turn of phrase, that even a monarchy can be republican (Ibid., II:6, OC 3, p 380 [note]).

24 "Sitôt que quelqu'un dit des affaires de l'Etat, *que m'importe?* on doit compter que l'Etat est perdu." (Ibid., III:15, OC 3, p 429)

25 Turgot, speech delivered at the Sorbonne, December 1750

On the surface, his *Discours* resembles a disparaging attack on the ideals of the Enlightenment. It relies on a wealth of examples drawn from history to identify a correlation between the progress of the sciences and the arts²⁶ on the one hand and the debasement of *mœurs* on the other, striving to demonstrate the existence of a causal relationship between the two phenomena.

The first step in his strategy consisted in changing the question: in his hands, it became “Le rétablissement des Sciences et des Arts a-t'il contribué à épurer ou à corrompre les Mœurs?” Unlike the original question, the new formulation openly put into tension two alternative positions. It also rendered legitimate an answer in the form of a causal argument, as opposed to a mindlessly effusive paean to “progress”, clearing the stage for a genuine critique of the sciences and the arts.

The *Discours* begins, however, with words of praise for man's intellectual progress in the Age of Enlightenment:

“C'est un grand et beau spectacle de voir l'homme sortir en quelque maniere du néant par ses propres efforts; dissiper, par les lumieres de sa raison, les ténèbres dans lesquelles la nature l'avoit enveloppé; s'élever au-dessus de soi-même; s'élancer par l'esprit jusques dans les régions célestes; parcourir à pas de Géant ainsi que le Soleil, la vaste étendue de l'Univers; et, ce qui est encore plus grand et plus difficile, rentrer en soi pour y étudier l'homme et connoître sa nature, ses devoirs et sa fin. Toutes ces merveilles se sont renouvelées depuis peu de Générations.”²⁷

This expression of enthusiasm for the Enlightenment was accompanied by a recognition

26 The precise meaning Rousseau imparted to these terms in the *First Discourse* is perhaps best grasped by considering his own examples. “Sciences” mentioned in the text include physics, philosophy, and the natural sciences; “arts” include literature, oratory, sculpture, painting, architecture, and music. The author thus evidently employed the terms fairly loosely, and for the purposes of his argument regarded the development of the sciences and the arts as something of a unified cultural phenomenon, in keeping with the vision of his contemporaries. Indeed, in his letter to Lecat, Rousseau stated that the torch of Prometheus represented both “Sciences” and “Lettres”. The arts and the sciences are in this sense both manifestations of what we might call “culture” (Gourevitch 1972, p 737).

27 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, p 6

of the social benefits of the sciences and the arts, credited with inspiring men to please one another through endeavours worthy of approbation²⁸.

But he then immediately juxtaposed this feigned optimism with a suspicion as to the progress the restoration of the sciences and the arts was alleged to have brought about, likening the urbanity of modern social relations to a morally hollow display²⁹. “Qu'il seroit doux de vivre parmi nous”, Rousseau cynically speculated, “si la contenance extérieure étoit toujours l'image des dispositions du cœur; si la décence étoit la vertu; si nos maximes nous servoient de règles”. “Mais tant de qualités vont trop rarement ensemble, et la vertu ne marche guères en si grande pompe”, he lamented³⁰.

The polished manners of artful society, he claimed, had created an increasing gap between appearance and reality³¹, and a growing inability of men to trust one another. He denounced the insincerity and secrecy of modern man, and the moral void which his deceiving outward demeanour concealed, positing an important connection between transparency and moral rectitude, and conversely, between opacity and vice:

“Avant que l'Art eut façonné nos manières et appris à nos passions à parler un langage apprêté, nos mœurs étoient rustiques, mais naturelles; et la différence des procédés annonçoit au premier coup d'oeil celle des caracteres. La nature humaine, au fond, n'étoit pas meilleure; mais les hommes trouvoient leur sécurité dans la facilité de se pénétrer réciproquement, et cet avantage, dont nous ne sentons plus le prix, leur épargnoit bien des vices.”³²

Rousseau explained the triumph of vice by attributing it to the propensity of men to elude the scrutiny of others, contrasting the duplicity of the sophisticated urbanite with

28 Ibid., I, OC 3, p 6. For a study of Rousseau's position vis-à-vis the 'doux commerce' thesis, according to which social relations in enlightened commercial societies render men more cordial toward one another, see Mendham 2010.

29 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, p 7

30 Ibid., I, OC 3, pp. 7-8

31 This dichotomy between transparency and opacity occupies a place of choice in Rousseau's thought, as Jean Starobinski has persuasively argued (Starobinski 1971).

32 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, p 8

the simple, blunt, but sincere manners of more primitive, rural men.

The perspective from which Rousseau emitted his criticisms is not always clear: he opposed “la dorure d'un Courtisan” to “l'habit rustique d'un Laboureur”, but then, on what seems a different note, distinguished the “parure” of the socialite from the admirable nakedness of the “Athlète”, who scorns those “vils ornemens” that would encumber the use of his strength and agility as he valiantly wrestles with an opponent³³. The reader is left wondering whether Rousseau's was the protest of a defender of pastoral mores, soiled by the advance of an urban way of life, or of an admirer of the ancients and their martial prowess, emolliated by modern preciousness. To use the terms popularized by Judith Shklar, one struggles to see whether Rousseau deplored the passing of the Age of Gold, or regretted the fall of Sparta³⁴. In the *First Discourse*, Rousseau artificially regrouped the pastoral and classical elements of his critique under the general label of the “homme de bien”, whose only discernibly constant trait was that of physical health and robustness. Less concerned with the positive task of presenting a fully fleshed out ideal of the upright man, the author concentrated his efforts on the negative task of diagnosing the corruption of his contemporaries.

The first part of the *Discours* contains numerous historical examples intended to support the paradoxical contention that the development of the sciences and the arts went hand in hand with moral decay. Rousseau mentioned Ancient Egypt, which betrayed the ideals of the great conqueror Sesostris, and succumbed after becoming “la mere de la Philosophie et des beaux Arts”; Ancient Greece, once a land of Heroes, where “le progrès des Arts, la dissolution des mœurs et le joug du Macedonien se

33 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, p 8

34 See Shklar 1969, ch. 1

suivirent de près”; and Rome, whose growing artistic sophistication transformed it from a “Temple de la Vertu” into a “Théâtre du crime, l'opprobre des Nations et le jouet des barbares”³⁵. The 'Prosopopeia of Fabricius', Rousseau's fictive rendition of a speech delivered by a Roman general faced with the decline of history's greatest empire, deplores the corrosive effects of the arts on martial values and the simplicity of Roman mores; Fabricius angrily laments the sight of an empire invaded by “Rhéteurs”, “Architectes”, “Peintres”, and other “hommes frivoles”, observing with consternation the propagation of their emollient sophistication³⁶.

To all appearances, the *First Discourse* thus seems to constitute a frontal attack on the sciences and the arts, accusing them of corrupting morals and destroying virtues. Some scholars espouse this vision of the text, regarding its celebration of the simple country life, characterised by sincerity and spontaneity, and its severe condemnation of high culture and sophistication, as representative of Rousseau's thought as a whole³⁷. It has also been argued that this distaste for the sciences and the arts has its roots in Rousseau's particular conception of epistemology, which differed from that of his illustrious contemporaries. Intellectuals such as D'Alembert conceived of the truth as something which could only be accessed through discussion, via an exchange of ideas, and the collision of different points of view. From this perspective, the furthering of human knowledge was a necessarily collective and dialectical process, which moved forward only gradually, through sustained discussion. The tolerant neutrality of the *Encyclopédie*, with its sprawling juxtaposition of articles, its multiplication of diverse opinions, all united within a common scientific framework, very much reflected this pragmatic philosophy. Rousseau, it is alleged, deemed knowledge of oneself, of one's

35 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, pp. 10-11

36 *Ibid.*, I, OC 3, pp. 14-15

37 Berlin 2002, pp. 40-41

own nature, the most important of all knowledges, and one not acquired through an exchange of ideas and opinions with others, but through solitary striving, introspection, private intuition, and feeling, all of which benefited from isolation rather than sophisticated commerce³⁸.

Yet, a number of elements call these accounts into question. For one thing, to depict Rousseau as an enemy of the sciences and the arts is to forget that he was himself an artist, with noteworthy literary, musical, and theatrical productions to boast of, as well as an avid scientist, with keen interests in physics, anatomy, chemistry and botany, who contributed numerous articles to the *Encyclopédie*. Furthermore, it is to ignore the controversy to which the *First Discourse* gave rise at the time of its publication, which occasioned an intriguing debate through which the author was able to clarify his position. D'Alembert had captured the mood of many of Rousseau's critics in the *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie* (1751) when he asked him to examine “si la plupart des maux qu'il attribue aux sciences et aux arts ne sont point dues à des causes toutes différentes”³⁹. In the preface to a projected letter to the Lyon intellectual Bordes, Rousseau insisted on the accuracy of his argument, while conceding that the language of the *First Discourse* itself was relatively opaque. “(C)'est pour pouvoir tout faire entendre que je n'ai pas voulu tout dire”, he stated, adding that “(s)ouvent je me suis donné beaucoup de peine pour tâcher de renfermer dans une Phrase, dans une ligne, dans un mot jetté comme au hasard, le résultat d'une longue suite de réflexions”. Those readers who disparaged the *First Discourse* as a superficial declamation lacking in substance, Rousseau contended, had failed to notice “le tronc dont je ne leur montrais que les rameaux”⁴⁰.

38 Grange 2007, pp. 397-400

39 *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*. See Trousson 2000, p 15

40 *Préface d'une Seconde Lettre à Bordes*, OC 3, pp. 106. This brief text is thought to have been written

3. Cause and Effect

Rousseau's letter to Bordes suggested that to understand the *Discours* required recognising the incomplete and cryptic—even *deceptive*—nature of the text. Beneath its polemic veneer lay covert but discernible signals that the author meant to advance a deeper thesis than that suggested by the text's title.

Although Rousseau identified a correlation between the development of the sciences and the arts and the corruption of *mœurs*, illustrated by the examples adduced in the *Discours*, a rigorous explanation as to how one phenomenon caused the other was lacking. Advances in the sciences and the arts typically coincided with the debasement of public morality, but were not clearly identified as its source. Fabricius's claim that his fellow citizens had become enamoured with artists and their contagiously effeminate way of life remained purely descriptive and devoid of any causal analysis. The question of why the Romans allowed their empire to be overrun by the idle in the first place was left open, which suggested that the real explanation of the phenomenon lay beyond the general's verbal salvo, implicating causal mechanisms not mentioned in the speech itself. And this impression was further reinforced by a later passage, where Rousseau announced:

“Où il n'y a nul effet, il n'y a point de cause à chercher: mais ici l'effet est certain, la dépravation réelle, et nos ames se sont corrompuës a mesure que nos Sciences et nos Arts se sont avancés à la perfection. Dira-t-on que c'est un malheur particulier à notre âge? Non, Messieurs; les maux causés par notre vaine curiosité sont aussi vieux que le monde.”⁴¹

Whereas the title of Rousseau's text suggested his intention to treat the restoration of the sciences and the arts as a *cause*, whose effects on morals he would investigate, here he

in late 1753 or early 1754.

41 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, pp. 9-10

described, instead, a *proportional* relation between the progress of science and the depravation of *mœurs*⁴². The sciences and the arts were said to *accompany* corruption rather than to *engender* it, and they were replaced in this latter role by “notre vaine curiosité”. Rousseau then resorted to the following trope to complement his statement:

“L'élévation et l'abaissement journalier des eaux de l'Océan n'ont pas été plus régulièrement assujettis au cours de l'Astre qui nous éclaire durant la nuit, que le sort des mœurs et de la probité au progrès des Sciences et des Arts. On a vu la vertu s'enfuir à mesure que leur lumière s'élevait sur notre horizon, et le même phénomène s'est observé dans tous les tems et dans tous les lieux.”⁴³

In this key passage, Rousseau identified the sciences and the arts with the moon, presenting them as an important influence on “le sort des mœurs et de la probité”, itself assimilated to the earth’s tides. On the surface, this appears to be a straightforward causal argument. Yet, the metaphor employed to illustrate this point is ambiguous, since the physical relationship it evokes is in reality more complex than the one suggested. What causes the motion of the tides is really the revolution of the moon, which is itself produced by the earth’s gravity, as Rousseau, who was familiar with the theories of Isaac Newton, knew well⁴⁴. Seen in this light, the metaphor seems to hint at a proportional influence between intellectual progress and moral rectitude, in the same way that the moon and the earth proportionally bear upon one another. More importantly, however, it also points to a more remote cause that explains both the lunar and terrestrial phenomena, which is the sun. Rousseau implicitly referred to the influence of the sun when he described the moon as “l'Astre qui nous éclaire durant la

42 “(J)'ai assigné ce premier degré de la décadence des mœurs au premier moment de la culture des Lettres dans tous les pays du monde, et j'ai trouvé le progrès de ces deux choses toujours en proportion”, Rousseau wrote in his letter to Abbé Raynal (1751) (*Lettre à Raynal*, OC 3, p 32).

43 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, p 10

44 Newtonian physics were widely diffused and popularized in the 18th Century, and it is inconceivable that an intellectual of Rousseau’s calibre, ever curious about all areas of human knowledge, would not have been familiar with its laws and principles. Indeed, in his poem *Le Verger de Madame de Warens* (1739), Rousseau described himself studying Newton in the shade of a tree (*Le Verger de Madame de Warens*, OC 2, p 1128). And, of course, Rousseau repeatedly referred to the illustrious Cambridge scientist in the *First Discourse* itself, calling him a “Precepteur (...) du Genre-humain” (*Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 29).

nuit”, since the light in question originates in the sun and is merely reflected by the moon. The implication was that the sciences and the arts should not be understood as the root cause of the progress or decline of *mœurs*, but merely as the effect of a more distant cause. The affirmation that “(o)n a vu la vertu s'enfuir à mesure que leur lumière s'élevait sur notre horizon” makes clear that the rising sun has replaced the waning moon⁴⁵.

II. The Deeper Argument of the *Discours*

1. The Scourge of Inequality

Having hinted that the phenomena whose manifestations throughout history he had charted in Part I of the *Discours* were the effect of a more remote cause than the sole progress of the sciences and the arts, it remained for Rousseau to identify it. What real source of the corruption of *mœurs* did the sun stand for in his astral metaphor?

The author had already dropped a clue by attaching causal primacy to “notre vaine curiosité” earlier in the text, the word “vaine” ringing particularly ominously. And at the very beginning of Part II, he went further, providing an arresting hypothesis about the origins of the sciences and the arts:

“En effet, soit qu'on feuillette les annales du monde, soit qu'on supplée à des chroniques incertaines par des recherches philosophiques, on ne trouvera pas aux connaissances humaines une origine qui réponde à l'idée qu'on aime à s'en former. L'Astronomie est née de la superstition; l'Eloquence, de l'ambition, de la haine, de la flatterie, du mensonge; la Géométrie, de l'avarice; la Physique, d'une vaine curiosité; toutes, et la Morale même, de l'orgueil humain. Les Sciences et les Arts doivent donc leur naissance à nos vices”⁴⁶.

45 For analysis of this metaphor, see Campbell & Scott 2005, pp. 820-822. The search for hidden meaning between the lines of Rousseau's texts, particularly his *First Discourse*, owes much to the Straussian approach (see Strauss 1947).

46 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 17

Vice was not only the progenitor of the sciences and the arts, but also a precondition for their continued existence over time:

“Le défaut de leur origine ne nous est que trop retracé dans leurs objets. Que ferions-nous des Arts, sans le luxe qui les nourrit? Sans les injustices des hommes, à quoi serviroit la Jurisprudence? Que deviendroit l'Histoire, s'il n'y avoit ni Tyrans, ni Guerres, ni Conspirateurs?”⁴⁷

Rousseau's reference to “orgueil” in this pivotal passage is significant, because it begins to reveal the core of his concerns. “(L)'étude de l'Univers devrait élever l'homme à son Créateur, je le sçais; mais elle n'eleve que la vanité humaine”, he wrote⁴⁸. Likewise, philosophy had its source in “l'orgueil humain”⁴⁹.

Taken in a philosophical sense, “orgueil” often denotes a belief in one's superiority over others, or an ardent aspiration to such superiority. In *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes employed the term “pride” to describe a petulant passion, common to all of mankind, which impelled individuals to seek reputation at the expense of others, and caused terrible conflicts between human beings in the absence of strong political authority⁵⁰. That Rousseau adopted a pejorative understanding of the concept is clear from his association of “orgueil” with a series of vices. And the mention of “luxe” and “injustices” indicates his interest in the social and political symptoms of “orgueil”, an impression confirmed in a letter Rousseau wrote to King Stanislas I of Poland in 1751, where he summarized the argument of the *First Discourse* in the following terms:

“La première source du mal est l'inégalité; de l'inégalité sont venues les richesses; car ces mots de pauvre et de riche sont relatifs, et par tout où les hommes seront égaux, il n'y aura ni riches ni pauvres. Des richesses sont nés le luxe et l'oisiveté; du luxe sont venus les Beaux Arts, et de l'oisiveté les

47 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 17

48 *Observations*, OC 3, p 41

49 Ibid., OC 3, p 46 [note]

50 *Leviathan*, Chapter XIII

Sciences.”⁵¹

Rousseau did not explain how inequality itself came about, whether it be in the *First Discourse* or in the correspondence surrounding it. But leaving aside the question its *origins*, which he would go on to address in the *Second Discourse*, it is worth asking what precisely Rousseau found objectionable about inequality's *consequences*. The most interesting word mentioned in his brief explanation to King Stanislas is perhaps the word “luxe”. Luxury was condemnable for Rousseau because he thought it revolting that a small class of privileged individuals should live opulently while the many struggled to survive⁵². But there is another, and very important sense in which the man who bathes in luxury is culpable: not content with possessing wealth, he wishes to *display* it. Luxury also exists for purposes of ostentation, and is enjoyed to the extent that others are deprived of it: it is a relative, positional commodity, made to be showcased⁵³. “Le luxe corrompt tout; et le riche qui en jouit, et le misérable qui le convoite”, Rousseau wrote to Stanislas⁵⁴. What Rousseau denounced when he mentioned luxury and its connection to the arts was not only the superfluity of the arts, but also—and more importantly—the way in which artistic culture proceeded out of a desire to impress others. To link the birth of the arts to luxury was to identify them as a currency of social distinction.

51 *Observations*, OC 3, pp. 49-50. The importance of inequality to Rousseau's argument seems confirmed by a sentence somewhat clumsily placed at the beginning of a paragraph in Part II that reads: “D'où naissent tous ces abus, si ce n'est de l'inégalité funeste introduite entre les hommes par la distinction des talens et par l'avilissement des vertus?” (*Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 25). Bouchardy believes it almost certain that this sentence is one of two additions Rousseau made to the published version of the *Discours* (Bouchardy in OC 3, p 1240).

52 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, II, OC 3, p 194. The case for luxury to which Rousseau was responding had been made by Jean-François Melon in his *Essai Politique sur le Commerce* (1734) (see Jennings 2011, pp. 131-134). Elsewhere, Rousseau equated luxury with servitude, describing Roman ceremonies during which conquered chieftains were paraded in chains made of gold. “Voilà du luxe bien entendu”, he quipped (*Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, III, OC 3, p 964).

53 As part of a tirade on luxury in Book III of *Emile*, Rousseau quoted Petronius: “Nolo habere bona nisi quibus populus inviderit” (*Emile*, III, OC 4, p 457). In the novel *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, when the characters of Julie and her husband, the Baron de Wolmar, move into the Castle of Clarens, they painstakingly rid it of all signs of luxury: “ils en ont mis à leur usage tout ce qui ne servoit qu'à l'ornement; ce n'est plus une maison faite pour être vue, mais pour être habitée” (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, IV:10, OC 2, p 441).

54 *Observations*, OC 3, p 51

2. *The Thirst for Social Distinction*

From this perspective, the contours of the problem become clearer. Men are, in general, drawn to that which has prestige. In a society where culture is celebrated, and intellectuals enjoy considerable esteem, where progress in the sciences and the arts is intently followed by large numbers of people in positions of prestige and authority, where sophistication and taste are prized, and manners polished, men are presented with an irresistible incentive to exhibit scientific knowledge and artistic refinement, irrespective of whether or not they actually possess them. They are incited to display thoughtfulness, to perfect their style, to refine their tastes, and to show grace and urbanity. “Le goût des lettres”, Rousseau wrote in the 1752 preface to his play *Narcisse*, “naît du désir de se distinguer”⁵⁵. And this creates an important problem:

“Toutes ces choses seront, si l'on veut, le supplément de la vertu: mais jamais on ne pourra dire qu'elles soient la vertu, et rarement elles s'associeront avec elle. Il y aura toujours cette différence, que celui qui se rend utile travaille pour les autres, et que celui qui ne songe qu'à se rendre agréable ne travaille que pour lui.”⁵⁶

Underlying Rousseau's statement was his distinction between legitimate government, which rested on virtue and the eminence of the general will, and flawed government, under which individuals did not purposively pursue the public good. As we saw, unlike Montesquieu, who saw in monarchical honour an acceptable substitute for republican virtue, Rousseau saw no viable alternative; hence the importance of preserving virtue, that “(s)cience sublime des ames simples”⁵⁷.

If the key to social success lies in distinguishing oneself in the sciences and the

55 *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même*, Préface, OC 2, p 965

56 *Dernière Réponse*, OC 3, p 74

57 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 30

arts, then virtue falls into disrepute. “On ne demande plus d'un homme s'il a de la probité, mais s'il a des talens; ni d'un Livre s'il est utile, mais s'il est bien écrit”, Rousseau complained⁵⁸, adding that “(l)es récompenses sont prodiguées au bel esprit, et la vertu reste sans honneurs”⁵⁹. It is not difficult to see why Rousseau found this problematic: under such a paradigm, men's fortunes depend on natural talents, which are gifts from the heavens, rather than on moral probity, which requires effort but is universally attainable⁶⁰. Moreover, since natural talents are not only *arbitrarily* but also *unequally* distributed, making social success hinge on talent produces social and political inequality⁶¹, stretching the bonds of society and threatening the freedom of its members. And, crucially, the social prestige which accrues to the talented attracts the multitude, like the satyr of the frontispiece, diverting the population away from useful occupations and thence ruining society⁶².

This envy alters the aspirations of those belonging to the poorer strata of society. In order to acquire standing and social approbation, ordinary men seek to conform to a profile celebrated by socialites. The universal desire for artistic or scientific distinction results in a socially costly misallocation of human resources, as individuals are sucked into prestigious but inadequate professions. “(I)l seroit à souhaiter que tous ceux qui ne pouvoient avancer loin dans la carrière des Lettres, eussent été rebuttés dès l'entrée, et se fussent jettés dans des Arts utiles à la société”, Rousseau lamented. “Tel qui sera toute sa vie un mauvais versificateur, un Geomètre subalterne, seroit peut-être devenu

58 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 25.

59 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 25

60 “(O)n ne récompense dans les hommes que les qualités qui ne dépendent pas d'eux: car nos talens naissent avec nous, nos vertus seules nous appartiennent”, Rousseau complained in the preface to *Narcisse (Narcisse, ou l'Amant de lui-même)*, Preface, OC 2, p 966). Similar thoughts appear in *Emile*: “Les grands hommes [...] sont trop sensés pour tirer vanité d'un don qu'ils ne se sont pas fait”. “L'homme de bien”, Rousseau continued, “peut être fier de sa vertu, parce qu'elle est à lui; mais de quoi l'homme d'esprit est-il fier?” (*Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 537)

61 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 25

62 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 19

un grand fabricant d'étoffes"⁶³. Furthermore, those who devote their lives to projects to which they are not suited out of a socially-fuelled craving for admiration experience an impoverished individual existence. The tale Rousseau would later tell in *Emile* of the talentless painter who vainly turned to art and obstinately persevered in this path despite his manifest lack of aptitude is a case in point, which illustrates both the ridicule and vacuity of such a life. In addition, by creating incentives for individuals to affect qualities that they do not truly possess, this state of affairs opens up a dreadful gap between appearance and reality, as men don masks of deception, rendering it impossible for them to know—and trust—each other⁶⁴.

Although Rousseau did not regard them as the original cause of the corruption of *mœurs* (in fact, he held instead that they could be, in certain circumstances, a palliative medicine against the evils that gave them birth⁶⁵), his critique of the sciences and the arts in the *First Discourse* is not merely a smoke screen: the author genuinely believed that they contributed to the debasement of a people's way of life⁶⁶. They consume time that should have been spent on activities more useful to society⁶⁷, for “c'est un grand

63 Ibid., II, OC 3, pp. 29. Michael McLendon recounts a revealing anecdote from 1754 in which an abbot lacking in literary talent named Petit read out one of his works at the salon of the Baron d'Holbach, only to be humiliatingly cheered on by the mocking *Philosophes*. Rousseau alone among them refused to play along, telling Petit the truth in an apparent effort to deter him from a career in letters (McLendon 2009, pp. 511-512).

64 “Jusqu'ici j'ai vû beaucoup de masques; quand verrai-je des visages d'hommes?”, Saint-Preux, the fictional character of Rousseau's epistolary novel *Julie, la Nouvelle Héloïse*, revealingly exclaims after a few weeks of life in Paris (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, II, 14, OC 2, p 236).

65 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 26. In his letter to King Stanislas, the Citizen of Geneva argued that it would be a folly to burn Europe's libraries and academies, on the grounds that this would only plunge the continent back into barbarism, with no improvement to morals. He then pronounced “une grande et fatale vérité”: “on n'a jamais vû de peuple une fois corrompu, revenir à la vertu” (*Observations*, OC 3, pp. 55-56). Rousseau also used this line of argument to defend his own indulgence in the arts, in particular his musical and literary productions (see the Second Preface of *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, OC 2, pp. 11-30).

66 Indeed, many of the themes broached in the *Discours* would receive a fuller treatment in later works, especially the *Lettre à D'Alembert sur les Spectacles*, where Rousseau offered a more detailed examination of the effects of the arts on society, focusing in particular on the theatre. See in particular the thought experiment in which a theatre is established on the primeval hill of the *Montagnons* (*Lettre à D'Alembert*, OC 5, pp. 55-59).

67 “Nées dans l'oisiveté, (nos sciences) la nourrissent à leur tour; et la perte irréparable du tems, est le premier préjudice qu'elles causent nécessairement à la société.” (*Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 18)

mal que de ne point faire de bien”⁶⁸. They also beget pusillanimity, eroding the citizens' courage⁶⁹, and fascinating them with trivialities that turn them away from their *patrie*⁷⁰. “Les Romains ont avoué que la vertu militaire s'étoit éteinte parmi eux, à mesure qu'ils avoient commencé à se connoître en Tableaux, en Gravures, en vases d'Orphéverie, et à cultiver les beaux arts”, Rousseau remarked⁷¹. The arts and the sciences undermine freedom by generating new needs and therefore new sources of dependence⁷². Moreover, they render men's servitude endurable, even pleasant, by decorating their chains with garlands of flowers⁷³, and fostering a “petitesse d'âme” that fully befits their servile condition⁷⁴. They chip away at the foundations of sound *mœurs* by encouraging modes of reasoning that demystify faith⁷⁵, and undermine mutual trust by introducing opacity in men's relations. Rousseau warned that “(l)es soupçons, les ombrages, les craintes, la froideur, la reserve, la haine, la trahison se cacheront sans cesse sous ce voile uniforme et perfide de politesse, sous cette urbanité si vantée que nous devons aux lumieres de nore siècle”⁷⁶.

But the argument is a complicated one: the sciences and the arts could not exist without human pride and the circumstances of economic inequality that trigger its infernal dynamics, but man's unquenchable appetite for social distinction would not have been sharpened to such a dreadful extent without the subsequent corrupting effects of the sciences and the arts. In Rousseau's philosophy, it is common for effects to influence their engendering causes. “Le goût des lettres annonce toujours chez un

68 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 18

69 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 22

70 Ibid., I, OC 3, p 14, 19

71 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 23

72 Ibid., I, OC 3, p 7 [note]

73 Ibid., I, OC 3, p 7

74 Ibid., I, OC 3, p 7 [note]

75 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 19. “La Science s'étend et la foi s'anéantit”, Rousseau concluded (*Observations*, OC 3, p 48).

76 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, pp. 8-9

peuple un commencement de corruption qu'il accélère très-prompement", he wrote in the preface of *Narcisse*⁷⁷. "Le gout des Lettres et des Arts nait chez un Peuple d'un vice intérieur qu'il augmente", he added in a 1755 letter to Voltaire⁷⁸. Hence the difficulty of identifying the precise nature of the relationship between the sciences and the arts and the corruption of *mœurs*, since, paradoxically, the former constitute *both the effect and the cause* of the latter.

III. Why Rousseau veiled his Argument

1. "*Des discussions délicates*"

The way in which Rousseau initially set up his enquiry in the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* suggested that he would argue that the perfection of culture corrupted morals, but what he actually argued was quite different. The author searched for the true source of humanity's progress in the sciences and the arts, and located it in a universal appetite for social distinction. This inclination—which Rousseau called "orgueil" in the *Discours* and would name "amour-propre" in later texts—converted naturally occurring disparities in talent into social and political inequalities if it was not properly channelled by social institutions to serve the common good of the community, and if natural talents were employed selfishly rather than civically. This inequality then produced idleness and luxury, from which sprang the sciences and the arts, which in turn re-enforced patterns of inequality and further loosened the bonds of society.

At this point, it becomes clearer why Rousseau veiled his denunciation of the true causes of the corruption of *mœurs*. As Sally Howard and John T. Scott remark, an

⁷⁷ *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même*, Preface, OC 2, p 965

⁷⁸ *Réponse à Voltaire*, OC 3, p 227

open criticism of social inequality might have been interpreted as an affront to the *Ancien Régime*, and its rigidly hierarchical structures⁷⁹. And the philosopher had every reason to fear the consequences of offending the powerful: indeed, it is worth recalling that Rousseau discovered the question which gave rise to the *Discours* on the road to Vincennes, where his friend Diderot had been imprisoned for the iconoclastic nature of his writings⁸⁰. Even in his letter to Stanislas, Rousseau's reticence to discuss political inequality was manifest; he wrote that “(c)ette question renferme de grandes vuës et demanderoit des éclaircissemens trop étendus pour convenir à cet écrit”, expressing his reluctance to explore “les relations très-cachées, mais très-réelles qui se trouvent entre la nature du gouvernement, et le génie, les mœurs et les connoissances des citoyens”, since “ceci me jetteroit dans des discussions délicates, qui me pourroient mener trop loin”⁸¹.

There is room for disagreement as to the precise target of Rousseau's critique. Some scholars argue that what particularly angered him was hereditary privilege, a principle enshrined in the unwritten constitution of the *Ancien Régime*, and which constituted an insurmountable obstacle to meritocracy, preventing genuinely talented artists and scientists from acceding to high ranks where their gifts could be honourably put to the service of the nation, rather than perverted to flatter the vanity of patrons and the prejudices of the public⁸². Others maintain that Rousseau's philosophical crosshairs were set on his own colleagues, the *Philosophes*, who proudly proclaimed their intellectual superiority over ordinary men and made no secret of their ardent desire to convert this mental ascendancy into social eminence⁸³. There is undoubtedly some truth

79 Campbell & Scott 2005, pp. 825-826

80 Diderot had been arrested for writing his *Lettres sur les Aveugles* (1749), an essay that advanced, albeit under an inchoate form, the idea of natural selection, and was deemed prejudicial to religion.

81 *Observations*, OC 3, p 43

82 Campbell & Scott 2005, p 825

83 McLendon 2009. Texts such as the chapter entitled 'On the regard that ought to be shown to Men of

to both these claims. On the one hand, Rousseau may have wished to veil his actual argument in order to elude the watchful eye of the French authorities, and for this purpose a harmlessly polemical declamation against the progress of culture constituted the perfect coating for his text. On the other hand, Rousseau also denounced French society's overvaluation of talent at the expense of virtue, and this could be seen as an attack on the *Philosophes*, who culpably assumed that intellectual gifts should confer a superior social status on men who were fortunate enough to possess them. In fine, the climate of social inequality fostered by the *Ancien Régime* allowed the *Philosophes* to develop the particular pretensions Rousseau castigated them for harbouring.

2. Rousseau's Defiance

Why, one might ask, such a contrast between the provident Rousseau of the *First Discourse* and the bold Rousseau of later texts, who was capable of denouncing inequality with verve in the *Second Discourse*, and condemning the French monarchy in no uncertain terms in *Du Contract Social*? What led Rousseau to throw caution to the wind?

Three factors are worthy of mention. Firstly, in practice, few of the readers of Rousseau's *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* revealed themselves to be as perspicacious as D'Alembert, most of them mistaking the “rameaux” of Rousseau's thesis for its “tronc”. The letters Rousseau wrote in the aftermath of its publication show the frustration of a misunderstood author, whose excessive efforts to disguise the message of his text had inadvertently obscured it altogether. The *Citoyen de Genève*

Letters' in Voltaire's *Letters concerning the English nation* (1733) and D'Alembert's *Essai sur la société des gens de lettres et des grands* (1753) alike display the social ambitions of the *Philosophes*, desirous of prestige. See Paul Bénichou's excellent study on the rise of the *homme de lettres* in 18th century France (Bénichou 1973).

may have concluded from this disappointing experiment that, in future, greater clarity would be called for. Secondly, the very success of the *Discours* appears to have given Rousseau a confidence he previously lacked. “Cette faveur du public nullement brigüée et pour un Auteur inconnu, me donna la première assurance véritable de mon talent dont malgré le sentiment interne j'avois toujours douté jusqu'alors”, he wrote in the *Confessions*⁸⁴. The prize of the Dijon academy emboldened Rousseau, leaving him “enivré” with virtue⁸⁵. And thirdly, Rousseau's political theory undoubtedly remained inchoate at the time he wrote the *First Discourse*, and took its definitive form only later, thanks in part to the confidence garnered by a vindicated author.

One should not, however, overestimate the distance that separates the pre- from the post-*First Discourse* Rousseau in this regard, and construct an artificial antithesis between a cowardly early Rousseau and a relentlessly iconoclastic mature Rousseau. In fact, many of the author's later works, including some of his most famous, possess a polemical façade similar to that of his 1750 text: the opposition between primitivism and civilisation in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*⁸⁶, which could lead as erudite a reader as Voltaire to lament (albeit with trademark irony) the desire the text gave him to “marcher à quatre pattes”, and cause debate among scholars as to whether Rousseau was not an adversary of all forms of culture until as late as the 1920s⁸⁷, the contrast between

84 *Confessions*, VIII, OC 1, p 363. “The truth”, John Plamenatz states, “is that, with a self-assurance that came to him only with success, Rousseau put forward with force and elegance beliefs he had long held” (Plamenatz 2012, p 166).

85 “(C)omme je ne songeois plus à mon discours, j'appris qu'il avoit remporté le prix à Dijon. Cette nouvelle réveilla toutes les idées qui me l'avoient dicté, les anima d'une nouvelle force et acheva de mettre en fermentation dans mon cœur ce premier levain d'heroïsme et de vertu que mon Pere et ma patrie et Plutarque y avoient mis dans mon enfance.” (*Confessions*, VIII, OC 1, p 356) Rousseau spoke of being “enivré de la vertu” in Book IX (Ibid., IX, OC 1, p 416).

86 What must one think, for instance, of the work's frontispiece, depicting a civilised Hottentot tearing off his clothes to return “chez ses Egaux”? On the meaning of this frontispiece, see Note XVI of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*.

87 “The notion that Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* was essentially a glorification of the state of nature and that its influence tended wholly or chiefly to promote “primitivism” is one of the most persistent of historical errors”, Arthur Lovejoy wrote in 1923 (Lovejoy 1923, p 165).

“natural” and conventional education in *Emile*, or the dichotomy between ancient and modern politics in *Du Contract Social* all show that even Rousseau's mature work was not immune to caricature, and can also conceivably be construed as deliberate distractions designed to deceive censors while conveying a deeper message to the alert few.

Neither did Rousseau necessarily intend—or foresee—the controversy that works such as *Emile* and *Du Contract Social* would stir. In his *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, he expressed surprise as to the condemnation of his works, maintaining that he wrote his famous *profession de foi du vicaire savoyard* to defend—rather than profane—the spirit of Christianity⁸⁸, and that his political theory supported—rather than sapped—the founding principles of the Republic of Geneva⁸⁹, in which it had been condemned. Regarding Rousseau as a shallow contrarian would amount to ignoring the complexity of his attitude towards the ideals of the Enlightenment, of which he set out to articulate a constructive critique rather than a univocal condemnation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been argued that the problem of human pride is central to Rousseau's thinking about society's ills from the very onset of his career as a political theorist. Behind the *First Discourse's* abrasive declamation against the sciences and the arts lurks a sophisticated critique of inequality and its effects on the dynamics of social distinction. According to Rousseau, whose analysis subtly intertwined moral, social and political considerations, the real crime of Enlightenment society consisted less in having celebrated the sciences and the arts than tacitly encouraging *everyone* to excel in them.

⁸⁸ *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, V, OC 3, p 803

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, OC 3, p 811

Rousseau saw in the striving for reputation a general and potent feature of men. “O fureur de se distinguer, que ne pouvez vous point?”, he asked rhetorically in the *Discours*⁹⁰. Even the sage, he conceded, is not wholly indifferent to glory⁹¹. And therein, indeed, lies the root of the problem: *all* men seek distinction, from the most celestial to the “vulgaire”, and, like the satyr of the frontispiece, they are drawn to those pursuits prized by society, irrespective of whether they are suited to them. And when this aspiration is frustrated, people are denied something fundamental to their fulfilment as human beings: the psychological basis for self-respect.

That Rousseau regarded this lack of consideration as singularly harmful transpires clearly from his text. Enlightenment France would not have executed Socrates, he wrote, but, in showering him with mockery and contempt, it would have reserved him a fate a hundred times worse than death⁹². However, the victims of 'enlightened' culture for which Rousseau expressed greatest concern were not the great philosophers, but rather the “satyrs”, the common people whose simple virtues had been socially devalued, leaving them psychologically enslaved to criteria of consideration that were not their own. “Nous avons des Physiciens, des Géometres, des Chymistes, des Astronomes, des Poëtes, des Musiciens, des Peintres; nous n'avons plus de citoyens; ou s'il nous en reste encore, dispersés dans nos campagnes abandonnées, ils y périssent indigens et méprisés”, Rousseau wrote. “Tel est l'état où sont réduits, tels sont les sentimens qu'obtiennent de nous ceux qui nous donnent du pain, et qui donnent du lait à nos enfans”⁹³.

90 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 19

91 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 26

92 *Ibid.*, I, OC 3, p 15

93 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 26

In the *First Discourse*, Rousseau oscillated between two possible reactions to this problem. He denounced those who scorned patriotism and moral probity, contending that a just distribution of glory would inspire citizens to be virtuous⁹⁴, yet also advised his readers to cultivate a philosophical indifference to public opinion⁹⁵. This hesitation between the imperative of a methodical independence from existing public opinion and the dream of a civically fertile dependence on the right kind of public opinion lay at the very heart of Rousseau's thought, and would resurface in many of his later works. As we shall see, the opposition between the “sage” and the “multitude”, already present under an inchoate form in the *Discours*, became central in determining which of the two paths was preferable.

Importantly, Rousseau described pride as a highly complex proclivity, from which sprang both what was most brilliant and appalling in human behaviour. The *Discours* underlined both the potency of pride, explicitly describing it as a catalyst for artistic and scientific prowess, as well as the ultimate cause of human progress, and its many perverse effects, as well as its violent, unruly character, referring to it as furious (“la fureur de se distinguer”) and ardent (“cette ardeur à faire parler de soi”).

Montesquieu too had realized the importance of this disposition as well as its role in driving men to cultivate their talents, and believed that the homogenising austerity of republican *mœurs* threatened to stifle its creative potential. On these grounds, the author of *De L'Esprit des Lois* praised modern monarchies such as 18th

94 “Le sage ne court point après la fortune, mais il n'est pas insensible à la gloire; et quand il la voit si mal distribuée, sa vertu, qu'un peu d'émulation auroit animée et rendu avantageuse à la société, tombe en langueur, et s'éteint dans la misère et dans l'oubli.” (*Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 26)

95 “A quoi bon chercher nôtre bonheur dans l'opinion d'autrui si nous pouvons le trouver en nous-mêmes?” (*Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 30)

century England, which afforded more latitude to the expression of individuality than ancient poleis such as Sparta⁹⁶. But the price to pay for this individualism was, by Montesquieu's own admission, the demise of virtue, which he thought could, however, be replaced by the vigorous spirit fomented by trade, or by the feudal notion of honour⁹⁷.

For Rousseau, who recognised the potential of “orgueil” but rejected the notion that any legitimate government could do without virtue, the challenge lay in nurturing talent, and orienting it towards the public good, while preserving republican *mœurs* from the aversive social effects of the sciences and the arts. At the end of the *Discours*, he proposed that ordinary mortals be content with practising simple virtues, leaving the sciences and the arts to the exceptionally gifted few: only those capable of following in the footsteps of Bacon, Descartes and Newton should enter the sanctuary of the sciences⁹⁸. To avoid undermining the system of incentives required to encourage intellectual endeavour in a virtuous society, this would presumably have involved altering the character of the public's consideration for scientists and artists such that populations could admire men of spirit without envying them. Although Rousseau neglected to map out the details of this project, to conclude the *First Discourse* on such

96 *De L'Esprit des Lois*, XI: 4 & 6

97 For an interesting discussion of this point, see Strauss 1947, p 259.

98 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, II, OC 3, p 29. It is a mistake, however, to contend that Rousseau believed that geniuses belonged to a superior class, a legislature of spirit, impermeable to the corrupting effects of study (for an example of this view, see Campbell & Scott 2005, p 824), for his own examples plead against such a reading. It is unlikely, for instance, that either Bacon or Descartes were thought by Rousseau to be paragons of selflessness and virtue: the first usurped public office, and was charged in 1621 on twenty-three separate counts of corruption by the English parliament (something Rousseau may well have been aware of, since he appears to refer to Bacon's tenure as Lord Chancellor on p 29); as for the second, his “prétenduë sagesse” and “vains systèmes” come under devastating attack in Rousseau's letter to Stanislas (OC 3, p 41). One possible reason for which Rousseau licensed gifted individuals to indulge in study is that he believed that the benefits it could produce in such fine hands outweighed its corrupting effects. A similar weighing of costs and benefits informs Rousseau's judgement of actors in the *Lettre à D'Alembert sur les Spectacles*, where he contends that acting is a villainous trade because it involves deceit, but concedes that a few supremely gifted performers should be entitled to practise it (*Lettre à D'Alembert*, OC 5, p 84).

a note indicated the direction in which he intended to orient his future reflections. The economy of “orgueil”, or, to employ the terms Rousseau would introduce in his *Second Discourse*, of “amour de soi” and “amour-propre”, was to occupy a central place in his philosophy.

Chapter 2: The Problem of Self-Love in Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité*

“Singe de Diogene, comme tu te condamnes toi meme!”

– Voltaire, Marginalium on Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité*

Introduction

1. *The Diverter of Legacies*

In an intriguing passage of the *Confessions*, Rousseau described the method he employed to grasp the concepts and theories of other philosophers:

“Je m'aperçus bientôt que tous ces auteurs étoient entre eux en contradiction presque perpétuelle, et je formai le chimérique projet de les accorder, qui me fatiga beaucoup et me fit perdre bien du tems. Je me brouillois la tête, et je n'avançois point. Enfin renonçant à cette méthode j'en pris une infiniment meilleure, et à laquelle j'attribue tout le progrès que je puis avoir fait, malgré mon défaut de capacité; car il est certain que j'en eus toujours fort peu pour l'étude. En lisant chaque Auteur, je me fis une loi d'adopter et suivre toutes ses idées sans y mêler les miennes ni celles d'un autre, et sans jamais disputer avec lui. Je me dis, commençons par me faire un magasin d'idées, vrayes ou fausses, mais nettes, en attendant que ma tête en soit assez fournie pour pouvoir les comparer et choisir. Cette methode n'est pas sans inconvénient, je le sais, mais elle m'a reussi dans l'objet de m'instruire. Au bout de quelques années passées à ne penser exactement que d'après autrui, sans réfléchir, pour ainsi dire, et presque sans raisonner, je me suis trouvé un assez grand fond d'aquis pour me suffire à moi-même et penser sans le secours d'autrui.”¹

Leaving aside his own convictions, suspending judgement, and striving to see the world through their eyes, he strove to achieve an immanent perspective on the works of other thinkers. This method no doubt gave him a unique capacity to absorb the wisdom contained in their writings, and eclectically appropriate their ideas for his own philosophical purposes. Seen from this angle, the author of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*

1 *Confessions*, VI, OC 1, p 237

comes across as an attentive student of the works of others. In this regard, the contrast between Rousseau and Voltaire, a notoriously irritable and fastidious reader, whose copy of the *Discours* is covered with a profusion of caustic marginalia², could not be greater.

Like all great political thinkers, Rousseau was capable of discerning truth in the theories of others, and borrowing elements from the repertoires of a variety of authors and traditions in order to enrich his own theories. Bruno Bernardi refers to Rousseau's method of conceptual invention as “the diversion of legacies”: it consisted in seizing a concept, a question, or an argument articulated by another author, extracting it from its original context, and redeploying it in a different context in which its meaning was considerably altered³. There is perhaps some truth to Germaine de Staël's famous remark that Rousseau discovered nothing new, but set everything ablaze⁴. But, as John Plamenatz remarks, in his endeavour to combine ideas taken from a variety of sources, and bring them to bear on problems peculiar to his own time, Rousseau transformed those ideas radically⁵.

This chapter focuses on the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, examining how Rousseau applied this technique of conceptual invention to craft his theory of human self-love, which built on the ideas advanced in the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, and would later constitute the fulcrum of his mature political and moral theories.

2 See Havens 1933.

3 Bernardi 2006, p 176. See in particular Bernardi's remarkable analysis of how Rousseau employed the concept of “tolérance” (pp. 179-183).

4 “Il n'a rien découvert, mais il a tout enflammé” (*De la Littérature*, I:20).

5 Plamenatz 2012, ch. 11

2. *From one Discours to another*

In his *First Discourse*, Rousseau declaimed against the corruption of *mœurs* in modern societies, openly lambasting the sciences and the arts with an eloquence that made him famous, while covertly denouncing what he considered the deeper cause of moral debasement, namely *inequality*, which perverted human pride's secret mechanics, diverting the universal urge for social distinction away from virtue⁶. Yet, neither in the text itself, nor in the correspondence that followed its publication, did Rousseau trace the sources of corruption any further than this, confining himself, instead, to the laconic statement that “(l)a première source du mal est l'inégalité”⁷.

After this initial foray into the causes of society's corruption, it remained for Rousseau to investigate the origin of inequality itself, and, fatefully enough, the chance to undertake such an enquiry presented itself in 1753, when, four years after crowning his *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, the Academy of Dijon announced that it would award another prize, this time for the best answer to the question: “Quelle est l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes, et si elle est autorisée par la Loy naturelle.” This new challenge instantly drew Rousseau's attention, as he regarded it as an opportunity to revisit, in greater depth, the themes broached in the *First Discourse*. The result would be one of his most famous works, the *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondemens de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes* (often referred to simply as *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, or *Second Discourse*), written in 1754 and published in 1755.

By the time he turned his sights to the origins and foundations of inequality, the laureate of the Academy's 1749 prize had already built a name for himself on France's

⁶ See Chapter 1.

⁷ *Observations*, OC 3, p 49

literary scene, and his resounding correspondence with critics of the *First Discourse* had displayed his talent both as a consummate polemicist and an original thinker. Rousseau entered his second competition with the serenity of a man whose intellectual reputation was already established, and who had little left to prove. The author of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* was no longer in the mood for winning academic prizes; years of intense reflection had given him a new dimension as a thinker, and this time his ambitions were philosophical in nature. That his new *Discours*, which breached all of the Academy's rules, produced irritation among the jury, who refused to declare it the competition's winner, and reportedly even declined to read it in its entirety⁸, was of little concern to Rousseau, for he intended his entry for an altogether different audience. The text, he informed his readers in a grandiloquent introduction, was to be read in Aristotle's Lyceum, to be heard by the whole of humankind, and judged by Plato and his virtuous student Xenocrates⁹. The *First Discourse* was a literary success; the *Second Discourse* is and remains a philosophical monument; the first ensured its author fame and celebrity; the second brought him immortality, and a deserved place in the pantheon of the world's great philosophers.

3. Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité*

The question addressed by the text concerned whether the inequalities¹⁰ observed in modern societies had a foundation in nature itself, and could hence be justified by natural law, or whether, to the contrary, they constituted a departure from it.

8 Starobinski in OC 3, p xliii

9 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, OC 3, p 133

10 The kind of inequality Rousseau considered in his *Discours* was “moral”, or “political”, i.e. conventional, rather than “natural”, or “physical” (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Prelude, OC 3, p 131), a point that appears obvious if one places the text in the continuity of the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*. Distinguishing what was “moral” from what was “natural” would, however, constitute one of the major challenges of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, as we shall see.

Natural law, in Rousseau's time, was understood to refer to a body of laws derived from nature, and believed to be binding upon men independently of laws established by human authority. To speak of natural law was to invoke a higher moral standard, above and beyond positive law, by which to judge existing societies. Although 17th Century theorists such as Grotius and Pufendorf had couched natural law in largely secular terms, insisting—in response to the scepticism epitomised by the philosophy of Montaigne—that man could access this law through reason, the concept retained a theological resonance, owing to the earlier writings of Thomas Aquinas, and to more openly doctrinal contributions by 18th Century advocates like Barbeyrac and Burlamaqui¹¹. The article of the *Encyclopédie* entitled 'Droit de la Nature', penned by Boucher d'Argis, and published the same year as Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, captured all of the ambiguity surrounding the concept. “On entend [...] par *droit naturel*”, Boucher d'Argis wrote, “certaines regles de justice & d'équité, que la seule raison naturelle a établies entre tous les hommes, ou pour mieux dire, que Dieu a gravées dans nos cœurs”¹².

In denying that natural law authorised inequality, Rousseau sought, in fine, to refute the thesis that political, social, and economic inequality formed part of an inescapable natural order, a “Great Chain of Being” sanctioned by God¹³. Those who defended this vision portrayed as the handiwork of providence human arrangements that Rousseau believed instead to be self-imposed sources of vice and misery¹⁴. The purpose of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* was thus to expose existing inequality as irreducibly

11 On contemporary theories of natural law, see Tuck 1990; Rosenblatt 1997, pp. 90-101.

12 'Droit de la Nature'

13 “The Christianized version of Aristotle's Great Chain of Being had enabled Europeans to envisage themselves safely ensconced at the top of an unchanging hierarchy, under instructions from God to superintend the world and use it for their own advantage”, Patricia Fara writes. “Rich hereditary landowners clung on to this reassuring vision, content to contemplate themselves and their descendants enjoying the privileges they regarded as their God-given rights.” (Fara 2009, p 231).

14 *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même*, Preface, OC 2, p 969

artificial, and fundamentally at odds with nature.

In order to argue his case, however, Rousseau felt it necessary to clarify the concept of natural law, and this, in turn, meant achieving a deeper understanding of human nature itself, to which natural law was meant to correspond¹⁵. “La plus utile et la moins avancée de toutes les connoissances humaines me paroît être celle de l'homme”, he wrote in the preface of his *Discours*. “(C)omment connoître la source de l'inégalité parmi les hommes”, Rousseau asked, “si l'on ne commence par les connoître eux mêmes?”¹⁶ He thus set out to probe into human nature, and to look beyond modern European societies, in search of the lost quintessence of man.

This, inevitably, would require addressing a question that had been central to the ethics of the previous century. One of the hallmarks of the accounts of human nature articulated by French theorists during the *Grand Siècle* was the importance attached to the idea of *self-love*, regarded not merely as a concern for one's own preservation, but as a fundamental principle influencing every aspect of man's conduct. This inclination they called “amour propre”, or “amour de soi”¹⁷.

15 In this sense, it can truly be said that the secularisation of natural law—epitomised by Grotius's famous claim in *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (1625) that the law held even if “there is no God”—served Rousseau's purposes by extricating the concept from the unfathomable realm of theology and attaching it instead to human nature, albeit understood as God's creation.

16 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, p 122

17 These two terms were often used synonymously throughout the 17th Century, both of them generally carrying equally pejorative connotations. As Charles-Olivier Stiker-Métral notes, unlike in its modern spelling, “amour-propre” was written in two separate words, without a hyphen, during the Century of Louis XIV (Stiker-Métral 2007, p 22). Interestingly, Rousseau adopted the same spelling convention in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, but then later resorted to the modern spelling in *Emile*. This would tend to lend support to the thesis defended in this chapter, according to which the account of self-love Rousseau presented in the *Discours*—which differs from the one found in his later works—is best understood as a response to earlier accounts of “amour propre”. Curiously, in his last text, the *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, Rousseau alternated between “amour propre” and “amour-propre”, even within the confines of a single sentence. “L'estime de soi-même”, he wrote, “est le plus grand mobile des ames fières, l'amour-propre fertile en illusions se deguise et se fait prendre pour cette estime, mais quand la fraude enfin se découvre et que l'amour propre ne peut plus se cacher, dès lors il n'est plus à craindre” (*Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, VIII, OC 1, p 1079).

4. “Amour propre” and “Amour de soi-même”

In this context, that Rousseau articulated his own conception of human self-love in the *Second Discourse* comes as no surprise: in so doing, he was following in the footsteps of a plethora of authors who had grounded their judgement of human nature on this very feature.

The passage of the text that offered the best synthesis of Rousseau's thoughts on the subject lay in one of the lengthy notes added to its published version:

“Il ne faut pas confondre l'Amour propre et l'Amour de soi-même; deux passions très différentes par leur nature et par leurs effets. L'Amour de soi-même est un sentiment naturel qui porte tout animal à veiller à sa propre conservation et qui, dirigé dans l'homme par la raison et modifié par la pitié, produit l'humanité et la vertu. L'Amour propre n'est qu'un sentiment relatif, factice, et né dans la société, qui porte chaque individu à faire plus de cas de soi que de tout autre, qui inspire aux hommes tous les maux qu'ils se font mutuellement, et qui est la véritable source de l'honneur.”¹⁸

This distinction between two varieties of self-love—the natural and beneficent “Amour de soi-même” and the artificial, malevolent “Amour propre”—has frequently been regarded as the key to Rousseau's anthropology¹⁹.

However, this understanding has come under attack in recent years, and with good reason: it fails to account for the discrepancies between Rousseau's treatment of self-love in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* and that found in later works, particularly *Emile*. As we shall see in the next chapter, the theory of self-love articulated in the latter text differs in several ways from the one presented in the *Discours*, and one loses sight of

18 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Note XV, OC 3, p 219

19 Sébastien Charbonnier remarks that Note XV of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* has hitherto constituted the canonical exposition of Rousseau's thoughts on human self-love in the eyes of Francophone scholars (Charbonnier 2010, p 321).

this fact by isolating a passage like the one reproduced above from its context and declaring it to be representative of Rousseau's philosophy as a whole, without investigating the particular characteristics of the text from which it was drawn, and its singular place within the author's wider *œuvre*.

In this chapter, it is argued that Rousseau's bicephal theory of self-love in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* is best understood as a strategic response to past and contemporary theories. It is probable that, in articulating his own account, Rousseau felt more concerned with stressing his disagreement with other theorists than presenting a definitive version of his own thoughts on the subject. Indeed, the succession of texts Rousseau penned between 1754 (when the *Second Discourse* was written) and 1762 (the year both *Emile* and *Du Contract Social* were published), reveals a philosophy in constant development on this and many other points. These were undoubtedly the critical years of the philosopher's intellectual journey, the period during which his thoughts gradually solidified as he prepared to pen his two masterpieces.

From this perspective, the *Discours* itself can be interpreted as a refutation of earlier philosophers' arguments rather than a sophisticated exposition of Rousseau's own. It constituted an effort to steer his philosophy away from the mistakes of his predecessors. The purpose of the *Second Discourse*—much like that of the *First Discourse*—was to alert readers to a problem, and to show them the inability of existing theories to deal with it. It is relative to this specific purpose that the passages on self-love within this text are best grasped. Beyond this, the value of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* resides in providing a fascinating snapshot of a great thinker engaged in the process of crafting his own distinct philosophy, dissecting the theories of others,

drawing elements from them, and integrating these into his own theory, combining old ideas in original ways to produce new and distinctive results.

The ensuing discussion is divided into two parts. The first offers a brief history of the concepts of “Amour propre” and “Amour de soi-même”, as well as an overview of the various theories of self-love that prevailed at the time Rousseau was writing the *Second Discourse*. The second examines how Rousseau borrowed elements from these different traditions to articulate his own account of self-love. Rousseau reaffirmed the *moral* condemnation of “Amour propre”, voiced by the French Augustinians, to undermine the optimistic vision of “amour-propre” advanced by *doux commerce* theorists. Yet he also drew inspiration from Voltaire in articulating a wholly *worldly* conception of “Amour propre”, so as to archaize the spiritual underpinnings of the Augustinian conception. And, lastly, the distinction between “Amour de soi-même” and “Amour propre”, originally drawn by Christian Humanists, allowed Rousseau to undercut all those theories that treated “Amour propre” as a natural datum, a perennial feature of human nature, and to offer a genealogy of “Amour propre” that showed the role played by contingency in its development, thus raising the possibility that different circumstances might have brought (and might yet bring) about a different kind of self-love, and indeed a different form of human nature. In fine, Rousseau's eclectic approach produced a singular vision of self-love that perfectly set up the problem his later works would seek to solve.

I. The Concepts of 'Amour de soi' and 'Amour propre' before Rousseau

Rousseau's theory of self-love in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* can be regarded as a response to three prominent strands of thought: Christian Humanism, Augustinianism,

and *doux commerce* theory. The advocates of these schools accorded a place of choice to self-love in their theories, and though they looked upon it more or less favourably depending on their philosophical—and, more often than not, theological—commitments, they all nevertheless shared a broadly similar understanding of what the terms “amour de soi” and “amour propre” referred to. Their vision of self-love was the product of centuries of discussions on the topic, and to understand the assumptions on which it rested it is necessary to briefly survey the history of the concept.

1. *Ancient Origins*

As Jean Mesnard remarks, the prototype of the concept of “amour propre”, so crucial to 17th Century ethics, was the Greek term “philautia”, found in the writings of many Ancient authors, both Greek and Roman²⁰. Though they occasionally employed “philautia” in a positive sense, in time its connotations became consistently negative, paving the way for their Judeo-Christian successors, many of whom would go on to castigate human self-love, opposing it to the higher love that men owed to God. One important difference between the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian accounts of self-love, as Mesnard notes, is that in the first, the description of “philautia” generally partook in a compartmentalised analysis of human traits, which often fell well short of a complete study of man's nature²¹, whereas Abrahamic theologians like Augustine of Hippo would adopt a more holistic approach, purporting to portray human nature as an *entity*, in all of its unflattering details.

20 Mesnard 1992, pp. 43-47. See, for instance, Plutarch's *Letter of Consolation* (c. 90 CE). Griffiths offers interesting analysis of the concept of “philautia” in this letter (see Griffiths 1991, p 83). On the probing psychology of the text, see also Baltussen 2009. On the concept of “philautia”, see Hausherr 1952.

21 Mesnard 1992, pp. 44-45

Jewish—and later Christian—theories of self-love drew both on Ancient philosophy and the Bible, which commanded that human beings be humble and love God above all else, positing that “the principle of all sin is pride”²². The Judaic Greek philosopher Philo of Alexandria, writing in the First Century, invested the concept of “philautia” with a theological dimension, opposing love of self to the true love of God. The author illustrated his point by proposing a psychological interpretation of the Biblical tale of the brothers Cain and Abel. According to Philo, in Cain and Abel self-love manifested itself in two radically different ways: Cain's vanity produced a dazzling sense of entitlement that turned him away from God, and made him jealous of his brother, ultimately leading him to commit murder; Abel, at the opposite, attained true knowledge, authentic wisdom, and the salvation of his soul by subjecting his self-love to his faith, and cultivating his relation to God²³.

The opposition of self-love and love of God would form the cornerstone of much subsequent Christian theology, and nowhere, perhaps, was it expressed more powerfully and with greater philosophical depth than in the works of Saint Augustine²⁴. In his seminal opus *The City of God* (410), Augustine placed the dichotomy between self-love (“amor sui”) and love of God (“amor Dei”) at the heart of his system, combining theological gravity with philosophical rigour to propound a doctrine that would influence countless generations of Christian thinkers in later centuries. He opposed two realms: the earthly city of man, where love of self was exalted to the point of contempt for God; and the celestial city of God, in which love of God was cultivated along with self-contempt. For Augustine, authentic faith in God, and the harmony it produced,

22 Ecclesiasticus, X, 15

23 *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain*. On Philo's psychological analysis of the story of Cain and Abel, see Najmar 2003, p 115. A similar interpretation of the tale is found in Augustine's *City of God*, XV:1.

24 On Augustine and the problem of self-love, see O'Donovan 1980.

stood in sharp contrast with the ruinous disorder of societies fuelled by pride and selfishness²⁵. Ever since the Fall, when God had punished Adam and Eve for the original sin by banishing them from the Garden of Eden, the condition of man on this earth had been a deeply precarious one: the little freedom he possessed allowed him to err and turn away from the path of God, yet he was not strong enough to achieve his soul's salvation all by himself. Born a corrupt and vicious creature, his only true hope lay in divine grace, which he deserved only if he chose to direct his will towards God rather than to himself. And this pious orientation of the will to the divinity constituted the precondition for all that was morally good. Augustine did not deny that there could exist a benign form of self-love; indeed, he conceded that a recognition of one's own value as a being created by God, in the own image of the author of all things, enabled respect for one's own life and well-being, as well as charity towards others²⁶. But importantly, that which alone rendered this type of attachment commendable was its ultimate orientation towards God. All human action could be judged to be good or evil depending on whether or not it proceeded from an unwavering love of God, and, on this basis, Augustine castigated the pagan virtues, which were nothing more than hidden vices, since man without God knew only pride, whether he sought the vacuous pleasures of the Epicureans or the austere wisdom of the Stoics.

2. Renaissance Humanists and Augustinian Moralists

The influence of Augustine's theological writings would prove enduring, and in the 17th Century his pessimistic vision of man as a creature naturally inclined towards vice stirred the passions of Christian thinkers, dividing them into two camps. On one

²⁵ *City of God*, XIV:28

²⁶ *On the Trinity*, 14:14:18. Augustine did not, however, refer to this form of self-love as "amor sui", but rather as "naturaliter inditum". John Rist remarks that Augustine's concession that man's first natural impulse is to self-preservation was undoubtedly inspired by the Stoics, whose school the Christian author otherwise condemned on all fronts (Rist 1996, p 190).

side stood the Humanists²⁷, who refused to believe human nature as thoroughly corrupt as Augustine had contended. Christian Humanism had emerged during the Renaissance as an effort to integrate the recently rediscovered philosophy and culture of the Ancients into Christianity. By contrast with theologians like Luther and Calvin, who denounced the actions and virtues of the Ancient Greeks and Romans as little more than sins in disguise, and for whom there could be nothing of worth beyond the realm of Christianity, Humanists such as Erasmus and Gassendi patiently foraged the texts of their pagan ancestors in search of relics and elements that could be retrieved and assimilated into Christian culture, which they thereby hoped to enrich. Partly influenced by Stoic and Epicurean philosophy, they propounded a more optimistic vision of human nature than that of Augustine, and this sometimes involved theoretical innovations on the theme of self-love²⁸.

In 17th Century France, it was customary to employ the expressions “amour de soi” and “amour propre” interchangeably; as Émile Littré notes, both fell into the Augustinian category of *amor sui* and were reprobated as contrary to *amor Dei*²⁹. But Humanists increasingly distinguished between different kinds of self-love; in his *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* (1616), the Genevan bishop François De Sales acknowledged the tension between love of God and love of self, but went on to distinguish a malign form of self-love, “amour propre”, and a benign form, “amour de nous-mêmes”.

27 This label is taken from Jean Lafond (see Lafond 1998).

28 There would also be Calvinist reappraisals of self-love, such as Jean La Placette's *Nouveaux essais de morale* (1697), which emphasized the natural character of self-love, and Jacques Abbadie's *L'art de se connoître soy-même* (1696), containing a distinction between beneficent and malevolent forms of self-love. See Rosenblatt 1997, ch. 2.

29 Paul-Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*. Indeed, in his *Maximes*, La Rochefoucauld wrote: “L'amour propre est l'amour de soi-même et de toutes choses pour soi” (MS 1).

This distinction was also found in Jean-Pierre Camus's *La Défense du Pur Amour Contre les Attaques de l'Amour Propre* (1640): “amour propre”, Camus held, was a covetous, defective form of self-love based on selfish, proprietary inclinations, whereas “amour de nous-mêmes” was a neutral form of self-love compatible with virtue³⁰. The author insisted that God himself commanded men to love themselves when he asked that they love their neighbours as themselves. But while “amour de nous-mêmes” directed man towards the general good (“intérêt nôtre”), “amour propre” deceived him into favouring a selfish and narrowly construed interest³¹, and it was often difficult to distinguish these two interests, and the two very different forms of self-love that inspired men to pursue them; this required the enlightenment that only pure love of God could bring about.

The idea of a properly understood “amour propre” was sometimes equated with the ideal of honesty. In his *Pensées sur l'Honnêteté* (1680), Damien Mitton contended that while all men desired to be happy, the right path to happiness involved helping ensure the happiness of others, and it was this consideration of happiness for oneself and for others that deserved the name of honesty (“honnêteté”), which was, in fact, nothing more than a well adjusted “amour propre” (“l'amour propre bien réglé”)³².

A similar vision, according to which nature and faith could ultimately be reconciled in a harmonious synthesis, was later expressed by the German rationalist philosopher Leibniz in a letter penned on 25 September 1708, addressed to Sophie of Hanover. Leibniz had been asked to refute *L'Art de Connoistre les Hommes*, an

30 *La Défense du Pur Amour* (pp. 26-28 of the original Alliot edition). Camus wrote that the term “propre” in “amour propre” connoted exclusivity, a refusal to extend one's love of self to love of God (Ibid., p 28). “Amour propre”, he affirmed, stole the glory of the Creator and constituted its own end (Ibid., p 27).

31 Ibid., pp. 33-34

32 *Pensées sur l'Honnêteté* (Lafond 1992, p 85)

aggressively misanthropic pamphlet signed by the Parisian lawyer Louis des Bans, who had pilfered most of its arguments in the Augustinian writings of Jacques Esprit. Writing in French, Leibniz attacked the idea that all human virtues were the product of vanity, and distinguished “amour de soy meme”, “une passion très bonne et tres pure, que l'auteur de la nature nous a donnée”, from “amour propre”, which was the consequence of the disordering (“dérèglement”) of human nature³³. Leibniz sometimes referred to “amour de soy mesme”, and at other times to “amour propre bien entendu”, seemingly using the two expressions interchangeably, and in each case contrasting them with “amour propre” understood in the sinister Augustinian sense of *amor sui*³⁴.

Opposite the Christian Humanists stood the Augustinians³⁵, who remained firmly committed to the pessimistic diagnosis articulated in the *City of God*, and launched successive waves of attack on their more optimistic opponents. As Paul Bénichou explains, one of their goals was to undermine the chivalric ideal of the “héro”, which had emerged during the Renaissance, inspired by the rediscovery of ancient texts³⁶. The “héro”, most memorably portrayed in the plays of Corneille, symbolised the nobility and majestic intensity of ancient passions. In the spirit of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605), the Augustinians sought to reveal the vain and delusional mindset that produced heroic behaviour, all the better to condemn it³⁷.

33 In the letter, Leibniz underlined both “amour de soy meme” and “amour propre”.

34 Letter to Sophie of Hanover, 25.09.1708. On this letter, see Lafond 1998, p 274.

35 The label “Augustinian” is preferable to that of “Jansenist” in this case, because the latter has particular religious connotations (relating to the re-ignition by Cornelius Jansen of the conflict between Augustinian and Pelagian doctrinal perspectives on the question of original sin), and not all the thinkers discussed here were theologians (this applies particularly to La Rochefoucauld), though they were all influenced by Augustine.

36 Bénichou 1948

37 Albert O. Hirschman remarks that while France was the country in which the aristocratic ideal of glorious chivalry found its finest expression, it was also there that surfaced the severest critiques of that ideal (Hirschman 1977, p 11).

The most influential 17th Century Augustinians were undoubtedly the French *Moralistes*. Philosophically, the *Moralistes* reasserted the cardinal tenets of Augustinian doctrine³⁸. In a letter written to his sister shortly after the death of their father in 1651, Blaise Pascal explained the origin of “amour propre” in the following terms:

“Dieu a créé l'homme avec deux amours, l'un pour Dieu, l'autre pour soi-même; mais avec cette loi, que l'amour pour Dieu seroit infini, c'est-à-dire sans aucune autre fin que Dieu même; et que l'amour pour soi-même seroit fini et rapportant à Dieu.

L'homme en cet état non-seulement s'aimoit sans péché, mais ne pouvoit pas ne point s'aimer sans péché.

Depuis, le péché étant arrivé, l'homme a perdu le premier de ces amours; et l'amour pour soi-même étant resté seul dans cette grande âme capable d'un amour infini, cet amour propre s'est étendu et débordé dans le vide que l'amour de Dieu a quitté; et ainsi il s'est aimé seul, et toutes choses pour soi, c'est-à-dire infiniment. Voilà l'origine de l'amour propre. Il étoit naturel à Adam, et juste en son innocence; mais il est devenu et criminel et immodéré, ensuite de son péché.”³⁹

For Pascal, though a benign form of self-love had existed before the Fall, it had been replaced by a malignant form of self-love after the Fall. Pascal's argument in his *Pensées*, the unfinished work for which his philosophy is best known⁴⁰, thus centred around the principle that, in the post-lapsarian world, the self was utterly detestable (“le moi est haïssable”)⁴¹, and true virtue consisted precisely in hating oneself⁴².

However, the strength of the *Moralistes* was stylistic as much as philosophical.

In a poem entitled *L'Homme et son Image*, Jean de La Fontaine evoked the myth of

38 See Brooke 2012, ch. 4.

39 *Lettre sur la Mort de Pascal le père, écrite par Pascal à sa sœur aînée*

40 The countless fragments of this work have been the object of different editions, which each place them in a different order. The three main editions are those of Sellier, Lafuma, and Brunshvicg. Here, the Sellier edition is used. A helpful concordance table can be found in Lafond 1992, pp. 308-18.

41 *Pensées*, S 494 (Lafond 1992, p 462). “Il n'y a que deux sortes d'hommes”, Pascal contended: “les uns justes, qui se croient pécheurs; les autres pécheurs, qui se croient justes.” [*Pensées*, S 469 (Lafond 1992, p 455)]

42 *Ibid.*, S 471 (Lafond 1992, p 456)

Narcissus, comparing the waters in which the youth saw and fell in love with his own reflection to the writings of the *Moralistes*. Interestingly, his narrative departed from classical versions of the tale, such as the one found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection believing that it was someone else's image: he was *mystified* by the mirror; La Fontaine's Narcissus, to the contrary, realized full well that the image was his own, but was disgruntled, because it contradicted his own delusional self-image: he was *aggrieved* by the mirror. This fable captured the spirit of the *Moralistes'* approach to describing self-love. In their writings, “amour propre” was assimilated to a refusal to accept reality and gain awareness of one's true condition. It caused a general aversion to the truth, an illusory overvaluation of the self, a tendency to deceive oneself and others, and a desire to submit others to one's will as a means of validating one's bloated sense of worth. In this context, the mirror was a salutary—if humbling—opportunity to acquire a lucid reflection of one's true self⁴³.

The goal of the *Moralistes* was thus to bring to the light that which was destined to remain in the shadows, to unveil the secret folds of the human heart. However, given the hatred for the truth that “amour propre” was known to inspire, a measure of seduction proved necessary in order to overcome the reader's recalcitrance. Hence the importance of format and style, which were elevated to exquisite art forms in their writings. La Bruyère's *Les Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce Siècle* (1688), and its piecemeal depiction of 17th Century French society, typify this approach⁴⁴. The most remarkable exemplar, however, was La Rochefoucauld, and his masterpiece, the

43 Stiker-Métral 2007, pp. 12-13; Lafond 1992, p xiv

44 La Bruyère's description of the French Court, in Chapter VIII, as the kingdom of vanity reveals affinities between his vision of society and Pascal's, although La Bruyère, more portraitist than philosopher, did not explicitly conceptualise “amour propre”.

Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes Morales (usually referred to simply as the *Maximes*) (1665).

La Rochefoucauld made three key claims about “amour propre”. Firstly, it was *impenetrable*. “(R)ien de si caché que ses desseins”, he wrote; “ses souplesses ne se peuvent représenter, ses transformations passent celles des métamorphoses, et ses raffinements ceux de la chimie”. “On ne peut sonder la profondeur, ni percer les ténèbres de ses abîmes”⁴⁵. Second, it was *invincible*: even when one strove to annihilate it, “dans le même temps qu'il se ruine en un endroit, il se rétablit en un autre”, and “lors même qu'il est vaincu et qu'on croit en être défait, on le retrouve qui triomphe dans sa propre défaite”⁴⁶. And third, it was in its very nature to be *blind to its own activity*, like an eye, which saw everything except itself⁴⁷. In order to expose the reality of “amour propre” to his readers, La Rochefoucauld purposively designed his text as a mirror, reflecting the unflattering realities of human nature for all to see. Composed of a succession of short thoughts, which rarely exceeded a paragraph, and often consisting in a single sentence, the fragmentary and discontinuous architecture of the text induced an effort of reflection on the part of readers, forcing them to reconstruct its hidden arguments themselves. The *Maximes* was a book that, paradoxically, drew its strength from its disorder. Moreover, the clinical conciseness, the economical style, and the cold, scientific tone all conspired to remove the author, and to leave the reader alone, faced with his own sinister image. The text ultimately constituted a trap: to understand the maxims was to be described by them.

45 *Maximes*, Maxime Supprimée 1 (Lafond 1992, pp. 179-180)

46 *Ibid.*, Maxime Supprimée 1 (Lafond 1992, p 181)

47 *Ibid.*, Maxime Supprimée 1 (Lafond 1992, p 180). Some commentators highlight the similarities between La Rochefoucauld's penetrating observations on “amour propre” and the later theories of psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Jean Lafond goes so far as to describe the author of the *Maximes* as “Freud in laces” (Lafond 1992, p 126). On this point, see Doubrovsky 1980.

3. *Doux Commerce*

Though the French Augustinians had castigated “amour propre”, they had also paid it a secret tribute, by exposing its centrality to all human behaviour. Indeed, many of La Rochefoucauld's maxims seemed to tacitly recognize that men could not survive without it. The eighty-seventh proclaimed that “(l)es hommes ne vivraient pas longtemps en société s'ils n'étoient les dupes les uns des autres”⁴⁸, and the eighty-third described “(c)e que les hommes ont nommé amitié” as nothing more than “un commerce où l'amour propre se propose toujours quelque chose à gagner”⁴⁹. Commenting on the book nearly a hundred years later in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), Voltaire wrote that “il n'y (a) presque qu'une vérité dans ce livre, qui est que l'amour-propre est le mobile de tout”⁵⁰. In the 18th Century, many French thinkers rested their analysis of human nature on this important insight, while freeing themselves from the austere theological framework of their forebears. This allowed them to begin thinking about human nature in new terms.

Although they had read the damning condemnations of fallen man articulated in the works of the *Moralistes* in the previous century, and were cognisant of the Augustinian critique of “amour propre”, Voltaire and many of his contemporaries chose to adopt a different perspective on the problem. Treating as axiomatic the observation that “l'amour-propre est le mobile de tout”, the champions of *doux commerce*⁵¹ argued

48 *Maximes*, 87 (Lafond 1992, p 142)

49 *Ibid.*, 83 (Lafond 1992, p 142)

50 *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, ch. 32

51 What has come to be known as *doux commerce* theory held that increased commerce—understood in broad and not merely economic terms—benefited society by elevating man in various ways. That the partisans of *doux commerce* favoured exactly the kind of social life that Rousseau denounced in his works is perfectly illustrated in a letter written by Voltaire to D'Alembert in 1761. Reacting against Rousseau's claim that he had corrupted Geneva, Voltaire wrote: “Comme si je me Souciais d'*adoucir* les mœurs de Geneve” (Lettre de François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire à Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, 19/03/1761, CC 8, p 272 [italics added]). On *doux commerce* theory, and Rousseau's criticism of it, see Mendham 2010.

that, irrespective of its flaws, self-love could be a force for good. If “amour-propre” was the secret cause of everything, then there were many grounds on which to admire it, since whatever prosperity existed in society must also be owed to it. Leaving aside the cobwebbed disputes of the theologians, they placed a new focus on the social and economic role of “amour-propre”, evaluating it according to its *usefulness* to society. They regarded it as the cement of society, and the fuel of all human action.

Jean Lafond contends that this perception of “amour-propre” can be traced back to Helvétius's influential work *De L'Esprit* (1758), where Helvétius criticized the Augustinians, undermined the dichotomy between *amor Dei* and *amor sui* by ignoring the former altogether, and highlighted the usefulness of “amour-propre” as the motor of all individual action and social life⁵². But, in reality, the idea of a socially useful “amour-propre” emerged much earlier than this. In *The Fable of the Bees* (1714)⁵³, the Dutch-born English philosopher Bernard de Mandeville provocatively distinguished between individual self-love, which was without question a vice, and the beneficial aggregate effects that resulted from each particular individual indulging in it. The *Moralistes* had offered a *microanalysis* of self-love, examining its manifestations in the hearts of individuals; however, a *macroanalysis* of self-love which took into account its social benefits yielded an entirely different picture⁵⁴. Mandeville went as far as to argue that society, like a hive, required selfish behaviour on the part of its members in order to function, and that, at the opposite, virtuous conduct, far from serving society, actually undermined it, because individuals required the incentive of self-love in order to

52 *De L'Esprit*, Discours Premier, ch. IV. See Lafond 1998, p 273.

53 *The Fable of the Bees* comprised a poem entitled 'The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves turn'd Honest', which originally appeared in 1705, and a commentary in prose. The book captured much attention, especially from 1723.

54 The *Moralistes*, at the opposite, had judged society on the basis of their analysis of individuals. “Rien ne nous peut tant instruire du dérèglement général de l'homme que la parfaite connoissance de nos dérèglements particuliers”, Madame de Sablé had written in the thirteenth of her *Maximes* [*Maximes* (Lafond 1992, p 247)].

contribute to the best of their ability. Hence the subtitle of Mandeville's notorious work: *Private vices, Publick Benefits*.

It is plausible to assume that both Montesquieu and Voltaire were influenced by Mandeville, since each of them spent time in London in the late 1720s, at a time when *The Fable of the Bees* was stirring much debate⁵⁵. In *De L'Esprit des Lois* (1748), Montesquieu expounded a theory of monarchical honour in which he argued that it was each individual's desire for distinction that enabled monarchical regimes to function. The universal craving for honour inspired the most beautiful deeds, and, properly guided by the laws, served the purposes of the government⁵⁶. The author conceded that such conduct was less admirable than true virtue, since those who sought honour showed greater love for themselves than for the state⁵⁷, but the supreme artistry of this regime resided precisely in its ability to make all individuals work unknowingly for the common good, while pursuing their own selfish goals. The selfish pursuit of repute by individuals served the common good of society: men actuated by the craving for honour proved to be excellent subjects⁵⁸. In his *Pensées*, Montesquieu stated that “tel a été le bonheur du genre humain que cet amour-propre, qui devoit dissoudre la société, la fortifie, au contraire, et la rend inébranlable”⁵⁹.

Likewise, in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764), Voltaire included two articles aimed specifically at undercutting the pessimism of the *Moralistes'* theories:

55 Voltaire fled to England in 1726 following an altercation with the Chevalier de Rohan and a brief sojourn in the Bastille. In 1733, he published his *Letters concerning the English Nation*, written in English, and translated into French as his *Lettres Philosophiques* in 1734. Montesquieu visited England in the Autumn of 1729 as part of a series of voyages across Europe, remaining on the island until 1731. See Churton Collins 1908.

56 *De L'Esprit des Lois*, III, 6

57 *Ibid.*, III, 6

58 *Ibid.*, III, 7

59 *Pensées*, No. 464

'Fausseté des Vertus Humaines', which attacked the contention that all human virtues sprang from despicable vanity; and 'Amour-propre', which heaped praise on the very passion Pascal had shown himself so determined to condemn. Voltaire rejected Pascal's moralistic judgement out of hand, and chose to assess “amour-propre” chiefly in terms of its observable effects. He described it as a useful disposition because it inclined man towards his own preservation, as well as that of the species. “Cet amour-propre est l'instrument de notre conservation”, he wrote; “il ressemble à l'instrument de la perpétuité de l'espèce: il nous est nécessaire, il nous est cher, il nous fait plaisir, et il faut le cacher”⁶⁰. In his *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie* (1770), Voltaire scornfully rejected the ideas lengthily propounded in Pierre Nicole's “deux ou trois mille volumes de morale”. “L'amour-propre n'est point une scélératesse, c'est un sentiment naturel à tous les hommes”, Voltaire concluded⁶¹.

This new vision of “amour-propre”, hailed by Montesquieu and Voltaire, differed from the “amour propre bien entendu” (or “bien réglé”) of Leibniz in that it rested on a broadly similar understanding of the nature and mechanisms of “amour-propre” to that of the *Moralistes*. Between the 17th century *Moralistes* and the 18th century partisans of *doux commerce*, there was no disagreement over the fundamental *nature* of “amour-propre”, only over how to judge it and to assess its social consequences⁶².

That Rousseau was exposed to—and influenced by—all of these discordant visions of self-love is indubitable. Beyond his readings, detailed in the *Confessions*, his very origins may also explain his interest in this question. As Helena Rosenblatt

60 *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Article 'Amour-propre'

61 *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, 'Amour-propre'

62 Keohane 1980, pp. 21-22; Bernardi 2006, p 288

observes, the city of Geneva was animated by fierce intellectual battles over the nature of self-love throughout the 18th century, opposing an increasingly wealthy and powerful, aristocratic, mercantilist, 'francophile' upper town, inclined to regard the satisfaction of one's interests as morally justified, and a poorer, artisanal, austere, republican, and Calvinist lower town, suspicious of commercial society⁶³. In response to the late 17th century appraisals of self-love proposed by Calvinist authors like Jean De La Placette and Jacques Abbadie, 18th century Genevan Calvinists such as Jacques- François Deluc, author of a *Lettre critique sur la fable des abeilles* (1747), and Jacob Vernet, author of *Instruction Chrétienne* (1751), continued to discriminate between good and bad forms of self-love, but denounced efforts to blur the distinction between virtue and vice, and insisted that avarice belonged to the realm of “amour-propre”.

Yet, to regard Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité* as merely prolonging the case defended by Genevan thinkers such as Vernet and Deluc would constitute both an oversimplification of his argument, which, in truth, drew inspiration from a far wider intellectual spectrum, and an injustice to the profound singularity of his contribution.

II. Self-love in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*

1. A moral account

In the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Rousseau rejected the optimism of *doux commerce* theory, likening the 'gentleness' produced by such commerce to mere appearance. “Qu'on pénètre donc au travers de nos frivoles démonstrations de bienveillance ce qui se passe au fond des cœurs”, he wrote, “et qu'on réfléchisse à ce que doit être un état de choses où tous les hommes sont forcés de se caresser et de se

63 Rosenblatt 1997, p 66

détruire mutuellement, et où ils naissent ennemis par devoir et fourbes par intérêt”⁶⁴. Tapping once again into the themes of the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, he affirmed that, beyond its glittering façade of harmony and prosperity, modern society, plagued by secret enmity, brought misery to its members. In the nameless—if all too familiar—society depicted in the *Second Discourse*, men were perpetually pitted against one another and tacitly encouraged to rejoice in others' ruin. “Il n'y a peut-être pas un homme aisé”, Rousseau deplored, “à qui des héritiers avides et souvent ses propres enfans ne souhaitent la mort en secret; pas un Vaisseau en Mer dont le naufrage ne fût une bonne nouvelle pour quelque Négociant”⁶⁵. He compared the modern civilised man to a coffin merchant delighting in the demise and grief of his neighbours⁶⁶, and inveighed against “l'ambition dévorante, l'ardeur d'élever sa fortune relative, moins par un véritable besoin que pour se mettre au-dessus des autres”, which inspired in all men “un noir penchant à se nuire mutuellement”⁶⁷. He denounced an “affreux désordre”, “les usurpations des riches”, “les Brigandages des Pauvres”, and a dark world in which man was avaricious, ambitious, and wicked⁶⁸. “(A)près de longues prospérités, après avoir englouti bien des trésors et désolé bien des hommes, (il) finira par tout égorger jusqu'à ce qu'il soit l'unique maître de l'Univers”; “(t)el est en abrégé le tableau moral, sinon de la vie humaine, au moins des prétentions secrettes du cœur de tout homme Civilisé”, Rousseau sinisterly concluded⁶⁹.

The role of self-love was of central importance in Rousseau's analysis of man's plight in modern society. The servitude caused by social corruption existed at a number of levels: at the *political* level, with the powerless subjected to the will of the strong; at

64 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Note IX, OC 3, p 203

65 *Ibid.*, Note IX, OC 3, p 202

66 *Ibid.*, Note IX, OC 3, p 203

67 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 175

68 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 176

69 *Ibid.*, Note IX, OC 3, p 203

the *economic* level, with the poor finding themselves at the mercy of the wealthy; and at the *social* level, with political and economic inequalities resulting in inequalities in status, which in turn served to naturalize and reify the former. However, what rendered *all* men slaves in modern society—as opposed to merely the weak and the poor—was a different kind of servitude, the description of which constituted the most haunting and disturbing part of Rousseau's diagnosis: the *psychological* loss of freedom inflicted by society on all its members. To illustrate this point, Rousseau contrasted the modern social human being with an imaginary kind of man, “l'homme sauvage”, who lived outside of society in a condition of primordial, nomadic solitude called the state of nature. Unlike the latter, whose simple, solitary and serene existence Rousseau nostalgically extolled, the former was tormented by “ce désir universel de réputation, d'honneurs, et de préférences”, which “excite et multiplie les passions”. “(C)'est à cette ardeur de faire parler de soi, à cette fureur de se distinguer qui nous tient presque toujours hors de nous mêmes”, Rousseau wrote, “que nous devons ce qu'il y a de meilleur et de pire parmi les hommes [...], c'est-à-dire, une multitude de mauvaises choses sur un petit nombre de bonnes”⁷⁰.

This vivid portrayal of a diseased society, blighted by “Amour propre”, borrowed many elements from other thinkers. Some scholars, such as Robert Derathé, emphasize Rousseau's description of social strife as an “état de guerre”⁷¹ and point to the influence of Thomas Hobbes, declaring that Rousseau transposed Hobbes's state of nature into society⁷². However, while this characterisation successfully conveys the general spirit of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, it is not entirely accurate.

70 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 189

71 Ibid., II, OC 3, p 176

72 Derathé 1950, p 109. See also Starobinski in OC 3, pp. 1349-1350.

In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes famously described the state of nature as an apolitical and asocial condition in which “a war of every man against every man” ensured that life was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”⁷³. Among the “principal causes of quarrel” was “glory”, each man's desire that others “value him at the same rate he sets upon himself”, which led men, “upon all signs of contempt or undervaluing”, to strive to correct the offence, usually violently, to “extort a greater value” from their immediate rivals, and improve their reputation in the eyes of onlookers⁷⁴. “Glory” had special importance in Hobbes's account of the state of war. For one thing, it was clearly the most volatile, inflammable element in the mixture; while the violence that resulted from competition and diffidence, the other two causes of conflict, was directly oriented towards survival and self-conservation, glory made men resort to violence “for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue”, and this applied not only to one's own individual but also to broader groups to which one identified, such as one's family, friends, or nation⁷⁵. Hobbes in fact suggested more than once that pride was the single most important reason in compelling man to leave the state of nature. In Chapter XXVIII, for instance, he wrote that it was man's “pride and other passions that have compelled him to submit himselfe to Government”⁷⁶. Hobbes also held that, even after the establishment of civil society, glory remained among the most salient features of humanity, given that the absolutist state he envisaged as the only solution to ensure an end to fratricidal conflict was designed to crush the proud by inspiring fear: Leviathan was king over the “children of pride”⁷⁷.

Rousseau's conception of “Amour propre” does exhibit certain undeniable similarities with Hobbes's conception of “glory”: both involve a striving for

73 *Leviathan*, ch. XIII, § 8-9

74 *Ibid.*, ch. XIII, § 3-7

75 *Ibid.*, ch. XIII, § 7

76 *Ibid.*, ch. XXVIII, § 27. See also ch. XVII, and *De Cive*, ch. I & V.

77 *Ibid.*, ch. XXVIII, § 27

comparative status, a desire to be valued highly by others, a volatility that may potentially lead to violent conflict, and a propensity to domineer. Yet, the two authors' accounts also diverge in a significant way: Hobbes did not deem “glory”, as it manifested itself in the state of nature, to be morally condemnable; indeed, as he wrote near the end of Chapter XIII of *Leviathan*, in the state of nature “nothing can be unjust”, since there was no true morality in men's actions outside of the state. Justice and injustice “are qualities that relate to men in society, not in solitude”⁷⁸. He argued that men only became sinners when they continued to behave belligerently within civil society, i.e. within the realm of positive law. The account of “glory” as a feature of man's psychology in the state of nature was entirely amoral, and simply highlighted the disadvantages of life in such a condition.

By contrast, Rousseau's account of “Amour propre” displayed all the characteristics of a *moral* condemnation. His “tableau moral” of the human heart presented this passion as not merely harmful, but sinful. He described men inhabited by it as corrupt and depraved. Their lives were not just miserable, but morally wayward. This moral indignation, expressed throughout the *Second Discourse*, and the theme of corruption more generally, was absent from Hobbes's comparatively pragmatic—and amoral—account of “glory” in *Leviathan's* Chapter XIII.

A more obvious source of inspiration for Rousseau's diagnosis of corrupt society lies, instead, in the writings of the *Moralistes*⁷⁹. In Part II of the *Discours*, the themes developed by Rousseau strongly evoke the Augustinian portrait of Fallen man, a being

78 Ibid., ch. XIII, § 13

79 Evidence of Rousseau's familiarity with the writings of the *Moralistes* abounds throughout his corpus. Rousseau referred to “les gros Livres des Moralistes” in the preface of the *Second Discourse* (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, p 122). See also *Confessions*, VI, OC 1, p 242.

whose swelling vanity produced an inner void, a moral vacuum, and a deceiving exterior. “(T)out se réduisant aux apparences, tout devient factice et joué; honneur, amitié, vertu, et souvent jusqu'aux vices mêmes, dont on trouve enfin le secret de se glorifier”, Rousseau grumbled near the end of the work⁸⁰. He lamented that “au milieu de tant de Philosophie, d'humanité, de politesse et de maximes Sublimes, nous n'avons qu'un extérieur trompeur et frivole, de l'honneur sans vertu”⁸¹, and decried “une jalousie secreta d'autant plus dangereuse que, pour faire son coup plus en sûreté, elle prend souvent le masque de la bienveillance”⁸². For Rousseau, the symbol of man's corruption was the philosopher, who cultivated a cold detachment from his fellow creatures:

“C'est la raison qui engendre l'amour propre, et c'est la réflexion qui le fortifie; C'est elle qui replie l'homme sur soi-même; c'est elle qui le sépare de tout ce qui le gêne et l'afflige: C'est la Philosophie qui l'isole; c'est par elle qu'il dit en secret, à l'aspect d'un homme souffrant, peris si tu veux, je suis en sûreté. Il n'y a plus que les dangers de la société entière qui troublent le sommeil tranquille du Philosophe, et qui l'arrachent de son lit. On peut impunément égorger son semblable sous sa fenestre; il n'a qu'à mettre ses mains sur ses oreilles et s'argumenter un peu, pour empêcher la Nature qui se revolte en lui, de l'identifier avec celui qu'on assassine.”⁸³

In this passage, Rousseau underscored one of the principal effects of “amour propre”, which was to isolate man, by turning him away from the path of Nature, and anaesthetising him to the suffering of others. The account was very similar to the Augustinian narrative, where man's appalling conduct towards his fellow creatures appeared as a consequence of turning away from God. One of the hallmarks of the *Discours* is the constant parallel between political phenomena such as inequality and oppression, and moral vices such as conceit and selfishness. Rousseau drew on the repertoire of the *Moralistes* to give his account its distinctly moral character, and undermine the optimistic picture conjured by the admirers of *doux commerce*.

80 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, II, OC 3, p 193

81 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 193

82 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 175

83 *Ibid.*, I, OC 3, p 156

2. A worldly account

Though Rousseau's account of self-love in society owed much to the writings of the *Moralistes*, there did, however, exist significant differences between their respective accounts. The chief woe that 17th Century aphorists associated with “amour propre”, that which underlaid and explained everything else, was man's loss of *spirituality*. As Charles-Olivier Stiker-Métral remarks, the texts of the *Moralistes* (especially those of La Rochefoucauld) were not primarily theological or metaphysical in character. They aimed less to expose theories than to enable readers to cast a critical gaze upon themselves. Their purpose was to encourage a lucid recognition of one's own vices, thereby destroying the illusions engendered by “amour propre”, which infatuated man with his own person and turned him away from God⁸⁴. The work they demanded of the reader constituted a precondition for leading a spiritual life. “Amour propre” was dangerous precisely because it deprived man of his spirituality, and consequently the central focus of the *Moralistes'* writings was man's relationship to God, which alone could reawaken that spirituality. In the social problems associated with “amour propre” the *Moralistes* saw merely symptoms of the breakdown of this central relationship. To them, the problem of self-love was ultimately a *foro interno* matter, boiling down to each man's weighing of *amor sui* against *amor Dei* within the secret confines of his soul. Everything else proceeded from this seminal ordering of loves.

In the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, however, Rousseau shifted the moral focus away from man's inner relationship with God, and onto men's relations to one another. This manifested itself in two particular aspects of the text.

⁸⁴ Stiker-Métral 2007, pp. 18-19

Firstly, in the revealing absence of God throughout its two parts: instead of the divinity, Rousseau referred to “Nature” (consistently spelled with a capital). The concept of “Nature” remained somewhat mysterious in this text, perhaps intentionally so, but one fairly clear consequence of the author's decision to substitute it to the theologically charged term of “God” was that it allowed Rousseau to de-personalise providence. Replacing an incarnated, personified divinity with a relatively abstract idea such as “Nature” enabled Rousseau to jettison the idea of a relationship of man to some higher entity altogether. Whereas the *Moralistes* judged man according to the nature of his relationship with God, Rousseau—drawing inspiration, in this respect, from the writings of his compatriot Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui⁸⁵—judged man according to his conformity to a standard, provided by “Nature”.

Secondly, Rousseau described morality as intrinsically interpersonal. He insisted that a state of nature populated by solitary men was amoral, because “les hommes dans cet état n'ayant entre eux aucune sorte de relation morale, ni de devoirs connus, ne pouvoient être ni bons ni méchants, et n'avoient ni vices ni vertus”⁸⁶. A semblance of morality only emerged during the age of gold, when human beings began to develop durable relations to one another, and it is certainly worth noting that this phenomenon seemed very much to coincide with the birth of “Amour propre”⁸⁷. When

85 On the influence of Burlamaqui's writings, particularly his *Principes du Droit Naturel* (1747), upon Rousseau's conception of “Nature” as a normative standard, see Douglass 2011. “(L)'idée du droit, dit Mr. Burlamaqui, et plus encore celle du droit naturel, sont manifestement des idées relatives à la Nature de l'homme”, Rousseau wrote in the *Discours*'s preface. “C'est donc de cette Nature même de l'homme, continue-t-il, de sa constitution et de son Etat qu'il faut déduire les principes de cette science.” (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, p 124)

86 *Ibid.*, I, OC 3, p 152. This does not contradict the claim, also made by Rousseau, that man in his most primordial condition is “good”, since the goodness in question is natural—rather than moral—in character. For Rousseau, human nature is good in the rather limited sense that it is not bad; as the author explained in Part I of the *Discours*, what makes natural savages “good” is that they are devoid of vices and do not know evil (*Ibid.*, I, OC 3, p 154).

87 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 170

Rousseau went on to condemn “Amour propre” in Note XV of the *Discours*, he made no mention of its distorting effects on man's spirituality; instead, he castigated it for inspiring in men a culpable feeling of superiority over others, and driving them to cause harm to their fellow creatures. As for the benign form of self-love, “Amour de soi-meme”, it was defended among other reasons because it produced “humanité”⁸⁸.

Rousseau's *Second Discourse* decried “Amour propre” because of its corrupting effects on human relations, not because it diverted man from the path of the “bon chrétien”. To Rousseau, social discord deserved concern in its own right, and was not merely a manifestation of some deeper, more fundamental problem. While Augustine condemned *amor sui* for establishing an illegitimate equality between man and God, Rousseau, by contrast, castigated “amour propre” for engendering an illegitimate inequality among men⁸⁹. Rousseau's was a *worldly* account of “amour propre”.

As Jacques Domenech remarks, this emancipation of moral theories from the religious framework of Christianity constituted one of the defining developments of French Enlightenment ethics, a movement spearheaded by the *Philosophes*⁹⁰. The notion that human suffering mattered in its own right, independently of metaphysical considerations, was famously articulated by Voltaire through a string of influential and often mordant works, culminating with *Candide* (1759), a satirical tale intended to ridicule the doctrine according to which human misfortune formed a necessary part of a beneficent cosmic design. Voltaire's and Rousseau's respective treatments of the

88 Ibid., Note XV, OC 3, p 219

89 For an excellent comparative study of the theories of self-love propounded by Augustine and the Rousseau of the *Second Discourse*, see Carnevali 2008. Carnevali has, however, rightly been criticised (see Charbonnier 2010, p 323), like many other scholars, for attributing to the mature Rousseau positions he adopted in the *Second Discourse* but modified in *Emile*, as we shall see in the following chapter.

90 Domenech 1996, p 618

question of morality differed in *character*, since Voltaire demurred, on the whole, from judging human nature, and offered a pragmatic, down-to-earth catechism, which would be crystalised in the maxim—serving as the conclusion of *Candide*—that “il faut cultiver notre jardin”, whereas Rousseau took a lot more seriously than his French counterpart the originally theological question of whether man's nature was inherently good or vicious. However, they shared a common *purview*, agreeing that the true realm of morality was the world, and more specifically human relations. To this extent, Rousseau sided with the *Philosophes* to extricate himself from the religious framework of the Augustinians.

3. *A genealogic account*

Rousseau thus transposed the Augustinian critique of “amour propre” into a worldly theory of self-love freed from the theological framework within which the *Moralistes* had continued to situate their writings. Yet, the most original aspect of the *Second Discourse* lay elsewhere, in the method Rousseau employed to distinguish distinct varieties of self-love.

During the *Grand Siècle*, theories of self-love had relied on what Jacques Abbadie called “l'anatomie du cœur humain”⁹¹. Under this paradigm, “amour propre” was regarded as timeless and unchanging, an object of enquiry to be dissected and examined. Rousseau proposed a different method, which he would later call “généalogie”⁹², consisting in articulating a *history* of the human heart, in tracing the development of self-love over time. This formed part of a broader ambition to distinguish the natural from the artificial in man, or, as Rousseau put it, “démêler ce

91 *L'art de se connoître soi-même*, II:5

92 *Lettre à Beaumont*, OC 4, p 936

qu'il tient de son propre fond d'avec ce que les circonstances et ses progrès ont ajoûté ou changé à son Etat primitif"⁹³.

Rousseau's approach owed much to the theories of the great scientist Buffon, who defined as "natural" that which was most removed from human interference⁹⁴. However, Buffon himself had mostly confined this principle within the zoological realm, remaining attached to the Cartesian tenet that man possessed innate reason, and scarcely imagining that the human spirit itself had evolved over time. Rousseau, influenced by the epistemology of Condillac⁹⁵ and the Enlightenment tradition of conjectural history⁹⁶, applied Buffon's principle to human nature itself, and specifically to the question of self-love. It was his determination to follow the French scientist's method to its logical conclusion that constituted the most radical part of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*. Crucially, it led him to *historicize* the problem of "amour propre".

The failure of philosophers to provide a plausible description of the state of nature constituted one of the great themes of the *Discours*. To emphasize the difficulty of the task, Rousseau famously compared human nature under its modern form to a littoral statue of the ancient god Glaucus, which the storms of the ages had disfigured and rendered unrecognisable⁹⁷. To this was added the paradox that the study of human

93 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, p 122

94 On the influence upon Rousseau of Buffon's *L'Histoire Naturelle*, the first volumes of which appeared in 1749, see Morel 1909, pp. 179-198; Fellows 1960; Moran 1993, p 50.

95 Condillac used the example of a statue gradually being exposed to sensations to illustrate the birth of the faculties in his *Traité des Sensations* (1754). As Mark Hulliung remarks, "(w)hat makes Rousseau unique is that he transposed the statue-man from epistemological debates [...] to discussions of 'the state of nature'" (Hulliung 1994, p 60).

96 A long list of eminent authors well known to Rousseau partook in this tradition, including Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government* and Bernard de Mandeville in his *Fable of the Bees*. As Jean Morel remarks, Rousseau would also have been familiar with Diderot's *Pensées sur l'Interprétation de la Nature* (1753), which cautiously explored the idea that human nature might have evolved over vast periods of time (Morel 1909, pp. 133-134).

97 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, p 122. On Rousseau and the symbolism of the statue of Glaucus, see Terrasse 1988.

nature itself constituted an artificial endeavour that contributed to distancing man from his origins. “(T)ous les progrès de l'Espèce humaine l'éloignant sans cesse de son état primitif, plus nous accumulons de nouvelles connoissances, et plus nous nous ôtons les moyens d'acquiescer la plus importantes de toutes”, Rousseau wrote. “(C)'est en un sens à force d'étudier l'homme que nous nous sommes mis hors d'état de le connoître.”⁹⁸

“Les Philosophes qui ont examiné les fondemens de la société ont tous senti la nécessité de remonter jusqu'à l'état de Nature, mais aucun d'eux n'y est arrivé”, the author exclaimed early on in the text⁹⁹. While Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke and Hobbes purported to describe human nature in its pristine condition, all, Rousseau contended, “parloient de l'Homme Sauvage et ils peignoient l'homme Civil”¹⁰⁰.

This failure owed much to their inability to recognise that man's self-love had evolved considerably over time. The author of *Leviathan*, in particular, stood guilty of attributing to primitive men “une multitude de passions qui sont l'ouvrage de la Société”¹⁰¹, thus failing to fulfil the conditions of his own naturalistic method. He transposed into the state of nature what were in fact exclusive traits of men warped by society, such as “avidité”, “oppression”, and “orgueil”¹⁰². The implication was that Hobbes's vision of a state of nature plagued by men's “glory” was implausible, since this particular passion—and the concern for relative status on which it rested—could not exist in the absence of prolonged social interaction. Rousseau believed that, in the absence of social ties, man's psychology would logically reflect the effects of a solitary existence: freedom, self-sufficiency, tranquillity, and very limited intelligence.

98 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, pp. 122-123

99 *Ibid.*, Prelude, OC 3, p 132

100 *Ibid.*, Prelude, OC 3, p 132

101 *Ibid.*, I, OC 3, p 153

102 *Ibid.*, Prelude, OC 3, p 132

According to Rousseau, such a man was endowed with four key qualities: firstly, an instinctive concern for his own well-being and preservation¹⁰³; secondly, “pitié”, which inclined him to empathise spontaneously with the suffering of others¹⁰⁴; a degree of free will, which placed his conduct beyond the reach of purely mechanical explanations¹⁰⁵; and “perfectibilité”, an innate capacity for progress¹⁰⁶.

“Perfectibilité” played a crucial role in the narrative, causing man's nature to change as he reacted to evolving circumstances. Positing this adaptability of human beings allowed Rousseau to explain how “l'homme sauvage” ultimately evolved into a civilised creature, and how elements ingrained in modern men's psychology could be considered alien to man in his original condition, while avoiding resting his account entirely on the contentious metaphysical concept of man's free will¹⁰⁷. It is important, however, to remark that Rousseau did not explicitly deny the role played by the (mis)use of freedom in man's gradual corruption: his insistence on attributing “liberté” to even the earliest men precluded predetermination¹⁰⁸. Rousseau probably deliberately abstained from defining too precisely the respective roles of “perfectibilité” and “liberté” in man's evolution, in order to preserve an advantageous ambiguity. The reader was left with a relatively vague account, in which a succession of contingent factors challenged man's ingenuity and inspired new ways of life, leading to progressive transformations of human nature.

103Ibid., II, OC 3, p 164

104Ibid., I, OC 3, pp. 154-156

105Ibid., I, OC 3, pp. 141-142

106Ibid., I, OC 3, p 142

107Strauss 1947, p 265; Masters 1968, p 69; O'Hagan 2004, p 87

108As Robin Douglass rightly argues, a deterministic genealogy of man's corruption in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* would sit uncomfortably with the rest of Rousseau's “triste et grand Système”, given the importance accorded to the free will in his deontological account of the origins of evil in *Emile*. Recognising the role of “liberté” in the narrative of the *Discours* forms a precondition for understanding the compatibility of the two texts (Douglass 2010, pp. 641-645). In his *Lettre à Philopolis*, Rousseau explicitly acknowledged the role played by “la volonté des hommes” in man's progressive corruption (*Lettre à Philopolis*, OC 3, p 232).

In the first instance, man's physical limitations led him to employ what little intelligence he possessed to adapt to his environment and outsmart other animals¹⁰⁹. Subsequently, the rigour of the seasons and the upheavals of the earth created the need for collaboration between individuals. Rousseau evoked a stag hunt as an example of an early form of cooperation that enabled men's survival through alliance, although such experiments often failed when individuals reverted to selfish impulses¹¹⁰. These experiences allowed human beings to acquire rudimentary notions of duty and reciprocity, but they also caused the first stirrings of human pride. “C'est ainsi”, Rousseau wrote, “que le premier regard qu'il porta sur lui-même, y produisit le premier mouvement d'orgueil; c'est ainsi que sachant encore à peine distinguer les rangs, et se contemplant au premier par son espèce, il se préparoit de loin à y prétendre par son individu”¹¹¹. The strength of the relationship between man's intellectual progress and the development of pride, one of the central themes of the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*¹¹², was here confirmed.

This sentiment of superiority, and the impression of greater security that it generated, in conjunction with increasingly rapid progress in human industry, gradually inspired men to choose a more sedentary mode of existence. Instead of sleeping under trees, or retreating into caverns, they settled into huts, eventually forming small communities¹¹³. This new and more comfortable way of life led to a decline in physical robustness, and rendered men more idle, inclining them to prize superfluous

109 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, II, OC 3, p 165

110 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, pp. 166-167

111 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, II, OC 3, p 166

112 See Chapter 1.

113 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, II, OC 3, p 167-169

commodities, on which they grew dependent. The social life thus fostered also caused the birth of new ideas, and new passions, including love, and a desire for consideration:

“Chacun commença à regarder les autres et à vouloir être regardé soi-même, et l'estime publique eut un prix. Celui qui chantoit ou dansoit le mieux; le plus beau, le plus fort, le plus adroit ou le plus éloquent devint le plus considéré, et ce fut là le premier pas vers l'inégalité, et vers le vice en même tems: de ces premières préférences nâquirent d'un côté la vanité et le mépris, de l'autre la honte et l'envie; et la fermentation causée par ces nouveaux levains produisit enfin des composés funestes au bonheur et à l'innocence.

Sitôt que les hommes eurent commencé à s'apprécier mutuellement et que l'idée de la considération fut formée dans leur esprit, chacun prétendit y avoir droit; et il ne fut plus possible d'en manquer impunément pour personne. De là sortirent les premiers devoirs de la civilité, même parmi les Sauvages, et delà tout tort volontaire devint un outrage, parce qu'avec le mal qui résultoit de l'injure, l'offensé y voyoit le mépris de sa personne souvent plus insupportable que le mal même. C'est ainsi que chacun punissant le mépris qu'on lui avoit témoigné d'une manière proportionnée au cas qu'il faisoit de lui-même, les vengeances devinrent terribles, et les hommes sanguinaires et cruels.”¹¹⁴

In speaking of “l'estime publique”, “la vanité et le mépris”, “la honte et l'envie”, and “l'idée de la considération”, Rousseau evidently referred to the same constellation of passions he had called “orgueil” in the *First Discourse*, and “Amour propre” in Note XV of the *Second*. Indeed, Rousseau explicitly connected the birth of feelings of “honneur” and “offense” to that of “Amour propre”¹¹⁵. In other words, Rousseau associated the first step towards inequality and vice to the birth of “Amour propre”, and the thirst for consideration it caused.

Despite its burning passions, Rousseau characterised this stage of human evolution, marked by the emergence of a social form of self-love within small nascent societies, as the true youth of the world, an age of gold in which an advantageous middle point between the bestiality of the state of nature and the corruption of advanced

114Ibid., II, OC 3, pp. 169-170

115Ibid., Note XV, p 219

society had been reached¹¹⁶. Only baneful accidents, such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, could have brought this epoch to an end, and forced men into tighter cooperation and the organised division of labour, facilitated by the invention of agriculture and metallurgy¹¹⁷.

The cultivation of the land led to its sharing out, and thus to the recognition of private property, and with it the first rules of justice¹¹⁸. The intensification of labour caused differences in talent to translate into sizeable inequalities in wealth and social standing, destroying equality for good¹¹⁹. And once all the land had been appropriated, the acquisition of wealth and prestige became a conflictual zero-sum game, a terrible state of affairs comparable to the Hobbesian state of war, and to which the rich sought to put an end through the cunning device of a fraudulent social contract that institutionalised injustice, ultimately paving the way for despotism.

In this story, man began as a simple being, whose nature was altered as it adapted to evolving circumstances. A limited and purely self-regarding species of self-love gave way to a boundless and relative species of self-love, in a conjectural narrative centred around the rise of inequality.

In articulating this genealogy, Rousseau was able to demonstrate, against the claims of both the 17th Century French Augustinians and the 18th Century apologists of self-love, that “amour propre” was a product of historical contingency, an outcome of mankind's ill-fated journey beyond the state of nature, and not an innate feature of

116Ibid., II, OC 3, p 171

117Ibid., II, OC 3, p 171

118Ibid., II, OC 3, p 173

119Ibid., II, OC 3, p 174

humanity. “(J)e dis que dans nôtre état primitif, dans le véritable état de nature, l'Amour propre n'existe pas”, he wrote, “(c)ar chaque homme en particulier se regardant lui-même comme le seul Spectateur qui l'observe, comme le seul être dans l'univers qui prenne intérêt à lui, comme le seul juge de son propre mérite, il n'est pas possible qu'un sentiment qui prend sa source dans des comparaisons qu'il n'est pas à portée de faire, puisse germer dans son ame”¹²⁰.

The distinction between natural “Amour de soi-même” and artificial “Amour-propre”—taken from the writings of the Christian Humanists—constituted a particularly dexterous conceptual move, since it allowed Rousseau to endorse the sinister Augustinian vision of “amour propre” on the one hand, while salvaging human nature itself, and the possibility of an uncorrupted, benevolent form of self-love, on the other¹²¹, uniting into a coherent whole intuitively appealing elements drawn from antagonistic philosophical camps. In this sense, Rousseau went much further than Leibniz or Abbadie in redeeming the nature of man: they had claimed that men could, through enlightenment, cultivate an innocent form of self-love rather than the corrupt “amour propre”; Rousseau held that “Amour de soi-même” constituted the sole natural form of self-love, of which “Amour propre” was an artificial perversion¹²².

The importance of this dichotomy was reflected by the way Rousseau brought the *Discours* to a close. Before a final paragraph that briefly summed up his argument,

¹²⁰Ibid., Note XV, OC 3, p 219. The *Moralistes'* vision of “amour propre” actually converged with Rousseau's to the extent that they purported to describe fallen man rather than man as he came out of the hands of God. But, in their doctrine, this corruption defined human nature in a far stronger sense than in Rousseau's. As Mark Cladis observes, “Augustine held that humans cannot cure themselves of sin or evil. The disposition to sin—an impaired will unable to order its loves properly—is acquired at birth and remains until death [...]. Original sin, simply put, is fatal. It is invasive and, in terms of human effort, irreversible. Baptism can wash away the guilt inherited from Adam, but the will remains disfigured; only upon death can the will of the elect become perfectly restored and free, that is to say, unable to will anything but the good.” (Cladis 1996, p 80)

¹²¹Brooke 2001, p 113

¹²²Litwin 2013

insisting that the inequality of modern societies violated natural law, he highlighted the contrast between the miseries of social man and the happiness of natural savages, explaining it with reference to the distinctive psychologies of “Amour de soi-même” and “Amour propre”:

“Telle est, en effet, la véritable cause de toutes ces différences: le Sauvage vit en lui-même; l'homme sociable toujours hors de lui ne sait vivre que dans l'opinion des autres, et c'est, pour ainsi dire, de leur seul jugement qu'il tire le sentiment de sa propre existence.”¹²³

Rousseau then evoked a host of vices associated with “une telle disposition”, including indifference to morality, deceitfulness, the glorification of one's own turpitude, sterile concupiscence, and servile dependence on the opinion of others. “Il me suffit d'avoir prouvé que ce n'est point-là l'état originel de l'homme”, he concluded, “et que c'est le seul esprit de la Société et l'inégalité qu'elle engendre, qui changent et altèrent ainsi toutes nos inclinations naturelles”¹²⁴. It is revealing that, although Rousseau had set out to search for the origins of inequality, he finally deemed it more important to emphasize that inequality itself had spawned “Amour propre”.

Conclusion

The frontispiece of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* depicted a civilised Hottentot bidding farewell to his European friends, and returning to live “chez ses égaux”, leaving a bundle of clothes behind him, as well as a contemplative European official. It perfectly captured the polemical thunder of the text, cruelly opposing the simple bliss of the natural savage to the sophisticated misery of the civilised man.

¹²³*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, II, OC 3, p 193

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 193

But, as in the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, beyond this caricature lay a sophisticated argument. To “retourne chez ses égaux”, in this case, meant, at a deeper level, choosing “Amour de soi-même” over “Amour propre”.



The frontispiece of Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité*

This chapter presented Rousseau's theory of self-love in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* as a sophisticated response to other theorists, based upon creative combinations of ideas eclectically drawn from a variety of mutually conflicting sources. After briefly retracing the history of these concepts, focusing in particular on their deployment by rival philosophical factions in the 17th and 18th centuries, I argued that Rousseau's employment of the concepts of “Amour de soi-même” and “Amour propre” constituted an effort to synthesise the ideas of his intellectual predecessors and to offer a

distinct and powerful contribution to the debate around human self-love. Rousseau rejected the optimism of *doux commerce* theories concerning the benefits of harnessed selfishness, endorsing much of the Augustinian diagnosis of the vices associated with self-love. However, Rousseau also sought to distance himself from the Augustinians on two key points, in both cases borrowing ideas from other schools of thought. Firstly, he endorsed the worldliness of *doux commerce* theories, focusing his moral concerns on relations *between men* rather than on the fundamental relationship *between man and God* privileged by the Augustinians. Secondly, in an effort to undercut the Augustinian condemnation of (fallen) human nature as such, Rousseau reclaimed and historicized the distinction introduced by the Christian Humanists between different forms of self-love: to the corrupt “Amour propre”, which was a product of society, he opposed the natural “Amour de soi-même”, a beneficent kind of self-love found in those human beings unsoiled by the social world, the primitive men of the state of nature. This allowed Rousseau to explain how human nature, which he took to have been initially good, evolved into its ghastly modern form, and why unbridled pride could be regarded as a contingent rather than a necessary feature of humanity.

Yet, the distinctive theory of self-love advanced by Rousseau left his readers with more questions than answers. On the one hand, if “Amour propre” was the outcome of contingent historical circumstances, then perhaps one could imagine a uchronic state of affairs, where man lived in conformity with nature, free from corruption and vice, and indeed from “Amour propre”. On the other hand, one could argue that the birth of “Amour propre” itself preceded the rise of political inequality, and would have emerged in *any* circumstances involving social interaction between human beings. If human nature was, as Rousseau held¹²⁵, in perpetual flux, then what

125Ibid., II, OC 3, p 192

did it even mean to say that “Amour de soi-même” was natural, while “Amour propre” was not?

Significantly, although recent interpretations of Rousseau's theory of self-love have tended to regard the *Second Discourse* as a text revolving around the distinction between these two forms of self-love, the actual terms “Amour de soi-même” and “Amour propre” are virtually absent from the text. In Part I, Rousseau referred to “pitié” as a passion given to man “pour adoucir, en certaines circonstances, la férocité de son amour propre, ou le désir de se conserver avant la naissance de cet amour”¹²⁶, and in Part II he described the golden age of mankind as “tenant un juste milieu entre l'indolence de l'état primitif et la pétulante activité de nôtre amour propre”¹²⁷. Significantly, the only explicit distinction between “Amour de soi-même” and “Amour propre” is found in the notes, which were written after the main body of the text, and introduced in the published version of the *Discours*, as if the strict dichotomy between the two passions had been added as an afterthought. It seems clear that, at the time he was writing the *Second Discourse* in 1754, Rousseau had yet to synthesize his own thoughts on the subject.

The key would lie in his later texts, which moved beyond the symbolic opposition between state of nature and society to articulate a constructive theory of the passions. “(L)es déclamateurs”, Rousseau had exclaimed as early as 1752, in the preface to a play that carried the appropriate title of *Narcisse*, “ont aperçu le mal, et moi j'en découvre les causes, et je fais voir sur-tout une chose très-consolante et très-utile en

126Ibid., I, OC 3, p 154

127Ibid., II, OC 3, p 171

montrant que tous ces vices n'appartiennent pas tant à l'homme, qu'à l'homme mal gouverné¹²⁸.

If “Amour propre” was an outcome of human history, to what extent could it—and should it—be eradicated? Was the appropriate response to try to govern men such that “Amour propre” disappeared from human affairs altogether, and what would this involve? Or was “Amour propre” a necessary feature of social life, which must be accommodated? And how would this be accomplished? Was the well-governed man an individual *devoid* of “Amour-propre”, characterised by only *limited* “Amour-propre”, or endowed with the right *kind* of “Amour-propre”? We will turn to these questions, looking at Rousseau's writings on both political theory and education, in the following chapters.

128 *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même*, Preface, OC 2, p 969

Chapter 3: Rousseau's Phenomenology of “Amour-Propre” in *Emile*

“C'est ici que je commence à parler une langue étrangère, aussi peu connue des Lecteurs que de vous.”

– Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Christophe de Beaumont

Introduction

Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité* presented a radically new perspective on the problem of self-love, and his subsequent writings went on to formulate an accordingly original solution to that problem. Of particular interest among these is *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (1762), ostensibly a pedagogical treatise, which aimed, in reality, to complete the project Rousseau had started in his discourses, by establishing beyond doubt the principle of man's natural goodness, and envisaging how men might remain good in society.

Rousseau himself regarded *Emile* as a capital work within his system. Yet, due to its length and curious nature (half treatise, half novel), the text has often been neglected, or read through the lens of the *Discours l'Inégalité*. As a result, many have seen in *Emile* the expression of an ideal education founded on the promotion of *amour de soi*, regarded as the beneficial form of man's self-love, and the suppression of *amour-propre*, construed as its destructive version. Over time, however, this expeditive interpretation of the text has been contested. Highlighting important discrepancies between *Emile* and the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*—particularly on the question of self-love—a growing number of scholars have, instead, drawn from *Emile* a positive conception of *amour-propre*, affirming that the education advocated by Rousseau aimed

to direct towards virtue the very social passions he had associated with vice in the *Discourses*. From this perspective, Rousseau's system resembles what Frederick Neuhouser has called a “theodicy of self-love”: though it identifies corrupted self-love as the first source of evil, it denies that this corruption is unavoidable, and reveals how it may be remedied through education.

In this chapter, it is argued that Rousseau's treatment of *amour-propre* in *Emile* constitutes neither a confirmation nor a refutation, but rather a prolongation of the vision advanced in the *Second Discourse*. In *Emile*, Rousseau moved decidedly beyond the sterile Augustinian condemnation of *amour-propre* (extending a movement that is already visible in the *Second Discourse*, as we have seen), insisting upon *amour-propre*'s positive potential rather than merely its pitfalls, but he continued to articulate a distinction between two forms of self-love, *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*, relying on the latter concept to problematise human sociability. “L'amour-propre”, he wrote, “est un instrument utile mais dangereux”.

Rousseau described *amour-propre* as the form taken by *amour de soi* in a social environment, holding that it could produce different effects, depending on the individual's understanding of his proper place in society. Indeed, *amour-propre*, Rousseau wrote, could even be “transform(é) en vertu”. Yet, the appropriate treatment of *amour-propre* varied with each successive phase of a person's education. During childhood, Rousseau insisted, its premature awakening should be prevented at all costs. With the onset of adolescence, however, the birth of *amour-propre* was inevitable, though its development was to be carefully nurtured, and directed by a lucid realisation of one's place within the social and cosmic order. Finally, on the cusp of adulthood, the

increasing intensity of its concentrating tendencies made it ultimately necessary for *amour-propre* to be mastered for true freedom to be achieved.

Significantly, Rousseau's pedagogic project culminated with the endorsement of a particular kind of citizenship, founded on primarily moral considerations, and quite distinct from the conception of citizenship articulated in the author's openly political writings, as we shall see in the following chapters. Socialised yet independent, bowing to “nécessité” yet free and self-governing, Rousseau's tutee Emile incarnated a singular ideal, adapted to a particular political context, and one that contrasted both with the primitive ideal embodied by the natural savage and the political ideal represented by the ancient citizen. Given this singularity, the education advocated in *Emile* may, in fine, be of only limited import for Rousseau's political theory. Yet, as we shall see in the following chapters, the theory of the passions on which this education rested is not without bearing on how Rousseau would envisage the task of the *Législateur*.

The first part of this chapter presents *Emile* and its place within Rousseau's system, while the second deals with its opening three books, examining the delaying tactics Rousseau proposed to prevent an early awakening of *amour-propre*. The third part explains how, in Book IV, he sought to cultivate nascent *amour-propre*, and the fourth studies how, in the final book, Rousseau proposed to overcome the vestigial flaws of *amour-propre*.

I. *Emile* and the Problem of Self-Love

1. From the Second Discourse to Emile

In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau denied that modern societies, and the

inequality that plagued them, were in any way “natural”, or authorised by natural law. He invented the state of nature, a primordial condition of humanity populated by innocent savages, to provide a stark contrast with the turpitude of civilised men, opposing the purity of man's origins to the corruption of his present condition, the independence of early times to the vile dependence of the modern epoch, and the innate “Amour de soi-même” to the factitious “Amour propre”.

However, Rousseau's purpose was not, as Voltaire sarcastically suggested, to incite his readers to “marcher à quatre pattes”¹ and promptly return to the woods, reversing the course of history in a moment of euphoric bestiality. Not only did Rousseau clearly believe this an impossible project², he also cast doubt both on the plausibility and the desirability of the state of nature as an alternative to society, implying that the life of a natural savage offered little, if any, scope for those faculties, such as reason, which were distinctly human, and suggesting that such a condition had probably never existed³. Much like the *First Discourse*, the *Second Discourse* was a primarily critical text, in which the author set out to condemn society, using whatever rhetorical ploys and effects of contrast were required to accentuate his diagnosis. And despite its sinister tone, the text actually conveyed a more optimistic message about “Amour propre” than the mordant aphorisms of the *Moralistes*. Indeed, unlike Pascal and La Rochefoucauld, who held the vices produced by “amour propre” to be intrinsic to the crooked timber of human nature, Rousseau argued that man is naturally good, and that the corruption of this primordial goodness—along with the emergence of “amour

1 *Lettre de Voltaire à Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 30/08/1755 (reproduced in OC 3, pp.1379-1381). “On n'a jamais tant employé d'esprit à vouloir nous rendre Bêtes”, Voltaire wrote of the *Second Discourse*.

2 *Observations*, OC 3, p 56; *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Note IX, OC 3, p 207; *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, III, OC 1, p 935

3 The imaginary character of the state of nature, implicit in Rousseau's presentation of his account in the *Second Discourse* as hypothetical (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, OC 3, pp. 132-133), was confirmed in his *Lettre sur la Vertu*, a short text thought to have been written in 1756, where Rousseau described the dwellers of the state of nature as “ces hommes primitifs et imaginaires” (*Lettre sur la Vertu*, p 322).

propre”—is caused by society. Contrary to the *static* vision adopted by the French Augustinians, who regarded “amour propre” as the perennial essence of human nature, an eternal lure detracting men from the love of God on which their salvation depended, Rousseau's analysis of “amour propre” was *dynamic*, considering it instead as a historical acquisition, and one that had, like human nature itself, taken different shapes over time. Rousseau *historicized* human nature, introducing *contingency* into the narrative of its evolution, and demonstrating that the constitution of man developed in response to external circumstances, among which political institutions were singled out as crucially influential. The corruption of human nature, Rousseau concluded, owed much to the inequality fostered by flawed political regimes to which the Catholic Church had, over the centuries, provided its unwavering support. Rousseau had caught the *Moralistes* in their own trap, and left them staring guiltily into their own mirror. To the *moral* narrative, which identified, judged, and condemned evil, Rousseau substituted a *genealogic* narrative, which explained its emergence. His next task was to advance a *remedial* narrative, to explore the possibility of a world devoid of corruption altogether.

A plausible corollary of the theory advanced in the *Second Discourse* was that improved social and political institutions might bring about a radical improvement in human nature, as Rousseau had already hinted in the preface to his play *Narcisse*, where he insisted that his conclusions were both consolatory and useful, for he had revealed that the vices of modern societies belonged less to man per se than to poorly governed man⁴. Along these lines, one can regard Rousseau's later works as providing a blueprint for profound reforms aiming at the regeneration of human nature. Rousseau adapted this transformative endeavour to both societies and individuals, the *macro*-project of founding the Republic, of which *Du Contract Social* formed the memorable centrepiece,

4 *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même*, Preface, OC 2, p 969

sitting alongside the *micro*-project of educating a new kind of man, set forth in the monumental *Emile*. Rousseau's prospects of success hinged in both cases on the pliability of human dispositions, particularly self-love, which the *Discourses* had revealed as the engine of history.

2. *Emile and Amour-Propre*

Rousseau's account of the corruption of an originally good human nature stressed the influence of social and political institutions, explaining how an independent and benign form of self-love, “Amour de soi” gradually gave way to a relative and malign form of self-love, “Amour propre”. In this respect, the theory advanced in the *Second Discourse* followed from—and built upon—the implicit thesis of the *First Discourse*, namely that societies which foment and entrench inequality inspire a potent yet destructive pride in man⁵.

How, then, according to Rousseau, could this corruption be averted? Broadly speaking, there are two possible answers: a *quantitative* approach, consisting in stunting the development of *amour-propre*; and a *qualitative* approach, involving cultivating a certain *kind* of *amour-propre* over another. To these two possible methods naturally correspond two very different conceptions of *amour-propre*: the quantitative approach presupposes that *amour-propre* is inherently malign; at the opposite, the qualitative approach assumes that *amour-propre* is malleable, and susceptible of taking different forms, some of which may be good. The question of the *strategy* employed to deal with *amour-propre* is thus inseparable from the question of its *nature*.

⁵ For a fine account of the philosophical continuity between Rousseau's discussion of “orgueil” in the *First Discourse* and his theory of “Amour propre” in the *Second Discourse*, see McLendon 2003, 2009.

Traditionally, scholars considered Rousseau to be an advocate of the first kind of approach because they interpreted his theory of self-love as a condemnation of “Amour propre” (or, as he would generally spell it after the *Second Discourse*, “amour-propre”⁶) in favour of “Amour de soi-même” (which became simply “amour de soi”). If *amour-propre* was “un sentiment relatif, factice, et né dans la société, qui porte chaque individu à faire plus de cas de soi que de tout autre, qui inspire aux hommes tous les maux qu'ils se font mutuellement”⁷, the source of “tant d'indifférence pour le bien et le mal, avec de si beaux discours de morale” and of an atmosphere in which “tout se réduisant aux apparences, tout devient factice et joué”⁸, they reasoned, then the strategy Rousseau proposed to overcome modern corruption must require suppressing *amour-propre* and promoting *amour de soi*, as well as other natural inclinations such as *pitié*. To regard Rousseau as an unconditional critic of “amour-propre” has always been the temptation of those inclined to see in the *Second Discourse* his definitive vision of self-love⁹. The harsh words with which Rousseau described *amour-propre* in this text strongly suggested a perception of the social passions as irredeemably corrupt, something

6 On the significance of Rousseau's successive spellings of the term, see Chapter 2, Note 17.

7 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Note XV, OC 3, p 219

8 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 193

9 Examples of this 'traditional' interpretation of Rousseau's theory of self-love, stressing his pejorative account of “amour-propre”, range from André Ravier's claim that Rousseau's pedagogic project purported to prevent the baneful transformation of “amour de soi” into “amour-propre” (Ravier 1941, pp. 296-298) to Jacques Voisine's affirmation that Rousseau condemned “amour-propre” in an Augustinian spirit (Voisine 1996, pp. 32-33). In a veritable philippic against Rousseau, Ernest Seillière affirms that the philosopher castigated “amour-propre” in an attempt to pass off as Christian while defending dangerously heretic views (Seillière 1921, pp. 137-141). Robert Osmont interprets “amour-propre” as a concept crafted by Rousseau to capture the vexing atmosphere of Parisian *salons* (Osmont 1934, pp. 35-36). In the same vein, Robert Derathé identifies “amour-propre” as the concept chosen by Rousseau to denounce a society in which appearances triumph over reality, and deception is the key to success (Derathé 1962, pp. 205-207). Raymond Polin regards “amour-propre” as the principle of all dependence, all alienation, and all servitude (Polin 1971, p 49). Pauline Chazan insists that “as a technical term that is itself the name of a disorder or distortion, amour-propre has, according to Rousseau, no rightful place in our lives at all” (Chazan 1993, p 341). Michael Rosen, analysing Rousseau's thoughts on the theatre with reference to La Boétie, describes “amour-propre” as a distortion of man's consciousness conducive to voluntary servitude (Rosen 1996, pp. 80-94). Barbara Carnevali regards Rousseau's concept of “amour-propre” as the equivalent of Augustine's concept of “amor sui”, applied in a different way (Carnevali 2008). Paul-Monique Vernes sees the task of the lawbringer evoked in *Du Contract Social* as showing to the people the salutary path back from “amour-propre” to “amour de soi” (Vernes 2008, pp. 149-150).

confirmed by many of his later texts. In the *Dialogues*, for instance, Rousseau would identify a vindictive and heinous *amour-propre* as the defining psychological trait of his invisible persecutors¹⁰, and in the Eighth Promenade of the *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* he would claim to owe the freedom he enjoyed from the yoke of opinion to the moment his own *amour-propre*, retreating into his soul, transformed back into *amour de soi*¹¹. “Les passions primitives, qui toutes tendent directement à notre bonheur”, Rousseau remarked, “ne nous occupent que des objets qui s'y rapportent et n'ayant que l'amour de soi pour principe sont toutes aimantes et douces par leur essence”. In *amour-propre*, by contrast, he saw “un sentiment relatif par lequel on se compare, qui demande des préférences, dont la jouissance est purement négative, et qui ne cherche plus à se satisfaire par notre propre bien, mais seulement par le mal d'autrui”¹². “L'amour-propre, principe de toute méchanceté”, Rousseau damningly proclaimed, “s'avive et s'exalte dans la société qui l'a fait naître”¹³.

More recently, however, a contrary interpretation has emerged, which holds that, overall, Rousseau's conception of *amour-propre* is more complex and nuanced than those who regard it as akin to an Augustinian condemnation of the vanities believe. The texts written by Rousseau between the time of the *Discourses*, in the early 1750s, and the publication of *Emile*, in 1762, contain signals that a more optimistic vision of *amour-propre* was germinating in his mind, in conformity with a broader movement

10 “L'orgueilleux despotisme de la philosophie moderne a porté l'égoïsme de l'amour-propre à son dernier terme”, he wrote in the Second Dialogue (*Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, II, OC 1, p 890). And even if the *Philosophes* were convinced of his innocence, he insisted, they would not forgive Rousseau, whose virtuous stance contrasted humiliatingly with their own turpitude. “(C)es gens si pétris d'amour-propre supporteroient-ils sans aigreur l'idée de leur propre bassesse comparée à sa patience et à sa douceur?”, he asked (*Ibid.*, II, OC 1, pp. 886).

11 “En se repliant sur mon ame et en coupant les relations extérieures qui le rendent exigeant, en renonçant aux comparaisons et aux préférences il s'est contenté que je fusse bon pour moi; alors redevenant amour de moi même il est rentré dans l'ordre de la nature et m'a délivré du joug de l'opinion.” (*Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, VIII, OC 1, p 1079).

12 *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, I, OC 1, p 669

13 *Ibid.*, II, OC 1, pp. 789-790

rehabilitating the passions in the 18th century. In *Economie Politique* (1755), Rousseau described the heroic passion of “amour de la patrie” as “ce sentiment doux et vif qui joint la force de l'amour propre à toute la beauté de la vertu”¹⁴. And his letters to Sophie d'Houdetot, written in 1757, contained refined passages on “amour propre”, in which Rousseau entreated Sophie, the object of his unrequited love, to be virtuous so as to console his own “amour propre” by showing that it should be no source of shame to him that such a celestial woman had remained beyond his reach¹⁵. Rousseau also advised her to be charitable because “(l)'exercice de la bienfaisance flate naturellement l'amour propre par une idée de supériorité”. “Cet air de puissance”, he continued, “fait qu'on prend plus de plaisir à exister et qu'on habite plus volontiers avec soi”¹⁶. Even the early preface of his play *Narcisse* (1752) had included the complaint that “(l)e goût des lettres, de la philosophie et des beaux arts, anéantit l'amour de nos premiers devoirs et de la véritable gloire”¹⁷.

Detecting these signals, and drawing from *Emile* itself a highly sophisticated analysis of *amour-propre* that emphasized its positive potential, many interpreters of Rousseau have turned away from the traditional view, to argue, instead, that his solution to the problem of *amour-propre* bore more resemblance to the qualitative than to the quantitative strategy. For all its impetuosity, they maintain, *amour-propre* constituted, in Rousseau's eyes, a necessary feature of social life, one without which human affairs would be unrecognisable. More importantly, if properly nurtured, it could become a force for good. Should the thirst for distinction of which it was the secret cause take the form of a quest for equal human dignity rather than superior social status, *amour-propre*

14 *Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 255

15 *Lettres Morales*, I, OC 4, p 1082

16 “Parez vous pour vous presenter à votre miroir”, Rousseau concluded, in a likely allusion to the writings of the *Moralistes*, “vous vous en regarderez plus volontiers” (Ibid., VI, OC 4, p 1116).

17 *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même*, Préface, p 966 (italics added)

would become the principle of a morally and politically fecund sociability purged of corruption¹⁸. Whether or not one accepts this second understanding of *amour-propre*, the terms of the discussion make it abundantly clear that the key to Rousseau's theory of self-love lies in *Emile*.

3. “*Un traité de la bonté originelle de l'homme*”

In his impassioned defence of the work in the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, Rousseau claimed that if he were summoned to stand trial before God he would appear

18 This interpretation was first advanced by Nicholas Dent in 1988, and has been further developed and modulated by many other scholars since. Dent argues that, while it is susceptible of becoming corrupted by social inequality, “amour-propre” is originally an aspiration to “enter the estate of man”, and thereby occupy the rank of human being on an equal footing with others: Rousseau's project in *Emile* was thus to explain how this noble aspiration could be fulfilled, in which case the demands of all men's “amours-propres” became compatible, rather than mutually conflicting, as in the society described at the end of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* (Dent 1988, ch. 2; 1992, p 35; 1998). Timothy O'Hagan endorses Dent's interpretation, describing it as “a revolution in intellectual history” (O'Hagan 1999b, p 91). In his influential essay *The Politics of Recognition*, Charles Taylor interprets “amour-propre” as the seed of a legitimate struggle for recognition in every human being, identifying Rousseau as the harbinger of a new vision of society founded on equal dignity and the acknowledgement of each individual's identity, that was soon to supplant the feudal vision of society based on rigid social hierarchies (Taylor 1994, p 48). The concept of “amour-propre”, Jacques Oërlemans explains, captures both the potential for social emancipation and the risk of disorder generated by such evolutions (Oërlemans 1992). “The extensions and transformations of amour-propre lie at the heart of Rousseau's redemptive quest”, David Gauthier avers (Gauthier 2006, p 10). Joshua Cohen distinguishes between “healthy” and “inflamed” forms of “amour-propre”, the former inspiring in man a desire for equality, the latter a vain and destructive aspiration to superiority (Cohen 1997; 2010, pp. 122-127), while John Rawls, drawing inspiration from Kant's reading of Rousseau, favours “the wide view of *amour-propre*”, according to which it is at first “a desire merely for equality”, which may or may not become “perverted” by flawed political arrangements (Rawls 2007, pp. 198-200). Frederick Neuhouser presents Rousseau's account of “amour-propre” as a “theodicy”, explaining how it became corrupt in order to stress its originally neutral character, as well as its astonishing potential (Neuhouser 2008). Laurence D. Cooper focuses on a distinction between “the two branches of amour-propre”, made by Rousseau in his *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, to argue that “amour-propre” founded on legitimate “orgueil” is socially beneficial, unlike “amour-propre” rooted in base “vanité” (Cooper 1998). Recognising the sinister complexion put on “amour-propre” in Note XV of the *Second Discourse*, Christopher Bertram nevertheless insists that Rousseau “emphatically does not believe that this form of amour propre is the form that it inevitably takes” (Bertram 2004, p 23). “Amour-propre is not necessarily bad for us”, Joseph Reiser writes, “and it does not necessarily incline us to do evil” (Reiser 2003, p 20). “(U)nder present conditions”, Niko Kolodny holds, “amour-propre—a concern for how one compares to others—becomes “inflamed”—very roughly, becomes a concern for *superiority* over others—whereas in other conditions, amour-propre would be “healthy”—would be a concern for *equality* with others” (Kolodny 2010, p 166). Christopher Brooke endorses Dent's interpretation of “amour-propre”, rejecting “the old, discredited view that *amour-propre* is intrinsically suspect” (Brooke 2012, p 197; see also Brooke 2010). This latter view remained prevalent among Francophone scholars well into the new millenium, an article by Yûji Sakakura (Sakakura 1997), translated from the Japanese and published in *Etudes Jean-Jacques Rousseau* in 1997, constituting a rare exception. More recent studies by Sébastien Charbonnier (Charbonnier 2010) and Blaise Bachofen (Bachofen 2013, pp. 33-36) suggest a possible convergence on the “wide” view of “amour-propre”.

with a copy of *Emile* in his hands, and request clemency from the supreme judge. “(J)'ai fait le mal sur la terre, mais j'ai publié cet Ecrit”, he wrote¹⁹. That Rousseau deemed *Emile* the greatest of his works has never been in doubt. In Book XI of the *Confessions*, he referred to it as “mon plus digne et meilleure livre”²⁰, and in the third of his *Dialogues* he explained that the text formed the centrepiece of his philosophical system, in which he uncovered the first principles of human nature, and for which the *Discourses* constituted merely the groundwork²¹.

On the surface, *Emile, ou de l'éducation* is a book in which Rousseau imagines that he has been tasked with the formation of a child called Emile, and dreams up the details of the boy's education, from the earliest age to the threshold of adulthood²². It is an unusual and curiously structured work, composed of five books, each dealing with a distinct stage of the child's development. The first three books comprise a mixture of philosophical musings and practical recommendations, written in a quite exhortative style reminiscent of the epistolary genre in which Rousseau excelled; the opening pages of Book IV are a brilliant exercise in the most penetrating moral psychology, followed by the famous *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard*, a fascinating theological meditation on human nature and man's place in the cosmos; and Book V contains Rousseau's thoughts on gender, as well as a series of considerations on politics, incorporating a condensed version of *Du Contract Social*. After Emile meets his soul

19 *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, I, OC 3, p 697

20 *Confessions*, XI, OC 1, p 568

21 *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, III, OC 1, p 933. It should be noted that, in the *Dialogues*, these recommendations are voiced by the Frenchman, not by the character of Rousseau, although there is no obvious reason to doubt, in this case, that the former was the mouthpiece of the author.

22 Rousseau had originally intended to write a purely theoretical and impersonal treaty on education, as we see in the *Manuscrit Favre* (OC 4, pp. 53-238). However, as John T. Scott notes, it seems that the author came to regard the depiction of a fictional pupil as a necessary part of his project, as a means of illustrating and lending verisimilitude to his theory. Having introduced the character of Emile toward the end of the *Manuscrit Favre*, Rousseau appears to have ceased writing and started afresh, this time incorporating him from the outset (Scott 2012, pp. 449-451). For a detailed study of the genesis and redaction of *Emile*, see Jimack 1960.

mate Sophie, the narrative focuses on their courtship and subsequent adventures, as the text gradually metamorphoses into a novel²³.

Despite the mundane character of certain passages of the text, there can be no doubting that *Emile* is an eminently philosophical work²⁴. “(I)l s'agit d'un nouveau système d'éducation, dont j'offre le plan à l'examen des sages, et non pas d'une méthode pour les pères et les mères, à laquelle je n'ai pas songé”, the author wrote in the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*²⁵.

Indeed, its central principle stemmed directly from the argument of the *Second Discourse*, as Rousseau explained in a letter written in 1763 to the Archbishop of Paris, Christophe de Beaumont, in response to the condemnation of *Emile* by the Church. “Le principe fondamental de toute morale, sur lequel j'ai raisonné dans tous mes Ecrits, et que j'ai développé dans ce dernier (*Emile*) avec toute la clarté dont j'étois capable”, he wrote “est que l'homme est un être naturellement bon, aimant la justice et l'ordre; qu'il

23 As John T. Scott remarks, the gradual transformation of *Emile* into a novel is methodologically justified by the fact that, as he progresses along the path traced by his tutor, Rousseau's pupil differs increasingly from ordinary pupils, and must thus be depicted with ever greater detail (Scott 2012, p 449). “(À) mesure que j'avance, mon élève autrement conduit que les vôtres n'est plus un enfant ordinaire”, Rousseau wrote. “Alors il paroît plus fréquemment sur la scène, et vers les derniers tems je ne le perds plus un moment de vue” (*Emile*, I, OC 4, p 265). “Ce devrait être l'histoire de mon espèce: vous qui la dépravez, c'est vous qui faites un roman de mon livre”, he added (*Ibid.*, V, OC 4, p 777). On the necessity of fiction in *Emile*, see also Mall 2002.

24 Bruno Bernardi speculates with some plausibility that Rousseau's apparently innocent remark about Plato's *Republic* in Book I of *Emile* contained a veiled message about the significance of his own text. “Voulez-vous prendre une idée de l'éducation publique?”, Rousseau asked. “Lisez la *République* de Platon. Ce n'est point un ouvrage de politique, comme le pensent ceux qui ne jugent des livres que par leurs titres. C'est le plus beau traité d'éducation qu'on ait jamais fait.” (*Emile*, I, OC 4, p 250) It is by no means an illegitimate extrapolation to interpret this as an invitation to look beyond the title *Emile, ou de l'éducation* and to recognise the work's political relevance. Turning the tables, one might well deem that “it is not a work on education, as those who judge books by their titles might think: it is the most beautiful political text ever written.” This would not amount to denying that *Emile* is also a book on education, any more than Rousseau's comment on Plato amounted to denying that the *Republic* was also a work dealing with the political. But it would suggest that Rousseau's educational project has political relevance (Bernardi 2012). For an interesting comparison between Plato's *Republic* and Rousseau's *Emile*, see Cooper 2002.

25 *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, V, OC 3, p 783. Rousseau did pen texts on education aimed specifically at parents, such as the *Mémoire présenté à Mr de Mably sur l'éducation de M. son fils* and the *Projet pour l'éducation de Monsieur de Saint-Marie*, both written in the 1740s. Even here, however, his philosophical principles never lie far beneath the surface.

n'y a point de perversité originelle dans le cœur humain, et que les premiers mouvemens de la nature sont toujours droits”²⁶. Yet, despite Rousseau's claims, the vision of human nature described in *Emile* is not reducible to that found in the *Second Discourse*.

4. *The Shadow of Seneca*

“La source de nos passions”, Rousseau wrote in Book IV of *Emile*, “l'origine et le principe de toutes les autres, la seule qui naît avec l'homme et ne le quitte jamais tant qu'il vit est l'amour de soi; passion primitive, innée, antérieure à toute autre et dont toutes les autres ne sont en un sens que des modifications”²⁷. This statement revealed two important evolutions in the author's theory of the passions. Firstly, *amour de soi*, previously described as one of two original passions of human nature, alongside *pitié*, now became the single source of all other passions. And secondly, the earlier dichotomy between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*, in which the first was a feature of the natural savage, and the second a property of social man, an outcome of humanity's sinister journey through time, gave way to a new relationship in which *amour-propre* became merely a “modification” of *amour de soi*. This suggested a passage from a dialogical to a monological theory of self-love.

Both of these evolutions reflected the growing influence upon Rousseau of Stoic thought, particularly that of Seneca, whose words adorn the title page of *Emile*²⁸. In

26 *Lettre à Beaumont*, OC 4, pp. 935-936. “Ce livre tant lû, si peu entendu et si mal apprécié n'est qu'un traité de la bonté originelle de l'homme”, the Frenchman confirmed in the *Dialogues (Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, III, OC 1, p 934).

27 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, pp. 491

28 The epigraph of *Emile* is a quotation from Seneca's *De ira* (II:13): “We are sick with evils that can be cured; and nature, having brought us forth sound, itself helps us if we wish to be improved.” On Seneca's influence upon Rousseau's pedagogic theory, see Pire 1953; Charbonnier 2010; Brooke 2012, ch. 8. George Pire remarks that the fact that Rousseau seldom refers to Seneca constitutes no obstacle to regarding him as an important source of inspiration for the author of *Emile*: on the contrary, Pire contends, it is precisely *because* Seneca was so profoundly influential on him that Rousseau endorsed many of his positions spontaneously, without needing to mention him by name (Pire 1953, p 85).

effect, there are evident similarities between “amour de soi”—understood as the single source of man's passions—and οἰκείωσις (or *oikeiosis*), a complex (and untranslatable) concept in Stoic philosophy that roughly denotes man's propensity to assimilate objects with his own good. In its most primitive form, *oikeiosis* is little more than an instinct for self-preservation, an inclination common to human beings and other animals, but in man it is susceptible of considerable development, and can be elevated to a love of mankind and an endearment to cosmic order²⁹. It is “the migration of (one's) natural affinity for self to an affinity for others, extending outward to larger and larger circles: self, family, community, nation, world, etc.”³⁰.

Similarly, in *Emile*, Rousseau portrayed *amour de soi* as a human desire to extend one's being³¹. This expansive character of *amour de soi* was, in fact, already implicit in the *Second Discourse*, where, although Rousseau presented the natural savage's innate sympathy for other sentient creatures as a separate principle, *pitié*, Note XV stated explicitly that “Amour de soi-même” was the source of man's love of humanity and justice³². Like *oikeiosis*, *amour de soi*, as described in *Emile*, would start out as a narrow concern for one's own well being, and gradually blossom into a more expansive and nobler engagement with the world.

Importantly, Rousseau also borrowed from Seneca the concept that the developing human being experienced a succession of different “constitutions”. “There is a constitution for every stage of life”, the Roman wrote in his *Moral Letters to*

29 On the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiosis*, see Acker 2008. The definition and purpose of the concept of *oikeiosis* within Stoic philosophy remains the object of numerous disagreements among scholars.

30 Wasson 2012, 'Oikeiosis'

31 For an interesting discussion on Rousseau and “the desire to extend our being”, see Cooper 2004.

32 It should be remarked that this note was written at a time when Rousseau was already beginning to alter the theory of self-love originally advanced in the *Discours* as it had been submitted to the Academy of Dijon.

Lucilius (c. 65 AD), “one for a baby, another for a boy and another for an old man”³³. This vision of human development as a gradual process, divided into distinct phases, forming “the great chain of ages”³⁴, was reflected in the structure of Rousseau's text, divided into five parts, each of which described a distinct stage of life: Book I dealt with Emile as an infant; Books II and III with different periods of his childhood; Book IV with adolescence; and Book V with the entry into adulthood³⁵.

As has already been explained, among the distinguishing features of Rousseau's account of human nature was his insistence that modern man's self-love—as depicted, sinisterly, in the 17th century by the *Moralistes*, and, more optimistically, in the 18th century by the advocates of *doux commerce*—was in large measure an artificial passion. “On croit que l'homme a un vif amour pour sa conservation, et cela est vrai”, Rousseau stated in *Emile*, “mais on ne voit pas que cet amour tel que nous le sentons est en grande partie l'ouvrage des hommes”³⁶.

Thus, one of the crucial tasks of the text was to expose the progressive development of self-love, to show how society typically influenced it, and to lay out the guiding principles of an education fine-tuned to its natural evolution. “L'humanité a sa place dans l'ordre des choses; l'enfance a la sienne dans l'ordre de la vie humaine; il faut considérer l'homme dans l'homme, et l'enfant dans l'enfant”, he wrote. “Assigner à chacun sa place et l'y fixer, *ordonner les passions humaines selon la constitution de l'homme* est tout ce que nous pouvons faire pour son bien-être”³⁷. The word “constitution” is particularly important, because, as Jean Starobinski remarks, it is a

33 *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, Letter 121, § 15

34 Raymond in OC 4, p xiii

35 On the influence of Seneca upon Rousseau's structuring of *Emile*, see Brooke 2012, p 192. “Emile”, Claude Habib writes, “is an architecture parading as a free wander” (Habib 2012, p 11).

36 *Emile*, II, OC 4, p 307

37 *Ibid.*, II, OC 4, p 303 (italics added)

term Rousseau substituted for the term “nature” whenever he meant to refer specifically to that in man which was subject to change³⁸.

The purpose of the pedagogic project presented in *Emile* was thus to cultivate man's passions in accordance with each successive stage of his development. Consequently, the vision of nature proposed in *Emile* differed from that found in the *Second Discourse*.

5. A Phenomenology of Amour-Propre

After depicting nature as an “état” that man had left behind him, Rousseau now described it as a *movement*³⁹, speaking of “la marche de la nature”⁴⁰. Having previously presented all progress beyond the condition of *bon sauvage* as a baneful departure from nature, he now equated “l'éducation de la nature” with “le development interne de nos facultés”⁴¹. Nature no longer stood merely for a providential standard, but now also referred to an empirical object of enquiry, to be observed and dissected. “Observez la nature, et suivez la route qu'elle vous trace”, he recommended⁴². Rousseau likened man's nature to the growth of a plant, which could be stunted or perverted by artificial interferences, but proceeded vertically when left to its immanent logic⁴³. Indeed, the strategy of Emile's *gouverneur* would consist in attempting to slow down this “marche”, or, at least, prevent its acceleration by society.

38 Starobinski in OC 3, p 1294. In the *Second Discourse*, for instance, Rousseau spoke of “ces changemens successifs de la constitution humaine” (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, p 123).

39 Smith 2002, pp. 94-95

40 *Emile*, Preface, OC 4, p 242

41 *Ibid.*, I, OC 4, p 247

42 *Ibid.*, I, OC 4, p 259

43 *Ibid.*, I, OC 4, pp. 247-248

In this respect, one might speak of a 'phenomenology' of *amour-propre*, since Rousseau's account of self-love in *Emile* unfolds only gradually before the reader, much like Hegel's grand narrative of the development of "Geist" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), revealing a succession of incomplete and ephemeral truths rather than an immediately accessible theory. "(I)l faudrait avoir observé ses penchans, vû ses progrès, suivi sa marche", Rousseau wrote of human nature⁴⁴. In both cases, the truth the text sought to reveal resided less in any given passage than in the journey connecting all its parts, and each stage of the journey was described from plural perspectives: in Hegel's case, from the respective perspectives of the developing "Geist" and the observing philosopher; in Rousseau's, from those of the implicated tutor, himself intent on seeing with the eyes of his pupil, and the detached theorist⁴⁵.

The nature of *Emile*, a text divided into distinct stages, and describing phenomena from different standpoints, renders necessary a particular reading grid, adapted to its complexity. The passages of the text dealing with the culture of Emile's passions need, in particular, to be understood within the context of the specific "constitution" to which they apply. In fact, their treatment varies from one chapter of Emile's education to the next. Grasping the true role of *amour-propre* in *Emile* requires a holistic understanding of the text, encompassing all of the successive phases of the pupil's education, and analysing its role within each of them.

Bearing this in mind, it is worth remarking that the 'optimistic' interpretation of

44 Ibid., I, OC 4, p 251

45 Alan Bloom describes Emile as "a *Phenomenology of the Mind* posing as Dr. Spock" (Bloom 1979, p 3). John T. Scott holds that Rousseau's account is doubly phenomenological, since he rests on his dual identity as philosopher and fictional tutor to observe human nature from the perspective of a man simultaneously aware of the vicious influence of actual society and the possibilities opened by his theories, frequently comparing his Emile to the children of society (Scott 2012, p 451). On the fusional relationship between Rousseau and the character of the *gouverneur*, see Mall 2002, ch. 9.

amour-propre relies almost exclusively on passages drawn from a narrow segment of *Emile*. Nicholas Dent, the instigator of this interpretation, describes the opening portion of Book IV as “the treatment of *amour-propre* to which I attribute the greatest authority in (Rousseau's) work”, and rests his analysis of Rousseau's theory of self-love entirely on this passage⁴⁶. Frederick Neuhouser, another of this interpretation's influential propounders, adopts a similar approach, dividing Emile's education into three phases, before proceeding to analyse only the second of these, which encompasses Book IV, described as “(t)he decisive phase of Emile's education”, providing only a brief overview of the first phase, covering Books I-III, and neglecting entirely the last phase, which concerns Book V. “It is, of course, the second phase of this education that is most relevant to Rousseau's theory of *amour-propre*”, he writes⁴⁷. In the light of the preceding remarks, the dangers of this insular approach should be clear. Rousseau's description of *amour-propre* in Book IV of *Emile* forms only one part of the work's overall treatment of the problem of self-love, only one ring in “the great chain of ages”, covering a particular phase of Emile's education, during which he entered society and experienced the awakening of his passions. It should be studied alongside—rather than separately from—the passages on self-love contained in the rest of the text. As we shall see, Rousseau's enthusiasm with Emile's “seconde naissance” in Book IV was tempered by his recognition, in Book V, of the problems it had created. If Book IV revealed the constructive potential of *amour-propre*, Book V exposed its darker side. While the former explained how this “instrument” could be “utile”, the latter reminded readers why it remained “dangereux”.

The first indication of this danger, however, came much earlier in the text, in the

46 Dent 1998, p 63, 67

47 Neuhouser 2008, pp. 172-180

opening three books, which demonstrated Rousseau's willingness to prevent the precocious awakening of *amour-propre* in the child.

II. Childhood: Guarding the Slumber of *Amour-Propre* (Books I-III)

While the *Second Discourse* retraced the history of the *species*, seeking to excavate from beneath the sands of time an image of the earliest man, “le bon sauvage”, *Emile* explored the history of the *individual*, striving to portray “l'enfant”. And just as earlier political theorists had attributed to the “sauvage” the features of civilised men, so too had previous theorists of education projected onto the child the characteristics of adults. “Ils cherchent toujours l'homme dans l'enfant”, Rousseau stated, “sans penser à ce qu'il est avant que d'être homme”⁴⁸. Both narratives portrayed a being bereft of depravity destined to be corrupted by society. “Tout est bien, sortant des mains de l'auteur des choses”, the opening sentence of *Emile* proclaimed, “tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme”⁴⁹. To demonstrate the goodness of human nature, to show that “les premiers mouvemens de la nature sont toujours droits”, and that “il n'y a point de perversité originelle dans le cœur humain”⁵⁰ constituted the book's overarching ambition.

The opening three books of *Emile* described Rousseau's efforts to preserve this natural rectitude in his pupil. For this purpose, he adopted a particular role, calling himself *Emile's* “gouverneur” rather than his “precepteur”, because his intention was not to lecture his pupil, but to *guide* him⁵¹. Although Books I-III covered different

48 *Emile*, Preface, OC 4, p 242

49 *Ibid.*, I, OC 4, p 245

50 *Ibid.*, II, OC 4, p 322

51 “(J)'appelle plutôt gouverneur que precepteur le maître de cette science; parce qu'il s'agit moins pour lui d'instruire que de conduire. Il ne doit point donner de préceptes, il doit les faire trouver” (*Ibid.*, I, OC 4, p 266).

phases of the boy's childhood, the *gouverneur's* strategy remained broadly the same throughout: through the careful manipulation of his charge's environment, and appropriately administered precepts, he sought to inoculate his pupil against the influence of a corrupting society⁵².

It was symbolic of Emile's childhood that the only book his *gouverneur* allowed him to read was *Robinson Crusoe*⁵³. Stranded on a desolate island, far from civilisation, and condemned to seek in himself his own resources, Daniel Defoe's famous protagonist represented an ideal that the first stages of Emile's education were designed to attain⁵⁴. Rousseau considered insularity a precondition for the orderly development of his pupil. In these early phases, Rousseau's pedagogic project consisted less in giving Emile the right kind of education than preventing him from receiving the wrong kind. A fortress was to be erected around his soul⁵⁵. This method Rousseau called *negative education*:

“Le plus dangereux intervalle de la vie humaine est celui de la naissance à l'age de douze ans. C'est le tems où germent les erreurs et les vices, sans qu'on ait encore aucun instrument pour les détruire; et quand l'instrument vient les racines sont si profondes qu'il n'est plus tems de les arracher. [...]

La première éducation doit donc être purement négative. Elle consiste, non point à enseigner la vertu ni la vérité, mais à garantir le cœur du vice et l'esprit de l'erreur.”⁵⁶

The doctrine of negative education rested on two complementary ideas: that society corrupts man, and that man is by nature good. It proceeded directly from the axiom that

52 As Claude Habib remarks, the carefully monitored education of Emile can be understood as a model conjured by Rousseau in reaction to his own rugged and disorganised education. “To educate Emile”, Habib writes, “is also to cast a critical gaze upon his own youth”. “For it is to dream of educating oneself integrally, protected from the storms of contingency, [...] in order to be raised as one should be, and to follow one's proper course.” This underlying autocritique, Habib concludes, gives the text its unique intensity (Habib 2012, p 10).

53 *Emile*, III, OC 4, p 467

54 As Thierry Ménissier explains, Rousseau endorsed the ideals of self-sufficiency and adaptation to nature present in *Robinson Crusoe*, but did not retain the novel's Puritan philosophy, particularly its Lockean emphasis on the mastery of nature through labour (Ménissier 2012).

55 *Emile*, I, OC 4, p 246

56 *Ibid.*, II, OC 4, pp. 323-324. “(Q)u'avons-nous à faire?”, Rousseau asked elsewhere. “Beaucoup, sans doute; c'est d'empêcher que rien ne soit fait” (*Ibid.*, I, OC 4, p 251).

“(t)out est bien, sortant des mains de l'auteur des choses: tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme”. Prior to the development of reason, the child remained unarmed against corrupting influences that might twist his mind and pervert his heart. Until that time came, he was to be shielded from them, so as to preserve his natural potential.

When one examines the *gouverneur's* strategy in more detail, however, it becomes clear that, in practice, negative education involved more than simply isolating the child on a proverbial island: it also consisted in actively preparing him to resist the effects of a society similar to the one described in the *Second Discourse*, which, sooner or later, was bound to intrude on his insular existence.

Rousseau declaimed against parents who poured artificial passions into their child's heart and later attributed its vices to nature. “(A)près avoir étouffé le naturel par les passions qu'on a fait naître, on remet cet être factice entre les mains d'un précepteur, lequel achève de développer les germes artificiels qu'il trouve déjà tout formés”, he wrote. Such a treatment produced a child that was both slave and tyrant, who soon revealed “son orgueil et tous ses vices”. Having taken pains to render him wicked, Rousseau deplored, adults then lamented his wickedness⁵⁷.

In deploring the child tyrant's “orgueil”, Rousseau dropped an unmistakable hint as to the cause of that child's corruption: the premature awakening of *amour-propre*. “Jusqu'à ce que le guide de l'amour-propre qui est la raison puisse naître”, he affirmed in language that mirrored that of his exposition of negative education, “il importe donc qu'un enfant ne fasse rien parce qu'il est vu ou entendu, rien en un mot par rapport aux

57 Ibid., I, OC 4, p 261

autres, mais seulement ce que la nature lui demande, et alors il ne fera rien que de bien”⁵⁸.

It fell to the *gouverneur* to incorporate Rousseau's philosophical principles into his teachings. To avert an early emergence of Emile's *amour-propre*, he sought methodically to prevent the mentality associated with it, in particular the concerns with appearance and social distinction, from taking root in his mind.

From this perspective, the game of masks to which the *gouverneur* introduced Emile in Book I⁵⁹ deserves attention. Though the game was purportedly designed to accustom the child to the frightening aspect of the masks, there is no mistaking its symbolic significance. As Pierre Burgelin rightly remarks, it constituted an early effort by the *gouverneur* to nurture in his pupil a distrust of appearances, which could prove deceptive⁶⁰. “L'homme du monde est tout entier dans son masque”, Rousseau would later exclaim⁶¹. Likewise, when, in Book II, Emile began painting⁶², the exercise became a pretext to awaken him to the paradoxes of social distinction. His and the *gouverneur's* works were to be displayed on the walls of the child's bedroom, the earliest and most hesitant efforts framed in shining gold, and the later, more accomplished work in simple black wood, for then “il n'a plus besoin d'autre ornement que lui-même”. Once again, the pedagogic purpose of the exercise was clear. “Ainsi”, Rousseau explained, “chacun de nous aspire à l'honneur du cadre uni, et quand l'un veut dédaigner un dessein de l'autre, il le condamne au cadre doré”. “Quelque jour, peut-

58 Ibid., II, OC 4, p 322. Neuhouser rightly insists on the importance of this sentence, regarding it as evidence of the *gouverneur's* commitment, in this early phase, to “maintaining *amour-propre's* dormancy” (Neuhouser 2008, pp. 173-174).

59 *Emile*, I, OC 4, p 283

60 Burgelin in OC 4, p 1328

61 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 515

62 Ibid., II, OC 4, pp. 398-399

être”, he then speculated, “ces cadres dorés passeront entre nous en proverbes, et nous admirerons combien d'hommes se rendent justice en se faisant encadrer ainsi”. In Book III, the desire for distinction was similarly discouraged when Emile participated in a race with other children⁶³. His sole aspiration should be to win a cake that the *gouverneur* offered as a prize to the victor, and not to surpass the other racers. “(J)amais de comparaisons avec d'autres enfans, point de rivaux, point de concurrens même à la course aussi-tôt qu'il commence à raisonner”, Rousseau later insisted: “j'aime cent fois mieux qu'il n'apprenne point ce qu'il n'apprendroit que par jalousie ou par vanité”⁶⁴.

In alerting his charge to the dangers of false appearances, and educating him such as to limit the power that artificial ideas relating to competition and social distinction could exert upon him, the *gouverneur* evidently sought to avoid a premature awakening of *amour-propre*, of which these ideas were presented as characteristic products in the *Second Discourse*⁶⁵.

III. Adolescence: Managing the Awakening of “Amour-Propre” (Book IV)

If the first phase of Emile's education consisted in delaying the awakening of *amour-propre*, the second sought to ensure that once *amour-propre* did finally emerge from its slumber, as it must, it was prevented from causing the havoc described in the *Second Discourse*. Accordingly, Book IV saw the *gouverneur* propose a new and different kind of education, adapted to Emile's entry into society, which saw Rousseau's

63 Ibid., III, OC 4, pp. 393-396

64 Ibid., III, OC 4, pp. 453-454

65 As Raymond Bazowski rightly remarks, “(t)his education is negative because it involves a vital defensive action designed to inhibit those superfluous values associated with amour propre” (Bazowski 1984, p 24).

imaginary pupil undertake a thorough study of his relations to other men. The central concept here was that of “place”: to find one's proper place in the order of society amounted, de facto, to placating the restless, impetuous, Hobbesian *amour-propre* prevalent in disordered societies, where men waged perpetual war with one another in a vain quest for superior status, and replacing it with a more serene *amour-propre* whose double aspiration to compare favourably with others and to be valued by others could be met by other means. For this purpose, Rousseau imagined an ideal, the ideal of man, which conferred an equal and equally prestigious title to all members of society.

1. *The Birth of Amour-Propre*

When Emile reached adolescence, new passions began to stir his heart. The onset of puberty awoke the most powerful of all, sexual desire, engendering a strong, if at first inchoate, longing for an other⁶⁶. These transformations led Rousseau's pupil to open his eyes anew to the world around him, and to experience a “seconde naissance”⁶⁷. Now came the time to enter society, and be introduced to its moral complexity. At this stage, Emile's education needed to change, or, rather, begin. “Cette époque où finissent les éducations ordinaires est proprement celle où la nôtre doit commencer”, Rousseau wrote⁶⁸.

Any attempt to *destroy* the adolescent's nascent passions, Rousseau insisted, was not only doomed to fail, but also condemnable on both practical and religious grounds. “Nos passions”, he maintained, “sont les principaux instrumens de nôtre conservation; c'est donc une entreprise aussi vaine que ridicule de vouloir les détruire; c'est controller

66 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, pp. 489-490

67 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 490

68 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 490

la nature, c'est réformer l'ouvrage de Dieu". Neither was it possible or desirable to prevent the birth of the passions. "(J)e trouverois celui qui voudroit empêcher les passions de naître presque aussi fou que celui qui voudroit les anéantir", Rousseau added, "et ceux qui croiroient que tel a été mon projet jusqu'ici m'auroient surement fort mal entendu"⁶⁹. The delaying tactics of *Emile's* first three books aimed to avoid a premature birth of the social passions, not to prevent it indefinitely. Now was the time to manage their awakening.

To accept the necessity of the passions was not, however, to endorse all of them. Rousseau immediately distinguished between natural and artificial passions, and claimed that society warped man's natural constitution by introducing into it a thousand unnatural elements. He compared the passions of socialised men to a river, contaminated by "foreign streams". "(M)ille ruisseaux étrangers l'ont grossie", he wrote: "c'est un grand fleuve qui s'accroît sans cesse et dans lequel on retrouveroit à peine quelques gouttes de ses premières eaux"⁷⁰. By "ses premières eaux", Rousseau meant *amour de soi*, construed, as we have already seen, as the single, natural source of man's passions, an innate disposition susceptible of "modifications"⁷¹. Always good and conform to order, *amour de soi* inspired a keen and necessary concern for one's own well-being⁷².

This natural concern, however, was altered when Emile entered the social world, as *amour de soi* 'changed into' *amour-propre*, a development that Rousseau described in the following terms:

69 Ibid., IV, OC 4, pp. 490-491

70 Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 491

71 Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 491

72 Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 491

“Mon Émile n'ayant jusqu'à présent regardé que lui-même, le premier regard qu'il jette sur ses semblables le porte à se comparer avec eux; et le premier sentiment qu'excite en lui cette comparaison, est de desirer la première place. Voilà le point où l'amour de soi se change en amour-propre, et où commencent à naître toutes les passions qui tiennent à celle-là. Mais pour décider si celles de ces passions qui domineront dans son caractère, seront humaines et douces, ou cruelles et malfaisantes, si ce seront des passions de bienfaisance et de commisération, ou d'envie et de convoitise, il faut savoir à quelle place il se sentira parmi les hommes, et quels genres d'obstacles il pourra croire avoir à vaincre, pour parvenir à celle qu'il veut occuper”⁷³

In this passage, Rousseau contended that the first gaze Emile cast on his peers led him to desire “la première place”. Though Rousseau did not explain here how this desire for eminence was born, he elsewhere identified such an aspiration to superiority as the effect of competition over mates. “La préférence qu'on accorde on veut l'obtenir; l'amour doit être réciproque”, Rousseau had written earlier in Book IV. “Pour être aimé”, he added, “il faut se rendre aimable; pour être préféré, il faut se rendre plus aimable qu'un autre, plus aimable que tout autre, au moins aux yeux de l'objet aimé”. “De là les premiers regards sur ses semblables; de là les premières comparaisons avec eux; de là l'émulation, les rivalités, la jalousie”, Rousseau concluded⁷⁴. This explanation, which chimed in perfectly with the account of burgeoning societies found in the *Second Discourse*⁷⁵, highlighted the connection between the awakening of *amour-propre* and the appearance of competition between individuals. Natural longings, altered by society into aspirations to love and friendship, led the absolute and self-regarding *amour de soi* to evolve into a concern for comparative standing and reputation⁷⁶. And with *amour-propre* came a new conception of the self, mediated by

73 Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 523

74 Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 494

75 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, II, OC 3, pp. 169-170

76 As Neuhouser remarks, this tendency to accord preference to oneself over others already existed in *amour de soi*, though it only surfaced episodically (Neuhouser 2008, pp. 146-147). Even the *bon sauvage*, Rousseau remarked in the *Second Discourse*, “est obligé de se donner la préférence à lui-même” when his own survival is at stake (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, p 126). However, Neuhouser rightly holds that, in society, “(a) soon as individuals begin to define their well-being in comparative terms—which is to say, as soon as they are moved by *amour-propre*—situations in which one person's good comes at the expense of another's are greatly multiplied, and this makes it 'natural' to assume the attitude that doing well for oneself implies doing better than everyone else” (Neuhouser

others: “aussi-tôt que l’amour-propre est développé le *moi* relatif se met en jeu sans cesse”, Rousseau wrote; “jamais le jeune homme n’observe les autres sans revenir sur lui-même et se comparer avec eux”⁷⁷. As Frederick Neuhouser remarks, this “moi” was “relatif” in two different senses: in comparing itself to others, and in seeking validation of its worth in the eyes of others⁷⁸. These two forms of relativity were closely connected, since the intersubjective nature of the goods (such as reverence, esteem and glory) that *amour-propre* compelled men to pursue rendered necessary their validation—one might say *reification*—in the opinion of other men.

Rousseau also held that this transformation engendered “toutes les passions qui tiennent à celle-là”, a statement that has caused much ink to be spilled among scholars. Those attached to a pejorative vision of *amour-propre* adamantly hold that “celle-là” here referred to *amour de soi*, because, if the “passions” in question could, potentially, be “humaines et douces”, as opposed to “cruelles et malfaisantes”, it was unthinkable that they could spring from *amour-propre*⁷⁹; those inclined, at the opposite, to regard *amour-propre* in a more positive light understand “celle-là” to mean *amour-propre* itself, construed as the source of passions that may be either docile or heinous⁸⁰. This is an important point, since attributing to Rousseau the claim that *amour-propre* could produce “des passions de bienfaisance et de commiseration” would confirm the interpretation advanced by Nicholas Dent, according to which there exist both benign as well as malign varieties of *amour-propre*⁸¹. Indeed, Christopher Brooke regards this

2008, p 147). In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau explained that the earliest, and most basic, criteria of social value were natural inequalities in talent, which were initially interpreted as reflecting intrinsic differences in individual worth. “And this of course”, Joshua Cohen writes, “reinforces the identification of the natural desire for an affirmation of worth with the demand that others treat one as a better” (Cohen 1997, pp. 123-124).

77 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 534

78 Neuhouser 2008, p 33

79 See, for example, Rosen 1996, p 85 [note 77].

80 See, for instance, Brooke 2012, p 198 [note 69]

81 Dent 1988, ch 2; Dent 1992, pp. 33-35; Dent 1998.

passage as one of two key exhibits used to justify that interpretation⁸².

Fully elucidating this passage proves difficult due to the ambiguity of Rousseau's phrasing. But resolving this dispute may not be necessary, since one can conjecture that when Rousseau evoked “celles de ces passions qui domineront dans son caractere”, he may not have been referring to the same passions as “les passions qui tiennent à celle-là”. In *Emile*, *amour-propre* no longer stood as the polar opposite of *amour de soi*, but rather as an “instrument” serving to prolong its expansive development. In this regard, the affirmation that “l'amour de soi se change en amour-propre” is a little confusing, but, when put into the context of the monological theory of self-love that Rousseau adopted in this text, can simply be understood to mean that self-love acquired a social dimension. Thus the social passions of Emile, while springing—like all other passions—from *amour de soi*, would nevertheless be shaped by *amour-propre*, the extension of self-love corresponding to his social self, “le moi relatif”.

By affirming that the quality of these passions depended both on Emile's perceived place among his peers and on the place he aspired to occupy in their midst, Rousseau implicitly recognised the importance of the role played by *amour-propre* in shaping his “caractere”. This notion of “place” was a purely relative one: it referred to how Emile would situate himself relatively to others, and to how they would situate him relatively to themselves. For Emile to occupy a “place” thus required a mutual recognition of his social standing. And it was precisely *amour-propre* that inspired the concern for one's social worth, and fuelled the intersubjectivity at the essence of all social relations. In this sense, Sébastien Charbonnier rightly describes *amour-propre* as

82 Brooke 2012, p 198. The other passage comes a little further in Book IV, when Rousseau claims that *amour-propre* can be transformed into a virtue if extended to other beings (*Emile*, IV, OC 4, pp. 547-548). This second quotation, however, is very much a double-edged sword, as we shall see below.

the matrix of one's social identity⁸³. Thus, whether Emile's passions became “douces et affectueuses”, or “haineuses et irascibles”, certainly hinged on the employment of his *amour-propre*.

2. A Useful but Dangerous Instrument

That the character of Emile's *amour-propre* depended on his beliefs and aspirations suggested the possibility of a constructive use of *amour-propre* that would enable Emile to flourish in society. *Amour-propre* constituted the tool thanks to which he would acquire a social identity. But it was both a promising and treacherous tool. “L'amour-propre”, Rousseau warned, “est un instrument utile, mais dangereux; souvent il blesse la main qui s'en sert, et fait rarement du bien sans mal”⁸⁴. That Rousseau chose to continue employing the two separate terms of *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* to describe human self-love (in which respect he differed from Seneca) demonstrated not only his persistent rejection of the idea that man was naturally sociable, but also a willingness to *problematise* sociability rather than regard it as merely one stage of a fluid process of expansion of self-love.

As we have seen, Emile's entry into the social world was brought about by sexual desire: that which, in the first instance, triggered man's transformation from an isolated to a social being was his need for a mate. “Toutes ses relations avec son espèce, toutes les affections de son ame naissent avec celle-là”, Rousseau wrote, adding that “(s)a première passion fait bientôt fermenter les autres”⁸⁵.

83 Charbonnier 2010, p 343

84 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 536

85 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 493

Yet, Rousseau insisted upon the originally inchoate and indeterminate character of this inclination, which grew sophisticated only under the effect of other faculties. “Le penchant de l'instinct est indéterminé. Un sexe est attiré vers l'autre, voila le mouvement de la nature”, he remarked. “Le choix, les préférences, l'attachement personnel sont l'ouvrage des lumières, des préjugés, de l'habitude; il faut du tems et des connoissances pour nous rendre capables d'amour; on n'aime qu'après avoir jugé, on ne préfère qu'après avoir comparé.”⁸⁶ Only as a result of comparative judgements did instinctive desire transform into love, by concentrating on particular objects. The emergence of *amour-propre*, of which the propensities to compare and express preferences were characteristic products, thus evidently counted among the key causes of love under its advanced form.

This centripetal tendency of *amour-propre* deserves attention: the spontaneous motion of *amour-propre* is from the indefinite to the definite, and from the general to the particular. Indeed, this motion, as a number of scholars remark, makes *amour-propre* an invaluable feature of human psychology, contributing to making human life recognisably human⁸⁷. Yet, Rousseau also underlined its darker side.

In another critical passage, he explained how sexual desire, refined and concentrated by *amour-propre*, triggered a series of evolutions that progressively undermined human freedom, giving opinion empire over the social world:

“La préférence qu'on accorde on veut l'obtenir; l'amour doit être réciproque. Pour être aimé, il faut se rendre aimable; pour être préféré, il faut se rendre plus aimable qu'un autre, plus aimable que tout autre, au moins aux yeux de l'objet

86 Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 493

87 Neuhouser 2008, p 1; Bachofen 2013, p 29

aimé. De là les premiers regards sur ses semblables; de là les premières comparaisons avec eux; de là l'émulation, les rivalités, la jalousie. Un cœur plein d'un sentiment qui déborde aime à s'épancher; du besoin d'une maîtresse naît bientôt celui d'un ami: celui qui sent combien il est doux d'être aimé voudrait l'être de tout le monde, et tous ne sauroient vouloir de préférence, qu'il n'y ait beaucoup de mécontents. Avec l'amour et l'amitié naissent les dissensions, l'inimitié, la haine. Du sein de tant de passions diverses je vois l'opinion s'élever un trône inébranlable, et les stupides mortels asservis à son empire ne fonder leur propre existence que sur les jugemens d'autrui."⁸⁸

Rousseau demonstrated how *amour-propre* drove men to seek the consideration of others: initially, this stemmed from their desire for a mate, and subsequently for a friend, resulting in a loss of psychological independence, as men's preoccupation with their perception by others led them to adjust their behaviour to gain approval, and thus erect a throne for opinion. He then immediately added the following remark:

“Etendez ces idées et vous verrez d'où vient à notre amour-propre la forme que nous lui croyons naturelle, et comment l'amour de soi, cessant d'être un sentiment absolu devient orgueil dans les grandes âmes, vanité dans les petites, et dans toutes se nourrit sans cesse aux dépens du prochain.”⁸⁹

It is tempting to conclude from this sentence that Rousseau believed in the existence of a 'natural' form of *amour-propre*, to be distinguished from the one that developed in the midst of corruption. Yet, it is equally possible, and far more plausible, that in uttering this sentence Rousseau intended merely to deny that the determinate forms of *amour-propre* present in corrupt men could be deemed natural, and this could well hold true of *all* possible forms of *amour-propre*. Importantly, the passage which preceded this sentence did not portray any particular society; on the contrary, it described the almost mechanical sequence of events through which the desire for love and friendship brought about a general dependence on opinion. The causes of these developments were quite general—one might say, universal—laws, which seemed to hold independently of

⁸⁸ *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 494

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 494

particular social circumstances. It is difficult to think of an alternative state of affairs where a “natural” form of *amour-propre* might have emerged. The social realm was, to the contrary, an irreducibly artificial one, an anything but seamless association, bound in every case to ruffle *amour-propre*'s ardent feathers⁹⁰. Bound, that is, unless the *gouverneur* (or, as we shall see further in the thesis, the *Législateur*) intervened and used his art to alter this state of affairs. But if this is the case, then talk of a 'natural' form of *amour-propre* becomes problematic.

To distinguish between 'natural' and 'corrupt' kinds of *amour-propre* risks obscuring the important fact that which shape *amour-propre* assumes depends entirely on the characteristics of the social world, or, failing that, on the artificial intervention of the educator. In the transition from negative to positive education, the reliance on nature was replaced by an interventionist method that actively strove to shape the pupil's passions. If negative education was designed to preserve the natural innocence of the child, this new, 'positive' education was meant to instil in the adolescent what Niko Kolodny appositely calls “possible goodness”⁹¹.

The artificial character of this positive education manifested itself in the *gouverneur*'s willingness to decelerate the development of Emile's newfound aspirations, to protract the period over which the adolescent would forge his social identity, and to draw out the spontaneous movement of *amour-propre*, temporarily directing the comparative judgements associated with the “moi relatif” towards a recognition of general commonalities rather than particular differences with his fellow

90 Timothy O'Hagan concedes that the dissension that love is perpetually liable to feed in society makes it difficult to envisage how *amour-propre* could ever cease to be a potential threat to civil concord (O'Hagan 1999B, pp. 94-99).

91 Kolodny 2010, p 165

peers. For this purpose, Rousseau wove a general, indeed universal ideal, that of *man*.

3. *The Ideal of Man*

As we have seen, the overarching goal of Emile's positive education was to achieve a sound vision of his place in the world. And this place, Rousseau held, should be that of a man, on a footing of fundamental equality with all other men.

Rousseau emphasized the difficulty of the task, due to the initial inaccessibility of the very idea of humanity. “En dirigeant sur (son espece) sa sensibilité naissante, ne croyez pas qu'elle embrassera d'abord tous les hommes, et que ce mot de genre humain signifiera pour lui quelque chose”, he wrote. “Ce ne sera qu'après avoir cultivé son naturel en mille manieres, après bien des réflexions sur ses propres sentimens, et sur ceux qu'il observera dans les autres”, he added, “qu'il pourra parvenir à généraliser ses notions individuelles, sous l'idée abstraite d'humanité, et joindre à ses affections particulieres celles qui peuvent l'identifier avec son espece”⁹².

In order for this “idée abstraite d'humanité” to germinate in Emile's mind, his *gouverneur* embarked him on a thorough study of his relations to other men. To grasp the true relations of man, to himself and to his species, and to order his dispositions according to those relations constituted the two cardinal principles on which rested “la sagesse humaine dans l'usage des passions”⁹³. And the instrument to be used for such a study was *amour-propre*, the source of the “moi relatif”.

A lucid understanding of one's proper place in society required sustained

92 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 520

93 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 501

observations of, and comparisons with, other human beings. The petulant *amour-propre* implicitly condemned in the *First Discourse* and explicitly excoriated in the *Second Discourse* rested on a fundamental ignorance as to one's real place, an ignorance which was entertained by incomplete observations and judgements. The belief that one kind of advantage—such as talent or hereditary privilege—overrode all others, conferring a superior status on those that possessed it, relied on the assumption that the worth of individuals could be measured on a single scale. But this illusion could be dispelled by a proper grasp of actual human relations in all of their complexity. A more complete study tended to result in an overall impression of equality between individuals. “Les hommes ne sont naturellement ni Rois, ni Grands, ni Courtisans, ni riches”, Rousseau observed. “Tous sont nés nuds et pauvres, tous sujets aux misères de la vie, aux chagrins, aux maux, aux besoins, aux douleurs de toute espèce; enfin tous sont condamnés à la mort.” “Voilà”, he concluded, “ce qui est vraiment de l'homme”⁹⁴. The remedy to the social alienation described in the *Second Discourse* lay in a sagacious exploitation of the otherwise dangerous mechanisms of *amour-propre*, and in more—not less—indulgence in comparative judgements. As Sébastien Charbonnier correctly remarks, Rousseau discerned that, in this regard, *amour-propre* contained within itself resources against its own excesses⁹⁵.

The positive education of Emile's passions aimed, firstly, to make him proud of holding the status of man, and, secondly, to make him willing to share it with all other men. Meeting the first of these objectives required crafting an ideal whose prestige would suffice to seduce Emile's *amour-propre*. From this perspective, the *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard*, a theological meditation on human nature and man's place in the

94 Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 504

95 Charbonnier 2010, p 339

cosmos, which began, crucially, with the stimulation of the *amour-propre* of the vicaire's interlocutor⁹⁶, fully deserved its place at the heart of Book IV: the rank of man, it affirmed, was the highest of all. “(J)e cherche quel rang j'occupe dans l'ordre des choses”, the *vicaire* declared, concluding, on the basis of free will, superior intelligence, and self-consciousness, that “(j)e me trouve incontestablement au premier par mon espèce”⁹⁷. “Il est donc vrai que l'homme est le Roy de la terre”, he observed. “(C)ontent de la place où Dieu m'a mis, je ne vois rien après lui de meilleur que mon espèce”, he added, “et si j'avois à choisir ma place dans l'ordre des êtres, que pourrois-je choisir de plus que d'être homme?”⁹⁸ “Puis-je me voir ainsi distingué sans me féliciter de remplir ce poste honorable”, the *vicaire* asked⁹⁹. By presenting the rank of man as supremely prestigious, the *Profession de foi* offered an ideal whose pursuit might assuage Emile's thirst for distinction.

Achieving the second objective necessitated instilling in Emile feelings of sympathy and brotherhood towards the other holders of this rank. Here *pitié* played a vital role: in sensitising Emile to the vulnerability of others, it made him less likely to regard them as rivals. Emile was to experience his equality with others, and learn that “il est homme comme les autres et sujet aux mêmes foiblesses”¹⁰⁰. As with *amour-propre*, the *gouverneur* sought to provide Emile's *pitié* with a general rather than a particular object. “Pour empêcher la pitié de dégénérer en foiblesse il faut [...] la généraliser, et l'étendre sur tout le genre humain”, Rousseau wrote. His task consisted in substituting a general regard for the common vulnerability of humanity to the particular regard for suffering beings characteristic of the spontaneous form of *pitié*

96 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 562

97 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, pp. 581-582

98 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 582

99 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 583

100 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 537

described in the *Second Discourse*¹⁰¹. Together, the pride of *amour-propre* and the empathy of *pitié* provided the psychological basis for Emile's identification with the ideal of man.

Two aspects of the ideal of man here deserve to be stressed. The first is its artificiality: only through the sophisticated cultivation of his passions did Emile become receptive to the “*idée abstraite d'humanité*”. While Rousseau evidently believed that *amour-propre* possessed certain essential features, such as the aspiration to occupy “*la première place*” or the concern with the opinion of others, the aspiration to “*enter man's estate*”¹⁰² cannot, on this evidence, be considered one of them. Indeed, that Rousseau sought to “*transform*” *amour-propre* into a virtue¹⁰³ revealed the moral insufficiencies of *amour-propre* prior to this transformation.

The second is the particular political context in which the ideal was invoked: Rousseau rejected the traditional feudal vision of one's place in society, defined in terms of particular social ranks, in favour of a universalist vision that, in insisting upon all men's belonging to “*la condition humaine*”, transcended those ranks, but he did so in response to specific circumstances. Rousseau saw the ideal of man as a necessity in a context of social flux¹⁰⁴ that he took as a given, an inescapable horizon, yet otherwise admonished. Qua political theorist, he had already expressed his preference for more stable and traditional social orders, insisting that “*rien n'est plus funeste aux mœurs et à*

101For an excellent account of the *gouverneur's* cultivation of *pitié* in *Emile*, see Neuhouser 2008, pp. 176-178.

102Dent 1998

103*Emile*, IV, OC 4, pp. 547-548

104“*Vous vous fiez à l'ordre actuel de la société, sans songer que cet ordre est sujet à des révolutions inévitables, et qu'il vous est impossible de prévoir ni de prévenir celle qui peut regarder vos enfans*”, Rousseau affirmed. “*Le Grand devient petit, le riche devient pauvre, le monarque devient sujet: les coups du sort sont-ils si rares que vous puissiez compter d'en être exempt? Nous approchons de l'état de crise et du siècle des révolutions. Qui peut vous répondre de ce que vous deviendrez alors?*” (Ibid., III, OC 4, pp. 468-469)

la république que les changemens continuels d'état et de fortune entre les citoyens”¹⁰⁵. “Si les hommes naissoient attachés au sol d'un pays”, Rousseau wrote in *Emile*, “si chacun tenoit à sa fortune de manière à n'en pouvoir jamais changer, la pratique établie seroit la bonne à certains égards; l'enfant élevé pour son état n'en sortant jamais, ne pourroit être exposé aux inconveniens d'un autre”. “Mais vû la mobilité des choses humaines; vû l'esprit inquiet et remuant de ce siècle qui bouleverse tout à chaque génération, peut-on concevoir une méthode plus insensée”, he asked. “Il faut donc généraliser nos vues, et considérer dans nôtre élève l'homme abstrait, l'homme exposé à tous les accidens de la vie humaine”¹⁰⁶.

The point to emphasize here is that Rousseau did not imagine the ideal of man in a vacuum: he imagined it as a necessarily broad ideal in a context of widespread confusion and instability of traditional ranks. The ideal formed part of a strategy to placate *amour-propre*, to avoid it degenerating in the way it did in the society described at the end of the *Second Discourse*, to which Emile's society exhibited striking similarities. And this strategy was necessarily a temporary one.

So long as Emile's passions were given a *general* object, and founded on solidarity with his fellow human beings, the petulance of *amour-propre* was not to be feared; yet when the time came for him to seek the satisfaction of his *particular* aspirations in society, this threat inevitably re-emerged. The generalisation of Emile's passions formed an essential part of his positive education, facilitating the development of a constellation of altruistic dispositions. But only the return from the general to the particular would expose him to the true dangers of *amour-propre*. And this return

105 *Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 264

106 *Emile*, I, OC 4, p 252

would occur when Emile sought the fulfillment of that aspiration which triggered his entry into the social world in the first place.

IV. The Threshold of Adulthood: Mastering “Amour-Propre” (Book V)

1. Emile's Corruption

By the end of Book IV, Rousseau described Emile as “l'homme de la nature”, whose heart was so pure that the reader could not hope to identify with him¹⁰⁷. His was not the purity of the solitary “homme sauvage”, but it was close enough for Rousseau to describe Emile as “un sauvage fait pour habiter les villes”¹⁰⁸.

Unlike the dweller of the state of nature, however, Rousseau's pupil was to face “le tourbillon social”. He would live in a corrupt society, and witness a spectacle not unlike that described at the end of the *Second Discourse*.

As the narrative entered Book V, Emile's *gouverneur* had reasons for both confidence and anxiety. On the one hand, Emile's negative (Books I-III) and positive (Book IV) educations equipped him as best he could be to resist the corrupting influence of society. Paradoxically, his was in fact an advantageous situation in that it allowed him to watch and learn from the examples of others, and thereby become a wiser person, since “(r)ien n'est plus propre à rendre sage que les folies qu'on voit sans les partager”¹⁰⁹. On the other hand, the education of Emile's passions remained incomplete, since he had yet to experience the most powerful and dangerous of all. That love, which Rousseau had portrayed as the ultimate moral challenge for the good-

107Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 678

108Ibid., III, OC 4, p 484

109Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 551

hearted in his novel *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, would constitute the great theme of *Emile's* Book V was clearly signalled by the vignette with which it opened in Duchêne's 1762 edition of the text, depicting Ulysses entering the palace of Circe the enchantress. “C'est ainsi qu'ayant avili les compagnons d'Ulysse”, Rousseau explained, “Circe les dédaigne, et se donne à lui seul qu'elle n'a pu changer”¹¹⁰. The implication was that love could, like Circe's magic, transform men into contemptible beasts, and that only those capable of remaining unchanged in the face of its overwhelming charms were truly worthy of it.

This mythological imagery, imposed—like the other illustrations that accompanied *Emile* in its first edition—by Duchêne, rather than chosen by the author himself, may have seemed something of an encumbrance to Rousseau, who considerably modified its original meaning in order to integrate it into the philosophical texture of his work¹¹¹. Yet, ironically, its symbolism proved perfectly congenial to the cardinal distinction that Book V introduced, and which would define the mature Rousseau's moral theory, between natural goodness, an amoral innocence shared with animals, and moral goodness, a higher form of benevolence that was a distinctive manifestation of man's free will. Significantly, Rousseau described Ulysses's resistance to Circe in juridical terms, writing that “(e)lle n'a point voulu d'amant qui ne connut de loi que la sienne”. His merit lay in obeying a higher law than hers, in retaining his independence—in Marc Escola's words, his *autonomy*¹¹²—where his companions had

110Ibid., V, OC 4, p 810. This sentence was added to the text after the first draft, upon receipt of the etchings from Duchêne (Burgelin in OC 4, p 1674).

111On this vignette and its significance for *Emile*, see Escola 2012. Marc Escola indicates that Rousseau's interpretation of the episode differed markedly from Homer's: in the *Odyssey*, Ulysses did not rely on his inner fortitude to resist the magic of Circe, but, rather, on an external means, a magical herb called *moly*, given to him by the God Hermes (Ibid., pp. 124-125). That Rousseau was cognisant of this fact transpires from his reference to “le Lotos, qui n'est pas la pâture des Bêtes, et le Moly qui empêche les hommes de le devenir” in a 1755 letter to Voltaire (*Réponse à Voltaire*, OC 3, p 229).

112Escola 2012, p 121

lost theirs.

While the *gouverneur* had sought, in the first four books, to shape his pupil's character, the fifth would put Emile to the test, and teach him to control his appetites. “Défiez-vous de l'instinct sitôt que vous ne vous y bornez plus”, Rousseau had warned earlier in the text, “il est bon tant qu'il agit seul, il est suspect dès qu'il se mêle aux institutions des hommes; il ne faut pas le détruire, il faut le régler, et cela peut-être plus difficile que de l'anéantir”¹¹³. Though the first movements of nature were “droits”, and though the *gouverneur* had endeavoured to preserve this rectitude, now was the time for Emile himself to stay the course in the presence of a strong temptation to deviate. The success of his education hinged on this moment, which would see him exercise his free will to validate—or betray—the principles that had guided his *gouverneur's* work.

This test would come in the form of Emile's passion for Sophie, the central theme of the final book. “On ne considère pas assés l'influence que doit avoir la première liaison d'un homme avec une femme dans le cours de la vie de l'un et de l'autre”, Rousseau wrote. “On ne voit pas qu'une première impression aussi vive que celle de l'amour ou du penchant qui tient sa place a de longs effets [...] qui ne cessent d'agir jusqu'à la mort”¹¹⁴. This distinction between “l'amour” and “(le) penchant qui tient sa place” is important, and we shall return to it shortly. Before that, however, let us seek to understand why Rousseau deemed the relationship between Emile and Sophie so decisive.

To grasp the importance accorded by Rousseau to first love, one must recall that

113 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 663

114 *Ibid.*, V, OC 4, p 777

it was Emile's inchoate desire for a mate that compelled him to enter society, and awoke *amour-propre*. As we have seen, Rousseau devoted Book IV to explaining how this outward movement, this extension of his being, culminated in Emile's endorsement of his rightful place in the social and cosmic orders. *Amour-propre* had been given a goal, that of occupying the rank of man. However, Emile's initial aspiration remained as yet unfulfilled. Indeed, the education of his passions had deliberately depended on his own particular desires being kept on hold, as he was “jett(é) hors de lui” to identify with others. “Dans les affaires tenons-le toujours loin de lui”, Rousseau had written. “Plus ses soins seront consacrés au bonheur d'autrui, plus ils seront éclairés et sages, et moins il se trompera sur ce qui est bien ou mal”, he added, insisting that “(m)oins l'objet de nos soins tient immédiatement à nous-même, moins l'illusion de l'intérêt particulier est à craindre”. To transform *amour-propre* into a virtue meant projecting it onto others, and cultivating an indiscriminate love of humanity that left little room for particular attachments. “(N)e souffrons jamais en lui de préférence aveugle fondée uniquement sur des acceptations de personnes”, Rousseau had affirmed¹¹⁵. “(Q)u'avons-nous donc à faire, si ce n'est d'offrir au jeune homme des objets sur lesquels puisse agir la force expansive de son cœur, qui le dilatent, qui l'étendent sur les autres êtres, qui le fassent par tout retrouver hors de lui, d'écarter avec soin ceux qui le resserrent, le concentrent et tendent le ressort du moi humain?”¹¹⁶

Beyond the image of the dilated heart, that of the retracting and extending spring revealed the inevitably ephemeral nature of these arrangements: sooner or later, an extended spring is bound to recoil. Until now, Emile had been encouraged to pursue the common good to the exclusion of his private goals, but, unless his was to be an

115Ibid., IV, OC 4, pp. 547-548. “Etendons l'amour-propre *sur les autres êtres*, nous le transformerons en vertu”, Rousseau wrote (italics added).

116Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 506

integrally altruistic, wholly disinterested existence, of the kind Rousseau explicitly ruled out¹¹⁷, he would surely eventually need to pursue the satisfaction of his own desire, and the time for that pursuit came in Book V.

In effect, *Emile's* final book began with the claim that the “denouement” of the pupil's youth was still to come, and that the as yet unfulfilled promise of Book IV would now be held. “Il n'est pas bon que l'homme soit seul”, Rousseau wrote. “Emile est homme; nous lui avons promis une compagne, il faut la lui donner.”¹¹⁸ Emile's courtship of Sophie thus constituted the logical conclusion of the process through which the *gouverneur* had sought to mould his passions.

In his courtship of Sophie, a modest but uncorrupted country girl, Emile would face two alternative options, and here the distinction noted earlier becomes important. In effect, telling the difference between true love and mere penchant would prove the key to Emile's success. As Benjamin Thompson and Robert Lamb observe, in articulating a dichotomy between a morally worthy “amour” and a lower “penchant qui tient sa place”, Rousseau undoubtedly drew inspiration from Fénelon's theory of hierarchical loves¹¹⁹. Indeed, the influence of Fénelon permeated Book V of *Emile*¹²⁰. His celebrated *Télémaque* (1699), which described the education of Ulysses' son in the

¹¹⁷It is significant that Rousseau's most explicit rejection of the possibility of a disinterested moral agent is found in a 1761 letter he wrote to one M. D'Offreville, i.e. a text written concomitantly with *Emile*. “(Q)uand nous agissons, il faut que nous ayons un motif pour agir”, he averred, “& ce motif ne peut être étranger à nous, puisque c'est nous qu'il met en œuvre: il est absurde d'imaginer qu'étant moi, j'agirai comme si j'étois un autre”. “N'est-t-il pas vrai”, he asked, “que si l'on vous disoit qu'un corps est poussé sans que rien le touche, vous diriez que cela n'est pas concevable? C'est la même chose en morale quand on croit agir sans nul intérêt.” (*Lettre à M. D'Offreville à Douai*, 04.10.1761). Naturally, Rousseau did go on to distinguish between higher and lower interests, but he did express scepticism as to the possibility of moral excellence founded on disincarnated altruism (see Thompson & Lamb 2011, pp. 807-811).

¹¹⁸*Emile*, V, OC 4, p 692

¹¹⁹Thompson & Lamb 2011, pp. 805-814

¹²⁰On the influence of Fénelon upon Rousseau, see Mendham (forthcoming); Escola 2012; Thompson & Lamb 2011; Riley 2001; Pire 1955.

hands of his preceptor Mentor, was the sole work of fiction read by Sophie before meeting Emile, who would therefore need to embody the Prince of Ithaca's moral qualities to seduce her. And the same book would be symbolically handed to *Emile* by his *gouverneur* later in the text, to help him achieve an accurate understanding of virtue¹²¹.

Crucially, in the hierarchy established by Fénelon in his *Explications des Maximes des Saints sur la Vie Intérieure* (1697), the moral worth of each type of love depended on whether—and to what degree—it was alloyed with self-love. Those types of love that rested on self-gratification were placed below more altruistic forms, and at the top stood “pur amour”, an entirely disinterested love of God involving abnegation of the self¹²². Likewise, when, in his *Dialogues*, Rousseau described the virtuous man, citing Fénelon as a perfect and rare example, he spoke of “(c)elui qui sait régner sur son propre cœur, tenir toutes ses passions sous le joug; sur qui l'intérêt personnel et les desirs sensuels n'ont aucune puissance, et qui, soit en public, soit tout seul et sans témoin ne fait en toute occasion que ce qui est juste et honnête, sans égard aux vœux secrets de son cœur”¹²³. Though it was difficult to believe that these “vœux secrets de son cœur” could, under the quill of a studious reader of La Rochefoucauld, refer to anything other than *amour-propre*, Rousseau clarified this point by opposing the virtuous to the wicked, whose hearts were, by contrast, “vides de tout sentiment, excepté celui de l'amour-propre”¹²⁴.

121As Patrick Riley notes, that Rousseau should make Emile read *Télémaque* represented “a striking concession from one who thought almost all literature morally suspect” (Riley 2001, p 278).

122*Explication des Maximes des Saints sur la Vie Intérieure*. “The central truth about Fénelon”, Riley writes, “is that the whole of his practical thought—religious, moral, political—is held together by the notion of disinterested love, of 'going out of the self' in order to lose oneself in a greater Beyond (or, in the case of God, Above)” (Riley 2001, pp. 281-282).

123Rousseau *Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, II, OC 1, p 863

124Ibid., II, OC 1, p 863

In *Télémaque*, Fénelon made his hero experience different types of love by exposing him to the charms of different types of women. The condemnable and commendable forms of love were respectively embodied by the nymph Eucharis, whose dangerous charms and “caresses empoisonnées” Fénelon's pupil resisted on the island of Calypso¹²⁵, and by Princess Antiope of Crete, who, at the opposite, inspired in him feelings of a higher order. “Ce n'est point une passion aveugle, comme celle dont vous m'avez guéri dans l'île de Calypso”, Télémaque declared to Mentor after meeting Antiope. “Ce n'est point amour passionné. C'est goût, c'est estime, c'est persuasion.”¹²⁶

In *Emile*, it would fall to Sophie to incarnate both of these figures, Eucharis the temptress and Antiope the virtuous. In the early stages of their relationship, Rousseau likened the power exerted by Sophie over Emile to the fascination inspired by Eucharis, and, indeed, to the magic of Circe. “(L)es charmes de cette fille enchanteresse vont par torrents à son cœur”, he wrote; “il commence d'avalier à longs traits le poison dont elle l'enivre. Il ne parle plus, il ne répond plus; il ne voit que Sophie; il n'entend que Sophie: si elle dit un mot, il ouvre la bouche; si elle baisse les yeux, il les baisse; s'il la voit respirer, il soupire: c'est l'âme de Sophie qui paroît l'animer.” “Adieu la liberté”, Rousseau concluded¹²⁷. This first Sophie inspired in Emile a servile, imitative passion that deprived him of his freedom. Much like Circe imposed her law on the companions of Ulysses, Sophie animated Emile's very soul.

The challenge for Emile lay in resisting this poison, and avoiding corruption, by

125*Télémaque*, VI

126Ibid., XVII

127*Emile*, V, OC 4, pp. 776-777. Rousseau also used the theme of a corrupting poison to describe Julie's initial passion for Saint-Preux in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. “Dès le premier jour que j'eus le malheur de te voir”, Julie wrote, “je sentis le poison qui corrompt mes sens et ma raison; je le sentis du premier instant, et tes yeux, tes sentimens, tes discours, ta plume criminelle le rendent chaque jour plus mortel” (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, I:4, OC 2, p 39).

obeying a higher law than that of desire. And this, in turn, would allow him to discover a second, Antiope-like Sophie. The price for this discovery, however, would prove steep.

2. *Towards Virtue*

Despite her capacity to enslave Emile, the character of Sophie differed from that of Eucharis. Beyond her veil of beauty lay the soul of an Antiope, waiting to be seduced. Sophie certainly aspired to be loved, but she aspired to be loved by someone seduced no less by her moral integrity than by her beauty. “Elle dédaignerait un cœur qui ne sentirait pas tout le prix du sien, qui ne l'aimerait pas pour ses vertus autant et plus que pour ses charmes; un cœur qui ne lui préférerait pas ses propres devoirs”, Rousseau remarked¹²⁸.

In describing the ideal woman as one who wanted to be loved because of her virtues rather than merely her charm, and who disdained “un cœur qui ne lui préférerait pas ses propres devoirs”, Rousseau opposed a higher form of love (“l'amour”), sensitive to moral qualities, to a lower form of love (“(le) penchant qui tient sa place”), stimulated by sensual qualities, and which rendered those in thrall to it oblivious to their duties. The higher form of love differed from the lower through its conformity to a vaster moral order. The worthy lover attended to his moral obligations ahead of his passion for his mistress. This, indeed, would prove the key to Emile's success in courting Sophie, who offered him her hand only after an episode in which he had failed to pay her an expected visit in order to assist an injured farmer¹²⁹. “(N)'esperez pas me faire oublier les droits de l'humanité: ils me sont plus sacrés que les vôtres; je n'y

¹²⁸*Emile*, V, OC 4, pp. 809-810

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, V, OC 4, pp. 810-813

renoncerais jamais pour vous”, Emile declared to her¹³⁰. By demonstrating his capacity to prioritise a moral duty over his desire to see Sophie, he showed her that his endearment amounted to more than mere “penchant”, and was worthy of the name of “amour”. At the opposite, to indulge in “(le) penchant qui tient sa place” would have meant exiting the moral order and subordinating all moral considerations to his desires¹³¹.

Rousseau's distinction between higher and lower forms of love ties in perfectly with the vision espoused in the *Profession de foi*, where he described two distinct and competing principles of human nature: the celestial love of order and base instinct. The former, Rousseau wrote, elevated man, inspiring him to enter the moral, aesthetic and intellectual realms, and to admire God's handiwork; the latter, by contrast, degraded him, imprisoning him in the narrow confines of the self, enslaving him to the empire of the senses, and to that of the passions, which are their ministers¹³². He opposed conscience, an innate and universal moral compass residing in the depths of man's soul¹³³, to the passions, bodily propensities which all too often led men to ignore conscience, averring that “(l)a conscience est la voix de l'ame, les passions sont la voix du corps”. “Est-il étonnant que souvent ces deux langages se contredisent [...]?” he asked¹³⁴. The contention that “la voix du corps” began to contradict “la voix de l'ame” when man entered society and experienced the social passions¹³⁵ revealed the role of

130Ibid., V, OC 4, pp. 812-813

131In a recent paper, Frederick Neuhouser identifies a similar dichotomy between higher and lower forms of love in *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, insisting that the lower form not only leads one to neglect one's own duties, but also demands that one's beloved neglect theirs. “(T)he jealous exclusiveness with which sexual passion strives to possess its object is incompatible with the legitimate claims that others [...] have on the beloved”, he writes. “In desiring its object “for itself alone”, sexual passion seeks to remove its beloved from the web of obligations that joins him or her to others, demanding the neglect of all duties external to the single bond of passionate love” (Neuhouser 2014b, pp. 215-216).

132*Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 583

133Ibid., IV, OC 4, pp. 597-598

134Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 594

135Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 663

amour-propre in provoking this discordance. If conscience inspired man to align himself with the moral order willed by God, petulant *amour-propre*, and the burning passions of which it was the source, to the contrary, made him ride roughshod over that order. “(L)e bon s'ordonne par rapport au tout”, Rousseau wrote, whereas “le méchant ordonne le tout par rapport à lui”. “Celui-ci se fait le centre de toutes choses, l'autre mesure son rayon et se tient à la circonférence. Alors il est ordonné par rapport au centre commun qui est Dieu, et par rapport à tous les cercles concentriques qui sont les créatures.”¹³⁶

In opposing love of order to an unbridled, disordered love of self, Rousseau may well have been influenced by the French Oratorian school, a grouping of Augustinian thinkers who distinguished themselves from the Jansenists of Port-Royal precisely in affirming man's capacity to overcome the vices of *amour-propre* through alignment with a higher moral order¹³⁷. In the *Confessions*, Rousseau himself mentioned the long hours spent studying the writings of “l'Oratoire” during his stay at *Les Charmettes* in the late 1730s, particularly Père Lamy's *Entretiens sur les sciences*, which Rousseau claimed to have “lus et relus cent fois”, choosing it as his “guide”¹³⁸. As James Mitchell Lee remarks, in the writings of Oratorians such as Père Lamy, the concept of “ordre” formed the nucleus around which ideas such as cosmic harmony, the intelligent design of the universe, the force of conscience to reveal morality and man's free will—all key ideas in Rousseau's own moral theory—cohered¹³⁹.

136Ibid., IV, OC 4, p 602

137On the Oratorian influence on Rousseau's concept of “ordre”, see Lee 2001.

138*Confessions*, VI, OC 1, p 232

139Lee 2001, p 267. The stance of the Oratorians on the question of free will was a complex one, since, while expressing a belief in man's capacity to reach out to the divine and merit salvation, they nevertheless rejected the Pelagian implications of this position (Ibid., p 263).

Though one should not exaggerate Rousseau's debt to the Oratorians¹⁴⁰ or any other religious order, both the influence of Fénelon and that of Père Lamy point to an antagonistic relationship between *amour-propre* and moral excellence, whether one couch it in terms of “pur amour” or “amour de l'ordre”. “In the end, Rousseau averred that human beings have a choice between aligning themselves with order or succumbing to the passions induced by amour-propre”, Lee concludes¹⁴¹. In effect, in Rousseau's moral theory as we see it exposed in Book V of *Emile*, ascending to “amour” required preventing the morally blind, exclusive, centripetal force of *amour-propre* from diverting one away from one's duties, or, to phrase it differently, from tearing one out of the moral order.

However, the way in which Rousseau ultimately articulated the dichotomy between the two antagonistic principles of human nature owed little to earlier schools of thought, and much to his own creative genius. As we noted above, Rousseau praised Ulysses for accomplishing precisely what he failed to accomplish in the actual narrative of the *Odyssey*: resisting the magic of Circe through inner fortitude, such as to avoid becoming “(un) amant qui ne connut de loi que la sienne”. The capacity to obey a higher law, whose source lay in man's conscience, was the key to emancipating oneself from the empire of the passions.

In a capital passage of *Emile's* Book V, the *gouverneur* delivered an extraordinary lecture to his pupil on “amour”, in which he distinguished between *cultivating* the passions and *mastering* the passions, and between *natural* goodness and *moral* goodness:

140For a refutation of interpretations of Rousseau's thought that overstate the influence of Malebranche, see Bernardi 2006, pp. 310-311.

141Lee 2001, pp. 267-268

“En t'élevant dans toute la simplicité de la nature, au lieu de te prêcher de pénibles devoirs je t'ai garanti des vices qui rendent ces devoirs pénibles, [...] je t'ai moins appris à rendre à chacun ce qui lui appartient qu'à ne te soucier que de toi. Je t'ai fait plutôt bon que vertueux: mais celui qui n'est que bon ne demeure tel qu'autant qu'il a du plaisir à l'être, la bonté se brise et périt sous le choc des passions humaines; l'homme qui n'est que bon n'est bon que pour lui.

Qu'est-ce donc que l'homme vertueux? C'est celui qui sait vaincre ses affections. Car alors il suit sa raison, sa conscience, il fait son devoir, il se tient dans l'ordre et rien ne peut l'en écarter. Jusqu'ici tu n'étois libre qu'en apparence; tu n'avois que la liberté précaire d'un esclave à qui l'on n'a rien commandé. Maintenant sois libre en effet; apprends à devenir ton propre maître; commande à ton cœur, ô Emile, et tu seras vertueux.

Voilà donc un autre apprentissage à faire, et cet apprentissage est plus pénible que le premier: car la nature nous délivre des maux qu'elle nous impose ou nous apprend à les supporter; mais elle ne nous dit rien pour ceux qui nous viennent de nous; elle nous abandonne à nous-mêmes; elle nous laisse, victimes de nos passions [...].

C'est ici ta première passion. C'est la seule, peut-être, qui soit digne de toi. Si tu la sais régir en homme, elle sera la dernière; tu subjugueras toutes les autres et tu n'obéiras qu'à celle de la vertu.”¹⁴²

Rousseau here expressed two crucial ideas: firstly, that blind obedience to one's inclinations was ultimately amoral and servile¹⁴³; secondly, that moral excellence required striving to master those inclinations. This effort Rousseau named “vertu”.

We shall more fully unpack Rousseau theory of “vertu” in the following chapter, but, for now, let us draw the implications of this passage for the formation of self-love in *Emile*. Clearly, Emile's education in the hands of his *gouverneur* could only take him so far—ultimately, even when cultivated with utmost devotion and wisdom, his passions remained potentially troublesome, and an obstacle to becoming “libre en effet”. Emile had been immunised to the pernicious influence of society to the greatest degree

142*Emile*, V, OC 4, p 818

143Rousseau probably knew that, etymologically, “passion” comes from the Greek “paschein”, meaning “to endure an external pressure”; the substantive “pathos” denotes “the state of the soul when it is agitated by an external cause”. The term thus has something close to the idea of “heteronomy” built into it, a heteronomy one might oppose to the “autonomy” described by Marc Escola, consisting in obedience to a law originating from within.

possible, but there remained an enemy against which he must continually be on his guard: himself.



The frontispiece of Rousseau's *Emile*

Emile's frontispiece captured this point perfectly, depicting Thetis dipping Achilles into the river Styx. Referring to this imagery, Rousseau wrote:

“Quand tu es entré dans l'age de raison je t'ai garanti de l'opinion des hommes; quand ton cœur est devenu sensible, je t'ai préservé de l'empire des passions. Si j'avois pû prolonger ce calme intérieur jusqu'à la fin de ta vie j'aurois mis mon ouvrage en sureté, et tu serois toujours heureux autant qu'un homme peut l'être: mais cher Emile, j'ai eu beau tremper ton ame dans le Stix, je n'ai pu la rendre

par tout invulnérable [...].”¹⁴⁴

Endowed with a soul that, while well wrought by the *gouverneur*, nevertheless remained partially vulnerable to the empire of the passions, like Achilles's heel remained vulnerable to enemy arrows, it fell to Emile himself to learn to subjugate those passions.

Thus, in the passage from Book IV to Book V of *Emile*, the emphasis shifted from a *qualitative* approach to the passions centred around the concept of *cultivation* to an, at bottom, more *quantitative* approach revolving around the concept of *mastery*. “C'est une erreur de distinguer les passions en permises et déffendues pour se livrer aux premières et se refuser aux autres”, Rousseau concluded. “Toutes sont bonnes quand on en reste le maitre, toutes sont mauvaises quand on s'y laisse assujétir.”¹⁴⁵ “L'Etre suprême a voulu faire en tout honneur à l'espèce humaine”, he added; “en donnant à l'homme des penchans sans mesure il lui donne en même tems la loi qui les régle, afin qu'il soit libre et se commande à lui-même; en le livrant à des passions immodérées, il joint à ces passions la raison pour les gouverner”¹⁴⁶. The success of Emile's education could, in fine, be measured by the degree of control he exerted over his passions, and, indeed, over *amour-propre*.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that the account of self-love presented by Rousseau in *Emile* differed from the one earlier propounded in the *Second Discourse*. Initially, Rousseau described *amour de soi* and *pitié* as the two original passions of human nature, and *amour-propre* emerged as the product of man's ill-fated journey through history. But in

144*Emile*, V, OC 4, p 815

145Ibid., V, OC 4, p 819

146Ibid., V, OC 4, p 695

Emile, *amour de soi* became the unique natural inclination of man, albeit one holding the potential for considerable development, the mother principle of all other passions, with *amour-propre* redefined as an extension of *amour de soi* enabling the pursuit of social goods, such as one's standing in the eyes of others. Emile's *gouverneur* strove to educate and transform both *amour-propre* and *pitié* so as to perfect *amour de soi*, allowing it to evolve into *amour de l'humanité*. Crucial to the success of this education was the attainment by the individual of a sense of his true place in society, and it is here that *amour-propre* proved itself to be a particularly useful—if dangerous—instrument, by moving Emile to compare himself with others, to study his moral relations, and to take pride in occupying the honourable rank of man. On the cusp of adulthood, however, Emile learned that the proper ordering of his passions constituted a necessary—but not sufficient—condition for fulfilling the ultimate goal of his education, which was freedom. The courtship of Sophie taught him the value of resistance to one's passions, whose vestigial menace to rectitude could never be fully eradicated. Here Rousseau introduced a cardinal concept of his ethics, *vertu*, defined as a morally necessary struggle against the passions springing from *amour-propre*.

What are the implications of this discussion for Rousseau's political theory? Much depends on whether or not Rousseau saw in Emile a model for the citizens that might populate a Republic founded on the principles of *Du Contract Social*.

In *Emile* itself Rousseau famously insisted upon the difficulty, and indeed the impossibility, of reconciling the ideals of man and citizen, presenting them as mutually exclusive alternatives. Given the almost inevitable conflicts between nature and society, he affirmed that “il faut opter entre faire un homme ou un citoyen; car on ne peut faire à

la fois l'un et l'autre”¹⁴⁷.

Yet, many interpreters contest this dichotomy. As we noted in the introduction of this thesis, the idealist reading of Rousseau regards the education advocated in *Emile* as both the key to—and the precondition of—the passage from the state of nature to the city of the social contract. Likewise, Frederick Neuhouser holds that “what Rousseau denies is only the possibility of *simultaneously* forming children into both men and citizens”, insisting on “the obvious fact that part of Emile's education—taking up a sizable portion of Book V [...]—consists in preparing him to assume his place as a member of the state”. “This instruction for citizenship”, he adds, “is easily reconciled with the well-known fact that Emile's education is designed to make him into a man, once one realizes that his formation as a citizen (in Book V) takes place only *after* his formation as a man (in Books I-IV)”¹⁴⁸. In the same vein, Bruno Bernardi argues that the sharp contrast between 'man' and 'citizen' articulated at the beginning of *Emile* is misleading, as it results from contradictions which the education advocated by Rousseau was designed to overcome¹⁴⁹. Patrick Riley also observes a convergence between the measures taken by Emile's tutor and the “educative ministrations” of the *Législateur*¹⁵⁰. “Emile, shaped into a man as a result of his education, will learn to become a citizen to fulfill himself as a man”, Pierre Burgelin adds¹⁵¹.

But there are good reasons to be found in *Emile* itself for questioning this vision of the relationship between Rousseau's moral and political projects, and its optimistic affirmation of the compatibility between the ideals of man and citizen. Beyond the

147Ibid., I, OC 4, p 248

148Neuhouser 2008, p 172

149Bernardi 2012

150Riley 2013, p 575

151Burgelin in OC 4, p 1297

claims found in Book I, the discussion of Emile's political obligation in Book V deserves more attention than it has received.

Shortly after Emile revealed his wish to marry Sophie, his *gouverneur* demanded a temporary separation between the two lovers, and set off with his pupil on a series of voyages across Europe¹⁵². During the course of his travels, which were purportedly meant to enable him to choose his country of residence, Emile discovered for himself the corruption of the states of Europe. When the *gouverneur* showed him a condensed version of *Du Contract Social*, this merely impressed on him the gaping distance that existed between the “principes du droit politique” articulated in that text and the reality of existing polities. Here Rousseau distinguished man-made laws from the true laws of morality:

“C'est en vain qu'on aspire à la liberté sous la sauvegarde des loix. Des loix! Où est-ce qu'il y en a, et où est-ce qu'elles sont respectées? Par tout tu n'as vu regner sous ce nom que l'intérêt particulier et les passions des hommes. Mais les loix éternelles de la nature et de l'ordre existent. Elles tiennent lieu de loi positive au sage; elles sont écrites au fond de son cœur par la conscience et par la raison; c'est à celles-là qu'il doit s'asservir pour être libre [...]. La liberté n'est dans aucune forme de gouvernement, elle est dans le cœur de l'homme libre, il la porte par tout avec lui. L'homme vil porte par tout la servitude. L'un seroit esclave à Genève, et l'autre libre à Paris.”¹⁵³

Rousseau affirmed the existence, above and beyond positive laws, of higher laws, “les loix éternelles de la nature”, to which the “sage” obeyed in all times and places, thereby achieving the freedom that would always elude the “homme vil”. The locus of this freedom, which consisted in deliberately subjecting oneself to such higher laws, lay in the individual's *foro interno* rather than in a collective sphere such as the *Polis*. Indeed, “(l)a liberté n'est dans aucune forme de gouvernement”. Emile's freedom was to be *moral rather than political*, and could thus be enjoyed no less in a corrupt city such as

152 *Emile*, V, OC 4, pp. 826-855

153 *Ibid.*, V, OC 4, pp. 857-858

Paris than in a republic like Geneva.

When Emile, accordingly, declared his indifference as to where he would establish himself, his *gouverneur* promptly dismissed, however, the idea that his pupil and Sophie could lead an apolitical existence, wholly removed from human institutions and laws, introducing a key conceptual distinction. “(Q)ui n'a pas une patrie a du moins un pays”, he declared, insisting that Emile should respect the laws of his “pays” on the grounds that, wittingly or otherwise, he had benefited immensely from them, regardless of their imperfection:

“Il y a toujours un gouvernement et des simulacres de loix sous lesquels il a vecu tranquille. Que le contract social n'ait point été observé, qu'importe, si l'intérêt particulier l'a protégé comme auroit fait la volonté générale, si la violence publique l'a garanti des violences particulières, si le mal qu'il a vû faire lui a fait aimer ce qui étoit bien, et si nos institutions mêmes lui ont fait connoître et haïr leurs propres iniquités? Ô Emile! Où est l'homme de bien qui ne doit rien à son pays? Quel qu'il soit, il lui doit ce qu'il y a de plus précieux pour l'homme, la moralité de ses actions et l'amour de la vertu. Né dans le fond d'un bois il eut vécu plus heureux et plus libre; mais n'ayant rien à combattre pour suivre ses penchans il eut été bon sans mérite, il n'eut point été vertueux, et maintenant il sait l'être malgré ses passions. La seule apparence de l'ordre le porte à le connoître, à l'aimer. Le bien public, qui ne sert que de pretexte aux autres, est pour lui seul un motif réel. Il apprend à se combattre, à se vaincre, à sacrifier son intérêt à l'intérêt commun. Il n'est pas vrai qu'il ne tire aucun profit des loix; elles lui donnent le courage d'être juste, même parmi les méchans. Il n'est pas vrai qu'elles ne l'ont pas rendu libre, elles lui ont appris à régner sur lui.”¹⁵⁴

In a moment of uncharacteristic political pragmatism, Rousseau thus conceded that, in spite of its flaws, the laws of a *pays*—an imperfect state founded on the fraudulent social contract denounced at the end of the *Second Discourse* rather than the legitimate political pact championed in *Du Contract Social*¹⁵⁵—should be respected, since, in the eyes of the sage, the imperfect laws of men constituted, in the final analysis, acceptable surrogates for the true laws of justice, insofar as the appearance of order they offered

154Ibid., V, OC 4, p 858

155On Rousseau's distinction between “nation”, “patrie” and “pays”, see Bachofen 2012.

inspired him to love true order. Emile's *gouverneur* had prepared him to live in a “pays” rather than a “patrie”. Indeed, the ideal of man had been designed in response to a decadent and unstable social order. Emile was to respect the laws of the land because, though illegitimate from a *political* point of view, from a *moral* point of view they still offered a simulacrum of justice, and presented the sage with a valuable opportunity to cultivate moral relationships and exercise self-control.

In a short text called “De la Patrie”, Rousseau explained that he originally conceived his distinction between *patrie* and *pays* when comparing ancient Rome to modern Rome¹⁵⁶: at the time of the Republic, Romans strongly identified with, and were inhabited by an intense loyalty to, their city; by contrast, modern Romans experienced no such feelings, and were, if anything, generic Europeans, that is, by Rousseau's own reckoning, nothing¹⁵⁷. In each case, different political institutions engendered different kinds of men.

One should not overlook the significant differences that exist between the relationship of the ancient Roman citizen to his *patrie* and Emile's relationship to his *pays*. The mere fact that Emile should have travelled through Europe to choose his polity on the basis of a complex political theory revealed the artificial character of his allegiance, as did the frigidly transactional analysis his *gouverneur* relied upon to convince him that he should obey its laws. One cannot but observe the strong contrast between this soberly analytic route to minimal political obligation and the spontaneous, 'second nature' patriotism Rousseau would later advocate in political writings such as his text on Poland, where he insisted that “(t)out vrai républicain suçà avec le lait de sa

156 *Fragments Politiques*, XI, OC 3, pp. 534-535

157 *Emile*, I, OC 4, p 250

mère l'amour de sa patrie"¹⁵⁸, drawing inspiration from descriptions of Sparta, an ancient city where men were born patriots¹⁵⁹. 'Citizen' Emile displayed greater similarities with the ratiocinating Socrates of *Crito* than the ardent, seemingly innately patriotic Cato of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.

In this context, one should perhaps not be surprised that missing from the abbreviated version of *Du Contract Social* found in *Emile's* Book V were the passages on the *Législateur*, the political figure invoked by Rousseau to craft institutions that would foment a civic ethos among citizens. In other words, the *gouverneur* overlooked the constructive parts of the text to focus, instead, on those elements of theory that could be used to evaluate existing polities. This, as Tanguy L'Aminot remarks, represented a particular usage of *Du Contract Social*, one adapted to Emile's circumstances as the inhabitant of a mere *pays*, and, arguably, that most adapted to the political realities of the modern world¹⁶⁰.

Critically, in his account of Emile's debt to his *pays*, Rousseau repeatedly referred to morality, self-mastery, emancipation from the empire of the passions, and "vertu". This correlation between "pays" and "vertu" will be of central concern to us in the final three chapters of this thesis.

158 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, IV, OC 3, p 966

159 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, pp. 12-13

160 L'Aminot 2012

Chapter 4: Rousseau and the Problem of *Vertu*

“*La vertu n'irait pas si loin si la vanité ne lui tenait compagnie.*”

– *La Rochefoucauld, Maximes*

Introduction

When, speaking to his pupil in Book V of *Emile*, the *gouverneur* introduced one of the cardinal concepts of Rousseau's ethics, the concept of “*vertu*”¹, he described it as “*ce mot si profané*”, suggesting a disagreement with many existing definitions, and Rousseau's wish to articulate a more accurate one. However, one would strive in vain to confine all of Rousseau's uses of the term “*vertu*” within the compass of a single definition. Indeed, a brief survey of his writings reveals that he attached a plethora of different—and to all appearances contradictory—meanings to the word.

In the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, “*vertu*” stood for the *austerity* required to sustain the martial prowess of Roman soldiers, scandalously diluted by the preciousness of artistic culture²; the *innocence* that accompanied ancient rural mores, contrasted with the countless vices inseparable from modern urban luxuries³; and the *humility* asked of the multitude, entreated to leave the sciences and the arts in the hands of a few great men, while contenting itself with the practice of “(s)cience sublime des ames simples”, an easily accessible morality engraved for all time in the human heart⁴.

1 Amidst the abundance of studies devoted to Rousseau's thought, his concept of “*vertu*” has received relatively little attention. Revealingly, the editors of the authoritative *Dictionnaire de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* neglected to devote an article specifically to this concept, conflating it instead with “*morale*” (Trousson & Eigeldinger 1996, pp. 618-624).

2 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, pp. 14-15

3 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 22

4 *Ibid.*, II, OC 3, p 30

The theme of virtue as innocence resurfaced in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité's* depiction of the state of nature, where Rousseau described “pitié” as a natural virtue associated with the purity of the natural savage, a symbol of a foregone age of innocence⁵. Then, an altogether different meaning of the word appeared in the article *Economie Politique*, where “vertu” was the conformity of a citizen's particular will to the general will of the community⁶. Yet another emerged in *Emile*, where “vertu” was, this time, equated with mastery over the passions and the pursuit of moral freedom⁷; and another still in the *Confessions*, when Rousseau depicted his own efforts to be virtuous as an uncompromising attempt to live in conformity with his principles⁸ and to reveal every aspect of his soul to the reader⁹.

Perhaps one should not be surprised by the variety of meanings carried by this term within Rousseau's corpus. Philosophy in 18th century France bore the legacy of at least three major historical conceptions of virtue, all of which influenced Rousseau greatly: firstly, the *natural* conception, in which virtue was assimilated to the purity and simplicity of nature, untouched by human complexity, a primordial spontaneity at its peak in a past “age of gold”, but presently under threat from encroaching advances in human industry; secondly, the *classical* conception, wherein virtue constituted, to the contrary, an artificial science to be learned by the worthy in order to achieve happiness, and requiring sovereign rational control over the natural inclinations; and thirdly, the *Christian* conception, which equated virtue with sacrifice and self-loathing, a renunciation of earthly pleasures as warranted penitence for the original sin¹⁰. One could add a fourth: the *republican* conception of virtue, popularised in Rousseau's time

5 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, II, OC 3, p 154

6 *Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 252

7 *Emile*, V, OC 4, pp. 817-818

8 *Confessions*, OC 1, pp. 260, 356, 364

9 *Ibid.*, OC 1, pp. 3, 175

10 Schinz 1929, pp. 141-145

by Montesquieu, particularly in *De L'Esprit des Lois* (1748), in which virtue was defined as the citizen's love for the fatherland, his taste for equality, and the assimilation of his own good with that of his political community¹¹.

The coexistence of these different definitions and of the influences they exerted made it difficult to articulate a coherent conception of virtue. A further obstacle was that the ideal—or ideals—the term conveyed found itself under attack from a variety of angles, each of its adversaries advancing their own distinctive arguments. Two particularly clamorous camps were at work: firstly, advocates of *doux commerce* such as Voltaire, who denounced the doctrine of virtue championed by Christian theologians as anthropologically illiterate, inhumanly demanding, and utterly counterproductive, calling for man to jettison this insufferable religious straitjacket as a means of releasing his productive energies¹²; and secondly, the *Libertins*, heterodox authors who celebrated man's aspiration to seek intellectual and sensual satisfaction, free from the oppressive yoke of Christian morality. The most famous of the *Libertins*, the Marquis de Sade, would unmask virtue as a contrivance hatched by the rich to regiment the poor, and dissuade them from contesting the injustices of a social order in which genuine pleasures—whether of the mind or the flesh—were the preserve of the few¹³.

11 Rosenblatt 1997, pp. 1-9; Linton 2001, p 13

12 See Chapter 2.

13 In the 17th century, *libertinage* mainly expressed a desire for free thought, emancipated from the constraints imposed by the Church. However, it thereafter became associated with the idea of moral transgression, particularly in the sexual realm. Molière's *Dom Juan* symbolised this form of *libertinage*, which was to remain in vogue throughout the the following century. The voyeuristic eroticism of the 18th century *Libertins* was perfectly illustrated by Crébillon's *Le Sofa* (1742), in which a sofa recounted the numerous love affairs it had witnessed in titillating detail, as well as by the romances of Rétif de la Bretonne and Casanova's memoirs (which, though published only in the following century, very much captured the spirit of the age). Sade's most vehement dismissal of virtue as the centrepiece of a fraudulent moral code designed to perpetuate the misery of the oppressed multitude was found in his novel *Justine* (1791), which carried the revealing subtitle: “ou les malheurs de la vertu”. Jean Tullard remarks that the diffusion of the *Libertins*' ideas benefited from the French Crown's tacit toleration of their writings during the 18th century. What judicial condemnations they did incur usually resulted from their private conduct rather than the content of their works (Tullard 2007).

This perplexing ideological battlefield partly explains the tensions that exist between Rousseau's different descriptions of virtue. However, the claim defended in this chapter is that, beneath this confusing surface, Rousseau's works did in fact articulate a cogent and original theory. The author of *Emile*, it is argued, progressively invented his own brand of “vertu”, borrowing elements from a variety of traditions along the way. From the natural conception he borrowed the idea that virtue involves conformity to a harmonious cosmic order; from the classical conception he took the notion that virtue demands sovereignty over the passions; and from the Christian conception he retained the conviction that virtue requires constant striving, struggle, and sacrifice. In fine, Rousseau theorised *vertu* as a perpetual act of self-mastery that was the gateway to moral freedom.

This chapter divides into two parts: the first describes the general framework of Rousseau's theory of *vertu*, a moral philosophy centred around the cardinal distinction between natural goodness and moral goodness; the second part deals with the problem of political virtue, explaining how, and why, Rousseau discarded Abbé Saint-Pierre's idea that reason could rule the world, and ultimately denied the possibility of a morally virtuous citizenry.

I. The Framework of Rousseau's Moral Theory

1. Two Distinguishing Features

Rousseau's vision of man and his place in the order of nature presents two distinguishing features when compared to those of his contemporaries. The first is that Rousseau considered human nature through an avowedly moral lens, taking seriously

the theological question of the origins of *evil*, in which respect he differed particularly from his more secular contemporaries, the *Philosophes*, whose chief preoccupation concerned the question of man's *hardship* on this earth. As Robert Mauzi remarks, this preoccupation reflected the effort on the part of Enlightenment thinkers to revive the spirit of Ancient philosophy, in which the problem of morality was undistinguishable from the problem of happiness¹⁴. Thus the opinions of the *Philosophes* on the question of the goodness of nature, and on the benevolence of providence, rested partly on the empirical study of man's actual fate on earth, and were heavily influenced by concrete instances of human suffering, such as, most famously, the devastating Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which inspired Voltaire's *Poème sur le Désastre de Lisbonne* (1755), as well as *Candide* (1759), an intensely caustic novel¹⁵ whose biting irony was intended to ridicule the apologists of God, among which Rousseau, author in 1756 of a letter¹⁶ (addressed to Voltaire himself) that sought to explain how the occurrence of the Lisbon disaster was compatible with the goodness of nature, as well as the 17th century German rationalist philosopher Leibniz, who penned his *Essais de Théodicée* in 1710, and the 18th century English poet Alexander Pope, whose *Essay on Man* (1734) memorably affirmed that “whatever is, is right”. The bleak fate of the Lisboans scandalised Voltaire to such an extent that he came to regard the Christian theologians'

14 Mauzi 1994, p 15. As Mark Hulliung rightly observes, the great figures of the French Enlightenment—Rousseau included—tended to regard happiness and misery as pertinent moral criteria. This is well illustrated by Diderot's article 'Droit Naturel', which defended natural law with reference to self-interest and utility (or, indeed, Rousseau's *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, in which man's misery was seen as evidence of his moral corruption). Only at the end of the 18th century did Kant seek to elevate morality above these categories, while Bentham endeavoured to reduce it to them (Hulliung 1994, p 5). For this reason, it is anachronistic to label Voltaire or D'Alembert 'utilitarians', since this term refers to a school of thought that thrived after this schism, in an intellectual atmosphere quite foreign to theirs.

15 The derisive catchphrase of the novel, sarcastically reiterated throughout its thirty chapters, was “Tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes possibles!” See also the article 'Tout est bien' in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764): “Je vous prie, messieurs, de m'expliquer le *tout est bien*, car je ne l'entends pas”, Voltaire wrote. “Entendez-vous que chacun se porte bien, qu'il a de quoi vivre, et que personne ne souffre? Vous savez combien cela est faux.” For some interesting reflections on the impact of the Lisbon earthquake on Voltaire's thought, see Paillard 2008.

16 *Lettre à Voltaire* (also known as *Lettre sur la Providence*), 18/08/1756, OC 4, pp. 1057-1075. Rousseau's letter was meant as a response to Voltaire's 1755 poem. Although Voltaire did not overtly answer Rousseau's letter, one can think of *Candide* as something of a belated reply.

discussion of the question of evil as lamentably detached from worldly realities, at best a purely academic *jeu d'esprit*¹⁷. In the article on “Vertu” that he penned for his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764), Voltaire made it clear that he had equally little time for Christian doctrines of virtue, criticizing their insistence on moral purity, and castigating those who questioned the moral worth of philanthropists driven by vanity, such as the Roman Emperor Antoninus, accused by his critics of behaving charitably out of a vain craving for approval. “Mon Dieu, donnez nous souvent de pareils fripons!”, Voltaire exclaimed¹⁸. This overall equation of goodness with happiness and benevolence was fully reflected in Voltaire's new definitions of traditionally Christian concepts: “vertu” he simply defined as benevolence towards others¹⁹, such that the practice of virtue amounted to “un commerce de bienfaits”²⁰; and “amour-propre”, that scarecrow concept of Jansenist thought, he depicted as a principle of self-preservation, and the instrument of the perpetuity of the species²¹. On the whole, Voltaire's premise was clear: that which produced happiness was morally good, while that which brought misery was morally bad.

Although Rousseau's moral theory exhibited certain undeniable similarities to Voltaire's, particularly its attention to human suffering and its aspiration to free itself from the rigidities of Church doctrine, he did not share the *Philosophes'* tendency to conflate evil and misery together, and treat them as facts of nature. To Rousseau's mind, Voltaire's complaint that providence did nothing to prevent human suffering was misguided, because nature itself was not to blame for man's woes. Rousseau insisted on distinguishing between that suffering which was truly the work of nature, such as sheer

17 *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, 'Tout est bien'

18 Ibid., Article 'Vertu'

19 Ibid., Article 'Vertu': “Qu'est-ce que vertu? Bienfaisance envers le prochain.”

20 Ibid., Article 'Vertu'

21 Ibid., Article 'Amour-Propre'

physical pain, and those torments that, to the contrary, were man's own handiwork²², and argued that, on balance, the former paled into insignificance when compared to the latter. Indeed, even physical pain was in many cases artificially induced, he maintained, for it was truly man's own reactions to natural ills that transformed them into sources of misery, in particular through the work of the imagination²³ (not to mention the fact that civilised man's "depraved" way of life, and the disorders of society, not only weakened his constitution, as well as his ability to resist to illnesses, but also multiplied the latter exponentially²⁴). Most of man's misery in this life, Rousseau contended in a famous passage of *Emile*, was of his own making:

“C'est l'abus de nos facultés qui nous rend malheureux et méchants. Nos chagrins, nos soucis, nos peines nous viennent de nous. Le mal moral est incontestablement nôtre ouvrage, et le mal physique ne seroit rien sans nos vices qui nous l'ont rendu sensible. [...]

Homme, ne cherche plus l'auteur du mal, cet auteur c'est toi-même. Il n'existe point d'autre mal que celui que tu fais ou que tu souffres et l'un et l'autre te vient de toi. Le mal général ne peut-être que dans le desordre, et je vois dans le système du monde un ordre qui ne se dément point. Le mal particulier n'est que dans le sentiment de l'être qui souffre, et ce sentiment l'homme ne l'a pas reçu de la nature, il se l'est donné. La douleur a peu de prise sur quiconque, ayant peu réfléchi, n'a ni souvenir ni prévoyance. Ôtez nos funestes progrès, ôtez nos erreurs et nos vices, ôtez l'ouvrage de l'homme, et tout est bien.”²⁵

Clearing nature itself of any true blame for man's plight, portraying men as “murmurant contre la nature des maux qu'on s'est faits en l'offensant”, Rousseau sought to demonstrate the goodness of the world and of its creator in spite of widespread evidence of evil and suffering, while peering into the human soul in search of the true source of

22 We find this dichotomy in the 1756 letter to Voltaire, where Rousseau distinguished between evil (“le mal moral”), which was man's doing, and physical ills (“les maux physiques”), which came from nature (*Lettre à Voltaire*, OC 4, p 1061). On Rousseau and the question of evil, see Neiman 2002, pp. 36-57.

23 In Book VI of the *Confessions*, Rousseau described how true physical illness could, paradoxically, liberate a man from the imaginary ills he had inflicted on himself, by revealing to him their artificial character. “Je puis bien dire”, he quipped, “que je ne commençai de vivre que quand je me regardai comme un homme mort” (*Confessions*, VI, OC 1, p 228).

24 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, I, OC 3, p 138

25 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, pp. 587-588. A similar point is also made in the 7th Promenade (*Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, VII, OC 1, p 1065).

man's woes. Drawing inspiration from the probing analysis of the *Moralistes*, he explored the dark recesses of man's psychology and located the origin of man's suffering in the human vices, according, like his predecessors, pride of place to *amour-propre*, mother of all the social passions.

This was perfectly reflected in Rousseau's own stance on the Lisbon earthquake, which differed markedly from Voltaire's: while Voltaire had cursed providence for bringing about the disaster, Rousseau placed the responsibility on human shoulders, contending that neither the upheavals of the earth nor the towering waves from the sea were really responsible for the demise of the Lisboans, but rather their own avarice, which made them reluctant to flee the city and leave their treasures behind them²⁶. In fine, Rousseau refused to confine his moral concerns to the mere question of *hardship*; he retained the Christian concern with the question of *evil*.

However, Rousseau differed from the French Augustinians in an important respect, which constitutes the second distinctive feature of his vision. The French Augustinians held that men were inhabited by a deep-seated proclivity for evil: they were naturally twisted beings, fallen from the Garden of Eden, who spread mischief on the earth, and whose only hope of salvation lay in Divine Grace. While Rousseau agreed with this line of argument to the extent that conceiving of evil as a predicate of man's deeds served to clear God, or Nature, of any direct responsibility for human misery, he refused to accept the inference that human nature was itself fundamentally to blame. Indeed, Rousseau rejected the doctrine of original sin altogether, as well as the despairing notion that evil conduct was a natural consequence of the flawed architecture of the human heart. He contended, instead, that only after the corruption of man's

²⁶ *Lettre à Voltaire*, OC 4, pp. 1061-1062

inclinations did the use of his freedom become a possible source of evil. Before this, there was no evil in the human heart.

Rousseau conceded that existing generations of men were all too liable to behave wickedly, but insisted that human nature itself was fundamentally good, and that the original or primordial condition of man had been one of innocence and benevolence. In the third of his *Dialogues*, Rousseau eloquently branded this principle—which he considered the central and greatest tenet of his philosophy—“la bonté naturelle de l'homme”²⁷. The implication of the thesis of natural goodness was that the darker side of human conduct could in principle be traced back to a perversion of initially benevolent dispositions. Revealingly, Rousseau sometimes referred to wicked men (“les méchants”) as “cadavres moraux”, which was to suggest that they had once been good, and that their turpitude resulted from the demise of this inner goodness²⁸.

That evil, and its precondition—*corruption*—should be largely the product of circumstances rather than manifestations of 'the crooked timber of humanity' had important consequences for Rousseau's moral theory. Critically, it led him to argue simultaneously that evil had its source in human beings and that mankind was nevertheless capable of avoiding evil, since the conditions of the possibility of evil lay in the corruption of man's originally good nature.

2. *A Paradox*

On the surface, Rousseau's moral theory seemed to make mutually exclusive claims. On the one hand, it posited that human nature was fundamentally good; on the

²⁷ Rousseau *Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, III, OC 1, p 934

²⁸ Ibid., I, OC 1, p 668

other, it also affirmed that evil, and most (perhaps even all) human misery on this earth was man-made and self-inflicted. How could both of these statements hold true? And how could they be reconciled?

The challenge facing Rousseau was to articulate a conception of human psychology that accounted for existing evil, and explained why men were bad in the countless ways Rousseau said they were, but also left open the possibility that they might under different circumstances be good in the many ways he said they could be.

Two pitfalls await interpreters seeking to grasp Rousseau's overall position on this question: the first is that their effort to take seriously Rousseau's diagnosis of evil in society, and to accept the full force of his indictment of modern man, will drive them to empty the thesis of natural goodness of its substance. The second is that their effort to flesh out the thesis of natural goodness will lead them to soften the edges of Rousseau's critique of civilised man, and, in so doing, minimise, attenuate, and alter his powerful diagnosis of social corruption. Interpretations of Rousseau's moral theory that concentrate primarily on the *Second Discourse*—and take an excessively bleak view of *amour-propre*—tend to fall into the first of these traps, while those which focus first and foremost on Book IV of *Emile*—and favour an excessively positive view of *amour-propre*—tend to get caught in the second.

In fact, Rousseau's answer to the challenge cannot be understood merely as an attempt to redeem the human passions and to show how they may, with the right education, blossom into morally valuable dispositions, inclining men towards goodness. If this had been all Rousseau intended to argue, there would have been no need for

Book V of *Emile*, which introduced the cardinal concept of moral freedom as an emancipation from the empire of the passions²⁹.

Rousseau's answer was, rather, to distinguish between two different *kinds* of goodness: *natural goodness* and *moral goodness*. Man in the state of nature possessed *natural goodness*, a spontaneous and effortless benevolence, possible only in the silence of the passions and in the absence of vice. However, modern man, living in a world where passions had been set ablaze, and where vice had become widespread, was called upon to ascend to *moral goodness*, a deliberate and strenuous rectitude possible only as a result of inner struggle. And this struggle Rousseau called *vertu*.

3. Rousseau's Solution: the Distinction between Natural Goodness and Moral Goodness

In Book V of *Emile*, Rousseau's *gouverneur* introduced the concept of *vertu* to his pupil in the following terms:

“Mon enfant, il n'y a point de bonheur sans courage ni de vertu sans combat. Le mot de *vertu* vient de *force*; la force est la base de toute vertu. La vertu n'appartient qu'à un être foible par sa nature et fort par sa volonté; c'est en cela que consiste le mérite de l'homme juste, et quoique nous appelions Dieu bon nous ne l'appellons pas vertueux, parce qu'il n'a pas besoin d'effort pour bien faire. Pour t'expliquer ce mot si profané, j'ai attendu que tu fusses en état de m'entendre. Tant que la vertu ne coûte rien à pratiquer on a peu besoin de la connoître. Ce besoin vient quand les passions s'éveillent; il est déjà venu pour toi.”³⁰

Vertu was here defined as the strength of soul required of human beings to resist their passions when such resistance proved morally necessary. A manifestation of the free will, guided by the voice of conscience, it constituted the highest expression of morality. It was also a demanding and exacting exercise, a difficult striving, which required

29 See Chapter 3.

30 *Emile*, V, OC 4, p 817

renunciation and sacrifice. By insisting that a proper understanding of this word would have been beyond Emile in the earlier stages of his education, Rousseau also implied that *vertu* demanded knowledge and experience, particularly of the human passions.

Rousseau's remarks about *vertu* were not unequivocal, to be sure: on the one hand, he stated that “la force est la base de toute vertu”, and insisted that there could be no *vertu* without “combat”; on the other hand, he wrote that one need not know *vertu* while it remained possible to practise it effortlessly, which suggested a form of *vertu* that did *not* involve struggle and resistance.

Accordingly, one could call *vertueux* one of two types of behaviour: a conduct that is morally 'good' (however one specifies what counts as good), effortless in some circumstances and demanding in others; or as a subset of this definition, where it refers only to this kind of conduct in the latter case (i.e. when 'goodness' requires a particular kind of striving).

Though Rousseau's statement undeniably left some room for both understandings, the second is by far the more pertinent of the two, as well as that which fits best with the rest of Rousseau's remarks on the subject, and carries his distinct philosophical signature. It is clear that what Rousseau meant in this passage was that, so long as men lived in a state of innocence (whether it be that of the natural savage, untouched by civilisation, or that of the child, oblivious to the moral complexity of the adult world), they had no need for *vertu*, for they were spontaneously and effortlessly good; it became morally necessary to acquaint oneself with *vertu*, however, once the passions were awoken, for, at this point, remaining good came at a cost. So when

Rousseau spoke of effortless virtue, he manifestly used the term in a non-technical sense: what he really meant by virtue, in this case, was goodness.

There are many reasons for preferring this interpretation, but the most salient by far is that what Rousseau meant by 'goodness' in each case was quite different: the goodness of the child, or that of the natural savage, was a *natural* form of goodness in that it was spontaneous, mindlessly indulged in, rather than freely chosen, whereas the goodness of the individual who vanquished the temptation of vice and *chose* to be good was an expression of *freedom*, and therefore manifested *moral* goodness. The following passage, taken from a letter addressed by Rousseau to one Monsieur de Franquières in 1769, expressed this contrast with great clarity:

“Faire le bien est l'occupation la plus douce d'un homme bien né. Sa probité, sa bienfaisance ne sont point l'ouvrage de ses principes, mais celui de son bon naturel. Il cède à ses penchans en pratiquant la justice, comme le méchant cède aux siens en pratiquant l'iniquité. Contenter le goût qui nous porte à bien faire est bonté, mais non pas vertu.

Ce mot de vertu signifie *force*. Il n'y a point de vertu sans combat, il n'y en a point sans victoire. La vertu ne consiste pas seulement à être juste, mais à l'être en triomphant de ses passions, en régnant sur son propre cœur.”³¹

Rousseau employed the language of *spontaneity, feelings and inclinations* (“l'occupation la plus douce”, “ses penchans”, “(c)ontenter le goût qui nous porte à bien faire”) to describe natural goodness, and a more martial language, revolving around the ideas of *combat, struggle, will, and empire* (“*force*”, “combat”, “victoire”, “trionphant de ses passions”, “régnant sur son propre cœur”), to describe virtue and moral goodness. Paradoxically, natural goodness, in Rousseau's eyes, actually showed greater psychological similarity to villainy than to moral goodness, since the first two rested alike on the contentment of one's inclinations, while the third required overcoming

31 *Lettre à Franquières*, OC 4, pp. 1142-1143.

them. One did not truly *choose* “bonté”—or, for that matter, “méchanceté”—so much as *surrender* (“(i)l cède”) to it; to be “vertueux”, however, was to engage in a deliberate struggle against one's passions, and to triumph over them. As illustrations of virtuous men, Rousseau mentioned the Roman statesmen Titus, capable, upon becoming Emperor, of dismissing Berenice, the woman he loved, for the greater good of Rome; and Brutus, who, though a loving father, dutifully brought about the death of his sinful sons. “Brutus faisant mourir ses enfans pouvoit n'être que juste”, Rousseau wrote. “Mais Brutus étoit un tendre père; pour faire son devoir il déchira ses entrailles, et Brutus fut vertueux.”³² In other words, it was precisely because it had been so painful for Brutus to behave in the way he did that his conduct deserved to be called virtuous. By claiming that Brutus's decision would have been merely “juste” had it fallen short of being “vertueux”, Rousseau here explicitly distanced himself from the classical conception of virtue, in which justice was regarded as one of the four cardinal virtues. “Il y a bien de la différence entre l'homme vertueux et celui qui a des vertus”, he had written in his *Discours sur la Vertu du Héros* (1751)³³.

From this perspective, to regard *vertu* as synonymous with goodness would be to obscure the key point Rousseau was trying to make in his use of this concept: that there were different *kinds* of goodness. In the extract from Book V of *Emile* reproduced above, the author identified three distinct varieties of goodness: the all-powerful goodness of God; the natural goodness of primitive (or youthful) human beings, living in the silence of the passions; and the moral goodness of the virtuous man. While unquestionably good, God could not be described as virtuous, because this goodness sprang naturally from the Divinity's omnipotence and perfection; by contrast, human

32 *Lettre à Franquières*, OC 4, p 1143

33 *Discours sur la Vertu du Héros*, OC 2, p 1265

beings were virtuous when, though tempted by their penchants to err, they chose to do good. Hence “le mérite de l'homme juste” belonged only to those 'weak' human beings whose valiant striving enabled them to achieve goodness. The 'naturally good' man could not be called virtuous either, because his goodness owed to his spontaneous inclinations rather than to a deliberate effort. Moral goodness thus differed from other forms of goodness, in that it constituted an expression of man's *free will*: “(l)a vertu”, the *gouverneur* explained, “n'appartient qu'à un être foible par sa nature et fort par sa *volonté*”.

That claim is somewhat perplexing when taken in the broader context of Rousseau's moral theory: on the one hand, the *vicairé savoyard* seemed to affirm that man's freedom resided in an innate capacity to choose between good and evil³⁴; on the other hand, the *gouverneur* appeared to tell Emile that freedom must be achieved through a virtuous struggle³⁵. Paradoxically, then, freedom constituted the condition of its own possibility.

But this paradox, like so many others to be found in Rousseau, is merely apparent. In the *vicairé's* statement that God made man free to choose between good and evil, freedom was understood as a *potential*; when the *gouverneur* claimed that Emile must be virtuous in order to become free, he was referring to the realisation of this potential, to the exercise of freedom. This distinction appears throughout Rousseau's *œuvre*: in the *Second Discourse*, for instance, the freedom Rousseau attributed to the “sauvage” merely denoted the irreducibility of human conduct to the mechanical laws of nature, or man's fundamental status as a spiritual—and not merely

34 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, pp. 586-587

35 *Ibid.*, V, OC 4, p 818

physical—being³⁶; by contrast, the freedom discussed in Book V of *Emile* rested on the enlightened exercise of reason, guided by conscience, and expressed something even higher: a form of autonomy that made man truly the master of himself³⁷. Likewise, in *Du Contract Social*, Rousseau presented freedom as the very essence of humanity, such that entering slavery was to renounce one's status as a man³⁸; yet, in the same text he later implied that the condition of men living free from the bonds of society was one of slavery, because such men lacked moral freedom, which man could experience only in the civil state, and were driven by the impulse of mere appetite³⁹. If the natural savage possessed freedom (under a latent form), the virtuous man exercised it.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that *vertu* represented the only true expression of man's freedom. In fact, in an important sense, Rousseau also regarded corruption as a genuine—though belated—manifestation of the free will. True, a corrupt man who followed his inclinations, and in doing so perpetrated evil deeds, behaved no differently to a benevolent man who, by following his own penchants, acted charitably: this was precisely the claim Rousseau made in his *Lettre à Franquières*. Yet, there remained the question of how one *became* corrupted in the first place.

4. Virtue and Time

It has been argued that Rousseau differed from Kant in treating the wrongdoing of the corrupt man as an inevitable—one might say mechanical—consequence of his perverse penchants, as opposed to a deliberate course of action, while his Prussian counterpart, by contrast, insisted that corruption “has social causes, but does not suffice

36 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, I, OC 3, pp. 141-142

37 See Chapter 3.

38 *Du Contract Social*, I:4, OC 3, p 356

39 *Ibid.*, I:8, OC 3, p 365

to explain evil; instead, moral evil requires a choice (ultimately mysterious) to subordinate moral considerations to self-love⁴⁰.

This dichotomy between Rousseau and Kant looks plausible only if one adopts a static and atemporal view of moral responsibility. To speak of “cadavres moraux” is indeed to imply that some men are gnawed by such corruption that they may no longer carry responsibility for their wickedness. Yet, even if there existed, from Rousseau's perspective, no room, in such cases, for the “mysterious choice” of which Kant spoke, the path by which a man evolved into a “cadavre moral” over time might still have been paved with such choices. There is, in fact, strong evidence that Rousseau endorsed precisely this view. The following passage from the *Confessions* deserves particular attention:

“Le sophisme qui me perdit est celui de la plupart des hommes, qui se plaignent de manquer de force quand il est déjà trop tard pour en user. La vertu ne nous coûte que par notre faute, et si nous voulions être toujours sages, rarement aurions-nous besoin d'être vertueux. Mais des penchans faciles à surmonter nous entraînent sans resistance: nous cédon's à des tentations légères dont nous méprisons le danger. Insensiblement nous tombons dans des situations périlleuses dont nous pouvions aisément nous garantir, mais dont nous ne pouvons plus nous tirer sans des efforts héroïques qui nous effrayent, et nous tombons enfin dans l'abîme, en disant à Dieu, pourquoi m'as-tu fait si foible? Mais malgré nous il répond à nos consciences: je t'ai fait trop foible pour sortir du gouffre, parce que je t'ai fait assez fort pour n'y pas tomber.”⁴¹

Despite Rousseau's somewhat loose terminology (again, it is not clear whether virtue is intrinsically, or merely contingently, demanding), the thesis defended in this passage is quite clear: men's persistent surrender to slight temptations that it was entirely in their power to resist leads them into difficult situations, where the demands of morality can be met only at the price of great and daunting efforts. Though one may be inclined, in

40 Cohen 1997, p 135 [note 24]

41 *Confessions*, II, OC 1, p 64. “Ah! le premier pas [...] étoit celui qu'il ne falloit pas faire; comment m'arrêtero'is-je aux autres?”, Julie asks in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. “Non, de ce premier pas je me sens entraîner dans l'abîme” (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, I:4, OC 2, p 40).

such circumstances, to blame God for one's weakness, such weakness is, in fact, the result of a process in which one's free will played a decisive part. Thus, the voice of his conscience reminds man that the responsibility for his presently helpless situation—one might say, the responsibility for his own irresponsibility—lies squarely on his own shoulders⁴². However deep the chasms in which men fall may be, they possessed the powers to avoid them. “Si je fais le mal je n'ai point d'excuse; je le fais parce que je le veux”, Rousseau wrote in *Emile*⁴³. Freedom, for Rousseau, was not simply a gift from God; it was also a state in which one could remain only through constant striving. And the failure to engage in such striving, far from a mere surrender to amoral inclination, constituted a positive moral fault. Morally irreproachable men followed a path revealed to them by conscience; the farther one strayed away from this path, by repeatedly neglecting to abide by one's inner dictamen, the greater the virtue required to return to it.

This understanding of corruption as a preventable descent into 'mechanical immorality' enables us to bridge the apparent gap between two accounts of the origins of evil within Rousseau's corpus that have often been regarded as difficultly reconcilable: the *naturalistic* account found in Part II of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, which insists upon the role played by circumstances lying beyond man's control in the process through which man's originally good nature became corrupted, and the *deontological* account found in the *Profession de foi*, which emphasizes man's free will and moral responsibility in the production of evil, insisting upon the goodness of God.

In the first case, man's corruption resembles an irresistible evolution of the species, an

42 “Les coupables qui se disent forcés au crime sont aussi menteurs que méchants; comment ne voyent-ils point que la foiblesse dont ils se plaignent est leur propre ouvrage, que leur première dépravation vient de leur volonté, qu'à force de vouloir céder à leurs tentations ils leur cèdent enfin, malgré eux et les rendent irresistibles? Sans doute, il ne dépend plus d'eux de n'être pas méchants et foibles; mais il dépend d'eux de ne le pas devenir.” (*Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 604)

43 *Ibid.*, IV, OC 4, p 605

inescapable process of which individuals are merely the victims, whereas, in the second, it seems to result from man's deliberate refusal to listen to—or act upon—the inner voice of conscience. In fact, these two accounts ultimately converge in recognising the goodness of nature, and locating the cause of corruption in the misuse of man's free will. In a recent paper, Robin Douglass has shown that the narrative offered in the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* leaves ample room for man's free agency⁴⁴. External forces may have drawn man out of his original state, thereby awakening new faculties in him, but it was he who abused these faculties. To contend, as Rousseau did, that man's freedom eluded the mechanical laws of nature amounted to an implicit recognition that his evolution could not wholly be explained by such laws. Commenting on the *Discours* in his *Lettre à Philopolis*, Rousseau recognised that the onward march of man's *perfectibilité* was made possible not only by natural accidents, but also by the will of men⁴⁵. Writing to Voltaire, Rousseau claimed that all evil had its source in man, who was (and the order here is important) “libre, perfectionné, partant corrompu”⁴⁶. If the *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard* offered a spiritual account of freedom, in which man was faced with a choice between good and evil, the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* presented a worldly account of mankind's trajectory through history, which was the result of a long chain of such choices over time, as the appearance of new kinds of temptations typically coincided with the birth of new faculties that might have been (but were not) used to resist them.

So, contrary to initial appearances, the pieces of Rousseau's jigsaw fit together: man is free to choose between good and evil, and this choice is reflected in the amount

44 Douglass 2010, pp. 641-645. “At every turn in the *Second Discourse*”, Douglass writes, “chance natural events provided occasions whereby man, through use of his free will, was able to make choices that would irrevocably alter his circumstances and constitution” (Ibid., p 644).

45 “(L'état de) société découle de la nature du genre humain, non pas immédiatement [...], mais seulement, comme je l'ai prouvé, à l'aide de certaines circonstances [...]. Plusieurs même de ces circonstances *dependent de la volonté des hommes* [...]” (*Lettre à Philopolis*, OC 3, p 232) (italics added)

46 *Lettre à Voltaire*, OC 4, p 1061

of resistance he opposes to those forces that divert him from the path of goodness. He is morally good to the extent that he is virtuous, in the specific sense we have uncovered. Crucial to this conception of virtue is the idea of struggle, of inner warfare. As Saint-Preux proclaimed in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, “la vertu est un état de guerre, et [...] pour y vivre on a toujours quelque combat à rendre contre soi”⁴⁷. In this regard, Rousseau parted ways with the Stoics⁴⁸.

But this leaves an important question unanswered: what is the nature of those forces that conscience demands man constantly struggle against? What is the source of those treacherous temptations to which men all too often surrender? What sirens send man sleepwalking into the moral chasms of which Rousseau spoke in the *Confessions*?

The mention, in the *Confessions*, of “des tentations légères dont nous méprisons le danger” and the claim, in *Emile*, that man must be virtuous “quand les passions s'éveillent” both point to *amour-propre*, the source of the passions, and in particular that of contempt. Indeed, the originality of *vertu* resides specifically in its relationship to *amour-propre*, a concept unknown to the Stoics, elaborated by the French Augustinians, before being modified by Rousseau⁴⁹.

As we saw in the last chapter, the opposition between the celestial love of order inspired to man by *conscience* and the base passions springing from *amour-propre* was

47 *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, VI:7, OC 2, p 682

48 As John Plamenatz remarks, the attainment of self-mastery is a primarily *epistemic* quest, requiring the discovery of the rational laws of the cosmos; for Rousseau, the achievement of virtue is a principally *practical* endeavour to impose laws upon oneself. “The law of nature consisted, for the Stoics as for the mediaeval philosophers, of truths for men to discover and live by rather than as laws they prescribe to themselves”, Plamenatz writes (Plamenatz 2012, p 169). Indeed, for Rousseau, knowledge of virtue came only after multiple efforts to practise it, as is well illustrated by the narrative of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. “(S)oyez vertueux pour savoir ce que c'est que de l'être”, Rousseau wrote (*Lettre sur la Vertu*, p 318).

49 See Chapters 2 and 3.

central to Rousseau's moral theory. In fine, *vertu* involved mastering one's *amour-propre* to align oneself with order. Yet, due to its very ambitiousness, this ideal would prove difficult for Rousseau's political theory to uphold.

II. The Problem of Political Virtue

1. At the Juncture of Rousseau's Moral and Political Theories

As we have seen, the question of *vertu* in *Emile* was discussed within a particular political context. Yet the political implications of the work were far from clear. What conclusions did Rousseau qua political theorist draw from *Emile's* experience of “liberté morale”? Should political institutions be transformed such as to prevent conflicts between duty and inclination, and empower individuals to lead lives that both fulfil their desires and preserve their innocence? Or is the moral virtue described in *Emile* something that states should strive to instil in their citizens, in the knowledge that such conflicts are inevitable?

These are difficult questions, as they touch on the relationship between Rousseau's moral theory, which applies to individuals, and his political theory, addressed to entire nations, one of the most difficult problems facing Rousseau's interpreters. But one starting point might be to examine whatever similarities exist between Rousseau's moral vision of the fate of individuals and his political vision of the fate of states. Two such similarities strike the eye.

The first is Rousseau's belief that both individuals and communities can be “naturally good”, that is, spontaneously benevolent, uncorrupted, and conform to the

primordial simplicity of humanity's origins. What holds true of Julie before her adventure with Saint-Preux, or of Emile in the liminal stages of his education, also applies to societies, as is well illustrated by Saint-Preux's description of the *Montagnons*, the dwellers of the peaceful mountains of Le Valais, a simple, rural people naturally inclined towards benevolence⁵⁰. Of the Swiss population in its early days, Rousseau writes: “il n'avoit pas des vertus puisque, n'ayant point de vices à vaincre, bien faire ne lui coutoit rien, et il étoit bon et juste sans savoir même ce que c'étoit que justice et vertu”⁵¹. Another people Rousseau described as naturally good were those of his native city of Geneva. “Le Génevois est de tous les peuples du monde celui qui cache le moins son caractere, et qu'on connoit le plus promptement”, Claire writes in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. “Ses mœurs, ses vices mêmes, sont mêlés de franchise. *Il se sent naturellement bon*, et cela lui suffit pour ne pas craindre de se montrer tel qu'il est.”⁵² True, Genevans have an excessive fondness of money, but this, she explains, is natural, since the lack of arable land renders commerce necessary⁵³. Rousseau elsewhere referred to the people of Geneva as “un peuple simple et laborieux”⁵⁴.

50 *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, I:23, OC 2, p 79-82

51 *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, pp. 914-915

52 *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, VI:5, OC 2, p 658 (italics added)

53 *Ibid.*, VI:5, OC 2, p 658

54 *Lettre à d'Alembert*, OC 5, p 53. It should be remarked, however, that Rousseau's opinions on the alpine city evolved considerably with time. The picture of a city inhabited by naturally good men gradually gave way to one of lost innocence and corruption, as we shall see below. Furthermore, Rousseau identified two different causes to explain the original goodness of the Genevans: one was the purity of unsoiled human nature, combined with the effects of the Swiss land and climate, which were conducive to independence (*Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, pp. 913-915); but another lay in the city's sound republican institutions and austere *mœurs*, which protected the liberty of its inhabitants and elevated them to the rank of citizens (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Dedication, OC 3, pp. 111-121), though Rousseau did distinguish the humble and self-interested citizen of Geneva from the grand and proud citizens of ancient Sparta or Rome. “Vous n'êtes ni Romains, ni Spartiates”, he writes in the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*; “vous n'êtes pas même Athéniens. Laissez-là ces grands noms qui ne vous vont point.” (*Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, IX, OC 3, p 881). On the whole, the case of Geneva eludes precise categorisation, partly because of Rousseau's own conflicting (and evolving) thoughts and feelings about his native city. The message from the *Lettres* seems to be that the remedy to Geneva's present corruption lies in a return to the letter and spirit of its republican constitution. In a recent article focusing on the dedication to the Republic of Geneva that precedes Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, Leonard Sorenson explores the tension between the different facets of Geneva (as Rousseau imagines it), and explains how Rousseau's self-perception influenced his vision of Geneva (Sorenson 2009). See also Rosenblatt 1997.

The second similarity is the notion that both naturally good individuals and naturally good communities are especially vulnerable to corruption. The fatal flaw of natural goodness lies in the incapacity of those who are good merely by inclination to withstand the fascination typically inspired by agents of corruption, and thus of mounting any resistance to the temptation of vice. Vice, Rousseau believed, only rarely attacks out in the open: it hides behind the sumptuous masks of wealth, sophistication and even moral excellence⁵⁵. The capacity to remain good in the face of such a threat cannot be expected of those accustomed to following the spontaneous inclinations of nature, but only of those who 'know the enemy' and, consequently, understand the necessity of moral virtue: this was the key lesson contained in Book V of *Emile*. Moral goodness can emerge only in the midst of corruption, for it requires thorough knowledge of the vices and the human heart's vulnerability to contract them. Those Rousseau regarded as the most celestial incarnations of virtue all lived in the midst of decadence, coruscating idols in oceans of darkness. Socrates's sublime philosophy and admirable death for the sake of truth came during the decline of Athens. Cato's iron integrity and honourable suicide were the swansong of Roman virtue in the twilight of a Republic defiled and subdued by Julius Caesar. And Molière's *Alceste*, a model of virtue⁵⁶, formulated a judgement on his society so severe that he appeared misanthropic. Only when environed by corruption can one fully understand and protect oneself from it. “(C)'est dans les plus grandes Villes, chez les peuples les plus corrompus qu'on apprend à mieux pénétrer dans les cœurs, à mieux observer les hommes, à mieux interpréter leurs discours par leurs sentimens, à mieux distinguer la réalité de l'apparence”, Rousseau wrote in a 1763 letter to his compatriot Usteri⁵⁷. That the finest analysis of the secret logic of *amour-propre* came under the quill of the French

55 *Confessions*, XI, OC 1, p 442

56 *Lettre à d'Alembert*, OC 5, pp. 34-39

57 Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau au ministre Leonhard Usteri, 18.07.1763, CC 17, pp. 63-64

Moralistes—men such as La Rochefoucauld, assiduous participants of *Salon* culture—is no accident⁵⁸. And, paradoxically, to have faltered oneself may also prove morally formative. “Je sens qu’il faut avoir été ce que je fus pour devenir ce que je veux être”, Saint-Preux writes in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*⁵⁹. It comes as no surprise that part of Emile's moral education involved travelling to Paris while on his search for a wife, encouraged by his *gouverneur* to witness—and learn from—the sinister backstage of glittering Parisian society in order to avoid later being tempted by vice's deceiving outward apparel.

The contrast between this carefully monitored dip into the city that, to Rousseau, epitomised modern corruption and the many examples provided in *Emile* of unsupervised young country folk imprudently settling in the capital only to be corrupted, is telling: without the guidance of the *gouverneur*, itself evidently the product of considerable moral wisdom, natural goodness, doubly symbolized by youth and rurality, almost inevitably succumbed to corruption. And naturally good communities are equally vulnerable, as Rousseau's speculations on the effects of introducing the sciences and the arts among the *Montagnons* illustrated⁶⁰. The all but ineluctable journey from natural goodness to abject corruption, which constituted the great theme of the *Second Discourse*⁶¹, seemed bound to repeat itself on both scales without the intervention of *vertu*.

58 La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* had little appeal to the good-natured, Rousseau wrote in a note of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. “Jamais son triste livre ne sera goûté des bonnes gens.” (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, III:20 [note], OC 2, p 373)

59 *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, V:3, OC 2, p 557. “(A)près avoir été ce que nous fumes être ce que nous sommes aujourd'hui, voila le vrai triomphe de la vertu”, Julie exclaims in a later letter (*Ibid.*, VI: 6, OC 2, 664).

60 *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les Spectacles*, OC 5, pp. 55-59

61 As Patrick Hochart convincingly argues in a recent article, that Rousseau chose to dedicate this text to the Republic of Geneva suggests that his compatriots represented its primary intended audience (Hochart 2012, pp. 391-392). As paragons of 'natural goodness', their situation could be compared to that of the soon-to-be-corrupted *bon sauvage*.

If the goal of Rousseau's political theory is to discover the means by which societies can avoid succumbing to corruption, as cannot be doubted, then it appears that he must choose between two possible strategies: the first is to protect and preserve their natural goodness; the second is to educate their members such as to render them capable of moral goodness. Unfortunately, both strategies face formidable obstacles.

2. *Corruption in Europe*

It may appear that the best course for a society regarded as naturally good is a form of isolationism: limited interaction with other nations might be considered the surest means of preserving the goodness of one's own, and avoiding its corruption. This idea surfaces in the *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les Spectacles* (1758), where Rousseau took a resolute stand against d'Alembert's proposal, in the *Encyclopédie's* article on Geneva, to introduce a theatre in the alpine city, regarding spectacles as the Trojan horses of modern corruption that would contaminate the city with the vices of Parisian society⁶².

Yet the desire to preserve pastoral bastions of natural goodness from corruption was in contrast to Rousseau's realisation that in the context of 18th century Europe, such attempts were destined to fail. In the Preface to *Julie*, he bewailed the unrelenting spread of urbanity and its “maximes empoisonnées” throughout the continent, inveighing against literature, theatre, and the arts in general, which derided rural mores and encouraged an envious fascination with modern town life:

“Les Auteurs, les Gens de Lettres, les Philosophes ne cessent de crier que, pour remplir ses devoirs de citoyen, pour servir ses semblables, il faut habiter les

62 *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les Spectacles*, OC 5, esp. pp. 15-24. Rousseau expresses his fear of seeing “ce monument du luxe et de la mollesse s'élever sur les ruines de notre antique simplicité” (Ibid., OC 5, p 88). “(T)out cela substituera bientôt l'agréable vie de Paris et les bons airs de France à notre ancienne simplicité”, he adds further in the text (Ibid., OC 5, pp. 101-102).

grandes villes; selon eux fuir Paris, c'est haïr le genre humain; le peuple de la campagne est nul à leurs yeux; à les entendre on croiroit qu'il n'y a des hommes qu'où il y a des pensions, des académies et des dînés.

De proche en proche la même pente entraîne tous les états. Les Contes, les Romans, les Pièces de théâtre, tout tire sur les Provinciaux; tout tourne en dérision la simplicité des mœurs rustiques; tout prêche les manières et les plaisirs du grand monde: c'est une honte de ne les pas connoître; c'est un malheur de ne les pas goûter. Qui sait de combien de filoux et de filles publiques l'attrait de ces plaisirs imaginaires peuple Paris de jour en jour? Ainsi les préjugés et l'opinion publique renforçant l'effet des systèmes politiques, amoncellent, entassent les habitans de chaque pays sur quelques points du territoire, laissant tout le reste en friche et désert: ainsi, pour faire briller les Capitales, se dépeuplent les Nations; et ce frivole éclat qui frappe les yeux des sots, fait courir l'Europe à grands pas vers sa ruine."⁶³

The persuasion that a pernicious philosophy centred around the denigration of country folk—and the natural goodness for which they stood—threatened, in conjunction with the social and political developments of which it was both a manifestation and a strengthening cause, to bring about rural exodus on an unprecedented scale was relied upon by Rousseau to justify his own indulgence in the arts, arguing that the modern doctrine needed to be combated with its own weapons, through the use of literature and music to depict pastoral life under more appealing colours (as opuses such as *Julie* and the opera *Le Devin du Village* certainly did), and to expose urban vices to uncompromising moral scrutiny. And for Rousseau to adopt such a strategy reveals an evolution in his assessment of the menace of modern corruption.

In the *First Discourse*, Rousseau had claimed that the threat posed to chaste *mœurs* by the corrupting influence of the sciences and the arts constituted a perennial feature of human societies⁶⁴. But the philosophical detachment with which Rousseau made this remark was later replaced by the distressing conviction that corruption in his own age was spreading ever faster, and on an ever greater scale. In a January 1760

63 *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, Second Preface, OC 2, p 20

64 *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, p 10

letter to his friend Moulto, Rousseau confided that he had gravely underestimated the true extent of Geneva's corruption in his *Lettre à d'Alembert*: the impression he had been under, that his native city had preserved its ancient integrity, unlike its decadent neighbours, was false⁶⁵. In stark contrast to the bold (though perhaps strategic) optimism of the *Second Discourse's* dedication to the Republic of Geneva, and to the defensive pride of the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Rousseau's subsequent writings on Geneva, beginning with the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne* (1764), would all express a grave concern over the uninhibited progress of commerce and wealth during the city's "golden age" of capitalism in the 18th century, as traditional republican values such as frugality, solidarity and devotion to the fatherland came under increasing pressure⁶⁶. In 1760, when Rousseau marked his rupture with Voltaire in a dramatically phrased letter, he accused the expatriate French philosopher—whose influence in spreading urbane manners and Parisian sophistication within the walls of the small republic during his exile there was universally acknowledged—of trampling on the city's last vestiges of republican rectitude⁶⁷. And the *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, written in the 1760s, contains a chilling account of the gradual corruption and present decadence of his native city under the influence of foreign cultures, explaining the baneful effects of luxury, dependence and vice, and brandishing the example of Geneva as one Corsicans would be well advised not to follow⁶⁸.

It appears that, in Rousseau's eyes, Geneva's past *mœurs*, and the ideal of natural goodness they epitomized, untouched by the sludge of 'refined' societies, was becoming

65 "Ne nous faisons plus illusion, Monsieur, je me suis trompé dans ma Lettre à M. d'Alembert. Je ne croyois pas nos progrès si grands ni nos mœurs si avancées. Nos maux sont desormais sans remède, il ne nous faut plus que des palliatifs, et la comédie en est un." (Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau au ministre Paul-Claude Moulto, 29.01.1760, CC 7, p 24)

66 See Rosenblatt 1997

67 See *Confessions*, X, OC 1, p 541

68 *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, pp. 914-917

a diminishingly viable political option in the 18th century's general climate of growing economic interdependency and cultural cross-fertilization. The Age of Enlightenment was also, from Rousseau's singular vantage point, an age of accelerated corruption which had hastened the spread of vice to the whole of Europe. "La corruption desormais est par tout la même", he darkly grumbled in Book XI of the *Confessions*; "il n'existe plus ni mœurs ni vertus en Europe"⁶⁹. The conservation of natural goodness had become an all but obsolete political strategy in the face of the hegemonic ubiquity of corruption.

But this did not necessarily condemn Rousseau's political theory to the mere management of corruption. In effect, the prevalence of vice seemed to open the possibility of shedding the ideal of natural goodness and arming oneself against corruption with the more solid rule of *vertu*, thereby giving all men access to the higher goods of self-mastery and moral freedom. Perhaps the proper political answer to the challenge of rampant corruption is to help elevate nations to moral goodness, in the same way that *Emile* was. If there exists a particular type of education that prepares individuals to resist the temptation of vice, then why not apply it to entire populations so as to eradicate evil from human affairs once and for all?

There are rare passages in Rousseau's writings to suggest that such a project may have been on the cards. In the third of his *Dialogues*, for instance, he claimed to want to foster a general awareness of what truly lies beyond the glittering façades of urbanity⁷⁰. However, on the whole, Rousseau's treatment of political matters falls well short of validating the conclusions reached in *Emile*, or suggesting any true convergence

⁶⁹ *Confessions*, XI, OC 1, p 546

⁷⁰ *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, III, OC 1, p 935

between his respective ambitions as political and moral theorist. A survey of the contrasted landscape of his openly political contributions appears, on the contrary, to reveal an important discrepancy between the two projects.

To begin with, it is worth noting that Rousseau considerably tempered his optimism for *vertu* in his autobiographical writings, describing the virtuous life as an almost inhumanly demanding one. In Book II of the *Confessions*, for instance, he wrote that it is an important moral maxim to avoid situations that oppose our duties and our interests, for it is certain that in such situations, however sincere one's love of virtue, one falters sooner or later without noticing it⁷¹. “L'instinct de la nature”, he remarked in the *Dialogues*, “est moins pur peut-être, mais certainement plus sûr que la loi de la vertu”⁷². And the crepuscular *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* describe a Rousseau innocently regressing back to natural goodness in the solitude of the woods surrounding the Castle of Ermenonville.

While Rousseau's autobiographical writings undoubtedly reflect the mindset of an author increasingly disillusioned with the world of men, the scepticism they express about *vertu* is not confined to their pages, appearing in many earlier writings as well. In the *Second Discourse*, for instance, Rousseau presented the rational sovereignty associated with *vertu* as the preserve of a distinguished few, an ideal accessible to Socrates and other men “de sa trempe”, but inaccessible to the bulk of mankind: indeed, human kind as a whole, Rousseau remarked, would have perished long ago had its survival depended solely on the reasoning of those who compose it⁷³. Rousseau also included among the virtuous more contemporary figures such as the Roman Catholic

71 *Confessions*, II, OC 1, p 56

72 *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, II, OC 1, p 864

73 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, OC 3, pp. 156-157

archbishop (and author of *Télémaque*) François Fénelon, the Marshal of France Nicolas Catinat, and Rousseau's erstwhile protector, the 10th Earl Marischal George Keith, but added in the same breath that, with these distinguished exceptions, he had seen in the apparent virtues of man only boasting, hypocrisy and vanity⁷⁴.

Nowhere, however, is Rousseau's pessimism with regard to *vertu* more apparent than in his critique of the political writings penned by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre.

3. Rousseau's Political Realism

Saint-Pierre was the author of a series of lengthy essays on political matters ranging from perpetual peace and international relations to the benefits of multicameralism, some of which Rousseau agreed to edit and have published after the Abbé's death, at the request of their mutual friend Madame Dupin⁷⁵. These writings, particularly his most famous, the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* (originally published in 1713 and edited by Rousseau in 1756), expressed their author's pronounced political optimism and unwavering faith in the progress of universal reason. Saint-Pierre believed that contemporary advances in the sciences and the arts would perfect men's rationality and lead them to pursue the common good of humanity by establishing an international federation of nations designed to ensure perpetual peace.

⁷⁴ Rousseau *Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, II, OC 1, pp. 863-864

⁷⁵ Rousseau edited several of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's works, including *Extrait du Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* (1756) and *Polysynodie de l'Abbé de Saint-Pierre* (1782). Both works were meant to be published alongside a commentary by Rousseau. Though they remained unpublished in Rousseau's lifetime, these "judgements" can be found in the third volume of the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade's edition of Rousseau's complete works. Rousseau refused to edit any further texts by Saint-Pierre, partly due to the scale and difficulty of the task (made no easier by the reportedly insufferable aridity of Saint-Pierre's prose), and partly because of the political risks that would have come with publishing—and, more importantly, expressing with his own incendiary eloquence—the Abbé's often iconoclastic ideas (*Confessions*, IX, OC 1, pp. 423-424). A third and very plausible reason is that Rousseau simply felt uncomfortable in the sober role of editor, which required his disappearance behind another author (Stelling-Michaud 1964, OC 3, p cxxx). A good study of the influence that Saint-Pierre's writings had upon Rousseau's own political theory can be found in Roosevelt 2009 (see particularly pp. 102-106).

Such was Rousseau's contempt for Saint-Pierre's faith in the political potential of enlightened reason that, even within his edited version of the *Projet*, he struggled to conceal his incredulity: the Project would never be accomplished, he concluded, not because *it* was unreasonable, but precisely because its accomplishment demanded that *men* be reasonable. And it is a kind of folly, Rousseau opined, to be wise among the mad⁷⁶.

The “folly” of the Abbé was due to a cardinal error, which Rousseau described in Book IX of the *Confessions*:

“l'examen approfondi de ses ouvrages de politique ne me montra que des vues superficielles, des projets utiles mais impraticables par l'idée dont l'auteur n'a jamais pu sortir que les hommes se conduisoient par leurs lumières plustot que par leurs passions. La haute opinion qu'il avoit des connoissances modernes lui avoit fait adopter ce faux principe de la raison perfectionnée, base de tous les établissemens qu'il proposoit, et source de tous ses sophismes politiques. Cet homme rare, l'honneur de son siècle et de son espèce, et le seul peut-être depuis l'existence du genre humain qui n'eut d'autre passion que celle de la raison, ne fit cependant que marcher d'erreur en erreur dans tous ses systemes, pour avoir voulu rendre les hommes semblables à lui, au lieu de les prendre tels qu'ils sont et qu'ils continueront d'être. Il n'a travaillé que pour des êtres imaginaires en pensant travailler pour ses contemporains.”⁷⁷

Despite his intellectual brilliance, the Abbé did nothing but proceed from one error to the next as a result of his fallacious idea that reason—rather than the passions—could be the dominant spring of human action. This eminent man's mistake, Rousseau alleged, was to have imagined men in their majority to be as rational as himself instead of taking them “tels qu'ils sont et qu'ils continueront d'être”—a requirement that would not be lost on the author of *Du Contract Social*⁷⁸. The rational men called upon to lay the

76 “Si, malgré tout cela, ce Projet demeure sans exécution, ce n'est donc pas qu'il soit chimérique; c'est que les hommes sont insensés, et que c'est une sorte de folie d'être sage au milieu des fous.” (*Projet de Paix Perpétuelle*, OC 3, p 589)

77 *Confessions*, IX, OC 1, p 422. The same criticism is expressed in *Jugement sur la Polysynodie* (OC 3, p 637).

78 Rousseau's political masterpiece famously proceeds “en prenant les hommes tels qu'ils sont” (*Du*

foundations of perpetual peace were little more than a figment of Saint-Pierre's imagination.

Opposing a stark brand of political realism to the Abbé's utopianism, Rousseau rejected the triumphant rationalism shared by so many of his contemporaries, and his principal reason for doing so lay in his belief in the fundamental irrationality of men. All members of society, he contended, from princes all the way down to beggars, are led by their passions⁷⁹. And though Saint-Pierre's failure to grasp this reality originated in his own superiorly sovereign rationality, which he wrongly imagined to be a characteristic of all men rather than merely his own, his erroneous conviction that mankind as a whole could be made to adopt his principles and share his disinterested enlightenment revealed, at bottom, a quite childish naivety⁸⁰.

In his *Jugement sur le Projet de Paix Perpétuelle*, Rousseau provided a more detailed refutation of Saint-Pierre's views. He began by contrasting the Abbé's optimistic vision of Europe's monarchs, harmoniously assembled around an immaculate table of negotiation, soberly discussing the terms of perpetual peace, with a depressing metaphor of his own, in which the monarchs of Europe were likened, instead, to insane ship captains, affronting unnecessary perils for the sole sake of exhibiting their skill and impressing their crews⁸¹. For Rousseau, that monarchs shared a genuine interest in establishing the conditions of perpetual peace was true but of little consequence, for they were forever inclined, like other men, to prefer their apparent interest over their

Contract Social, I, OC 3, p 351).

79 *Fragments et Notes sur l'Abbé sur Saint-Pierre*, 3, OC 3, pp. 657-658

80 "L'abbé de St Pierre bien faisant et sans passion sembloit un Dieu parmi les hommes mais en voulant leur faire adopter ses principes et leur faire goûter sa raison desinteressée il se rendoit plus enfant qu'eux" (*Fragments et Notes sur l'Abbé sur Saint-Pierre*, 11, OC 3, p 659). Rousseau also describes Saint-Pierre as a naïve child in his *Jugement sur le Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* (OC 3, p 595).

81 *Jugement sur le Projet de Paix Perpétuelle*, OC 3, p 592

real interest⁸². Rousseau explained both the nature and the powerful appeal of this fictitious interest using language similar to that found in the *Second Discourse* and *Emile*: if princes sought to “faire montre d'un vain savoir”, it was because they were driven by their passions, and “(s)ans cesse abusés par l'apparence des choses”⁸³. And if they discounted the benefits of perpetual peace, particularly with regard to commerce, this was because such benefits were universal, and lacked the special allure of exclusive advantages: by belonging to everybody, they belonged to nobody⁸⁴. This concern with appearance, exclusivity, and relative standing could only have one source:

“(C)'est la grande punition des excés de l'amour-propre de recourir toujours à des moyens qui l'abusent et [...] l'ardeur même des passions est presque toujours ce qui les détourne de leur but.”⁸⁵

And that which applied to monarchs, he insisted, also held true of ministers and all men in general⁸⁶. Whether or not Rousseau was right to denigrate Saint-Pierre's 'childish' ambitions, he manifestly regarded the excesses of *amour-propre*, and the passions of which it is the boiling spring, as the central, insurmountable obstacle to their realization.

In a revealing passage of the *Jugement*, Rousseau then compared the Abbé's ethereal musings with the infinitely shrewder political scheme conjured in the early 17th century by French King Henry IV and his cunning minister the Duc de Sulli to establish a Christian Republic in Europe, a precedent which Saint-Pierre himself had alluded to in his original text⁸⁷. Rousseau identified three key differences between the two projects. Firstly, unlike Saint-Pierre's, Henry IV's project was self-serving, designed to weaken the cumbersome Spanish kingdom and establish France as Europe's dominant power.

82 Ibid., OC 3, p 592

83 Ibid., OC 3, p 594

84 Ibid., OC 3, p 594

85 Ibid., OC 3, p 592

86 Ibid., OC 3, p 595

87 Ibid., OC 3, pp. 595-599

Secondly, Henry was able to count on the support of an array of important allies, which he had seduced by persuading them that his plan served their own private interests: the English monarch hoped to rid himself of the intrigue that Spain had long fomented within his state; the King of Swedes expected territorial expansion; the Pope aspired to check the tyranny of the Spaniards, and had also been promised the kingdom of Naples, and so on and so forth: “chacun”, Rousseau summarized, “ne travailloit que dans la vue de son intérêt particulier qu' Henri avait eu le secret de leur montrer à tous sous une forme très attrayante”⁸⁸. And thirdly, Henry's plan involved deceit, since he carefully avoided informing his allies of that which he himself stood to gain from its execution, the plan's true purpose. As Rousseau put it, “tous concouroient au grand but sans pouvoir dire quel il étoit”⁸⁹. This last sentence is particularly noteworthy, reminiscent as it is of the fruitful cecity described in Montesquieu's account of monarchical honour in *De L'Esprit des Lois*, or Mandeville's theory of “publick benefits” in the *Fable of the Bees*: absorbed by the intense pursuit of their private interests, each participant failed to grasp the aggregate significance of the enterprise.

In short, the political realism with which Rousseau credited Henry rested on the well-founded belief that men are animated by—and thus controlled through—self-love. Or, to put it another way, Henry's plan, unlike Saint-Pierre's, took men as they are.

In the penultimate sentence of the *Jugement*, Rousseau went further, claiming that the prospect of perpetual peace, however unlikely, was not in itself chimeric, and that such peace could even be achieved were men such as Henry IV and Sulli to re-emerge⁹⁰. Indeed, but for the criminal hand of Ravailac, Henry's project may well have

88 Ibid., OC 3, p 598

89 Ibid., OC 3, p 597

90 Ibid., OC 3, pp. 599-600

been carried out⁹¹. This suggests that Rousseau regarded the kind of political realism demonstrated by Henry, founded on a thorough understanding of the human passions, as the condition of the possibility of political change, even if Rousseau tempered his enthusiasm with the chilling thought that such change would necessarily involve violence and bloodshed.

Rousseau's political realism was by no means confined to these relatively early writings from the mid-1750s—though that he should have expressed it with greatest fervour in response to an abbot is in itself significant⁹². A broadly identical critique of political rationalism can be found in Rousseau's 1767 letter to the Marquis de Mirabeau, where he reiterated the axiom that “chacun se conduit très rarement par ses lumières, et très fréquemment par ses passions”, and castigated the *Physiocrates*, of which Mirabeau was an eminent member, in terms that might just as well have come straight from the texts on Saint-Pierre: “Messieurs, permettez-moi de vous le dire”, Rousseau wrote, “vous donnez trop de force à vos calculs, et pas assez aux penchants du cœur humain et au jeu des passions. Votre système est très bon pour les gens de l'Utopie; il ne vaut rien pour les enfants d'Adam.”⁹³

One is left to conclude from these general remarks on the invincible empire of the passions and the impotence of reason, that there was a difference, in Rousseau's mind, between the potential for *vertu* possessed by individuals such as Julie or Emile on the one hand, and that of entire populations on the other. It may have been that Rousseau considered his fictional characters more headstrong and purposeful than the

91 Ibid., OC 3, p 599

92 As we shall see in Chapter 6, the realism of Rousseau's political theory manifests itself partly as a “Machiavellian” reaction against the detachment from worldly affairs allegedly encouraged by Christianity.

93 *Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau à Monsieur le Marquis de Mirabeau*, 26/07/1767, CC 33, pp. 239-240

average individual⁹⁴. Or perhaps he deemed that, though all men are equally capable of *vertu*, it is an inevitable empirical fact that only a scarce few will actually practise it⁹⁵. A third possibility is that Rousseau simply looked at the world differently depending on whether he was adopting the perspective of a moral philosopher or that of a political theorist, the former free to look upon the pupil Emile as a particular individual endowed with a unique potential of which it was the *gouverneur's* task to facilitate the development, the latter confined to trading in generalities and to treating probable human behaviour as an inert datum to be computed into his theory. Along these lines, the possibility of moral freedom may simply lie beyond the purview of the political theorist, an eventuality which we shall explore in the final chapter.

Irrespective of its cause, Rousseau's lack of faith in the possibility of *vertu* on a wide scale meant that his political answer to the problem of corruption would necessarily differ from his moral answer. In fine, as we shall see in the next chapter, Rousseau as political theorist sought neither to protect the natural goodness of peoples nor to instil moral virtue in them; instead, he chose a third way: the establishment of republican *mœurs*. And the force he relied upon to invigorate and sustain republican *mœurs* was *amour-propre*. Far from representing the chief obstacle to the success of

94 Despite being initially introduced as an ordinary boy, endowed with no more than average intelligence, Emile's special upbringing causes him to become so unique that, by Book III, readers can no longer be expected to relate to him. Ordinary in terms of his natural talents, Emile stands out as extraordinary as a result of his education. Likewise, although Rousseau describes Julie as merely a simple-minded country girl in the Preface of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, her letters, to the contrary, show evidence of a remarkably sagacious mind. The theme of her uniqueness is also prominent in the novel: "Elle n'a point vécu comme une autre: personne que je sache, n'est mort comme elle", Wolmar concludes (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, VI:11, OC 2, p 704). Of her small circle of friends, Rousseau writes: "ne trouvant nulle part ce qu'ils sentent, ils se replient sur eux-même; ils se détachent du reste de l'Univers; et créant entr'eux un petit monde différent du nôtre, ils y forment un spectacle véritablement nouveau" (Ibid., Second Preface, OC 2, pp. 16-17).

95 The denunciation of the Catholic priest's oath of celibacy in a note of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, for instance, rests on the argument that only a few virtuous priests can be counted on to remain chaste. "(I)mposer le célibat à un corps aussi nombreux que le Clergé de l'Eglise Romaine, ce n'est pas tant lui deffendre de n'avoir point de femmes, que de lui ordonner de se contenter de celles d'autrui", Rousseau writes (Ibid., VI:6 [note], OC 2, p 668). It is thus specifically the *number* of priests that makes the oath a folly.

Rousseau's political theory, as has often been held, the hegemony of *amour-propre* actually constitutes its starting point.

Chapter 5: The Spirit of Citizenship: Rousseau's Concept of *Amour de la Patrie*

“Il ne faut pas moins d'art pour unir que pour diviser.”

– Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Institutions Chimiques*

Introduction

The previous chapter concluded with a paradox. As a *moral* theorist, Rousseau regarded moral goodness, and *vertu*, as the highest goal attainable by man, a sublime manifestation of self-mastery involving the sovereignty of his conscience over his passions, and the proper employment of the freedom with which God endowed him. Yet, as a *political* theorist, Rousseau believed that most men, dominated by their passions, lacked *vertu*, leading him to take the hegemony of *amour-propre* as the inaugural assumption of his political reflections.

Hence, while it was naive to expect populations to live up to the celestial standards of *vertu*, or to be guided by reason alone (such had been the mistake of the 'childish' Abbé de Saint-Pierre), it seemed equally forlorn to hope that those peoples living in the simplicity of the age of gold, uncorrupted by inequality, commerce, and the advances of the sciences and the arts, could remain perpetually unsoiled, given the unrelenting advance of corruption in the modern age, and their inability to resist its treacherous attractions. Indeed, Rousseau's *Second Discourse* had shown how little resistance humanity had opposed to the baneful currents that led it progressively from a state of natural goodness to a state of corruption through the triumph of the passions.

At the heart of this paradox lay a fundamental tension between Rousseau's moral and political theories. The present chapter examines this tension, and argues that Rousseau's ethical and political projects differ in offering contrasting solutions to the problem of *amour-propre*.

How the moral and the political relate to one another in Rousseau's work is a delicate matter. Scholars who regard Rousseau's writings as the constitutive parts of a unified system often highlight a famous passage in *Emile* where the author writes that “(i)l faut étudier la société par les hommes, et les hommes par la société: ceux qui voudront traiter séparément la politique et la morale, n'entendront jamais rien à aucune des deux”¹. They contend that interpretations that sunder Rousseau's moral and political theories betray the spirit of his work. But, as Bruno Bernardi has rightly insisted, Rousseau's claim in this passage is epistemological and concerns merely the study of political and moral matters². It pertains to the manner in which moral and political problems might be understood, and by no means precludes that the solutions proposed by Rousseau to solve those problems may differ considerably. As we shall see, if Rousseau's political and moral theories celebrate very different ideals of virtue, they nevertheless rely on the same understanding of human nature, and the effects of contrasting political circumstances upon it. Indeed, just as the third chapter revealed the importance of political context in shaping the particular variety of virtue to which Emile should aspire, the present chapter will aim to show how the perspective of the political theorist enabled Rousseau to envisage an entirely different political context, in which citizens were wedded to an alternative kind of virtue.

1 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 524

2 Bernardi 2006, pp. 390-391

Rousseau's political project divided into two parts, which one might call, respectively, the *principles of political right* and the *science of the Législateur*. The first established the fundamental values and tenets on which a political community should be founded, while the second imagined the institutions required to instil in citizens an ethos that would sustain that community over time in a particular context.

Notwithstanding its many digressions, *Du Contract Social*, Rousseau's most famous political writing, constituted a primarily theoretical text, purporting to provide timeless political principles. Accordingly, it shed but little light on the psychology of citizenship³. Rousseau wrote the text in an effort to clarify the vocabulary of politics, and supplant earlier—to his mind unsatisfactory—efforts to theorize the social contract. Importantly, he also intended it as a completion of Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Lois*, a work which Rousseau greatly admired, but regarded as excessively descriptive: to his mind, it offered a comprehensive study of positive law under established governments, but lacked a clear normative stance, an explicit affirmation of the principles with which to judge the legitimacy of political authority⁴. His own text aimed to remedy this alleged shortcoming by articulating such principles, hence its (often overlooked) subtitle: *principes du droit politique*. As a result, the elaboration and justification of the principles of legitimate political rule took precedence over the analysis of the effects of institutions on individuals, or the description of the kind of mentality (using Montesquieu's categories, the kind of *principe*) required to sustain a particular type of political system, which latter questions had been explored in much greater depth in *De l'Esprit des Lois*.

3 Indeed, it is significant that the words “amour-propre” and “vertu” are virtually absent from this text.

4 See Sonenscher 2007, pp. 222-223.

However, Rousseau did expose his science of the *Législateur* in other works, where he turned his attention specifically to the question of how to cultivate the passions of citizens. In *Economie Politique*, an article published in the *Encyclopédie* in 1755, Rousseau drew inspiration from the civic ethos found in cities of the ancient world—particularly Sparta and Rome—to develop his own theory on the subject. He envisaged the model citizen as an individual who identified strongly and instinctively with his political community, and whose partial existence was meaningful only relatively to the whole. In order for such a mindset to be possible, a particular passion needed to be instilled in citizens' hearts, an intense patriotic verve called *amour de la patrie*. Rousseau described *amour de la patrie* as an ardent love of one's political community, an unconditional fraternal endearment to one's fellow citizens that made one will what they willed, and “(un) sentiment doux et vif qui joint la force de l'amour-propre à toute la beauté de la vertu, lui donne une énergie qui sans la défigurer, en fait la plus héroïque de toutes les passions”⁵. And here the importance of Rousseau's insistence upon the wedding of “amour-propre” and “vertu” as a defining feature of *amour de la patrie* should not be understated, for it invites us to regard the psychology of citizenship as one free from precisely that conflict that had posed such a daunting moral challenge to Emile. Crucially, by extending the self's zone of concern to the entire Republic, Rousseau qua political theorist sought to elevate and sublimate *amour-propre* rather than combat it.

As Tanguy L'Aminot has recently complained, efforts on the part of interpreters to reconcile Rousseau's moral and political theories too often result in a considerably watered down, facile and unambitious rendition of his ideal of citizenship, suited to modern societies rather than to the kind of societies Rousseau envisaged in his

5 *Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 255

prescriptive political writings⁶. Artificial attempts to wed the ideals of man and citizen incline some scholars to regard the latter as amounting to little more than “the choice of a spouse, the founding of a family and one's establishment in a particular country”⁷.

By contrast, this chapter insists both upon the specificity and the ambitiousness of Rousseau's ideal of citizenship. Such was the author of *Du Contract Social's* disdain for modern polities, and his conviction that true citizens had no place in them, that he recommended that the very word “citoyen” be removed from the modern vocabulary of politics⁸. True citizens, Rousseau asserted in a famous passage of *Emile*, resembled the Spartan politician who celebrated his own electoral defeat, safe in the knowledge that more able men would rule the kingdom, or the Spartan mother who rejoiced in the deaths of her own sons on the battlefield because Sparta had prevailed. There would be a distinctly Genevan undertone to Saint-Just's later claim that “le monde est vide depuis les Romains”⁹, and indeed, as we shall see in the final chapter, Rousseau would come under attack after the French Revolution from the likes of Benjamin Constant for indulging in a dangerous nostalgia of the Ancients. The defining feature of Rousseau's “citoyen” lay precisely in the cultivation of *amour de la patrie*, a force of—to modern minds—unimaginable intensity¹⁰, which the author, intriguingly, described as “plus vif et plus délicieux cent fois que celui d'une maîtresse”¹¹, as if, perhaps, to distinguish it from the comparatively prosaic passions encountered by the characters that populated his moral writings. “Il faut saisir la circonstance de l'événement présent pour monter les

6 L'Aminot 2012

7 Guénard 2009, p 12

8 *Emile*, I, OC 4, p 250

9 Saint-Just, *Discours du 11 Germinal*

10 “Comment eux qui se sentent si petits penseroient-ils qu'il y ait eu de si grands hommes?”, Rousseau wrote of the moderns, praising ancient citizens for “ce degré d'énergie dont rien aujourd'hui ne nous donne d'idée, et qu'il n'appartient pas même aux modernes de croire” (*Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, II, OC 3, p 956, 958).

11 *Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 255

ames au ton des ames antiques”, he would write in his text on Poland¹².

Focusing on the concept of “amour de la patrie”, and the psychological foundations on which Rousseau intended republican patriotism to rest, we shall examine how the *ethos of citizen* described in his prescriptive political works differed from the *ethos of man* defended in works such as *Emile*. The first part introduces the figure of the “Législateur”, the founding father of the Republic, and how Rousseau imagined himself playing this role in his political writings on Corsica and Poland. The second identifies three important differences between the ethos of citizen and the ethos of man. And the third examines the implications for the relationship between Rousseau's moral and political projects.

I. Enter the *Législateur*

1. *The Founder of the Republic*

Rousseau more than once expressed the conviction that the political shapes all human affairs¹³. In his eyes, there could thus scarcely exist a more influential figure than he who shaped politics itself, and such a figure, indeed, lay at the heart of Rousseau's political theory, carrying the title of “Législateur”.

It was in its discussion of the *Législateur* that Rousseau's *Du Contract Social* most clearly departed from Machiavelli's *The Prince*, a work Rousseau enthusiastically described as “le livre des républicains”¹⁴. Machiavelli's masterpiece revealed the secret

¹² *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, III, OC 3, p 961

¹³ “Il est certain que les peuples sont à la longue ce que le gouvernement les fait être”, he wrote in *Economie Politique* (Ibid., OC 3, p 251). “J'avois vu que [...] de quelque façon qu'on s'y prît, aucun peuple ne seroit jamais que ce que la nature de son gouvernement le feroit être”, he claimed in the *Confessions* (*Confessions*, IX, OC 1, p 404).

¹⁴ *Du Contract Social*, III:6, OC 3, p 409

strategies conducive to the conquest and preservation of power: it was a rulebook for ambitious politicians, which Rousseau—rightly or wrongly—interpreted as an implicit but deliberate denunciation of princely immorality for popular consumption¹⁵. Rousseau's political magnum opus, by contrast, started out by explicitly discarding the fertile assumption of Machiavelli's, namely the possibility of grabbing the reins of political power¹⁶. Far from dampening his aspirations, however, this inaugural pessimism gave Rousseau licence to think about politics on a far grander scale. Disregarding the dark realities described by his Florentine predecessor, he turned to a whole new realm of political possibilities.

From the outset, Rousseau manifested little interest in the figure of the Prince, belittling its importance in comparison to that of the *Législateur*. If the Prince could prove an astute player of the political game, the greater glory of *inventing* the game accrued to the *Législateur*¹⁷. Indeed, his colossal task it was to lay the foundations of the Republic, and to invent institutions, laws and traditions that would sustain it through time. It was a superior function that demanded extraordinary, indeed superhuman qualities, as well as a thorough knowledge of human nature and the principles of political right. “Il faudroit des Dieux pour donner des loix aux hommes”, Rousseau exclaimed¹⁸.

His models of *Législateurs* he drew from Antiquity, citing as the three greatest Moses, who descended from Mount Sinai to bring long-lasting laws to the Jewish people; Lycurgus, who imposed an iron yoke on the Spartans to make them the feared

15 “En feignant de donner des leçons aux Rois (Machiavel) en a donné de grandes aux peuples”, Rousseau wrote (*Du Contract Social*, III:6, OC 3, p 409).

16 *Ibid.*, I, OC 3, p 351

17 *Ibid.*, II:7, OC 3, p 381

18 *Ibid.*, II:7, OC 3, p 381

and revered capital of Ancient Greece and the terror of the Persian Empire; and Numa, the true founder of Rome, who solidified Romulus's precarious work, transforming a crowd of brigands into citizens¹⁹. These were founding fathers, men whose merit resided above all else in having bequeathed prodigious political systems to their respective peoples. Indeed, Rousseau insisted on the distinctness of the roles of *Législateur* and Prince. The former should not rule, but only create the rules: empire over the laws proved incompatible with empire over men. Hence Lycurgus withdrew after establishing the constitution of Sparta, as did Calvin after founding the Republic of Geneva; at the opposite, Rome crumbled when it conferred the powers of Prince and *Législateur* to the same men²⁰.

Thinking about the role of the *Législateur* led Rousseau to treat political questions from an altogether different perspective, to behold human affairs from a higher standpoint. The role of the *Législateur* was to make a people a people, to dispose it to be receptive to the general will, so that it might govern itself in accordance with the perennial principles of the social contract. “Le même esprit guida tous les anciens Législateurs dans leurs institutions”, Rousseau wrote. “Tous cherchent des liens qui attachassent les Citoyens à la patrie et les uns aux autres”²¹. His task was to imagine ways of fomenting public-spiritedness and civic virtues, and all of this within a particular context.

2. Rousseau *Législateur*

In his imagined role as a *Législateur*, Rousseau dealt successively with three

19 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, II, OC 3, p 956

20 *Du Contract Social*, II:7, OC 3, p 382

21 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, II, OC 3, p 958

particular cases: Geneva, Corsica and Poland²².

His interest in the first naturally owed much to his own past, yet Rousseau also saw in Geneva, at least for a time, one of the last bastions of republicanism in Europe. For this reason, Rousseau's texts on Geneva advocate a *negative*, defensive form of 'legislation': prior to his avowed realisation of the city's moral demise, his purpose had been to protect the city from sources of corruption, such as the theatre, as we see in the *Lettre à D'Alembert*; after this realisation, he sought to alert its citizens to the progress of oligarchy, incarnated by the *petit conseil*, and reawaken their republican passions, most notably in the three final letters of the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*.

By contrast, Rousseau's work on Corsica and Poland advocated a *positive*, constructive form of 'legislation', aiming less to protect existing institutions and traditions than to create new and better ones, or, to be more precise, to prolong and render perennial exceptional circumstances that had seen the fall of an undesirable regime. Indeed, both nations had recently risen against oppression (the 1751 revolution spearheaded by Pasquale Paoli against Genoa in the case of Corsica; the revolt led by the Confederation of Bar against Russia between 1768 and 1772 in the case of Poland) and were suitable candidates for a radical political refoundation because their struggles had temporarily revived patriotic sentiments²³. The recent

22 Rousseau spoke of Geneva in several important texts, most notably—though by no means exclusively—the dedication that precedes his *Discours sur l'Inégalité* (1755), the *Lettre à D'Alembert sur les Spectacles* (1758), Claire's description of the city in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), and the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne* (1764). The key texts on Corsica and Poland are, respectively, the *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* [thought to have been written in 1765 (Guichet 2008)] and the *Considerations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne* (completed in 1771).

23 “Il est encore en Europe un pays capable de législation; c'est l'Isle de Corse”, Rousseau wrote in *Du Contract Social*. “La valeur et la constance avec laquelle ce brave peuple a su recouvrer et défendre sa liberté, mériterait bien que quelque homme sage lui apprit à la conserver. J'ai quelque pressentiment qu'un jour cette petite Isle étonnera l'Europe.” (*Du Contract Social*, II:10, OC 3, p 391) Those lines drew the attention of Rousseau's Corsican readers, and eventually led him to work on his unfinished *Projet de Constitution de la Corse* in 1765, at the request of a Corsican politician by the name of Matteo Buttafoco, intent on giving Rousseau the opportunity to become a Corsican Lycurgus, and who

developments in Corsica and Poland offered good examples of what Jeffrey A. Smith has termed the “harmonization of self-interest by revolution”²⁴. The *Législateur's* undertaking thus consisted in creating the political conditions to sustain the fertile but ephemeral collective ethos that had appeared during the two nations' respective uprisings, rather than transforming those nations²⁵, notwithstanding the metamorphic language of *Du Contract Social*, where Rousseau spoke of changing human nature²⁶. And though this endeavour appeared steep due to the risk of seeing those who had united to overthrow foreign masters lapse back into the very factionalism that had led them to servitude in the first place, Rousseau contended that such divisions, far from forming part of a natural state of affairs, had in fact been artificially fomented by their enemies, and could thus, in principle, be prevented from re-emerging²⁷. Inclining the Corsicans and the Poles towards concord did not require denaturing them, but merely altering the propensity to quarrel amongst themselves that their tormentors had cunningly instilled in them. This would require what Denise Schaeffler appositely calls “a countervailing artifice”²⁸.

Whether in the case of Geneva or those of Corsica and Poland, Rousseau sought

may or may not have been representing Pasquale Paoli. It appears that Buttafoco may have wished to use Rousseau's prestige to enhance his own standing on the island's discordant political scene (Stelling-Michaud in OC 3, p ccii). However, Buttafoco's ideas diverged considerably from those of Rousseau, and Guichet speculates that the Corsican might well have appealed instead to Montesquieu, had the illustrious author of *De L'Esprit des Lois* still lived (Guichet 2008, pp. 64-65). In October 1770, Rousseau would start working on his *Considerations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, this time prompted by one Count Wielhorski, a Polish nobleman with ties to the Confederation of Bar. Here too Rousseau insisted upon the exceptional circumstances facing the Poles. “Vous aimez la liberté, vous en êtes dignes; vous l'avez défendue contre un agresseur puissant et rusé”, he insisted. “C'est au sein de cette anarchie qui vous est odieuse que se sont formées ces ames patriotiques qui vous ont garantis du joug. Elles s'endormaient dans un repos léthargique; l'orage les a réveillées.” (*Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, I, OC 3, p 954) In this regard, that Rousseau's text seems to have been written *before* the capitulation of the Confederation of Bar in 1772, at a time rich with possibilities—and not *after*, as is sometimes claimed—is worthy of note (Favre in OC 3, pp. 1733-1735).

24 Smith 2006, p 23

25 “Il s'agit moins de devenir autres que vous n'êtes, mais de savoir vous conserver tels”, Rousseau wrote to the Corsicans (*Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, p 903).

26 *Du Contract Social*, II:7, OC 3, p 381

27 See in particular *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, p 903.

28 Schaeffer 2012, p 428

to adapt his political theory to particular contexts, in each instance requesting very detailed information on their history, culture, geography, and climate. One should certainly not lose sight of the specific nature of these texts, which constitute responses to particular political circumstances. Yet, it is undeniable that certain features of the formation of citizens pervade all of Rousseau's texts on the subject, and stem from the more theoretical article *Economie Politique*, distinguishing the ethos of citizen quite clearly from that exposed in *Emile*.

II. Two Educations

The ideal of citizen, Rousseau insisted in *Economie Politique*, hinged no less on education than the ideal of man. “(F)ormer des citoyens n'est pas l'affaire d'un jour”, he wrote, “et pour les avoir hommes, il faut les instruire enfans”²⁹. This education of future citizens mirrored that of *Emile* in two respects. Firstly, just as the *gouverneur* had refused any attempt to destroy his pupil's nascent passions, so the *Législateur* abstained from extirpating the passions of citizens, not least because he should understand that “un homme qui n'auroit point de passions seroit certainement un fort mauvais citoyen”³⁰. The public education of the *citoyen*, like the private education of *Emile*, would aim, not to mould a passionless being, but a being endowed with the right *kind* of passions. And secondly, in both cases, particular attention was devoted to the passion of self-love. To the *gouverneur*'s sophisticated three-staged strategy for dealing with *Emile*'s *amour-propre*³¹ corresponded the *Législateur*'s project to instil in citizens a love of fatherland that relied upon “ce sentiment exquis que tout homme isolé n'a que pour soi-même” and required the transformation of “cette disposition dangereuse d'où

29 *Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 259

30 *Ibid.*, OC 3, p 259

31 See Chapter 3.

naissent tous nos vices” into “une vertu sublime”³².

Beyond these analogies, however, these two educations offered radically different solutions to the problem of *amour-propre*. Revealingly, no sooner had Rousseau evoked the mysterious alchemy of *amour de la patrie* in *Economie Politique* that he immediately foreclosed the possibility of its birth within the depressingly limiting context of a disordered society. “Comment l'amour de la patrie pourroit-il germer au milieu de tant d'autres passions qui l'étouffent?”, he despaired³³. Yet, as we have seen, it was precisely this kind of society that formed the backdrop of Emile's education, which undoubtedly explains the absence of any mention of *amour de la patrie* during the discussion of his political allegiance in Book V.

Comparing the way in which the *Législateur* aimed to cultivate the passions of citizens in Rousseau's prescriptive political writings to the manner with which the *gouverneur* fostered those of his pupil in *Emile* reveals three significant discrepancies between the education that seeks to form citizens and that which aims to make a man. They concern, respectively, attitudes towards pride, competition and emulation; degrees of dependence on public opinion; and the perception of fellow countrymen and outsiders. All reveal the difference between an education that aims to *master amour-propre* and an education that seeks to *channel amour-propre*.

1. *Pride, Competition and Emulation*

Firstly, unlike in *Emile*, where the pupil was taught to repress feelings of emulation and rivalry, in Rousseau's political writings the *Législateur* strongly

³² *Economie Politique*, OC 3, pp. 259-260

³³ *Ibid.*, OC 3, p 260

encouraged pride, competition and emulation among citizens. In the first case, the *gouverneur* invited his pupil to compare himself to those around him in order to discern that which united him to them, their common humanity, while discouraging any form of personal rivalry. The “moi relatif” was summoned for primarily *analytical* purposes. In the second case, however, individuals were explicitly encouraged to take pride in their identity, to compete against one another, and to emulate the achievements of their peers, as a means of attaching them to the body politic, stimulating activity, and developing a combative spirit that would enable them to spill their blood in defence of the fatherland should this prove necessary.

“(C)ommençez toujours par donner aux Polonois une grande opinion d'eux-mêmes et de leur patrie”, Rousseau wrote in the *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*³⁴. His ensuing remark that the Poles' recent struggles against Russian oppression justified this self-confidence revealed the comparative nature of the judgement. “Comme il n'y a rien de plus réellement beau que l'indépendance et la puissance tout peuple qui se forme est d'abord orgueilleux”, Rousseau wrote in the *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, here again drawing attention to the Corsicans' victorious struggle to free themselves from the yoke of Genoa³⁵. He explicitly described this “orgueil” as “une des deux branches de l'amour-propre”³⁶. True, it differed from “vanité”, the other branch, in being founded on truly estimable qualities rather than those questionable qualities that had no intrinsic worth independently of “opinion”, and in concentrating on great, collective objects such as the nation, as opposed to the inevitably individual and frivolous objects of “vanité”. But, as Laurence Cooper remarks, even though men inhabited by “orgueil” may pursue higher and nobler goods

34 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, III, OC 3, p 961

35 *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, p 938

36 *Ibid.*, OC 3, pp. 937-938

than those driven by “vanité”, and seek praiseworthiness as well as praise, theirs is nevertheless a psychology centred around *amour-propre*³⁷.

Alongside national pride, Rousseau insisted on the importance of competition and emulation among citizens. The Corsican farmer was to be constantly preoccupied with his relative standing among his peers, and animated by a burning desire to surpass them. Of the condition of farmer on the island, Rousseau wrote that “on voudra s'y distinguer, on voudra le remplir mieux que d'autres, faire de plus grandes récoltes, fournir un plus fort contingent à l'état, mériter dans les élections les suffrages du peuple”. Each would aspire to the “honneur” of heading a large, well fed, and well dressed family. And, revealingly, Rousseau used the language of luxury to describe the abundance that Corsicans should aim to secure for themselves, declaring that “l'abondance réelle étant l'unique objet de luxe chacun voudra se distinguer par ce luxe-là”. “Tant que le cœur humain demeurera ce qu'il est de pareils établissemens ne produiront pas la paresse”, he concluded³⁸ in a statement that mirrored the objection levelled against Abbé Saint-Pierre that one should take men “tels qu'ils sont et qu'ils continueront d'être”. Likewise, Rousseau opposed hereditary monarchy in Poland, proposing to transform the Polish crown into a supreme prize destined to be awarded to the most deserving. “Quel ressort puissant sur des âmes grandes et ambitieuses que cette couronne destinée au plus digne, et mise en perspective devant les yeux de tout citoyen qui saura mériter l'estime publique”, he exclaimed³⁹. “(Q)uel ferment de patriotisme dans tous les cœurs”, Rousseau jubilated, “quand on sauroit bien que ce n'est que par là qu'on peut obtenir cette place devenue l'objet secret des vœux de tous

37 Cooper 1998, pp. 671-683

38 *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, p 925

39 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, XIV, OC 3, p 1030

les particuliers”⁴⁰.

A striking feature of Rousseau's texts on Corsica and Poland is thus the reliance on man's sense of pride and his thirst for distinction for the purpose of stimulating industry and a devotion to the *patrie*. Where Emile's *gouverneur* sought to inspire in his pupil an acceptance of equality through belonging to the rank of man, the *Législateur* strove, by contrast, to encourage a competitive desire to surpass others⁴¹. Rousseau, as political theorist, jettisoned the *gouverneur*'s anti-hubristic maxims, in favour of Pericles's old principle that “the love of honour alone is ever young”.

2. Dependence on Opinion

Secondly, whereas his pedagogic theory accorded great importance to the cultivation of an independent mind capable of withstanding the tide of opinion, as a *Législateur* Rousseau regarded public opinion's powers of influence and scrutiny as critical to the perpetuation of republican *mœurs*.

In his *Lettre à D'Alembert sur les Spectacles*, Rousseau included “l'empire de l'opinion” among the three major instruments available to the *Législateur* to shape the *mœurs* of a people, alongside “la force des loix” and “l'attrait du plaisir”⁴². That he regarded opinion as the most powerful of the three transpired from the text's subsequent discussion of duelling, in which Rousseau excoriated modern governments for failing to eradicate the practice: if, instead of outlawing duelling, they had established a “Cour d'Honneur”, a tribunal of public opinion, to put culprits to shame, better results would

40 Ibid., XIV, OC 3, p 1030

41 “That Rousseau keeps revisiting concerns about the possible threat of laziness suggests that he is just as (or almost as) worried about passive, peaceful acceptance of one's station as he is about the desire to leave one's station”, Denise Schaeffer writes (Schaeffer 2012, pp. 433-434).

42 *Lettre à D'Alembert*, OC 5, pp. 20-21

have been achieved⁴³. Rousseau argued that in a world where men lived 'outside themselves', constantly seeking validation of their worth in the eyes of others, animated by *amour-propre*, the power of opinion was indeed considerable:

“Par où le gouvernement peut-il donc avoir prise sur les mœurs? Je réponds que c'est par l'opinion publique. Si nos habitudes naissent de nos propres sentimens dans la retraite, elles naissent de l'opinion d'autrui dans la Société. Quand on ne vit pas en soi, mais dans les autres, ce sont leurs jugemens qui règlent tout, rien ne paroît bon ni désirable aux particuliers que ce que le public a jugé tel, et le seul bonheur que la plupart des hommes connoissent est d'être estimés heureux.”⁴⁴

Rousseau's political theory can, accordingly, be interpreted as an effort to invest public opinion with a role it had lost in modern politics, where, he complained, “le blame et l'approbation publique ne produisent rien”⁴⁵. Rousseau's claim was not, of course, that “opinion” had lost its influential power in modern societies: he recognised as a general truth that “nos habitudes [...] naissent de l'opinion d'autrui dans la Société”, and both the *Second Discourse* and *Emile* had emphasized—and deplored—the role of opinion in shaping men's lives. Rather, as his treatment of the case of duelling illustrated, he believed that, in modern states, political authorities typically neglected the importance of opinion in shaping habits, resulting in a powerlessness that left princes in thrall to the temptation of using force instead of persuasion⁴⁶. Moreover, in the absence of political intervention to steer it in a particular direction, public opinion, while remaining as influential as ever, resembled, in the best of cases, a random phenomenon, driven by the arbitrary whims of men, comparable to the throwing of dice⁴⁷. In the worst of cases, the vacuum left by public authorities could be filled by others, intent on manipulating public opinion to partisan ends. This, indeed, was precisely what Rousseau accused his enemies of contriving in *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*, regarding himself as the

43 Ibid., OC 5, pp. 62-67

44 Ibid., OC 5, pp. 61-62

45 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, II, OC 3, p 959

46 Maloy 2005, p 240

47 *Lettre à D'Alembert*, OC 5, p 68

victim of a distorted collective vision, of a “jaunisse universelle”, an “œuvre de tenebres” orchestrated by his diabolical adversaries to demean him in the public eye⁴⁸.

Yet, Rousseau believed that, in the Republic, a properly guided public opinion could cause as many benefits as the errant public opinion of his own society caused harms. “Quiconque se mêle d’instituer un peuple doit savoir dominer les opinions et par elles gouverner les passions des hommes”, he claimed in the *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*⁴⁹.

Citizens were constantly to live under the judging gaze of their peers, and to engage only in pursuits that were open—at least in principle—to public observation. Publicity played a crucial regulatory role in the Republic, whether it be in the organisation of festivities, sporting events, or even the courtship between lovers. In the *Lettre à D’Alembert*, Rousseau contrasted the Genevan “cercles”, beneficial associations of citizens open to public scrutiny, with the culpable secrecy of Parisian cabals⁵⁰. The perfect citizen was thus comparable to the Roman to which the Baron of Wolmar alluded approvingly in *Julie*, who had so little to hide that he built his house such that every corner of it was visible to onlookers⁵¹.

In fine, the *Législateur*'s reliance on public opinion contrasts sharply with Rousseau's sinister description of the workings of public opinion, assimilated to a “machine diabolique”, in his autobiographical writings, or with Emile's maxim, “ne rien donner à l'opinion”⁵². Yet, this merely reflects the type of “opinion” at work in each

48 *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, II, OC 1, pp. 880-881; *Confessions*, XII, OC 1, p 589

49 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, III, OC 3, pp. 965-966

50 *Lettre à D’Alembert*, OC 5, pp. 96-ff.

51 *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, IV: 6, OC 2, p 424

52 *Emile*, III, OC 4, p 486

case: there is, in principle, no contradiction between a private tutor's recommendation that his pupil surrender nothing to a nefarious public opinion escaping his influence and a great lawbringer's ambition to shape and exploit public opinion in the service of political goals. Emile's *gouverneur* operated within a social order determined by forces lying beyond his control; the *Législateur* of Rousseau's political writings aspired to exert full control over the process through which the “corps politique” came into being. If, as Rousseau contended, the formation of public opinion was typically determined by chance, like the throwing of dice, it fell to the *Législateur*—and to him alone—to load them.

Indeed, beyond the *Législateur*'s sphere of influence, reliance on opinion was once again strongly discouraged. Protecting citizens from the dangerous prejudices of other nations constituted a priority. “(L)es Polonois ne doivent point jeter les yeux autour d'eux pour imiter ce qui s'y fait”, Rousseau insisted⁵³. Thus if relations between citizens were to be governed by *amour-propre*, relations between the Republic and its neighbours on the international scene, as Grace Roosevelt remarks, were, as far as possible, to be governed by an autarchic, self-regarding, uncompetitive and non-envious *amour de soi*⁵⁴. Though the *Législateur*'s management of public opinion *within* the state differed considerably from the *gouverneur*'s, his strategy to combat the influence of *foreign* public opinions was actually quite comparable.

3. *The Perception of Fellow Countrymen and Outsiders*

The third major discrepancy between the formations of men and citizens concerned the scope of individuals' emotional attachments. In *Emile*, Rousseau's pupil

53 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, XII, OC 3, p 1015

54 Roosevelt 2001, p 1081

was encouraged to cultivate a fondness for all other human beings: *amour de soi* blossomed into *amour du genre humain*⁵⁵. In Rousseau's prescriptive political writings, however, the citizen's affections were explicitly confined to his *patrie*.

“Tout peuple a, ou doit avoir, un caractère national et s'il en manquoit, il faudroit commencer par le lui donner”, he proclaimed in his *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*⁵⁶. The great lawbringers of Antiquity, Rousseau remarked in his *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, sought to unify a political community by means of particular, distinctive and exclusive customs⁵⁷. Such measures, which Rousseau, in turn, advocated in Corsica and Poland, served to bestow upon the souls of citizens “une physionomie nationale qui les distinguera des autres peuples, qui les empêchera de se fondre, de se plaire, de s'allier avec eux”⁵⁸.

The intensity of *amour de la patrie* depended on circumscribing the sphere in which it held sway. “Il semble que le sentiment de l'humanité s'évapore et s'affoiblisse en s'étendant sur toute la terre, et que nous ne saurions être touchés des calamités de la Tartarie ou du Japon, comme celles d'un peuple européen”, Rousseau wrote in *Economie Politique*. “Il faut en quelque maniere borner et comprimer l'intérêt et la commisération pour lui donner de l'activité.”⁵⁹ This understanding of men's concern for others is consistent with the theory of *amour-propre* later advanced in *Emile*: the more men concentrate their passions on objects close to themselves, the greater the intensity of those passions, and the greater the risk of inequity, of affronts to *amour de la justice*,

55 See Chapter 3.

56 *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, p 913

57 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, II, OC 3, p 958

58 *Ibid.*, III, OC 3, p 960

59 *Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 254. By “sentiment de l'humanité” Rousseau here evidently meant fraternal love in a generic sense rather than specifically *amour du genre humain*, a concept he would elaborate only years later in *Emile*.

due to subjective preferences.

Unsurprisingly, from this perspective, the concentration of *amour de la patrie* seemed to go hand in hand with a certain defiance—Rousseau sometimes even used the word “repugnance”—of strangers. At the opposite of Emile, who regarded himself first and foremost as a member of mankind, and cultivated a universal love of humanity, the citizen focused his affections exclusively on his community, to the detriment of aliens. “L'esprit patriotique est un esprit exclusif qui nous fait regarder comme étranger, et presque comme ennemi tout autre que nos concitoyens”, Rousseau told his Genevan friend Leonhard Usteri, citing the spirit of Sparta and Rome as good illustrations⁶⁰. This could even mean double standards in terms of morality, with one code of conduct applying to one's fellow citizens, and another to outsiders. “L'essentiel est d'être bon aux gens avec qui l'on vit”, Rousseau wrote of the citizen in *Emile*. “Au dehors le Spartiate étoit ambitieux, avare, inique: mais le désintéressement, l'équité, la concorde régnoient dans ses murs.”⁶¹ And so too should Poles always favour the company of their fellow countrymen, and develop “une répugnance naturelle à se mêler avec l'étranger”⁶².

Some scholars argue that Rousseau's texts on Corsica and Poland contain “the seed of nationalism”⁶³. In the words of Steven T. Engel, “Rousseau's thought can be seen as providing the foundation for nationalism even if he would not have endorsed it”⁶⁴. Pauline Kra argues that Rousseau played a key role in replacing the concept of “people” with that of “nation” as the seat of political sovereignty, observing that while

60 Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau au ministre Leonhard Usteri, 30.04.1763, CC 16, p 127

61 *Emile*, I, OC 4, p 249

62 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, III, OC 3, p 962

63 Melzer 2000, p 123

64 Engel 2005, p 515

the term “people” appeared far more frequently than that of “nation” in *Du Contract Social*, occurrences of the term “nation” outnumbered those of the term “people” in the *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*⁶⁵. Rousseau's wish to see a scaffold erected on the borders of African nations “où je ferois pendre sans rémission le premier Européen qui oseroit y pénétrer, et le premier Citoyen qui tenteroit d'en sortir”⁶⁶, or his insistence that no more than one alien be given “le droit de cité” in Corsica every fifty years⁶⁷ do little to dissipate these suspicions.

Whatever the merits of such speculation, it is clear that for Rousseau the cultivation of distinctive Corsican and Polish identities did not constitute an end in itself, but instead served as a rampart against foreign oppression, be it Genoese or Russian. “Si vous faites en sorte qu'un Polonois ne puisse jamais devenir un Russe”, Rousseau wrote, “je vous répons que la Russie ne subjuguera pas la Pologne”⁶⁸. His ambition he summarized as “établir tellement la République dans les cœurs des Polonois, qu'elle y subsiste malgré tous les efforts de ses oppresseurs”⁶⁹. Rousseau defended national homogeneity as a means to a higher end, which was liberty. Rousseau's fundamental political concept remained the “patrie”, which, he insisted, could not be reduced to “les murs ou les hommes”, but existed instead as a relation between citizens and their political institutions. “La patrie est dans la relation de l'Etat à ses membres”, he wrote in a 1764 letter to General Pictet⁷⁰. As Blaise Bachofen has recently demonstrated, Rousseau never considered the “nation” to be an end in itself, but instead saw it either as the 'raw material' from which a republic might be made, or

65 According to Kra's figures, “people” appeared 259 times in *Du Contract Social*, whereas “nation” was used only 17 times. In the *Considérations*, by contrast, “nation” was used 74 times, and “people” only 57 times (Kra 2002, p 6).

66 *Dernière Réponse*, OC 3, pp. 90-91

67 *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, OC 3, p 941

68 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, III, OC 3, p 960

69 *Ibid.*, III, OC 3, p 959

70 Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau au Général Pictet, 01.03.1764, cited in Bachofen 2012, p 279

an 'artifact' to be created to support political institutions⁷¹.

Yet, there can be no denying the difference between the patriotism described in Rousseau's political texts and the humanism advocated in *Emile*. “Le patriotisme et l'humanité sont [...] deux vertus incompatibles dans leur énergie, et surtout chez un peuple entier”, Rousseau proclaimed in his *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*. “Le Législateur qui les voudra toutes deux n'obtiendra ni l'une ni l'autre: cet accord ne s'est jamais vu; il ne se verra jamais; parce qu'il est contraire à la nature, et qu'on ne peut donner deux objets à la même passion.”⁷² *Amour de la patrie*, which appeared to merely displace the antagonisms associated with *amour-propre* from the domestic to the international sphere, could be distinguished from *amour de l'ordre*, the dominant passion of *Emile*, which inspired the individual to discern his place within a vaster cosmic ensemble, and to feel at home everywhere. In the *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, in what must surely be interpreted as a deliberate swipe at the Stoics—a crucial point considering the undeniable influence of one of this school of thought's leading lights, Seneca, upon the doctrines propounded in *Emile*⁷³—Rousseau ostentatiously discarded Cicero's “execrable” proverb 'Patria est ubicumque est bene' ('one's fatherland is wherever one is at ease') in favour of the modified motto 'Ubi Patria, Ibi Bené' ('one only feels at ease in one's fatherland')⁷⁴.

71 Bachofen 2012, pp. 271-272

72 *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, I, OC 3, p 706 [note]

73 See Chapter 3.

74 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, III, OC 3, p 963. As Patrick Riley remarks, it was also in its rejection of the universal in favour of the general (most notably in the refutation of Diderot's theory of the general will of humankind in the *Geneva Manuscript*) that Rousseau's political theory diverged from that of Fénelon, a partisan of Dante's *respublica christiana*, and another key influence on the theories developed in *Emile* (Riley 2001, pp. 285-287).

III. The Politics of *Amour-Propre*

The discrepancies we have identified between Rousseau's two projects should come as no surprise, since he was, in each case, evidently engaged in quite different enterprises. *Emile* dealt with the domestic education of an individual within a disordered and fluctuating society; by contrast, the political writings articulated proposals on the formation of an entire citizenry within a well-ordered society. The citizen, Rousseau explained, had a *patrie*, a special, privileged, intersubjective sphere in which sound institutions fomented sound *mœurs*, and this allowed him to interact with—and rely upon—others in a way that would be unimaginable for Emile, who had only a *pays*, a disordered polity gangrened by discord and corruption.

Rousseau's republicanism, as it manifested itself in the writings on Geneva, Corsica and Poland, stressed the role of the passions in uniting the body politic. Within the *patrie*, they were to be elevated to a high level of intensity, very much at odds with the comparative sobriety of Emile. As Denise Schaeffer aptly concludes, "Rousseau's proposals are designed to harness the animating force of amour-propre to redirect it towards civic virtue"⁷⁵.

Without this intensity, Rousseau maintained, polities would lack vigour and togetherness. In a 1763 letter to Usteri, he described a society populated by passionless men as one doomed to crumble. "(O)tez-leur toutes les passions humaines, le lien civil perd à l'instant tout son ressort; plus d'émulation, plus de gloire, plus d'ardeur pour les préférences, l'intérêt particulier est détruit, et faute d'un soutien convenable, l'Etat politique tombe en langueur", Rousseau wrote, expressing his belief, which owed much

⁷⁵ Schaeffler 2012, p 424. For similar conclusions, see Trachtenberg 1993; Maloy 2005; Smith 2006; Hanley 2008.

to Montesquieu, that passions alone preserved human institutions⁷⁶.

Thus, in a sense, Rousseau joined Mandeville in affirming the importance of passions in holding society together, and insisting that a society of men devoid of passions would be all the worse for it. However, unlike the author of the *Fable of the Bees*, Rousseau refused to accept the vices of mercantile society as an unavoidable reality, and sought instead a return to the grandeur of the Ancients, in an effort to supersede lowly passions such as selfish *amour-propre* and replace them with noble passions such as *amour de la patrie*.

This ambition has attracted much criticism, Rousseau's science of the *Législateur* being portrayed pejoratively as excessively intrusive, or, in the words of Michael Sandel, “soulcraft”⁷⁷. Yet, one should not hastily conclude that Rousseau's *législation* aimed to foment a purely passion-driven, unreflective, 'Pavlovian' society in which instincts, emotions, and passions prevailed hegemonically over reason, a *polis* where *pathos* ruled over *logos*, a monolithic and deterministic order shaped for all time's sake by a providential lawbringer.

Firstly, in arguing that the shaping of *mœurs* fell within the purview of the political, the author of *Du Contract Social* actually meant to combat authoritarian politics. Rousseau believed that the violent nature of many modern regimes owed to the failure of political leaders to understand the importance of *mœurs* in inclining subjects to obey the law through love rather than coercion: confining themselves to taxation and repression, they neglected the fundamental task of inspiring genuine adhesion by

76 Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau au ministre Leonhard Usteri, 18.07.1763, CC 17, p 63

77 Sandel 1996, p 320

winning the battle for hearts and minds⁷⁸. “C'est beaucoup que d'avoir fait régner l'ordre et la paix dans toutes les parties de la république; c'est beaucoup que l'état soit tranquille et la loi respectée”, Rousseau wrote in *Economie Politique*, “mais si l'on ne fait rien de plus, il y aura dans tout cela plus d'apparence que de réalité, et le gouvernement se fera difficilement obéir s'il se borne à l'obéissance”⁷⁹. His own political theory thus aimed to revive ancient principles of statecraft in an attempt to foment not merely obedience, but *adherence* to the laws. “Ils obéiront aux loix et ne les eluderont pas, parce qu'elles leur conviendront, et qu'elles auront l'assentiment interne de leur volonté”, Rousseau wrote of the Poles⁸⁰.

Secondly, the labour of the *Législateur* should not be regarded as finished work, a perfectly cut and polished gemstone to be preserved intact. As Denise Schaeffer rightly insists, *législation* “is not something a legislator does once and for all, erecting a static social culture designed to persist unwaveringly through time until friction slowly alters its course”, but amounts, instead, to laying the foundations of future political life rather than predetermining it entirely⁸¹. Leaving Corsicans the choice as to whether to pay their taxes in kind or with currency, and encouraging them to reflect on the long term effects of agricultural production and population growth constituted two examples of Rousseau's willingness to keep the islanders on their toes, as did inviting them to learn from the case of the Swiss and drawing attention to certain similarities between Rousseau's own proposals and the schemes hatched by Genoa to enslave them, whereby he suggested that Corsicans would need to rely on their own judgement to tell the difference between good and bad laws⁸². Likewise, in his writing on Poland Rousseau

78 Maloy 2005, p 240

79 *Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 251

80 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, III, OC 3, p 961

81 Schaeffer 2012, pp. 432-433

82 *Ibid.*, p 429

insisted that in order to remain free, a people should retain some sense that their freedom stood under threat⁸³. “Le repos et la liberté me paroissent incompatibles; il faut opter”, he averred⁸⁴. The model of citizenship defended by Rousseau in Corsica and Poland is actually more dynamic and less deterministic than is often recognised.

Far from demanding that citizens passively accept the political system bequeathed to them by the *Législateur*, Rousseau clearly gave them the leeway to reflect upon the laws and revise them if necessary, without which a polity is destined to fossilise. Yet, what Rousseau could not allow to happen was the waning of *amour-propre*, as is perfectly illustrated by the central role accorded to the social passions in his prescriptive political writings. In *Emile*, he had warned against “la paresse qui résulteroit de (l')indifférence pour les jugemens des hommes et du calme des passions”⁸⁵.

Conclusion

In the *Confessions*, Rousseau evoked a book he never wrote, called *La morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage*. A man's behaviour varied considerably during the course of his life, sometimes making it difficult to believe him the same man he had once been, he remarked, explaining his intention to investigate the causes of these variations and to study those that depended on man himself to show how these might be directed such as to render him better and more reliable. “Car il est sans contredit plus pénible à l'honnête homme de résister à des desirs déjà tout formés qu'il doit vaincre, que de prévenir, changer ou modifier ces mêmes desirs dans leur source, s'il étoit en état

83 On Rousseau's efforts to present liberty as perpetually threatened in the *Considérations*, see Smith 2003.

84 *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, I, OC 3, p 955

85 *Emile*, III, OC 4, p 480

d'y remonter”, Rousseau averred. The book thus would have proposed “un régime extérieur qui varié selon les circonstances pouvoit mettre ou maintenir l'ame dans l'état le plus favorable à la vertu”. “Que d'écarts on sauroit à la raison, que de vices on empêcheroit de naitre si l'on savoit forcer l'économie animale à favoriser l'ordre moral qu'elle trouble si souvent!”⁸⁶

Though the project of *la morale sensitive* remained unfulfilled, this broad sketch suffices to suggest that Rousseau's science of the *Législateur* can be interpreted as very much proceeding from its spirit. Arguably, the great lawbringer's endeavour to bring about a society in which men's inclinations were protected from corruption rather than a society of men taught to resist the inevitable corruption of their inclinations reflected its stated ambition to align “l'économie animale” on “l'ordre moral”. “Là, disoient les autres Peuples, *les hommes naissent vertueux, et l'air même du Païs semble respirer la vertu*”, Rousseau wrote of Sparta in the *First Discourse*⁸⁷, though he may as well have been speaking of Corsica or Poland, such as he imagined them in his political writings.

One may speculate about the meaning of the word “vertu” in these passages. But if the distinction articulated in this thesis between different varieties of virtue holds, then one is led to conclude that both Rousseau's *morale sensitive* and his theory of citizenship were designed to foster political virtue, defined as the conformity of a citizen's will with the general will, rather than moral virtue, man's effort to conform to the moral order through the mastery of his passions. In this sense, the doctrine of *la morale sensitive*, and its aim of bringing man's inclinations in line with his duties, lay at the heart of Rousseau's political theory, and stood opposed to the belief in an inevitable

⁸⁶ *Confessions*, IX, OC 1, pp. 408-409

⁸⁷ *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, I, OC 3, pp. 12-13

tension between inclination and duty that pervaded his moral theory, as Timothy O'Hagan has discerned⁸⁸.

Ultimately, Rousseau's theories on education and citizenship yield a puzzling conclusion, since it would appear that the education of Emile, which takes place in the midst of a society gnawed by corruption, meets a higher moral standard than that of the citizen, which is organized within a republic of virtue. While Emile learns to treat all men as his brothers, the citizen's moral duties die out at the borders of the republic. A certain "repugnance" vis-a-vis strangers seems to form an integral part of the process through which the citizen forges his own identity.

Traditionally, interpreters of Rousseau's political thought have tended to posit that the value of the social contract resided in its promise of freedom to all citizens, both in terms of the protection of individual rights and the possibility of moral anticipation through rational self-determination. However, an analysis of Rousseau's strategies for dealing with *amour-propre* reveals a fissure in his thought on human life in society. On the one hand, at the *individual* level, Rousseau qua *gouverneur* strove to equip his pupil with the weapons required to subjugate his *amour-propre* and master the passions in an effort to achieve freedom. On the other hand, at the *political* level, Rousseau qua *Législateur* sought to exalt *amour-propre* to ensure harmony and concord within the well-ordered society. In the first case, a singular emancipation, referred to as 'true freedom', was achieved through the triumph of will over the passions in a context of friction between duty and inclination; in the second case, duty and inclination were wedded within a radically reworked social and political order.

88 O'Hagan 1999a, pp. 11-12

Chapter 6: The Place of “Liberté Morale” in Rousseau's Political Theory

“*Quand il n'y a plus de liberté commune il reste une ressource:
c'est de cultiver la liberté particulière, c'est à dire la vertu.*”

– Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Paul-Claude Moutou, 18 February 1765

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw a division emerge between Rousseau's moral and political theories, a rift manifest in radically different treatments of the problem of *amour-propre*. This leaves us with a tripartite picture of Rousseau's philosophy, inhabited by three distinct ideals: the ideal of *nature*, symbolized by the savage of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, or the *promeneur solitaire* of the *Rêveries*, detached from the complexity of social life and free from its attendant torments; that of *virtue*, incarnated by Rousseau's aspiring student in *Emile*, and more generally by the figure of the *sage*, moral strivers in decadent worlds; and the *Republican* ideal, revolving around the generous and ardent *citizen* summoned in Rousseau's political writings, inspired by the general will, and guardian of the common good.

As has already been argued, defending these three different visions of the good life does not condemn Rousseau to inconsistency. Rather, in allowing political circumstances to shape his ideals, Rousseau merely affirmed the centrality of politics to his thought, in keeping both with the philosopher's famous axiom in the *Confessions* that “tout tenoit radicalement à la politique”¹, and with the vision of the unity of Rousseau's thought defended in this thesis, a unity through *harmony*, whereby the

1 *Confessions*, IX, OC 1, p 404

various parts of Rousseau's system prove to be mutually consistent, rather than through architectonic integrity, in which all of these parts comprise one unidirectional, overarching project. The 'harmonious' interpretation seems to better accommodate the diversity and complexity of Rousseau's *œuvre*, while according it the philosophical credentials it fully deserves.

This final chapter uses the analysis contained in the previous parts of the thesis as a platform for the construction of what is undoubtedly its boldest argument, which concerns the question of *freedom*.

In *Du Contract Social*, Rousseau describes “liberté” as the central value around which his political theory articulates itself. “L'homme est né libre, et par-tout il est dans les fers”, he memorably proclaims in the very first sentence of the book's inaugural chapter². The fundamental problem of the social contract is to unite men within a political community while leaving them just as free as they were before entering it³. Equality itself, such a major theme in the Genevan philosopher's thought, finds its justification only in the instrumental role it plays in safeguarding liberty⁴. Without liberty, Rousseau affirms, man relinquishes his very status as a human being⁵.

Yet, Rousseau's conception of liberty has been the object of a plethora of mutually contradictory interpretations. On the one hand, the author stands accused of championing a deceptively authoritarian ideal of liberty, rejecting absolute monarchy only to replace it with a totalitarian tyranny of his own manufacture. On the other hand,

2 *Du Contract Social*, I:1, OC 3, p 351

3 *Ibid.*, I:6, OC 3, p 360

4 *Ibid.*, II:11, OC 3, p 391

5 *Ibid.*, I:4, OC 3, p 356

he is showered with praise for breathing new life into the noblest principles of republicanism, and imagining the political and social conditions in which to realise them.

The first perspective emerges in the aftermath of the French Revolution⁶. In the eyes of Benjamin Constant, a leading liberal voice in post-revolutionary France, Rousseau was guilty of advocating the pursuit of an antiquated and excessively ambitious ideal of freedom. His, Constant asserted in a famous speech given in 1819, were the dreams of a philosopher dangerously out of touch with modern political realities, and intoxicated, like his aggressively illiberal fellow philosopher Mably, and his sanguinary spiritual son Robespierre, by an intense nostalgic fascination with the outdated classical models of Sparta and Rome. Scornfully refusing to celebrate the protected sphere accorded to men by political institutions for the pursuit of their private goals, which Constant—following, in this regard, in Thomas Hobbes's footsteps⁷—termed 'the liberty of the moderns', Rousseau called for the pursuit of a higher form of freedom involving the active participation of all citizens in shaping their collective destiny, something Constant called 'the liberty of the ancients'.

In a lecture delivered over a century later, Isaiah Berlin revived this line of criticism, identifying the goal of Rousseau's political theory as the attainment of 'positive liberty', the liberty to govern oneself, unencumbered by inner restraint, rather

6 As Jeremy Jennings notes, Rousseau's memory in post-revolutionary France was tainted by the association of his political theory with the radicalism of the *Jacobins* during the *Terreur*. In the words of the Catholic counter-revolutionary thinker Louis de Bonald, the author of *Du Contract Social* “sacrificed society for man, history for his own opinions, and the universe for Geneva” (Jennings 2011, pp. 115-128). The Harvard historian Niall Ferguson places *Du Contract Social* “among the most dangerous books Western civilization ever produced”, regarding it as one of the causes of the violent nature of the French Revolution (Ferguson 2011, p 151).

7 *Leviathan*, ch. XXI. For interesting analysis of the genesis of Hobbes's theory of liberty, understood as a reaction against certain abuses associated with the Roman conception of liberty, see Kapust & Turner 2013.

than 'negative liberty', the liberty to live free from outward oppression. Berlin concluded that Rousseau's theory of liberty amounted to a sinister espousal of tyranny because, unlike Thomas Hobbes or John Locke, who regarded liberty as a *relative* value locked in perpetual tension with the rival value of authority, Rousseau considered liberty to be an *absolute* value, the highest expression of which is self-imposed coercion. And if freedom and coercion are one, then men may legitimately be coerced by those in power in the name of their own freedom.

Mistakingly “thinking that the authority of the social body is liberty” and “transposing into our modern age an extent of social power, of collective sovereignty, which belonged to other centuries”, “this sublime genius, animated by the purest love of liberty, has nevertheless furnished deadly pretexts for more than one kind of tyranny”, Constant stated⁸. “From (Rousseau's) notion of absolute liberty, we gradually reach the notion of absolute despotism”, Berlin wrote⁹. In fine, Rousseau, that “great illusionist”, theorised nothing less than “the planned regimentation and intrusion into every aspect of every individual's life by a central authority”, leaving men “enslaved by liberty”, Lester G. Crocker later added¹⁰.

This Dantean vision of Rousseau's political theory remains profoundly influential today, and has undoubtedly contributed to the conspicuous reluctance of many modern republican thinkers to endorse the author of *Du Contract Social*¹¹. This

8 *De la liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes*

9 Berlin 2002. A similar line of argument is found in Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), Bertrand Russell's *The History of Western Philosophy* (1945), and J. L. Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952). It is worth noting that these criticisms (including Berlin's, which was originally articulated in a 1952 lecture to the BBC) were advanced in the aftermath of World War Two, partly in reaction to the atrocities perpetrated by totalitarian regimes. The revered Rousseau scholar Bruno Bernardi humourously compares the recurring and politically contingent portrayals of Rousseau as an apostle of tyranny to successive sightings of the Loch Ness monster (Bernardi 2006, p 194, note 2).

10 Crocker 1995, pp. 257, 259, 261

11 See Spector 2011, ch. 6.

reluctance is, for instance, manifest in the writings of Philip Pettit, who denounces Rousseau's alleged conception of freedom as self-imposed coercion. According to Pettit, traditional republican thought, originating in the ancient world and later reinvented in Renaissance Italy, 17th century England, and 18th century France and America, rests on an understanding of freedom as the absence of subjection to the will of another, as well as the belief that this freedom should be protected by a mixed constitution that provides for a division of powers and a healthy system of checks and balances. Rousseau, Pettit writes, departed from this tradition by refusing the idea of a balance of powers and holding on to the Hobbesian imperative of a unified and unimpeded sovereign. In so doing, he “gave rise to the idea that not only was freedom guaranteed by incorporation in collective self-government, that is what freedom means”¹².

The most forceful expression of the second, more favourable perspective lies in the works of the Republican thinker Maurizio Viroli. Responding to Constant and Berlin, Viroli maintains that Rousseau's “well-ordered society” is designed to uphold a distinctly republican ideal of liberty, protecting citizens from subjection to the will of other men and enabling participation in the political process through which laws are made, an ideal which, Viroli insists, cannot be properly grasped in terms of Berlin's dichotomy between positive and negative liberty. “According to Rousseau”, Viroli writes, “there is but one form of liberty: republican liberty. This is the liberty which individuals enjoy under the law and by virtue of a just political constitution which frees them from a narrow dependence on the individual will of others. It is 'positive' because it involves obedience to laws which have been sanctioned by individual men; it is 'negative' because the sovereignty of the law protects each and every one from the

12 Pettit 2011, pp. 715-716

wrongs, the affronts and the wilful infringements of their rights perpetrated by others, whether they be private individuals or magistrates.” “Freedom founded on the sovereignty of the general will and on the strength of the law”, Viroli concludes, “is the greatest good which individuals can enjoy in a well-ordered society”¹³. Jean-Fabien Spitz, another of Rousseau's Republican supporters, resolutely rejects the charge that Rousseau conceived of the law as an expression of the individual's 'deeper' will, to be coercively substituted to his actual will by the state. Freedom for Rousseau, Spitz insists, solely involves living in a community of individuals required by law to abstain from imposing their particular wills on each other¹⁴.

It is my contention that both of these interpretations rely on incomplete visions of Rousseau's thoughts on freedom. The latter accords primary importance to only one of the two great threats to freedom identified by Rousseau in his works, the *external* threat constituted by man's subjection to the will of others, overlooking the other, the *internal* threat represented by the empire of the passions, with which *Emile* is centrally concerned, a theme that cannot be overlooked given the importance accorded by Rousseau himself to that work, which he described as his greatest, as well as the cornerstone of his system. To present “republican liberty” as the only kind of freedom Rousseau sought to defend is to ignore the philosopher's discussion of freedom in his moral writings. The “Virolian” interpretation thus leaves a considerable amount of the philosopher's treatment of the question of freedom (particularly that found in Book V of *Emile*) unaccounted for. The former, “Berlinian” interpretation, at the opposite, emphasizes Rousseau's understanding of liberty as a submission to self-imposed legislation, but fails to address the question of the relationship between moral and

13 Viroli 1988, p 11

14 Spitz 2007. Spitz's republican reading of Rousseau emphasizes social and economic equality as a precondition for true political liberty.

political self-rule in Rousseau's philosophy, taking for granted Cassirer's vision of Rousseau's project as one oriented towards the simultaneous pursuit of spiritual and civic liberation, and overlooking the discrepancies between *Emile* and *Du Contract Social*, as well as Rousseau's specifically political treatment of the question of liberty in such works as the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*¹⁵.

In this chapter, it is argued that, just as it propounds different ideals of the good life, so too does Rousseau's philosophy express different conceptions of freedom. Three such conceptions are identified: *natural* freedom, *political* freedom, and *moral* freedom. An effort is made to highlight the distinctions Rousseau articulates between them, particularly between political and moral freedom: it is suggested that political and moral self-rule—two notions frequently (and forgivably) conflated by interpreters of Rousseau—are not only distinct, but also stand in a relation of mutual tension, which considerably complicates the picture of the relationship between freedom and authority in Rousseau's system.

The first part examines Rousseau's three distinct conceptions of freedom, placing them in their proper context within the author's writings, and explaining their relationship to Rousseau's three ideals of the good life. It poses the question of the political relevance of Rousseau's concept of “liberté morale”.

The second part analyses the complicated relationship between political and moral notions of self-rule in Rousseau's philosophy, focusing on two key writings: *Du*

15 As this chapter deals specifically with liberty at a conceptual level, it leaves aside assessments of Rousseau's liberal credentials that focus on his detailed discussion of institutional arrangements. For an authoritative discussion on the scope of liberty within the institutional framework propounded by Rousseau, see Hampsher-Monk 1995. On the institutional arrangements imagined by Rousseau to prevent tyranny, see also Williams 2005.

Contract Social and the earlier version of that text, known as the *Manuscrit de Genève*. Rousseau employed two distinct idioms in these works, those of republicanism and natural law theory, the first of which emphasized the collective exercise and defence of sovereignty, and the second of which conveyed the moral emancipation of individuals enabled by political institutions, particularly the law. It is contended that the language of republicanism provided a vehicle for a political ideal of self-rule, that of the citizen body, while the language of natural law theory expressed a moral ideal of self-rule, that of the sage. That Rousseau chose to water down much of the rhetoric of natural law originally contained in the experimental *Manuscrit de Genève* when it came to the final version of *Du Contract Social* strongly suggests, firstly, that establishing the conditions of political sovereignty constituted the prime aim of his political theory, the question of man's moral emancipation inside the political community receding to the periphery; and secondly, that there may have existed, in the philosopher's mind, a tension between the pursuit of these two ideals.

In the third and final part, this tension between political self-rule and moral self-rule is explored through a study of three passages from Rousseau's texts that deal specifically with their relationship: the comparison between Socrates and Cato of Utica in the article *Economie Politique*; the political assessment of the Pagan and Christian religions in Book IV, Chapter 8 of *Du Contract Social*; and the discussion of slavery and revolt in the Second Letter of the unfinished epistolary novel *Emile et Sophie*. In each case, Rousseau opposes the pursuit of *political* freedom to the pursuit of *moral* freedom, contrasting the collective endeavour of ardent, passion-driven citizens with the individual striving of the rational sage.

I. Rousseau's Plural Concept of Freedom

1. Three Conceptions of Freedom

David Miller argues that the history of political thought presents three particularly prominent visions of freedom. The first of these is the *republican* vision, given shape by the self-governing community of citizens, protected both from external threats to its security and internal threats such as arbitrary rule. The second is the *liberal* vision, where freedom is regarded as a property of each individual, equated with the absence of unwarranted interference—particularly from the state—in each person's sphere of privacy, and depends less on the form of government than on its scope. Then comes the *idealist* vision of freedom, concerned with the internal forces that determine men's behaviour, and centred around the value of autonomy, which political institutions should be crafted such as to promote¹⁶.

Elements of all three of these varieties of freedom can be found in Rousseau's texts. Indeed, in a single chapter of *Du Contract Social* (Book I, Chapter 8), the philosopher invoked each in turn. He first distinguished between “liberté naturelle” and “liberté civile”: “liberté naturelle” referred to the freedom enjoyed by the individual *before* entering the civil state, while “liberté civile” denoted the freedom acquired by the individual *upon* entering it¹⁷. The implication was that when individuals left the lawless state of nature behind them to enter a political community, a certain kind of freedom, fundamentally apolitical and best defined as independence, which consisted in the ability to behave as one wished, free from constraint, was relinquished in favour of a new type of freedom, framed by the laws and thus limited by the general will.

¹⁶ Miller D. 2006, pp. 2-4

¹⁷ *Du Contract Social*, I:8, OC 3, pp. 364-365

Rousseau deemed this a potentially advantageous transaction, since it substituted an order based on right to an order founded on mere force, a point that he illustrated by contrasting *property*, a legally recognised entitlement, to *possession*, a form of ownership which was solely the effect of might or chance¹⁸. Naturally, the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* and its dark fulminations against society were not altogether forgotten, and Rousseau cast doubt over whether the establishment of “l'état civil” should necessarily be regarded as a blessing, reminding his readers of the abuses perpetrated by man in this new condition. Yet he could not remain indifferent to the development of the human mind enabled by civil society, which transformed a limited animal into a man¹⁹. And at the end of the chapter, in arguably the most mystical passage of his entire corpus, Rousseau went further, introducing a third type of freedom:

“On pourroit sur ce qui précède ajouter à l'acquis de l'état civil la liberté morale, qui seule rend l'homme vraiment maître de lui; car l'impulsion du seul appetit est esclavage, et l'obéissance à la loi qu'on s'est prescrite est liberté.”²⁰

“Liberté morale” Rousseau associated with man's mastery over himself and obedience to self-prescribed laws. The use of the word “vraiment” also suggested that this form of freedom was somehow greater or more profound than those mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Each of these conceptions of freedom occupied an important place in Rousseau's philosophy, and corresponded to one of his distinct images of the good life. “Liberté naturelle” of course evoked the idyllic state of nature described in Part I of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, and its insouciant dweller, the *bon sauvage*, immune, through a felicitous ignorance, to the myriad pathologies of social existence. But it also applied to the

18 Ibid., I:8, OC 3, p 365

19 Ibid., I:8, OC 3, p 364

20 Ibid., I:8, OC 3, pp. 364-365

isolated man within society, the *homme seul* who retained something of his natural goodness by controlling his exposure to the world of men, and enjoyed the simple pleasures of a life in the countryside, freely following his innocent inclinations. Indeed, it was precisely because his proclivities remained pure that he had licence to freely indulge in them. Rousseau considered himself an incarnation of this ideal, particularly in the crepuscular *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*²¹, and never forgave his former friend Diderot for assimilating solitude with wickedness in his play *Le Fils Naturel* (1757)²². The connection between “bonté naturelle” and the personality of Rousseau himself was explicitly established in the *Dialogues*. “D’où le peintre et l’apologiste de la nature aujourd’hui si défigurée et si calmonnée peut-il avoir tiré son modèle si ce n’est de son propre cœur?”, he rhetorically enquired²³. It was, he explained in the *Confessions*, during his “promenades” in the solitude of the woods, that the condition of the natural savage was first imagined²⁴. The “promenade” itself was the activity that best captured the exhilaration of “liberté naturelle”. Beyond the *Rêveries*, which are replete with examples, the following text, drawn from *Emile*, is particularly worthy of attention:

“On part à son moment, on s’arrête à sa volonté, on fait tant et si peu d’exercice qu’on veut. On observe tout le pays, on se détourne à droite, à gauche, on examine tout ce qui nous flate, on s’arrête à tous les points de vue. Aperçois-je une rivière? je la cotoye; un bois touffu? je vais sous son ombre; une grotte? je la visite; une carrière? j’examine les minéraux. Par tout où je me plais, j’y reste. A l’instant que je m’ennuie, je m’en vais. Je ne dépends ni des chevaux ni du postillon. Je n’ai pas besoin de choisir des chemins tout faits, des routes comodes, je passe par tout où un homme peut passer; je vois tout ce qu’un homme peut voir et ne dépendant que de moi-même je jouis de toute la liberté

21 Only in the *Rêveries*, among his trident of late autobiographical writings, did Rousseau fully endorse this ideal of natural goodness: the clinical *Confessions*, too lucid as to the author’s flaws to sustain the image of primordial innocence, primarily depicted the reformed *Citoyen de Genève*, while the curious trial of Rousseau by Rousseau found in the *Dialogues* summoned all of the author’s personas without according primacy to any of them, but rather trying to reconcile them. It was in the *Rêveries* that Rousseau truly relinquished the aspiration to virtue and contented himself with embracing goodness in its stead.

22 On the dispute between Rousseau and Diderot over this sentence, and the relationship between Rousseau and the character of Dorval, see Kelly 2004, pp. 57-58.

23 *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, III, OC 1, p 936

24 *Confessions*, VIII, OC 3, p 388

dont un homme peut jouir.”²⁵

The two ingredients of “liberté naturelle” were here clearly identified: firstly, the ability to freely satisfy one's inclinations; and secondly, self-sufficiency, ensured by the absence of any kind of dependency beyond those imposed by nature itself. It would be wrong to assimilate the *promeneur solitaire* to a hermit, deliberately withdrawn from civilisation: his freedom resides, rather, in his rejection of dependency, in the refusal to become entangled in a social web of reciprocal obligations²⁶. The animal that best incarnated freedom, in Rousseau's eyes, was the cat, precisely because, while capable of enjoying the company of men, it nevertheless insisted on retaining its independence in their midst²⁷. This much misunderstood imperative is the key to understanding Rousseau's otherwise perplexing hostility to 'benefactors' who sought to shower him with gifts and favours (most famously in the case of David Hume²⁸).

Rousseau's second conception of freedom, republican liberty, pervades his political writings, from his *Dédicace* to the Republic of Geneva to the *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne* via *Du Contract Social*. Rousseau himself did not use the label “liberté républicaine” because within the framework of his political theory there could be no freedom outside the republic²⁹. However, when contrasted with his

25 *Emile*, V, OC 4, p 772

26 On this theme, see the Sixth Promenade of the *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*. Rousseau explained, for instance, how he grew weary of encountering a small boy after his habit of giving him alms became something of a duty (*Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, VI, OC 1, pp. 1050-1051).

27 Rousseau purportedly declared to his Scottish friend James Boswell that he regarded men's attitudes towards cats as “a good test of character”. Men who disliked cats revealed their “despotic instinct”, because “the cat is free and will never consent to become a slave”. “He will do nothing to your order, as the other animals do”, he added (Boswell 1991, p 117). David Kasunic recounts the episode in a recent article (Kasunic 2013, p 267).

28 For an excellent account of the relationship between Rousseau and Hume, and the role played by Rousseau's unconditional attachment to independence in its rapid unravelling, see David Edmonds and John Eidinow's richly entertaining book *Rousseau's Dog: Two Great Thinkers at War in the Age of Enlightenment* (2006). See also Zaretsky & Scott 2009 and Guillemin 2001.

29 It is important to remember that Rousseau's concept of the republic refers to the eminence of the general will within a political community rather than the form of that community. Rousseau shared with Montesquieu the belief that democratic government was suitable only to small states, but he maintained that even a monarchy could be republican (*Du Contract Social*, II:6, OC 3, p 380 [note]). By way of example, Rousseau referred to Sparta's two-headed monarchy as a republic (*Economie*

other conceptions of freedom, this epithet perfectly captures its distinctive character. The description of “liberté civile” in Book I, Chapter 8 of *Du Contract Social* falls short of fully fleshing out what republican liberty involves. That is because this early chapter deals only with man's passage from the state of nature into “l'état civil”, evidently understood in a quite broad sense. That Rousseau should speak of the condition of man in the civil state as one replete with abuses that oftentimes reduce him to a state below that which he enjoyed in the wilderness³⁰ shows that we should not understand “l'état civil” to refer specifically to Rousseau's well-ordered society, but rather to civil experience more generally, including that lived in disordered societies. The explanation of what republican liberty consisted in thus had no place in this chapter, and constituted the subject of the book as a whole, and indeed of Rousseau's political theory more generally. However, its distinction from “liberté naturelle” was an appropriate starting point. As Rousseau explained in the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, independence and liberty stand fundamentally at odds with one another:

“On a beau vouloir confondre l'indépendance et la liberté. Ces deux choses sont si différentes que même elles s'excluent mutuellement. Quand chacun fait ce qui lui plait, on fait souvent ce qui déplaît à d'autres, et cela ne s'appelle pas un état libre. La liberté consiste moins à faire sa volonté qu'à n'être pas soumis à celle d'autrui; elle consiste encore à ne pas soumettre la volonté d'autrui à la nôtre. Quiconque est maître ne peut être libre, et régner c'est obéir.”³¹

For a man to be free in this context means avoiding relationships involving domination, the subjection of one man's will to that of another. The only means of achieving this goal on the scale of an entire community is to ensure that each man is constrained by the laws alone, and never by the whim of particular men. As Rousseau put it, “(u)n peuple libre obéit, mais il ne sert pas; il a des chefs et non pas des maîtres; il obéit aux Loix,

Politique, OC 3, p 257).

30 *Du Contract Social*, I:8, OC 3, p 364

31 *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, VIII, OC 3, p 841

mais il n'obéit qu'aux Loix et c'est par la force des Loix qu'il n'obéit pas aux hommes.”³²

Yet, for this to be the case, the laws themselves need to be the emanation of his and all other men's wills qua *citizens*, i.e. the general will, rather than the manifestation of a particular will. Republican liberty thus amounts to both protection from the invidious influence of particular wills and participation in the political process through contribution to the general will. The sovereign body of citizens acts as the source of the laws to the force of which each man then submits qua *subject*³³. “Vos loix ne tiennent leur autorité que de vous; vous ne reconnoissez que celles que vous faites“, Rousseau wrote of the Genevans in the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*. “En Conseil général vous êtes Législateurs, Souverains, indépendans de toute puissance humaine; vous ratifiez les traités, vous décidez de la paix et de la guerre; vos Magistrats eux-mêmes vous traitent de *Magnifiques, très honorés et souverains Seigneurs*”, he added, before concluding: “Voilà votre liberté”³⁴.

Finally, “liberté morale” occupied a place of choice in all of Rousseau's moral writings, that is all those texts which dealt specifically with the spiritual dimension of the human condition. As early as the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* Rousseau evoked the irreducibility of human conduct to the mechanical laws of nature³⁵. And in *Emile*, the *gouverneur's* impassioned exhortation to his pupil to attain true freedom by mastering his passions constituted the culmination of his education³⁶. The lesson from Book V of *Emile* was that moral freedom required emancipating oneself from one's inclinations

32 *Ibid.*, VIII, OC 3, p 842. “Un Peuple est libre, quelque forme qu'ait son Gouvernement, quand dans celui qui le gouverne il ne voit point l'homme, mais l'organe de la Loi.” (*Ibid.*, VIII, OC 3, p 842)

33 *Du Contract Social*, I:6, OC 3, p 362

34 *Lettre écrites de la Montagne*, VII, OC 3, pp. 813-814. The gist of the *Lettres* was, however, that the Genevans had progressively lost this liberty as the city's *petit conseil* grew ever more powerful. “Rien n'est plus libre que votre état légitime; rien n'est plus servile que votre état actuel”, he wrote (*Ibid.*, VII, OC 3, p 813).

35 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, I, OC 3, pp. 141-142

36 *Emile*, V, OC 4, pp. 814-823

and combatting them when necessary. The circumstances of virtue, as the tragic tale of *Julie* illustrated, involved a conflict between duty and inclination. “Combattre et souffrir, voila son sort dans ce monde”, Saint-Preux said of the virtuous man in a letter to Milord Edouard³⁷. The exploration of Rousseau's theory of moral freedom and his powerful concept of *vertu* formed the subject-matter of Chapter 4 of this thesis, and need not be revisited at great length here. Let us note, however, the association made by Rousseau between moral freedom and the ideal of the sage, embodied by the wise individual who perpetually seeks to maintain the right equilibrium between his wants and his capacity to satisfy them, and whose observations and experience of the world of men have taught him to be wary of his passions. “La sagesse est la base de toute vertu”, Saint-Preux declared to Julie³⁸. Contrasting the young Emile with the “sauvage” of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau emphasized precisely this quality:

“Mon élève est ce sauvage, avec cette différence qu'Emile ayant plus réfléchi, plus comparé d'idées, vû nos erreurs de plus près, se tient plus en garde contre lui-même et ne juge que de ce qu'il connoit.”³⁹

Cured both of the prejudices of the philosophers and the ignorance of the primitives, Emile's distinguishing strength lay in his lucid recognition of the human condition and the capacity for moral introspection.

We may now ask how these three conceptions of freedom relate to one another. Are Rousseau's thoughts on freedom as many scattered and independent jottings, or are they fragments of a whole, forming a coherent overall vision?

37 *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, III:21, OC 2, p 380

38 *Ibid.*, III:19, OC 2, p 368

39 *Emile*, IV, OC 4, p 535

2. Republican Liberty and Moral Freedom

Few would disagree that natural independence stands opposed to both republican liberty and moral freedom. Nothing could be more contrary to the ethos of citizenship and its insistence on communal life and unity than the isolation of the *bon sauvage* or the obstinate independence of the *promeneur solitaire*. The contrast between these two ideals is symbolically captured in a passage from Book VI of the *Confessions*, when Rousseau, en route to the house of the charming Madame de Larnage, decided to renege on the promise of a tranquil and withdrawn domestic life before the grandiose Roman splendour of the Pont du Gard⁴⁰. Equally, though Rousseau insisted on the spiritual character of even the earliest forms of human life, there could scarcely be any mistaking the “animal stupide et borné” that was the inhabitant of the state of nature for the “être intelligent” that man was susceptible of becoming in society⁴¹. The cat, that symbol of natural independence, litmus test of men's proclivity for despotism, would sooner starve on a pile of fruit than deviate from its mechanical predeterminations⁴². And even the far more evolved version of independence embodied by the persecuted Rousseau, militantly draped in his Armenian robe, was a far cry from the celestial peaks of “liberté morale”⁴³.

There is nothing surprising about this, since the concept of natural freedom, much like the broader ideal of natural goodness, serves a largely *negative* purpose in Rousseau's philosophy, enabling him to reveal the steep costs of social life. The oblivious felicity of the savage merely highlighted the utter misery of modern man, much like the innocent bliss of Julie's early dealings with Saint-Preux in the glades of Warens contrasted with the exacting regimen of *vertu* later in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and

40 *Confessions*, VI, OC 1, pp. 255-256. One might describe this as the moment Rousseau chose Sparta over the Age Gold, to employ Judith Shklar's crisp dichotomy (Shklar 1966).

41 *Du Contract Social*, I:8, OC 3, p 364

42 *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, I, OC 3, p 141

43 *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, II, OC 1, p 774

even the solitary serenity of Jean-Jacques in his old age derived much of its own value from its contrast with the painful frustrations of his past involvement with society. That Rousseau cast doubt on the very existence of the state of nature⁴⁴ further reinforces the impression that these ideals served as critical devices at least as much as positive models.

Much greater difficulties await the interpreter seeking to grasp the relationship between moral freedom and republican liberty in Rousseau's thought. It is frequently assumed that both of these varieties of freedom form part of the citizen's experience in the community of the general will envisaged in *Du Contract Social*. David Miller, for instance, relies on the famous passage about “liberté morale” in Book I, Chapter 8 of *Du Contract Social* to affirm that “when a person is subject to the guidance of the general will, he achieves moral liberty”. “Political liberty under the general will also provides freedom in this higher and more intimate sense”, he writes⁴⁵. Patrick Riley claims that the institutions of Rousseau's republican state are designed to form the moral aptitude of citizens over time, so that “at the end of civic time” they are rationally capable of prescribing laws to themselves⁴⁶. Likewise, John Plamenatz states in a recently published lecture that “Emile is moral and free because the rules that guide his conduct in his dealings with others are rules he has prescribed to himself. So, too, the citizens of the ideal political community described in the *Social Contract* have what Rousseau calls moral freedom, because they are the makers of the laws they are required to obey”⁴⁷. “Rousseau believes that the society of the social compact achieves in its basic political and social institutions both civil and moral freedom”, John Rawls

44 *Lettre sur la Vertu* (p 322); *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Preface, OC 3, p 123). The *Manuscrit de Genève* questions the possibility of the “âge d'or” (*Manuscrit de Genève*, I:2, OC 3, p 283).

45 Miller D. 2006, pp. 4-5

46 Riley 2006, pp. 368-369

47 Plamenatz 2012, p 174

states in his lectures devoted to Rousseau. “Moral freedom”, he adds, “consists in obeying the law one has prescribed for oneself. And we know that that law is the fundamental law of the society of the social compact: namely the laws enacted from the point of view of the general will”⁴⁸. Joshua Cohen agrees that “under conditions of social interdependence, we can express our nature as free and thus achieve moral freedom only if we have a general will”⁴⁹.

Although they diverge in other respects, these interpretations rest on the shared belief that moral freedom lies at the heart of Rousseau's political project. In abiding by laws enacted from the point of view of the general will, that is the point of view of the good citizen, individuals pay homage to laws of their own making: they obey themselves, and thence are free.

The advantage of this interpretation lies in the coherence it attributes to Rousseau's system: upon entering society, man leaves natural freedom behind him and strives to replace it with the higher goods of republican liberty and moral freedom. However, it also creates two important problems for his political theory.

The first is the exceeding difficulty for a political theory to meet the conditions of both republican liberty and moral freedom, given how Rousseau defined these ideals. Rousseau everywhere insisted upon the demanding character of republican liberty, affirming that few nations were prepared for it⁵⁰, and describing the painstaking groundwork required of the *Législateur* to dispose a people to pay heed to the general

48 Rawls 2007, p 235

49 Cohen 1997, p 118

50 In the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Rousseau likened “liberté” to a strong wine, suitable only for those robust men accustomed to its consumption (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Dedication, OC 3, pp. 112-113).

will. As Bruno Bernardi rightly remarks, such is the difficulty of the *Législateur's* task that one could be forgiven for thinking that the “volonté générale” constitutes the precondition of its own existence⁵¹. The eternal principles of justice on which the Republic is founded cannot be grasped by men if they remain abstract truths hanging in the heavens. If men knew how to receive the law from these dazzling heights, there would be no need for government or laws⁵². In his effort to bring the Republic into being, the *Législateur* could not appeal to men's notions of justice, for he would assuredly fall on deaf ears. The correct method consisted, instead, in “persuader sans convaincre”⁵³, by appealing to men's imagination, particularly through recourse to the Gods⁵⁴. As Arash Abizadeh rightly remarks, the purpose of the distinction between “persuader” and “convaincre” was to open the door to a mode of communication that spoke to men's feelings and passions rather than to their reason⁵⁵.

There thus exists an undeniable tension between the foundational labour of the *Législateur*, reliant on salutary mystification, and the requirement to respect men's “liberté morale”. One could object that, beyond the exceptional circumstances of the Republic's birth, after the *Législateur* has withdrawn from the political scene—as Rousseau insisted he must⁵⁶—different circumstances, more congenial to the flourishing of citizens' moral freedom, obtain. In the words of Patrick Riley, “at the end of civic

51 Bernardi 2006, pp. 380-381. “Pour qu'un peuple naissant put goûter les saines maximes de la politique et suivre les règles fondamentales de la raison d'Etat, il faudroit que l'effet put devenir la cause, que l'esprit social qui doit être l'ouvrage de l'institution présidât à l'institution même, et que les hommes fussent avant les lois ce qu'ils doivent devenir par elles”, Rousseau wrote (*Du Contract Social*, II:7, OC 3, p 383).

52 Ibid., II:6, OC 3, p 378

53 Ibid., II:7, OC 3, p 383

54 Ibid., II:7, OC 3, pp. 383-384

55 Abizadeh 2001, p 562. The equation of “convaincre” with reason, and “persuader” with passion, transpires clearly from the following passage in *Emile*: “Il est aisé de convaincre un enfant que ce qu'on veut lui enseigner est utile; mais ce n'est rien de le convaincre si l'on ne sait le persuader. En vain la tranquille raison nous fait approuver ou blâmer, il n'y a que la passion qui nous fasse agir” (*Emile*, III, OC 4, p 453).

56 *Du Contract Social*, II:7, OC 3, p 382

time, they might actually be free, and not just 'forced to be free'⁵⁷. But this would be to underestimate the enduring role played by the passions in sustaining the Republic. Indeed, the paradoxical claim that man should be 'forced to be free' refers to the subject's observance of *established* laws, and not to any temporary inceptive phase of the Republic⁵⁸. In Chapter 5 of this thesis, it was argued that the psychology of citizenship involves channeling the social passions into *amour de la patrie*, relying on this passion of a higher order as the guide of citizens' conduct, and in this regard differs sharply from the psychology of *vertu*, which requires a rational mastery of the passions manifest in the exercise of "liberté morale"⁵⁹. There is very little—if any—textual support for Riley's claim that their participation in civic life within a well-ordered political community will eventually render men more prone to listening to their reason than being swayed by their passions, and much evidence, to the opposite, of Rousseau's persistent belief in the invincible hegemony of *amour-propre*⁶⁰. When Rousseau wrote that all was lost when a citizen came to regard the affairs of the state with indifference, uttering the terrible words "que m'importe?"⁶¹, he meant that such a state of affairs revealed less an intellectual failure than the loss of those beneficent passions that ought to have made this citizen assimilate his own good with that of the Republic, and of the *mœurs* designed to preserve them.

57 Riley 2006, p 368

58 John Hope Mason convincingly argues that this particular phrase expresses "an inescapable implication of the rule of law" (Hope-Mason 1995). Spitz reaches the same conclusion (Spitz 2007).

59 See Chapter 5

60 Naturally, this is not to attribute to Rousseau a simplistically sharp dichotomy between reason and the passions. As Bruno Bernardi rightly argues, reason and the passions are coextensive in Rousseau's anthropology, and mutually facilitate one another's development. In promoting the cultivation of patriotic passions, the institutions bequeathed to the people by the *Législateur* also "enlighten" the people as to where their true interests lie (Bernardi 2010, pp. 3-6). It is through the experience of such passions that the people acquire an understanding of the value of republican politics, and learn to assimilate their own good with the preservation of republican institutions. However, what Rousseau does not hold, it has been argued in this thesis, is that citizens can be expected to emancipate themselves from the empire of the passions altogether, and reach the higher level of *vertu*.

61 *Du Contract Social*, III:15, OC 3, p 429

The second problem with presenting Rousseau's political theory as one whose goal is the pursuit of both republican liberty and moral freedom is that such an interpretation leaves the theory vulnerable to the “Berlinian” charge according to which Rousseau authorized the state to coerce individuals in the name of their own higher and more rational will. Paradoxical phrases from *Du Contract Social*, such as the remark “on le forcera d'être libre”, have been seized upon by Rousseau's detractors, seeking to demonstrate the radically illiberal character of his political theory. As we have seen, most republican thinkers reject this vision on the grounds that 'forcing a citizen to be free' means nothing more sinister than enforcing laws that are the emanation of the general will and without which men would be reduced to a mutually enslaving clash of particular wills. Yet, this line of argument loses much of its force if one regards each citizen's attainment of moral freedom as the true goal of the social contract. In this case, one might well interpret the phrase about 'forcing men to be free' in a quite literal sense, and regard the pedagogical strategy of Emile's *gouverneur* as the blueprint for an invasive, totalitarian politics.

Ultimately, “idealists” and “Berlinians” share the assumption that, notwithstanding their complexity and diversity, Rousseau's ideas on freedom can ultimately be subsumed under a single overarching political project to liberate man from all forms of unwarranted heteronomy, whether it be subjection to the particular will of others or to the empire of passion, that internal 'other'. Let us, then, scrutinise this particular assumption.

3. *Moral Freedom and “l'état civil”*

There are two main reasons why Rousseau's concepts of republican liberty and

moral freedom are often regarded as bound together, neither of which bears close scrutiny.

The first resides in their formal similarity: both republican liberty and moral freedom require agents to impose rules upon themselves. Yet, this formal similarity should not blind us to the substantial difference that exists between them: republican liberty is a good enjoyed within a community, protecting individuals from subservience to the will of particular others, and made possible by their two-faceted identity as *citizens*, members of the sovereign and bearers of the general will, and *subjects*, required to obey the laws that emanate from the general will; moral freedom, by contrast, refers to a relation of the individual to himself, the obedience to self-prescribed laws, where the self truly is the individual self, rather than a sovereign body of which one is but a member, and whose freedom constitutes, in this case, an emancipation from the inner empire of the passions rather than the avoidance of dependence on an alien will⁶². Self-rule thus possesses distinct political and moral variants in Rousseau's philosophy.

The second reason for regarding the two kinds of freedom as entwined lies in Book I, Chapter 8 of *Du Contract Social*: that Rousseau should mention “liberté morale” in his major political text strongly suggests its political relevance. However, there exist even stronger reasons to remain sceptical as to the political import of Rousseau's discussion of freedom in this chapter. For one thing, Rousseau's mention of “liberté morale” in *Du Contract Social* is certainly that and no more than that. Having

62 John Plamenatz rightly emphasizes this distinction: “it is part of Rousseau's creed that the rules imposed by the community on its members are also, when certain conditions hold, imposed by each member on himself. Nevertheless, there are here distinguished two sorts of liberty: of which the first is a right or an ability which individuals enjoy in a community, and the second is a relation of the individual to himself.” (Plamenatz 1972, p 324)

articulated the definition of “liberté morale”, Rousseau immediately departs from the subject and closes the chapter, insisting that “je n'en ai déjà que trop dit sur cet article, et le sens philosophique du mot *liberté* n'est pas ici de mon sujet”⁶³.

This sentence raises two related questions: firstly, whether the concluding remark that the philosophical meaning of “liberté” was not “de mon sujet” means that it was not relevant to the subject-matter of *Du Contract Social* as a whole, or, rather, that it was not relevant to this particular step of the discussion; and secondly, whether, in regretting having said this much about “cet article”, Rousseau referred to the brief discussion of “liberté” contained in the chapter itself or to earlier parts of Book I. If one deduces that the deeper meaning of “liberté” falls outside the field of concern of *Du Contract Social* altogether, one is naturally led to doubt that the pursuit of “liberté morale” forms one of the goals of Rousseau's political theory. If, at the opposite, one believes the “philosophical” discussion of freedom politically relevant, though perhaps not relevant to this particular part of *Du Contract Social*'s argument, then one may judge “liberté morale” itself to be of political importance. But, in this case, it becomes a mystery why Rousseau fails to mention “liberté morale” again a single time in the following three books. The explanation of this mystery may be that, as was earlier speculated, Rousseau considered that this question had already received adequate treatment earlier in the text, and by this he meant not merely the lapidary remarks in Book I, Chapter 8, but Book I as a whole. Yet, the only other chapter of Book I dealing with “liberté” at any length is Chapter 4, “De l'Esclavage”, in which Rousseau referred to freedom in the following terms:

“Renoncer à sa liberté c'est renoncer à sa qualité d'homme, aux droits de l'humanité, même à ses devoirs. [...] Une telle renonciation est incompatible

63 *Du Contract Social*, I:8, OC 3, p 365

avec la nature de l'homme, et c'est ôter toute moralité à ses actions que d'ôter toute liberté à sa volonté."⁶⁴

The 'moral' character of "liberté" is here attached to the notion of a free will: if man cannot determine his actions himself, if their cause does not lie in his own volition, then those actions lack morality. However, the slave owes this loss of a free will not to any kingly appetites or domineering passions of his own, but to the yoke of his master. The violation of freedom addressed in this chapter is identified as the imposition of a master's will on that of a slave, a harsh and iniquitous state of affairs that Rousseau vigorously condemned, whether it be inflicted on mere individuals or entire peoples, and this led Rousseau to reject Grotius's proposition, according to which nations could willingly surrender their freedom to kings, the author of *Du Contract Social* deeming such a proposition contrary to the interests of peoples and to the principles of political right⁶⁵. Thus, while recognising the moral dimension of man's free will, Rousseau spoke here of republican liberty rather than moral freedom, since the obstacle to freedom encountered by the slave was his subjection to the will of a master⁶⁶.

Slavery could, of course, also constitute a threat to moral freedom, in that it destroyed man's mental resolve. "Les esclaves perdent tout dans leurs fers, jusqu'au désir d'en sortir", he wrote two chapters earlier; "ils aiment leur servitude comme les compagnons d'Ulysse aimoient leur abrutissement." If the *external* imposition of force led there to be slaves in the first place, the *internal* scourge of cowardice perpetuated slavery over time⁶⁷. It is also significant that, in the opening chapter of Book I, Rousseau deemed the master just as servile as the slave⁶⁸, since the servility of the

64 Ibid., I:4, OC 3, p 356

65 Ibid., I:4, OC 3, p 355. See also *L'Etat de Guerre*, OC 3, pp. 614-616.

66 Indeed, Rousseau described Grotius as one of "mille Docteurs vendus à la Tyrannie" (Ibid., OC 3, p 616).

67 *Du Contract Social*, I:2, OC 3, p 353

68 Ibid., I:1, OC 3, p 351

master evidently results from a form of inner dependence, such as a quenchless thirst for domination or an enslavement to opinion⁶⁹, rather than from a subjection to another's will. Yet, these internal obstacles to freedom were not the principal focus of Rousseau in *Du Contract Social*, or any of the other works that articulated his political theory. They were evoked merely in passing, and the panoply of political measures proposed in Books III and IV of *Du Contract Social* contained nothing aimed specifically at addressing them. The institutions crafted by the *Législateur* aimed to stimulate the right *kind* of passions rather than to emancipate men from their empire altogether. That republican liberty could exist in the absence of moral freedom was above all illustrated by the example of the Republic of Geneva, populated by avid merchants animated by their passion for money and treasures⁷⁰. Man could be both free from the yoke of a master and “morally” enslaved by his passions. More importantly, as we shall see, slavery itself proved entirely compatible with—indeed, disturbingly congenial to—moral freedom.

That Rousseau's mention of “liberté morale” in *Du Contract Social* came in the chapter entitled “De l'Etat Civil” also deserves attention. As explained above, by “état civil” Rousseau meant the civil state in a generic sense, since he associated it with abuses that often degraded man to a point where he found himself beneath the

69 *Emile*, II, OC 4, p 308

70 “(P)lus passionnés d'argent que de gloire, pour vivre dans l'abondance ils meurent dans l'obscurité, et laissent à leurs enfans pour tout exemple l'amour des trésors qu'ils leur ont acquis” (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, VI:5, OC 2, p 663). It is important to note that this passage from Claire's description of Geneva in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* describes the Genevans as Rousseau idealised them before—and not after—his realisation that Geneva had succumbed to corruption. Their passion for commerce and wealth may have relegated the Genevans far behind the Spartans, Romans, and even Athenians, in the league of political virtue, but it did not prevent them from deserving the name of citizens, and was thus perfectly compatible with the kind of civic life that made Geneva a Republic. Neither should it be thought that the corruption of Geneva of which Rousseau eventually claimed to have grown aware resulted from these passions, since in his *Lettres écrites de la Montagne* Rousseau located its cause instead in the flaws of Geneva's constitution, which had left the *petit conseil* under insufficient supervision, enabling it to accumulate excessive power (*Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, VII, OC 3, p 816).

“sauvage”⁷¹. It thus evidently referred to the nightmare society of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* as much as the Republic of *Du Contract Social*. On this basis, “liberté morale” should be understood as a potential acquisition of human beings entering the civil condition per se, understood in quite general terms, rather than specifically—or even necessarily—a product of the *volonté générale*, and thus an exclusive privilege of the citizen. Indeed, it is noteworthy that Rousseau used the expression “par le *contract social*” to describe man's loss of “liberté naturelle” and acquisition of “liberté civile”, and reverted to the phrase “l'acquis de *l'état civil*” in his brief reference to “liberté morale”.

The relationship between republican liberty and moral freedom, between political and moral self-rule, thus proves far more complicated than is often assumed, and the convergence of the two ideals should not be taken for granted. Indeed, as we are about to see, analysis of the languages of Rousseau's political writings reveals interesting tensions between them.

II. The Languages of Rousseau's Political Theory

1. The Idioms of Du Contract Social

No great text in the history of political theory is perhaps more replete with tensions than *Du Contract Social*, where the theoretical project to outline the principles of political right sits alongside practical considerations regarding the influence of climate on the character of populations, and where the distillation of a modern doctrine of voluntarism goes hand in hand with the expression of a morality of the common good taken from the ancients. Patrick Riley has rightly called Rousseau “the most complex

⁷¹ *Du Contract Social*, I:8, OC 3, p 364

contractarian of the eighteenth century”⁷².

The presence of diverse conceptions of freedom in *Du Contract Social*, and the consequent difficulty of grasping how they relate to one another, reflect both the complexity of Rousseau's reflections on politics and, importantly, the multifarious influences that fed in to them. These influences crystallised into distinct political languages, which coexist in his writings and convey different ideas about freedom. Understanding the role played by each of these languages in Rousseau's texts helps to better discern the place and role of ideas such as republican liberty and moral freedom within his system.

The most prominent political language found on the pages of *Du Contract Social* is that of *republicanism*, easily recognisable by its emphasis on the common weal, the ideal of the citizen, the principle that the people constitute the unique source of all sovereignty, and the conception of liberty as the avoidance of any manner of subjection to the arbitrary will of others.

Alongside its republican rhetoric, the text also displays several other languages. The first of these is the language of *natural law*, with its insistence upon the dignity of man, and its affirmation of moral principles anterior to, and independent of, politics, which are derived from human nature and place constraints on how men may be governed. The second is that of *social contract theory*, which stresses the consent of individuals to political authority as the condition of its legitimacy, and envisions the establishment of the state as a mutually beneficial transaction involving self-interested agents. And the third is that of *stoicism*, identifiable by its focus on man's rational

72 Riley 2006, p 369

capacity to master his passions, and obey a higher law than that of mere appetite, thus rising above the animal realm.

Though distinct, these three latter idioms are related: they all articulate an almost exclusive concern for the treatment and interests of individuals, coming to the political from what might be called an 'individualist' perspective⁷³. As Mark Hulliung remarks, though later divorced under the influences of Kant and Bentham, in Enlightenment France the moral ideal of natural law generally went hand in hand with notions of self-interest and utility⁷⁴. In Rousseau's political writings, the languages of natural law, social contract theory, and stoicism all convey a moral vision of the political centred around the interests of the individual.

Rousseau's strategy in *Du Contract Social* consisted in employing the languages of natural law and social contract theory to anchor the principles of a legitimate political order, and the language of republicanism to theorize the means by which imperfect human beings, animated by passion, might be made to endorse it⁷⁵. The 'individualist' languages served to express the rational foundations of the Republic, and explain why an enlightened and self-interested individual had reason to consent to republican rule; the republican idiom served to express how such a political order could conceivably be brought into being and survive over time. From this perspective, why the text contains an otherwise perplexing mixture of theoretical and practical considerations becomes clear: the “principes du droit politique” justified and legitimated a particular kind of political authority, while the “science du *Législateur*” revealed how to establish and

73 The term 'individualist' does not here denote an opposition between the individual and the community, but rather a perspective on the political that focuses chiefly on individuals.

74 Hulliung 1994, p 5

75 Viroli 1988, ch. 4

sustain it. The language of individualism reflected a concern for the *legitimacy* of the body politic; the language of republicanism manifested a concern for its *possibility*. The first conveyed the benefits that individuals could expect from the social contract, highlighting the securing of rights, and the moral emancipation of man enabled by political institutions, particularly the law; the second emphasized the necessity of the collective exercise and defence of sovereignty.

2. *The Parts and the Whole*

Drawing on natural law and social contract theory also enabled Rousseau to reconcile both the morality of the common good taken from ancient political theory and the Hobbesian insistence on undivided sovereignty—each of which characterises his theory of the general will—with a concern for the liberty of individuals⁷⁶. The fourth chapter of Book II, titled “Des bornes du pouvoir souverain”, perfectly illustrates this reconciliation:

“Les engagements qui nous lient au corps social ne sont obligatoires que parce qu'ils sont mutuels, et leur nature est telle qu'en les remplissant on ne peut travailler pour autrui sans travailler aussi pour soi. Pourquoi la volonté générale est-elle toujours droite, et pourquoi tous veulent-ils constamment le bonheur de chacun d'eux, si ce n'est parce qu'il n'y a personne qui ne s'approprie ce mot *chacun*, et qui ne songe à lui-même en votant pour tous?”⁷⁷

The duties imposed upon individuals by the requirements of civic life were justified on the grounds that they served their own interests, and the rectitude of the general will owed to the fact that each citizen discerned his own good in the common good⁷⁸. A few

76 In this respect, Rousseau utilised the notions of natural law and social contract in a similar way to that in which they had frequently been used in the 17th and 18th centuries, as tools to regulate and limit the abuses of absolutism.

77 *Du Contract Social*, II:4, OC 3, p 373

78 As Rousseau went on to state, the “volonté générale” was thus both a procedural and a substantive ideal, stipulating not only how citizens should act, but also what goals they should pursue, i.e. their own: “la volonté générale pour être vraiment telle doit l'être dans son objet ainsi que dans son essence” (Ibid., II:4, OC 3, p 373). On the substantiality of the general will, see Bernardi 2006, p 368; Waldron 2009b, p 710. Many scholars continue, however, to see in Rousseau's political theory a

lines further, Rousseau summoned a cardinal principle of natural law, claiming that his conception of justice was derived from “la préférence que chacun se donne et par conséquent de la nature de l'homme”⁷⁹. The contrast between this passage from *Du Contract Social* and the vivid remarks about the spirit of ancient citizenship in Book I of *Emile*, where Rousseau evoked Spartan political candidates rejoicing in their own electoral defeat, enlivened by the knowledge that their city lay in the hands of more capable men than they, and Spartan mothers crying tears of rapture over the carcasses of their sons in the aftermath of military victory⁸⁰, is striking. To the sacrificial holism of the Spartans, Rousseau substituted a morality of the common good strongly inflected by modern individualism. He used the languages of natural law and social contract theory to explain why becoming a citizen served—rather than harmed—one's own interests: trading the independence of the natural savage for the rights of the citizen, Rousseau maintained, constituted a propitious deal.

However, this conjunction of a discourse gravitating around the common good and an individualist discourse focusing on men's self-interest does not pervade all of Rousseau's political writings. The individualist languages found in *Du Contract Social* all but vanish in the texts on Geneva, Corsica and Poland: as we saw in Chapter 5, these writings deal at length with how to develop a citizen ethos centred around “amour de la patrie”, as well as the constitutional and economic measures conducive to fomenting it. They are texts which apply the “science du Législateur” to particular states, and in which the language of republicanism takes noticeable precedence over the other political languages present in *Du Contract Social*.

primarily procedural defence of democracy (see, for instance, Urbinati & Saffon 2013, p 449).

⁷⁹ *Du Contract Social*, II:4, OC 3, p 373

⁸⁰ *Emile*, I, OC 4, p 249

Lester Crocker deplors the disappearance of the languages of natural law and social contract theory in those of Rousseau's texts that focus on particular states, where, he argues, an insistence on the common weal ominously overshadows concerns with individual liberty. According to Crocker, moving from the theoretical to the practical reveals the true, monstrously liberticide face of the philosopher's political doctrine⁸¹. But the contention that Rousseau conceived of liberty purely abstractly, much as the rest of Crocker's virulent case against Rousseau, bears no close scrutiny. In his writings on Corsica and Poland, Rousseau sought less to protect republics than to establish them: the imperative of creating the conditions of liberty eclipsed the question of the defence of liberty. But in his writings on Geneva—particularly the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*—that question took centre stage: indeed, Rousseau's chagrin owed precisely to the belief that his compatriots had shown greater verve in enshrining liberty in their constitution than defending it in practice, paving the way for oligarchy⁸². Rousseau's attachment to liberty did not, as Crocker suggests, desert him the instant he turned his attention to particular states.

Hence it would be inaccurate to say that Rousseau tempered his republicanism with references to natural law and social contract theory in *Du Contract Social*—but not in his later political writings—because the former expressed greater concern with liberty than the latter. Rather, Rousseau was addressing different audiences in each case. Rousseau's later political texts took the form of roadmaps for statesmen (independently of whether Rousseau genuinely regarded them as applicable), while *Du Contract Social* articulated, *inter alia*, a justification of the republic addressed to individuals, revealing the advantages of civic life. This justification involved adopting a particular perspective

81 Crocker 1995, p 257

82 *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, VII, OC 3, p 816

on the political, that is entirely absent from the later texts: the perspective of the rational individual considering the costs and benefits of becoming a citizen. Only when discussing the social contract from this particular perspective did Rousseau employ the individualist political languages mentioned above. And significantly, only in this case did he refer to moral freedom, describing it in much the same stoic language as in Book V of *Emile*.

One may thus affirm that while the ideal of political self-rule forms part of a holistic vision of the body politic described with the rhetoric of republicanism, the ideal of moral self-rule belongs to an individualist vision of the body politic expressed with different idioms, including the stoic idiom. And if this is the case, then the presence—or absence—of such languages can be understood to reflect Rousseau's degree of concern with those ideals in his texts. In this regard, the absence of the stoic idiom in Rousseau's writings on Geneva, Corsica and Poland vindicates the argument defended in this thesis, according to which Rousseau's concerns qua *Législateur* did not include facilitating the pursuit of moral freedom. Yet, even in *Du Contract Social* the discussion of “liberté morale” is kept to a bare minimum. Fleeting to the point of confusion, confined to a single sentence, though arguably completed by other isolated passages, the concept's appearance does little to clarify the true place of moral self-rule in Rousseau's political theory. However, the picture becomes much clearer when one compares *Du Contract Social* to an earlier version of that text, discovered in 1882⁸³, referred to as the *Geneva Manuscript*.

83 Derathé in OC 3, p lxxxii

3. The Geneva Manuscript

Though there exist no major doctrinal discrepancies between the two texts, they nevertheless differ in terms of style and content: stylistically, the *Manuscrit* adopts a more professorial tone than the later version, placing greater emphasis upon the artificiality of the social contract; substantially, some of the chapters contained in the *Manuscrit* disappear entirely (in the case of Book I, Chapter 2, “De la Société Générale du Genre Humain”) from the final version, while others (Book II, Chapter 4, “De la Nature des Loix, et du Principe de la Justice Civile” and the section “De la Religion Civile”) have been considerably modified⁸⁴. In both respects, the *Manuscrit* accords greater importance to the 'individualist' perspective on the political than *Du Contract Social*.

The absence in *Du Contract Social* of Book I, Chapter 2 of the *Manuscrit*, devoted to natural law⁸⁵, bears considerable significance. This particular chapter constituted a response to the article 'Droit Naturel', published (and almost certainly authored) by Diderot in the *Encyclopédie* in 1755, which sought to provide a philosophical grounding for the ideal of natural law⁸⁶. In this article, the author developed his case in response to a hypothetical “homme indépendant”, whose two key

84 Derathé in OC 3, pp.lxxxii-lxxxix

85 Rousseau gave this chapter the title 'Du droit naturel et de la société générale' before crossing it out (Derathé in OC 3, p 1410 [note d]). The title that Rousseau eventually chose is somewhat misleading because the concept of “société générale du genre humain” comes from Bossuet's *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte* (1709) (I:2), while Rousseau's chapter, as we shall see, constitutes an effort to undermine Diderot's conception of natural law, founded on “la volonté générale de l'espèce” ('Droit Naturel', ix) rather than Bossuet's theological vision of a humanity united as children of God. On this point, see Marcos 1996, pp. 7-8 [note 27]).

86 Diderot seems to have written the article 'Droit Naturel' for the *Encyclopédie* because he believed that the contribution that had originally been commissioned on that topic, penned by Boucher d'Argis, confined itself to recounting the history of theories on natural law, without endeavouring to demonstrate its existence, which was taken for granted. Diderot believed, to the contrary, that this could not be assumed and required a demonstration, particularly after the publication of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, regarded by Diderot as an attack on the ideal of natural law. On this point, see Bernardi 2006, pp. 381-386.

characteristics were a pronounced self-love⁸⁷ and the possession of “violent” and overwhelming passions⁸⁸. The “homme indépendant”, by insisting upon his right to ride roughshod over society in return for according the same right to others⁸⁹, represented a serious challenge to natural law, and Diderot responded by debunking the notion that there could exist a moral basis for such folly. The mere will of an individual, he argued, lacks the legitimacy to impose rules on the rest of society⁹⁰; the general will of humankind (Diderot used the term “volonté générale”), reflected in the positive laws of all civilised nations, in the practices of savages, in the natural passions of indignation and resentment, and even in the tacit conventions governing relations between scoundrels⁹¹, is the only true source of natural law⁹².

The article amounted to an attack on the anthropology propounded by Rousseau in his *Second Discourse*, for it implied that no moral standard could be derived from an amoral state of nature populated by isolated men: if such, indeed, had been man's original condition, then what source of justice remained for society? For Diderot, natural law presupposed the natural sociability of man.

In the *Manuscrit*, Rousseau recognised the amorality of the state of nature he had described in the *Discours*, yet he refused to jettison the ideal of natural law. To Rousseau, lucidity as to man's primitive origins did not preclude belief in a cosmic order to which it was man's moral duty to conform. Independently of man's solitude in the state of nature, there existed a divine law, a moral constitution, to which man's

87 “(P)ersonne ne m'est plus cher que je me le suis à moi-même”, he declares ('Droit Naturel', iii).

88 He is described as “tourmenté par des passions si violentes que la vie même lui devient un poids honéroux s'il ne les satisfait” (Ibid. iii).

89 Ibid., iii

90 Ibid., v

91 Ibid., viii

92 Ibid., vi

conscience is the portal. However, this law could not serve alone as the foundation of society, for two reasons.

Firstly, because man only acquired knowledge of the natural law through his experience of political institutions. Pre-political man's failure to grasp the principles of morality constitutes an important theme of the *Manuscrit's* Book I, Chapter 2. Inspired by the empiricism of Condillac, Rousseau rejected the notion that innate ideas of natural law populated the virginal human mind, insisting, instead, that men acquire such ideas through their observation of existing political orders. “(C)e n'est que de l'ordre social établi parmi nous que nous tirons les idées de celui que nous imaginons”, he contended⁹³. In man, the experience of civil life comes prior to—and forms the precondition of—any awareness of morality: law precedes justice⁹⁴. “(N)ous ne commençons proprement à devenir hommes qu'après avoir été Citoyens”, Rousseau insisted⁹⁵. Thus, a legitimate political order can only emerge from within a pre-existing society, however imperfect: the remedy resides within the evil itself⁹⁶. Diderot's sublime notion of a “volonté générale de l'espèce” could not serve as the original principle of human government because such a complex idea was entirely alien to the human mind prior to its experience of politics. Contra the proponents of man's natural sociability, Rousseau emphasized the irreducible artificiality of the social contract. “(C)e prétendu traité social dicté par la nature est une véritable chimère”, he fumed⁹⁷. This also explains why Rousseau turned his back on the idyllic age of gold, for which he had seemed to express such nostalgic regret in the earlier *Second Discourse*: in this

93 *Manuscrit de Genève*, I:2, OC 3, p 287

94 “(L)a loi est antérieure à la justice, et non pas la justice à la loi”, Rousseau wrote in another passage that is absent from the final version of *Du Contract Social*, found in Book II, Chapter 4 of the *Manuscrit* (Ibid., II:4, OC 3, p 329).

95 Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 287

96 “(E)fforçons nous de tirer du mal même le remède qui doit le guérir. [...] Montrons [...] dans l'art perfectionné la réparation des maux que l'art commencé fit à la nature” (Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 288).

97 Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 284

pre-political condition, for all his enviable felicity, man lacked the love of virtue⁹⁸.

Secondly, because, even if they possessed an awareness of natural law, it remained unlikely that men would abide by it, or, for that matter, even grasp its precepts. And here the manner in which Rousseau presented his case deserves particular attention. Opposing Diderot himself (referred to as “le sage”) to the “homme indépendant” of his article⁹⁹, Rousseau emphasized the contrast between their respective attitudes towards natural law. Natural law, Rousseau insisted, is both cold and remote. He proposed that it be renamed “la loi de la raison”¹⁰⁰, as if to emphasize its inaccessibility. Such a law, while perhaps eloquent to the ears of the celestial few, such as the editor of the *Encyclopédie*, holds no sway over a man dominated by his passions like the “homme indépendant”. Paradoxically, man's recognition of the natural law comes at a time when the force of the social passions considerably weakens the influence it can exert over him¹⁰¹. A social contract founded on natural law alone thus seems destined to be either ignored or violated, since natural man lacks an awareness of natural law and social man's passions impel him to violate it¹⁰².

Without a Lycurgus, a Numa, or a Moses, capable of creating a true body politic through appeal to the transcendent, and imposing the yoke of the law on all, men will remain prisoners of the nightmare described at the end of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, a condition in which the innocent bliss of the state of nature has been lost, but the

98 Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 283

99 Ibid., I:2, OC 3, pp. 284-285. That Rousseau borrowed the conceptual character of the “homme indépendant” from Diderot is beyond doubt, since the words he put in his mouth are quotations from the article 'Droit Naturel'. The link between Diderot himself and the “sage” is established by the idea that the latter seeks to “étouffer” his interlocutor, the very same term used by Diderot in his article ('Droit Naturel', v).

100 *Manuscrit de Genève*, I:2, OC 3, p 284

101 “(L)es notions de la Loi naturelle [...] ne commencent à se développer que quand le développement antérieur des passions rend impuissans tous ses préceptes” (Ibid., II:4, OC 3, p 329).

102 Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 284

advantages of society have yet to materialise, where the most impetuous passions prosper untrammelled, and a fraudulent social contract licenses the oppression of the poor by the rich; and this, indeed, forms the paradigm within which the “*homme indépendant*” determines his conduct. Even if cognisant of the natural law, why would he respect its principles in the absence of guarantees that others will reciprocate¹⁰³?

Only the intervention of a *Législateur*, Rousseau argued, by crafting positive laws that approximate the natural law, can bring men to live by its principles, at least within the confines of their *patrie*. Yet, it is clear from the outset that the founder of the Republic is to appeal to men's passions rather than to their reason. In invoking religion to support morality, he must bear in mind that “les notions sublimes du Dieu des sages, les douces loix de la fraternité qu'il nous impose, les vertus sociales des ames pures, qui sont le vrai culte qu'il veut de nous, echaperont toujours à la multitude”¹⁰⁴. The enlightenment required to grasp the “notions sublimes” of the God of sages, and the principles that Diderot had associated with natural law in his article, always (“*toujours*”)—and not merely temporarily, pending further cognitive development—elude the “multitude”, composed of men who, like Diderot's “*homme indépendant*”, are driven by “mille passions horribles et destructrices”¹⁰⁵. As a result, Rousseau held, most historical *Législateurs* invented parochial and violent religions, which the laws, who initially owed their authority to them, were then employed to temper¹⁰⁶.

In the same vein, the discussion of the general will deserves particular attention. Rousseau's definition of “*volonté générale*” as “un acte pur de l'entendement qui

103Ibid., I:2, OC 3, pp. 284-285

104Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 285

105Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 285

106Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 285

raisonne dans le silence des passions sur ce que l'homme peut exiger de son semblable, et sur ce que son semblable est en droit d'exiger de lui"¹⁰⁷ is taken directly from Diderot's article¹⁰⁸. Diderot's conception of the general will brings together three themes, which are very close to those expressed by the three 'individualist' political languages we identified in *Du Contract Social*: it is the gateway to natural law¹⁰⁹; it directs us towards our true interests¹¹⁰; and it involves willingly submitting to a law rationally discerned in the silence of the passions¹¹¹. In the *Manuscrit*, Rousseau proved far more loquacious on the question of the citizens' receptivity to the general will than he would do in *Du Contract Social*, which has surprisingly little to say on the subject. Where, Rousseau asked in the *Manuscrit*, is the man capable of such disincarnated reflection? The text offered a depressing answer:

“(C)omme l'art de généraliser ainsi ses idées est un des exercices les plus difficiles et les plus tardifs de l'entendement humain, le commun des hommes sera-t-il jamais en état de tirer de cette manière de raisonner les règles de sa conduite, et quand il faudroit consulter la volonté générale sur un acte particulier, combien de fois n'arriveroit-il pas à un homme bien intentionné de se tromper sur la règle ou sur l'application et de ne suivre que son penchant en pensant obéir à la loi? [...] (I)l faudroit qu'il ne se fut élevé dans son cœur aucune de ces passions qui parlent plus haut que la conscience”¹¹².

Earlier, Rousseau discarded the age of gold due to its inhabitants' ignorance of virtue, yet now he questioned whether even fully civilised men could abide by moral principles. Grasping a complex idea like the “volonté générale” required overcoming the double obstacle of the inherent difficulty of applying such an abstract concept and the deceiving influence of the passions. Beyond a small minority of sages, few could be expected to possess the enlightenment and virtue necessary for conforming to this *vox*

107Ibid., I:2, OC 3, p 286

108'Droit Naturel', ix

109Ibid., vii

110Ibid., vii

111Ibid., ix. Diderot speaks of “soumission à la volonté générale”.

112*Manuscrit de Genève*, I:2, OC 3, pp. 286-287

*Dei*¹¹³ through reason alone, which is why the *Législateur* must create a religion, craft institutions and invent traditions that foment patriotic passions, which in turn *incline* citizens to live up to the demands of the general will: only on this condition is the social contract workable.

It is of huge significance that Rousseau's vision of politics as the management of passions, rather than an appeal to reason alone, emerged in response to Diderot's rationalist defence of natural law. In this regard, one may fruitfully compare the thoughts on the general will expressed in the *Manuscrit* with those enunciated in the article 'Economie Politique', the first text in which Rousseau invoked the concept¹¹⁴. In 'Economie Politique', Rousseau described the “volonté générale” as the will of the body politic conceived as a moral being, ever tending towards its conservation, and the source of justice and the laws¹¹⁵. He did not, however, associate it with the cluster of ideas attached to it in the *Manuscrit*. The “volonté générale” is not clearly associated with receptivity to a higher moral standard; quite to the contrary, Rousseau emphasized its moral circumscription, explaining that the “volonté générale” of a faction within the state is just within the confines of the faction itself, but unjust with regard to the state¹¹⁶, whose own “volonté générale” may in turn prove morally reprehensible towards other nations¹¹⁷. Rousseau does not trumpet the relationship between the “volonté générale” and a rational deliberation in the silence of the passions either. The claim that only “la plus sublime vertu” can lead citizens to distinguish the general will from their particular

113“(L)a voix du peuple est en effet la voix de Dieu” (*Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 246).

114The article 'Economie Politique' appeared in the same volume of the *Encyclopédie* as the article 'Droit Naturel' in 1755, and thus was, in all likelihood, written before the *Manuscrit*. It does, however, seem to have been written—or, at least, redacted—after Rousseau became aware of the article 'Droit Naturel', since it contains a reference to the latter (*Economie Politique*, OC 3, p 247).

115Ibid., OC 3, p 245

116Ibid., OC 3, p 247

117Ibid., OC 3, p 246

will¹¹⁸ is a mere tautology, given Rousseau's definition of “vertu” in this article as “conformité de la volonté particuliere à la générale”¹¹⁹. Only in the *Manuscrit*, through his engagement with Diderot, did Rousseau expressly characterise the “volonté générale” in terms of the languages of natural law, social contract theory, and stoicism, and this, as we have seen, was accompanied by serious doubts as to its accessibility.

Hence the presence of 'individualist' idioms in *Du Contract Social* can be traced back to Rousseau's reflections on the article 'Droit Naturel', which seminally manifest themselves in the *Manuscrit*. The *Manuscrit* contains both a rational analysis of the costs and benefits of civic life and the expression of grievous doubts as to the “multitude”'s capacity to grasp this analysis. It is a dialectic text, revealing how different individualist languages fit together as part of a single 'perspective of the sage' on the social contract, and confronting this perspective to that of the *Législateur*, among whose distinguishing virtues is a greater awareness of the limitations of other men. “Ce fut souvent l'erreur des sages de parler au vulgaire leur langage au lieu du sien; aussi n'en furent-ils jamais entendus”, Rousseau wrote, clearly writing from the latter perspective. “Il est mille sortes d'idées qui n'ont qu'une langue et qu'il est impossible de traduire au Peuple. Les vües trop générales et les objets trop éloignés sont également hors de sa portée”¹²⁰.

One might well ask whether Rousseau did not, as an afterthought, deem some of the notions discussed in the *Manuscrit*'s chapter on natural law itself too ethereal for the “vulgar”, and therefore politically irrelevant. Scholars have struggled to explain the absence of this chapter in *Du Contract Social*: Charles Vaughan's contention that

118Ibid., OC 3, p 248

119Ibid., OC 3, p 252

120*Manuscrit de Genève*, II:2, OC 3, p 316

Rousseau rid himself of the chapter because its attack on natural law sapped the foundations of the “principes du droit politique” is rightly rejected as erroneous by Robert Derathé, since Rousseau's target in this chapter was natural sociability, and not natural law itself¹²¹; yet, Derathé's own thesis that Rousseau left the chapter out on the grounds that publically squabbling with Diderot, with whom he had, by 1762, become estranged, would have diminished the majesty of his political masterpiece¹²² is itself far from unassailable, since Rousseau allowed many such disputes to surface in *Emile*¹²³, a work to which he attached even greater importance.

It is plausible that Rousseau may have edited this chapter out of *Du Contract Social* because it revealed a fundamental tension in his thought between the ideals of political and moral self-rule, which, in the interest of presenting a robust and coherent political theory, he had reason to circumvent. Indeed, Rousseau's modifications of other chapters of the *Manuscrit* proceeded from precisely this logic, whether it be the watering down of his “religion civile” (on which more below), or the chalking out of the final part of Book II, Chapter 4, on the nature of the laws, dealing with natural law and the relationship between law and virtue. Here Rousseau had insisted upon the law's emancipatory effects, contending that its greatest advantage lay in giving man a clear vision of the true foundations of justice and natural right¹²⁴. Everything dutiful that the law inspires men to do beyond what it itself specifies he referred to as “civilité”, after having initially chosen the word “humanité”¹²⁵. “(L)'habitude qui nous dispose à pratiquer ces actes même à notre préjudice est ce qu'on nomme force ou vertu”, he

121Derathé in OC 3, p lxxxvii

122Ibid., p lxxxviii

123Rousseau's refutation of the thesis according to which the source of the differential social roles of men and women lies in convention rather than nature, a thesis defended in Diderot's *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (1748), is a striking example.

124*Manuscrit de Genève*, II:4, OC 3, p 328

125Derathé in OC 3, p 1424

added¹²⁶. Elsewhere, in Book I, Chapter 7, Rousseau spoke of forcing (“obliger”) men to conform their will to their reason, and teaching the public (“le public”) to know what it wants. “Alors”, he wrote, “des lumieres publiques resultera la vertu des particuliers, et cette union de l'entendement et de la volonte dans le corps social”¹²⁷. In *Du Contract Social*, Rousseau reproduced the sentence, but removed the words “resultera la vertu des particuliers”¹²⁸. These passages, which touched on moral self-rule, had no place in the definitive text.

According to this interpretation, the enduringly perplexing character of *Du Contract Social* owes much to Rousseau's efforts to downplay the divergence between the perspective of the sage and the perspective of the *Législateur*, and to ignore the distance separating moral theory from passional politics. This tension itself is perhaps best symbolized by Rousseau's decision to publish *Du Contract Social* the same year as *Emile*, presenting his respective ideals of citizen and man to the public simultaneously yet separately¹²⁹.

And arguably, some of the most contentious passages of *Du Contract Social*, such, for instance, as the phrase “on le forcera d'être libre”, make better sense within the framework introduced in the *Manuscrit's* inaugural chapter (the first chapter of Book I is a mere paragraph dealing with the general purpose of the work). The pertinent question may be less to enquire what it means to be forced to be free than to ask from whose

126 *Manuscrit de Genève*, II:4, OC 3, pp. 328-329

127 *Ibid.*, I:7, OC 3, p 311

128 “Alors des lumieres publiques résulte l'union de l'entendement et de la volonte” (*Du Contract Social*, II:6, OC 3, p 380). This particular omission suggests that Rousseau jettisoned an initial belief in a future possibility of “vertu” among citizens (Rousseau used the future tense in the *Manuscrit*).

129 That these two major texts express the double culmination of a single thought process is strongly suggested by the fact that Rousseau not only published them, but also worked on them, together. Rousseau began writing *Du Contract Social* before *Emile*, but he completed *Emile* (which is a far longer text) before *Du Contract Social* (Bernardi 2012).

perspective one is 'forced', and from whose perspective one is 'free'.

In fine, that Rousseau chose to remove much of the rhetoric of natural law contained in the experimental *Manuscrit de Genève* when it came to the final redaction of *Du Contract Social* strongly suggests, firstly, that establishing the conditions of political sovereignty constituted the prime aim of his political theory, the question of man's possible moral emancipation inside the political community receding to the periphery; and secondly, that there may have existed, in the philosopher's mind, a tension between the pursuit of these two ideals.

III. The Sage and the Citizen

The tension between republican liberty and moral freedom constitutes a recurring theme in Rousseau's texts. It is found in the early works of the 1750s and in those that came after 1762. In this final part, we shall analyse three passages in which it surfaced: the comparison between Socrates and Cato of Utica in the article *Economie Politique*; the political assessment of Christian and Pagan religions in Book IV, Chapter 8 of *Du Contract Social*; and the discussion of slavery and revolt in the Second Letter of the unfinished epistolary novel *Emile et Sophie*.

1. Socrates and Cato

The context in which Rousseau invoked the characters of Socrates and Cato of Utica in the article *Economie Politique* was that of his discussion of “amour de la patrie”, where the author expressed a preference for a parochial but real love of fatherland over the nobler but mostly virtual cosmopolitan love of mankind¹³⁰.

¹³⁰*Economie Politique*, OC 3, pp. 254-255

Rousseau attributed to “amour de la patrie” a particular kind of intensity, described as “cette ardeur bouillante et sublime dont ne brille pas la plus pure vertu quand elle en est séparée”¹³¹. He then immediately summoned Socrates and Cato to illustrate his point:

“Osons opposer Socrate même à Caton: l'un étoit plus philosophe, et l'autre plus citoyen. Athènes étoit déjà perdue, et Socrate n'avoit plus de patrie que le monde entier: Caton porta toujours la sienne au fond de son cœur; il ne vivoit que pour elle et ne put lui survivre. La vertu de Socrate est celle du plus sage des hommes: mais entre César et Pompée, Caton semble un dieu parmi les mortels. L'un instruit quelques particuliers, combat les sophistes, et meurt pour la vérité: l'autre défend l'état, la liberté, les lois contre les conquérans du monde, et quitte enfin la terre quand il n'y voit plus de patrie à servir. Un digne élève de Socrate seroit le plus vertueux de ses contemporains; un digne émule de Caton en seroit le plus grand. La vertu du premier feroit son bonheur, le second chercheroit son bonheur dans celui de tous. Nous serions instruits par l'un et conduits par l'autre, et cela seul décideroit de la préférence: car on n'a jamais fait un peuple de sages, mais il n'est pas impossible de rendre un peuple heureux.”¹³²

Rousseau enunciated three key differences between Socrates and Cato. The first concerned their respective *vocations*: Socrates was a philosopher, whose role it was to instruct men and defend the truth; Cato was a citizen, whose purpose was to lead men and defend liberty. The second difference pertained to each's *context*, to each's relationship to his home city: Socrates's city, Athens, was “already lost”, by which Rousseau meant that its republican institutions, once such a formidable rampart of liberty, were in decline, and Socrates, like the Stoics after him, had turned his sights beyond the rubble of the Polis, to the wider world, in a quest for universalism; Cato's city, the Republic of Rome, at the opposite, still stood, though threatened, and its defence gave him his *raison d'être*, such that he could not accept the idea of outliving it¹³³. And the third difference regarded the two men's respective *goals*: Socrates's “vertu” belonged to him alone, and his instructions benefited only a few men, whereas

131Ibid., OC 3, p 255

132Ibid., OC 3, p 255

133Rousseau expressed the relationship he wished to see between Polish citizens and their fatherland in much the same language: “il ne voit que la patrie, il ne vit que pour elle; sitôt qu'il est seul, il est nul: sitôt qu'il n'a plus de patrie, il n'est plus et s'il n'est pas mort, il est pis” (*Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, IV, OC 3, p 966).

Cato's "bonheur" could be shared with an entire people. Indeed, he himself could enjoy it only in common with his fellow citizens¹³⁴.

Socrates thus represented stateless virtue, while Cato embodied fervent citizenship. In an earlier text on Socrates and Plato, called *Parallèle de Socrate et de Caton* (1750-1752¹³⁵), Rousseau revealingly declared:

"Socrate pouvoit vivre sous des Tyrans, car il étoit bien sur de conserver par tout sa liberté, Caton abhorroit la Tyrannie, car il ne lui suffisoit pas d'être libre, il vouloit que tous les Citoyens le fussent."¹³⁶

To the philosophical life of Socrates corresponded one ideal of freedom, and to the patriotic life of Cato corresponded another: the first an internal, spiritual freedom, associated with "la plus pure vertu", and resting in the soul of man, beyond the reach of tyrants; the second a freedom attached to the very status of citizen, to that spirit whose value is not to be expressed in words¹³⁷, and which men could experience only together, free from the clutches of tyranny.

The implicit conclusion of the comparison between Socrates and Cato was thus that the kind of freedom Rousseau associated with Socrates differed from the republican liberty defended by Cato in that the former could prosper in a disordered society, whereas the latter could prosper only within a framework of republican institutions. In Book IV, Chapter 8 of *Du Contract Social*, Rousseau was to further accentuate this

134Rousseau drew a very similar dichotomy between "Sage" and "Héros" in the *Discours sur la Vertu du Héros*: "le soin de sa propre félicité fait toute l'occupation du Sage, et c'en est bien assez sans doute pour remplir la tâche d'un homme ordinaire", he wrote. "Les vues du vrai Héros s'étendent plus loin; le bonheur des hommes est son objet, et c'est à ce sublime travail qu'il consacre la grande ame qu'il a reçue du Ciel." (*Discours sur la Vertu du Héros*, OC 2, p 1263) Laurence Cooper is undoubtedly mistaken to regard Rousseau as a thinker who took his place alongside Plato "by proffering the philosopher as the highest human type" (Cooper 2002, p 109).

135Gagnebin in OC 3, p 1893

136*Parallèle de Socrate et de Caton*, OC 3, p 1897

137Thucydides, *Pericles's Funeral Oration*

contrast.

2. *The Machiavellian Moment*

Rousseau's chapter on civil religion constitutes an effort to imagine the role of religion in an authentic republic, founded on the timeless principles of political right. It was considered in its time the most controversial of the book because Rousseau's proposal, a watered-down version of Christianity combining elementary moral rules of conduct with a strict proscription of intolerance, was perceived as a direct affront to the Church¹³⁸. Rousseau certainly recognised the social usefulness, indeed the *necessity*, of religion, for without some moral standard to regulate men's conduct, social life would be impossible. “(J)amais Etat ne fut fondé que la Religion ne lui servit de base”, he plainly wrote¹³⁹. But Rousseau could not make the existing Christian religion (in any of its versions) part of the political package prescribed in his book, for reasons that lay in the opening section of the chapter, which established a daring comparison between Christianity and ancient religions.

Rousseau castigated Christianity, particularly in its Roman Catholic form, for contributing to the division of man's soul between two legislations, two *patries*, Church and State. In ancient times, each Pagan city possessed its own religion, and worshipped its specific Gods. Politics and religion were entwined: men lived, fought, and died for their Gods with the blessing of their princes. This was the religion of *citizen*, rooted in one specific community¹⁴⁰. Christianity, by contrast, left man torn between different allegiances, and subject to contradictory duties. Jesus sundered the spiritual and the

138Trousseau 2000, p 336

139*Du Contract Social*, IV:8, OC 3, p 464

140Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 460

political, creating a rift between man's loyalties to prince and priest, and giving birth to tensions that have never ceased to afflict Christendom¹⁴¹. The clergy emerged as a second sovereign power within the state¹⁴², something Rousseau vigorously condemned. "Toutes les institutions qui mettent l'homme en contradiction avec lui-même ne valent rien", he vituperated¹⁴³.

Rousseau's condemnation of the baneful dualism imposed on man by the tension between Church and State did not, however, blind him to the disadvantages of the ancient religion of citizen. These were, in fact, considerable. Rousseau criticised the Pagans' habit of drowning the relationship between man and the divine in a sea of "vain" rituals and ceremonies, and rejected the mutual hostility fomented between peoples by such religions, whose bellicose Gods inspired perpetual conflicts between the ancient world's cities, causing much human blood to be spilt¹⁴⁴.

Between these two equally unsatisfying kinds of religion, the religion of the divided soul and the religion of ancient citizens, Rousseau perceived the possibility of a third kind of religion, whose essence could be drawn from Christianity itself. This he called the religion of *man*, a universal faith aspiring to encompass the whole of humanity, resting on the idea of an eternal and unique God, before whom all men are brothers. A sober, discrete faith, lacking in temples, altars and rites, it rested first and foremost in the conscience of its followers. It found its finest expression in the Gospels and in the philosophy of divine natural law¹⁴⁵, and its followers formed a single society

141Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 462

142Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 463. Rousseau did not, however, regard this to be an affliction unique to Christianity: he also associated it with Islam, Buddhism and the Shinto religion (Ibid., IV:8, pp. 462-464).

143Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 464

144Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 465

145Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 464

whose bonds outlasted death itself¹⁴⁶.

Rousseau's "religion civile" sought to adapt this purified version of Christianity to the empirical reality of a world composed of particular societies, to make the humanism of a great universal religion compatible with the loyalty owed by citizens to their political community, to reconcile spiritual and political power, or, as he put it, "réunir les deux têtes de l'aigle", so that the state could be properly constituted¹⁴⁷.

However, it is important to remark that the author of *Du Contract Social* was under no illusions as to the considerable difficulty of this task. While commending it as a religion of peace and harmony, he nevertheless deemed the religion of man problematic from a political perspective. True, unlike Roman Catholicism, it did not ostentatiously provide man with a parallel set of laws to abide by, and a second authority to obey, but it did inspire a detachment from worldly affairs that could weaken social ties and play into the hands of despots.

Rousseau affirmed his adherence to Pierre Bayle's famous paradox according to which the more piously Christians behave individually, the less likely they are to form a free society together¹⁴⁸. By contrast with his illustrious forebear Montesquieu, who dismissed Bayle's claim in *De L'Esprit des Lois*, arguing that Christianity had no natural affinity with despotism¹⁴⁹, Rousseau vindicated the paradox, contending that such a relationship did indeed exist.

146Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 465

147Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 463

148Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697)

149*De L'Esprit des Lois*, XXIV & XXV

Though he agreed that true Christians would make just magistrates and dutiful citizens, resistant to the temptations of vanity and disdainful of luxury¹⁵⁰, Rousseau denied that a society composed of such men could possess the robustness of great cities such as Sparta or Rome. Even if these men's duties as Christians could be made to converge perfectly with their duties as citizens (something Rousseau—if only for the sake of argument—conceded, since he evoked Christian soldiers braving death on the battlefield¹⁵¹), in the long run the spirit of Christianity inevitably detached the citizen's heart from the state¹⁵². A society of perfectly pious men would simply be too perfect: for Rousseau, it is weakness that brought men together, and the passions that keep them together, both of which would be diminished in this case. The vice of this society would lie precisely in its shortage of vices: it would lack those connective tissues that truly make an aggregation of men a society¹⁵³. Additionally, the Christians' acute concern with moral purity and the afterlife would make them dangerously indifferent to the fate of society:

“Le Christianisme est une religion toute spirituelle occupée uniquement des choses du Ciel: la patrie du Chrétien n'est pas de ce monde. Il fait son devoir, il est vrai, mais il le fait avec une profonde indifférence sur le bon ou mauvais succès de ses soins. Pourvu qu'il n'ait rien à se reprocher, peu lui importe que tout aille bien ou mal ici bas. Si l'Etat est florissant, à peine ose-t-il jouir de la félicité publique, il craint de s'enorgueillir de la gloire de son pays; si l'Etat déperit, il bénit la main de Dieu qui s'appesantit sur son peuple.”¹⁵⁴

Rousseau described the perfect Christian as inhabited by a politically destructive form of selfishness: the protection of his conscience from the stain of guilt ultimately meant

¹⁵⁰*Du Contract Social*, IV:8, OC 3, pp. 465-466

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, IV:8, OC 3, p 466

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, IV:8, OC 3, p 465

¹⁵³“(C)ette société supposée ne seroit avec toute sa perfection ni la plus forte ni la plus durable: A force d'être parfaite, elle manqueroit de liaison; son vice destructeur seroit dans sa perfection même”, Rousseau wrote (*Ibid.*, IV:8, OC 3, p 465). He reiterated this thesis in a letter to his friend Usteri penned on 18 July 1763, insisting that Christianity detached men from society. “Ce sont des établissements purement humains dont, par conséquent le vrai Christianisme nous détache comme de tout ce qui n'est que terrestre: il n'y a que les vices des hommes qui rendent ces établissements nécessaires, et il n'y a que les passions humaines qui les conservent”, Rousseau repeated (*Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau au ministre Leonhard Usteri*, 18.07.1763, CC 17, p 63).

¹⁵⁴*Du Contract Social*, IV:8, OC 3, p 466

more to him than the fate of society. But in the harsh crucible of politics, there is little room for moral purity, and those unwilling to dirty their hands are destined for servitude. Should a tyrant emerge from their midst (and did the community of Angels itself not beget the Devil?¹⁵⁵), they are lost. Because their scruples forbid them from spilling blood to prevent the abuses of those less morally celestial than themselves, they prove incapable of upholding justice and liberty, and offering any resistance to the clutches of their oppressors¹⁵⁶. Rousseau's conclusion has at the very least the merit of clarity:

“(J)e me trompe en disant une République Chrétienne; chacun de ces deux mots exclut l'autre. Le Christianisme ne prêche que servitude et dépendance. Son esprit est trop favorable à la tyrannie pour qu'elle n'en profite pas toujours. Les vrais Chrétiens sont faits pour être esclaves; ils le savent et ne s'en émeuvent gueres; cette courte vie a trop peu de prix à leurs yeux.”¹⁵⁷

One might well call the first part of the chapter on civil religion Rousseau's 'Machiavellian moment', since, like his Florentine predecessor¹⁵⁸, Rousseau recognised both the political importance of religion and the necessity of resting his civil religion on Christian foundations given the hegemony of that religion in the modern world, and yet deplored the perfect Christian's indifference towards worldly affairs, his unwillingness to take vigorous measures in order to protect liberty, and his spirit of submission, born out of excessive faith in providence. Another element of Machiavelli's critique of the Christian spirit that had particular resonance with Rousseau was the denunciation of the

155Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau au ministre Leonhard Usteri, 18.07.1763, CC 17, p 63

156*Du Contract Social*, IV:8, OC 3, p 466

157Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 467. “(Q)u'importe qu'on soit libre ou serf dans cette vallée de miseres? L'essenciel est d'aller en paradis, et la résignation n'est qu'un moyen de plus pour cela.” (Ibid., IV:8, OC 3, p 466).

158Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livy*, II:2. For an excellent comparative study of Rousseau and Machiavelli on the question of civil religion, see Beiner 1993. Beiner argues that Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau all discerned the incompatibility of Christianity with the spirit of particular states, and devised civil religions that were modified versions of it: Machiavelli “paganised” Christianity, transforming it into a political means of shaping men into citizens, while Hobbes “judaised” Christianity, drawing on the Old Testament to strip it of its other-worldly aspirations, which threatened temporal authority. Rousseau, according to Beiner, ultimately failed to imagine a civil religion that could meet his own criteria.

Christians' condemnation of pride and contempt for worldly honour. In one particular passage, Rousseau highlighted the contrast between ancients and moderns in this regard by imagining a battle opposing an army of humble Christians to an army of proud Spartans or impetuous Romans:

“Survient-il quelque guerre étrangère? Les Citoyens marchent sans peine au combat; nul d'entre eux ne songe à fuir; ils font leur devoir, mais sans passion pour la victoire; ils savent plutôt mourir que vaincre. Qu'ils soient vainqueurs ou vaincus, qu'importe? La providence ne sait-elle pas mieux qu'eux ce qu'il leur faut? Qu'on imagine quel parti un ennemi fier, impétueux, passionné peut tirer de leur stoïcisme! Mettez vis-à-vis d'eux ces peuples généreux que dévorait l'ardent amour de la gloire et de la patrie, supposez votre république chrétienne vis-à-vis de Sparte ou de Rome; les pieux chrétiens seront battus, écrasés, détruits avant d'avoir eu le temps de se reconnoître, ou ne devront leur salut qu'au mépris que leur ennemi concevra pour eux.”¹⁵⁹

On the one hand, a passionless sense of duty and surrender to providence; on the other, ardent pride and love of fatherland: as if pitting his own ideals against one another, Rousseau cruelly confronted the ethic of *man* to the ethic of *citizen*. And he located the source of the true citizen's martial superiority in his pride: when Rousseau described the ancient soldiers as inhabited by “l'ardent amour de la gloire et de la patrie”, as, “fier”, “impétueux”, “passionné”, and inclined to feel “mépris” for their adversaries, he may as well have written that they were animated by unbridled *amour-propre*, unlike their frail Christian opponents, who despised glory, blushed at the slightest feeling of pride, and devoted their lives to subduing their *amour-propre*¹⁶⁰. That Rousseau should conclude his discussion of Bayle's paradox by confronting these divergent ideals is fitting, since the paradox's implication was precisely that political and moral virtues stood fundamentally at odds.

¹⁵⁹*Du Contract Social*, IV:8, OC 3, pp. 466-467

¹⁶⁰As Laurence Cooper remarks, it is *amour-propre* that leads men to combat—rather than merely deplore—worldly injustice. This moral indignation arises “only when one cares about having one's self-worth respected, or about having one's values respected, by others”. “And it is only *amour-propre* that gives rise to that kind of concern”, he concludes (Cooper 1998, 669).

Rousseau's oppositions between Socrates and Cato on the one hand, and between man and citizen on the other, overlap in important ways. Both Socrates and the perfect Christian were criticized for their detachment from political affairs, and consequent toleration of servitude: if Socrates could retain his freedom under the yoke of tyranny, so too could the Christian deserve salvation in chains. Neither was presented as an ardent citizen: Socrates “n'avoit plus de patrie que le monde entier”; and such had been the influence of Christianity upon mankind that the moderns might as well have effaced the very words “citoyen” and “patrie” from their language altogether¹⁶¹. What distinguished Cato and the Pagan citizen evoked in *Du Contract Social* was their burning desire to serve their city and uphold republican liberty. Socrates and the Christian possessed a similar inner force, beyond the reach of tyrants, referred to in the first case as “liberté” and in the second as “stoïcisme”, which rendered them indifferent to their worldly fate, but also indifferent to the world. Rousseau did not speak of “liberté morale” in either case, though he did speak of the “vertu” of Socrates, and of the Christian's contempt for worldly passions and obedience to a higher law. But in *Emile et Sophie*, Rousseau would go further.

3. *The Chains of Freedom*

An unfinished epistolary novel in which Rousseau recounted the fate of an adult Emile following the departure of his *gouverneur*, *Emile et Sophie, ou les Solitaires* begins in Paris, where Emile's wife Sophie, seemingly corrupted by the City of Lights, has fallen pregnant by another man¹⁶². The separation of the two lovers proves

¹⁶¹As Beiner remarks, the de-politicizing influence of Christianity described in his texts on civil religion constitutes the likely reason for which Rousseau believed it appropriate to remove the words “citoyen” and “patrie” from modern vocabulary, a reason which Rousseau evoked without revealing in Book II of *Emile* (Beiner 2010, p 73). See *Emile*, II, OC 4, p 250.

¹⁶²*Emile et Sophie*, I, OC 4, pp. 885-888

inevitable¹⁶³, and Emile decides to head south, leaving the capital behind him, and subsequently experiences a series of adventures, culminating in his capture by Moorish pirates and sale into bondage in Algiers, from which he eventually frees himself to enter the corridors of power¹⁶⁴.

There is room for disagreement as to the philosophical implications of these fictional events. Pierre Burgelin argues that the novel reveals the failure of Sophie's education, since she succumbed to Paris's temptations, and the success of Emile's, manifest in his steely resolution and capacity for recovery, as he overcomes emotional distress to reinvent himself as a traveller¹⁶⁵. Nancy Senior responds that Emile's education is at fault, for, distracted by Paris's many wonders, he neglected his wife and failed to fulfil his duties as a husband, father and citizen¹⁶⁶. Yet one should remain sceptical as to the exact theoretical import of the novel. The education propounded in *Emile* aimed to preserve children from corruption and prepare them to be virtuous adults, not to produce flawless individuals, as the powerful symbolism of the work's frontispiece, depicting Thetis dipping the infant Achilles in the River Styx, made clear¹⁶⁷. The line between the responsibility of the *gouverneur* as the sculptor of Emile's soul and the responsibility of the pupil himself as a moral agent is difficult to trace. And since the novel remains unfinished and unpublished, one should refrain from accepting its contents at face value or according it excessive importance. Indeed, the end of *Les Solitaires*, as it was allegedly revealed by Rousseau to his friends Pierre Prevost and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in which Emile and Sophie are eventually happily reunited on an exotic, paradisiac island, and attenuating circumstances emerge to clear Sophie of

163Ibid., I, OC 4, p 910

164Ibid., II, OC 4, pp. 912-924

165Burgelin 1959, p 128

166Senior 1976, pp. 531-532

167See Chapter 3.

any blame for her Parisian pregnancy¹⁶⁸, suggests that Rousseau intended the work to be far less philosophically autocritical than it looks in its unfinished state.

Arguably, if the text does contain an element of autocritique, it manifests itself less in the opening letter, describing the couple's urban travails, than in the second, concerned with Emile's adventures after his departure. Here Rousseau seems to have chosen the medium of fiction to reflect on his philosophy, particularly on his ideal of man. Indeed, the very first paragraph articulated the familiar dichotomy between “homme” and “citoyen”:

“J'ai bu l'eau d'oubli; le passé s'efface de ma Mémoire et l'univers s'ouvre devant moi. Voilà ce que je me disois en quittant ma Patrie dont j'avois à rougir, et à laquelle je ne devois que le mépris et la haine, puisqu'heureux et digne d'honneur par moi-même, je ne tenois d'elle et de ses vils habitans que les maux dont j'étois la proie, et l'opprobre où j'étois plongé. *En rompant les noeuds qui m'attachoient à mon pays je l'étendois sur toute la terre, et j'en devenois d'autant plus homme en cessant d'être Citoyen.*”¹⁶⁹

In this passage, the words “Patrie” and “Citoyen” are not meant to describe the French state and its inhabitants with any degree of accuracy. Indeed, Emile speaks of the shame France inspires him, as well as the vileness of the French, and uses the more modest “pays” at the second time of asking. The terms serve merely to emphasize the contrast between the two ideals of man and citizen—the latter an ideal confined to a particular political community, the former encompassing the whole of humanity—and signal Rousseau's intention of revisiting it.

Emile's peregrinations after bidding farewell to Paris perfectly illustrate his resolute endorsement of the ideal of man, as he journeys through the countryside, proceeding from village to village, seizing every opportunity to toil, always blending in

168Wirz 1963, pp. 302-303

169*Emile et Sophie*, II, OC 4, p 912 (italics added)

with his environment, and feeling at home everywhere¹⁷⁰. His is a mindset perfectly captured by the Stoic motto “ubi bene ibi patria”, a motto which Rousseau, qua political theorist, called “execrable” because contrary to the spirit of the citizen¹⁷¹. Though at times Emile seems to liken himself to the *bon sauvage* of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, describing his pre-lapsarian simplicity¹⁷² and feral serenity before death¹⁷³, this appearance is deceptive, for his attitude is informed by a deep knowledge of human nature, particularly of *amour-propre*¹⁷⁴. Though he works as a “paysan”, he thinks as a “philosophe”¹⁷⁵.

This ideal, however, is put to the test when Emile is captured by pirates and taken in shackles to Algiers. The episode appears to have offered Rousseau a pretext to philosophically revisit the question of servitude, and the description of Emile's reaction to enslavement deserves particular attention:

“(L) a première agitation cessée me laissa réfléchir sur mon changement d'état, et le sentiment qui m'occupoit encore dans toute sa force me fit dire en moi-même avec une sorte de satisfaction: que m'otera cet événement? Le pouvoir de faire une sottise. Je suis plus libre qu'auparavant. Emile esclave! reprenois-je, eh! dans quel sens? Qu'ai-je perdu de ma liberté primitive? Ne naquis-je pas esclave de la nécessité? Quel nouveau joug peuvent m'imposer les hommes? Le travail? Ne travaillois-je pas quand j'étois libre? La faim? Combien de fois je l'ai soufferte volontairement! La douleur? Toutes les forces humaines ne m'en donneront pas plus que ne m'en fit sentir un grain de sable. La contrainte? Sera-t-elle plus rude que celle de mes premiers fers, et je n'en voulois pas sortir. Soumis par ma naissance aux passions humaines, que leur joug me soit imposé par un autre ou par moi, ne faut-il pas toujours le porter, et qui sait de quelle part il me sera plus supportable? J'aurai du moins toute ma raison pour les modérer

170Ibid., II, OC 4, pp. 912-914

171See Chapter 5.

172*Emile et Sophie*, II, OC 4, p 913

173Ibid., II, OC 4, pp. 913-914

174Emile describes, for example, how refraining from requesting services from villagers made him more likely to receive them. “Demander un bienfait”, he states, “c'est y acquérir une espèce de droit, l'accorder est presque un devoir; et l'amour-propre aime mieux faire un don gratuit que payer une dette” (Ibid., II, OC 4, p 914). He even affirms that checking his own passions helped him to cross borders: “tout le monde me laissoit libre en voyant qu'on pouvoit disposer de moi sans me fâcher” (Ibid., II, OC 4, p 913).

175“Il faut qu'il travaille en paysan et qu'il pense en philosophe pour ne pas être aussi fainéant qu'un sauvage”, Rousseau wrote in *Emile* (*Emile*, III, OC 4, p 480).

dans un autre, combien de fois ne m'a-t-elle pas abandonné dans les miennes? Qui pourra me faire porter deux chaînes. N'en portois-je pas une auparavant. Il n'y a de servitude réelle que celle de la nature. Les hommes n'en sont que les instrumens. Qu'un maître m'assomme ou qu'un rocher m'écrase, c'est le même événement à mes yeux, et tout ce qui peut m'arriver de pis dans l'esclavage est de ne pas plus fléchir un tyran qu'un caillou. Enfin si j'avois ma liberté, qu'en ferois-je? Dans l'état où je suis que puis-je vouloir? Eh! pour ne pas tomber dans l'aneantissement j'ai besoin d'être animé par la volonté d'un autre au défaut de la mienne."¹⁷⁶

The divergence between the psychology described in this text and the spirit of citizenship elsewhere advocated by Rousseau is manifest. Emile's reaction to the experience of slavery resembles nothing less than a swipe at the principles of Rousseau's political theory: in stark contradiction with the ideal of republican liberty, and the revulsion with slavery expressed by the Rousseau of *Du Contract Social*, Emile welcomes his subjection as a blessing that relieves him of the burden of having to manage his own despair. He expresses a philosophy of passivity and renunciation that assimilates the deeds of men to natural necessity, the inflexible force to which his *gouverneur* taught him to surrender unconditionally. To him, the passions of others are no less unyielding than physical laws, which allows him to divest them of their moral significance.

This passage suggests that, as a consequence of living in a corrupt society, Emile has grown tolerant of the decadent theatre of human passions. In a society where men ignore the general will, individuals cannot participate in the liberating process of collective self-determination: they lack any influence on their community, other than that exerted by their unbridled passions. Such a situation leaves he who masters his own appetites uniquely devoid of leverage, rendering a reaction of contemptuous nonchalance quite rational.

¹⁷⁶*Emile et Sophie*, II, OC 4, pp. 916-917

What is most haunting about Emile's reflections, however, lies in how disturbingly congenial to slavery the education of which he is the product seems ultimately to prove to be¹⁷⁷. Emile appears to discover that he is perfectly suited to— one might even say, *prepared for*—subjection. Arguably, by tempering the impetuosity of *amour-propre*, his upbringing has weakened the influence of precisely that which Rousseau described as the means through which man became receptive to the intentions underlying other men's actions, and the source of his hatred of oppression¹⁷⁸. And it is, to all appearances, Emile's awareness of the inner tyranny exerted by his passions that leads him to accept the yoke of the slavers, having judged that the passions of others will be more easily tempered than his own. In this sense, it could be said that his *gouverneur's* admonition to be on guard against himself¹⁷⁹ is not lost on him as he embraces his chains.

Perhaps it would be wrong to assume that Emile's enthusiasm for servitude represents a perversion of the philosophy instilled in him by his education, because it seems that this experience does in fact fulfill the goal of his *gouverneur* in a very real sense. As Emile explains, he never felt more free than when the slavers took his freedom:

177As Christopher Brooke remarks, “Emile's education might not have prepared him adequately for the dilemmas of modern urban living, but it fitted him very well indeed for life as a slave in Algiers” (Brooke 2012, p 200).

178It is *amour-propre*, Rousseau explained in Note XV of the *Second Discourse*, that makes men receptive to the intentions behind other men's actions, and therefore susceptible of receiving offence (*Discours sur l'Inégalité*, Note XV, OC 3, pp. 219-220). “Dans tous les maux qui nous arrivent, nous regardons plus à l'intention qu'à l'effet”, Rousseau wrote in the Eighth Promenade of the *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*. “Une tuile qui tombe d'un toit peut nous blesser davantage mais ne nous navre pas tant qu'une pierre lancée à dessein par une main malveillante.” Rousseau distinguished between ordinary men, inclined to perceive evil intentions behind their every misfortune, and “(l)'homme sage qui ne voit dans tous les malheurs qui lui arrivent que les coups de l'aveugle nécessité”. “(I) crie dans sa douleur”, Rousseau added, “mais sans emportement, sans colère, il ne sent du mal dont il est la proie que l'atteinte matérielle et les coups qu'il reçoit ont beau blesser sa personne pas un n'arrive jusqu'à son cœur” (*Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, VIII, OC 1, p 1078). Interestingly, the manuscript of the *Rêveries* reveals that Rousseau initially added—before crossing out—a sentence highly reminiscent of Emile's situation: “J'étois bien loin d'être cet homme là mais j'ai appris à le devenir, mes persecuteurs ont été mes maitres.” (Raymond in OC 1, p 1818).

179Emile, V, OC 4, p 816

“Oui, mon pere, je puis le dire; le tems de ma servitude fut celui de mon régime, et jamais je n'eus tant d'autorité sur moi que quand je portai les fers des barbares. Soumis à leurs passions sans les partager, j'appris à mieux connoître les miennes. Leurs écarts furent pour moi des instructions plus vives que n'avoient été vos leçons, et je fis sous ces rudes maitres un cours de philosophie encore plus utile que celui que j'avois fait près de vous.”¹⁸⁰

Here, it seems, Rousseau finally crossed the Rubicon: Emile's “liberté morale” reached its zenith with the subjection of his will to the “barbares”. Placed in the morally instructive position of a man at the mercy of others' passions, he truly learned to know his own. The loss of liberty in the republican sense of that word enhanced his capacity for moral self-mastery. The time of his worldly servitude was that of his moral reign.

One might consider Emile's subjection more apparent than real, in that he wilfully submitted to the slavers. Yet, his choice comes in response to a *fait accompli*, and cannot be deemed free in any strong sense in the absence of alternative options. More importantly, a convergence between the wills of Emile and the slavers would short-circuit his morally emancipatory relationship to them, for it is precisely because Emile does *not* partake in the “écarts” of his masters that he benefits from studying the “passions” of which they are the symptoms. The moral benefit of Emile's situation derives from being subjected to the observably erring will of others, not to his own. Without this distance separating him from the confiscators of his liberty, there would be no “cours de philosophie” for Emile.

At the same time, given the mutually depraving character of dependence on men¹⁸¹, it is in Emile's interest to regard himself as dependent on “choses” rather than on the will of other moral agents. For this purpose, he chooses to see the whims of his

¹⁸⁰*Emile et Sophie*, II, OC 4, p 917

¹⁸¹*Emile*, II, OC 4, p 311

masters as manifestations of natural necessity, even though they reflect passions that are all too human. His is a dependence on men self-consciously masquerading as a dependence on things while recognising the humanity of those responsible for imposing that dependence, whose passions are to be fruitfully studied. It is a surrender to the will of others that refuses to recognise itself as such, a sophisticated exercise in philosophical acrobatics combining deliberate ignorance and acute lucidity. But purposeful misperceptions are not constitutive of reality. Emile's condition, however morally liberating, is indeed one of subjection in the republican sense.

It seems fitting that when an increasingly harsh treatment eventually leads Emile to participate in a slave revolt, the uprising owes its success to two Maltese knights evidently animated by petulant *amour-propre*¹⁸². As Christopher Kelly remarks, the knights incarnate a heroic ardour that is the very antithesis of Emile's rational placidity¹⁸³. The contrast between Emile's sombre acceptance of “nécessité” and the knights' feverish longing for worldly liberty appears clearly.

The concept of “nécessité” plays an important role in creating this contrast. Emile postulates that because all men are weak and dependent on “la dure nécessité”, he whose will best conforms to it is freest¹⁸⁴. And it is tempting to regard the theme of the acceptance of necessity, taken from the Stoics, who included the former slave Epictetus, as contrary to the spirit of Rousseau's political theory¹⁸⁵.

182The knights, Emile writes, had renounced their status as men (“l'état d'hommes”) because of their nobility, and proved incapable of bearing “le joug de la nécessité” (*Emile et Sophie*, II, OC 4, p 919). He describes the younger of the two knights as “impatiant, mais ardent, actif, intrepide” (Ibid., II, OC 4, p 919): “(j)e le connoissois homme de courage, capable de constance *pourvu qu'il fut sous les yeux des hommes*, et dès qu'il s'agissoit d'actes *brillans* et de vertus *héroïques*, je me tenois sûr de lui” (Ibid., II, OC 4, 920 [italics added]).

183Kelly 1997, pp. 363-364

184*Emile et Sophie*, II, OC 4, p 917

185As Christopher Brooke notes, it is precisely through his emphasis upon the role of political institutions that Rousseau departed most clearly from the Stoics. “Human institutions could always threaten to fall out of the picture altogether in ancient Stoicism”, he writes, “preoccupied as it was

Yet, the narrative of *Les Solitaires*, which shows Emile and the knights coming together to combat the slavers following a deterioration in working conditions, in a union of reason and passion, suggests that where they—and the ideals that they represent—ordinarily diverge is in their judgement of what counts as necessary. They differ less over the existence of the realm of necessity, or the wisdom of submitting to it, than over its scope, and, when they finally converge on this point, collaborative action becomes possible.

This would tend to confirm the idea that Rousseau ultimately articulates the ideals of man and citizen in response to different contexts. The ethical ideal of man, and its corresponding conception of freedom as “liberté morale”, is suited to the perspective of an individual facing the drear reality of an illegitimate order that is unlikely to be shaken. It forms part of a philosophy designed for cities that are “déjà perdues”. Like the ancient strands of thought that helped inspire it, this philosophy provides practical guidance for those wishing to lead morally worthy lives in the absence of a true Republic. It constitutes Rousseau's solution to the problem of corruption at the scale of the individual. On the other hand, the political ideal of citizen, and its attendant conception of freedom as republican liberty, forms part of a collective solution to this problem, which aims, through ambitious transformations of society, to push back the boundaries of the necessary. If ethics is the management of the necessary, politics is the art of the possible.

with the relationship between the individual and the cosmos” (Brooke 2012, p 202).

Conclusion

This chapter sought to identify the place of “liberté morale” within Rousseau's political thought. It distinguished between three different conceptions of freedom articulated in Rousseau's texts: natural independence, republican liberty, and moral freedom. Endeavouring to reveal the complexity of the relationship between republican liberty and moral freedom, it argued that the first conveyed an ideal of political self-rule, while the second was attached to an ideal of moral self-rule. It then highlighted the tension between these two ideals with reference to Rousseau's deployment of distinct political languages in his texts, focusing on *Du Contract Social* and its relationship to Rousseau's other political writings, and to specific passages of his *œuvre* that demonstrate the existence of a possible divergence in Rousseau's thought between the categories of 'man' and 'citizen'.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the relationship between political virtue and moral virtue in Rousseau's works. After critically engaging with Rousseau's compelling yet complex theory of human sociability, focusing more particularly on the seminal relationship between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*, it observed that the culmination of Rousseau's *Emile* saw him espouse a particular kind of moral excellence called *vertu*, defined as a striving to master one's passions, and a particular type of freedom named *liberté morale*, inherent in the act of obeying the inner law originating in man's conscience. After further exploring Rousseau's conception of *vertu*, and insisting upon the ambitiousness of his moral theory, it argued that Rousseau's political theory differed from it in “taking men as they are”, and starting from the assumption that men are driven by their passions. That the hegemony of *amour-propre* was pre-supposed by Rousseau's political project was demonstrated through a detailed comparison of the civic education described in his prescriptive political writings with the moral education advocated in *Emile*. Finally, it studied the implications of the discrepancies between Rousseau's moral and political versions of virtue for his political theory: Rousseau elaborated his moral ideal of virtue through an effort to imagine the very emancipation from the empire of self-love that his political ideal of virtue explicitly ruled out, thereby creating a divide between his moral and political projects, and sundering his ideal of freedom into the two potentially irreconcilable goals of moral freedom and republican liberty.

Far from imposing definitive answers to the questions raised by Rousseau's accounts of pride and virtue, this thesis sought merely to encourage a recognition of

their complexity and to inspire further reflection. The question of the place of autonomy in a society reformed in accordance with Rousseau's "principes du droit politique", of the possible coexistence of republican liberty and moral freedom, must remain open to future investigation. Without doubt, it is a matter of the highest importance, which raises further questions about the very relationship of Rousseau to the Enlightenment. If this work has succeeded in casting light on Rousseau's different solutions to the problem of self-love and their implications for his moral and political theories, it will have met its target.

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