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ROUSSEAU AND THE ROOTS OF MODERNITY

The general will is always right, but the judgment that guides it is not always enlightened.¹

Since Machiavelli, man and woman have become the center of political theory as the sole source and the ultimate sanction of political order. The theoretical order – contemplated by classical Greek philosophy and the Judeo-Christian tradition as the origin, the measure and the limit of political order – was rejected, at first as irrelevant and later on as non-existent. During the Enlightenment, theories of progress, the state of nature, and the social contract replaced the transcendent order. Man and woman were to lift themselves by their own bootstraps from misery and despotism, and usher humanity into a secularized paradise.

One summer day in 1749, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, just starting out as a philosopher and contributor to the *French Encyclopedia*, experienced a sudden illumination while walking to Vincennes to visit his incarcerated friend, Denis Diderot (1713–1784). In the *Mercure de France*, he had found an announcement about an essay contest organized by the Academy of Dijon. “Has the restoration of the sciences and the arts helped to purify morals?” ran the prize question. The powerful inspiration prompted by this question became the starting point for the political theory that Jean-Jacques perfected throughout his life. He challenged the idea of progress, so central to the Enlightenment, and succeeded in placing his concept of omnipotent general will among the canons of enlightened teaching.

¹ J.-J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, [in:] idem, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. Discourse on Political Economy*, trans. and ed. D. A. Cress, Indianapolis 1986, p. 38.

Rousseau is a very controversial political thinker. Often named “the Father of the French Revolution,” he is held responsible for the Jacobin terror imposed in the name of “the People.” Condemned by conservatives and liberals alike for his collectivism and authoritarianism, he attracts disciples mostly among various progressives and leftists. Some also defend him by placing his theory within the tradition of individualism and democracy. Lord Acton, for example, explains Rousseau’s collectivism by his first hand experience with the direct democracy of Swiss cantons. The majority, however, find his speculations too inconsistent and difficult to allow for a clear classification. But virtually all agree that he was one of the greatest political philosophers. One of his severest critics, Edmund Burke, branded him an “insane Socrates.” Insane, yet still a Socrates.² Leaving aside the dispute about Rousseau, this essay briefly analyzes his thought as elaborated in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *On the Social Contract* and *Emile or on Education*.

By origin, Rousseau was a Swiss, a citizen of the city-state of Geneva, where he was born in 1712 into a watchmaker’s family. His mother died a week after his birth, while his father seemed to care little for his son’s upbringing. At fifteen, Jean-Jacques escaped from Geneva and from then on he was on his own. For the next decade or so he lived with Madame de Warence, a lady fourteen years his senior, who, if we are to trust Rousseau’s account in his *Confessions*, became his lover when he was twenty.³ If he can be said to have had lean years until he won the prize of the Dijon Academy in 1750, his life afterwards was that of “celebrity,” of a *philosophe* of the first rank. Revered in French salons, showered with favors and patronage, he remained famous throughout the rest of his life, even if occasionally he got into trouble with France’s authorities.

Despite the friendship of leading French intellectuals and aristocratic patrons, Rousseau claimed to be a victim of international conspiracy. Suffering from persecution and physical pain seemed to be his fate. Moreover, his affliction was not ordinary: “What could your miseries have in common with mine? My situation is unique, unheard of since the beginning of time.” In his own view, he was unique not only in his suffering, but also in his capacity for goodness, friendship and love.

² J. E. Edwards Dalberg-Acton, *Lectures on the French Revolution*, ed. N. Figgis, R. Vere Laurence, London 1910, pp. 14–17; E. Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly, in Answer to some Objections to his Book on French Affairs*, [in:] *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, ed. J. C. Nimmo, 12 vols., London 1887, Vol. 4, p. 26. For an introduction to the problem of controversy surrounding Rousseau, see: *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Authoritarian Libertarian?*, ed. G. H. Dodge, Lexington 1971. In the past Rousseau was admired by Kant, Mill and various literary figures, especially the romantics (e.g. Schiller, Shelley, Hugo, Flaubert, Tolstoy).

³ P. Johnson, *Intellectuals*, New York 1988, p. 18. Johnson claims that Rousseau was a pathological liar and that nothing in his Confession could be trusted unless Jean-Jacques’ account is corroborated by other evidence.

Statements like “show me a better man than me, a heart more loving, more tender [and] more sensitive” or “the person who can love me as I can love is still to be born,” or “I was born to be the best friend that ever existed” are ubiquitous in his writing.⁴ His overflowing love, however, did not extend to his own five children, who were, on his orders, left in an orphanage as soon as they were born. No doubt, in addition to originality and talent, he displayed a huge ego.

Rousseau owed his fame not only to political writing. The romantic novel, *Julie, or the New Héloïse*, published in 1761, became a “bestseller” in the eighteenth century. His *Confessions*, only published posthumously, but read by Rousseau in French salons in 1770’s, contributed to his fame because of its scandalizing content.⁵ He died in 1778. Sixteen years later, the remains of his body were moved to the Pantheon, the temple honoring great Frenchmen.

Rousseau’s political teaching is founded upon a set of fairly standard assumptions for the age of Enlightenment. Man (*l’homme*) is by nature not a political being. Civil society is a historical form, preceded by the “state of nature.” One must therefore study this original state in order to rediscover man’s true nature and the foundation for his first rights. With an arrogance characteristic of enlightened philosophers, these studies were conceived as an exercise in abstract thinking, not as an anthropological investigation.⁶ German thinker Ernst Cassirer explains this problem in such a way:

The true knowledge of man cannot be found in ethnography or ethnology. There is only one living source for this knowledge... the genuine self-examination. And it is to this alone that Rousseau appeals; from this he seeks to derive all proofs of his principles and hypotheses... Everyone carries the true archetype within himself.⁷

The state of nature and man, recreated by Rousseau in his second *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, shares some common features with similar constructs designed by his predecessors in that epoch, as well as including striking differences. In the natural state, there is no authority; nor are there any social arrangements. Men (like other writers of the Enlightenment, Rousseau naturally did not mention women) were equal and free. However, the state of nature was not the Hobbesian “*bellum omnium contra omnes*,” and its inhabitants were not evil even if they knew neither virtue nor morality. Rousseau’s man was self-sufficient and lived like a wild

⁴ Johnson quotes a series of Rousseau’s *dicta* about himself (idem, *Intellectuals*, pp. 9–11, 13).

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12, 16–19.

⁶ Cf. J.-J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract. Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. Discourse on Political Economy*, pp. 114–115, hereafter referred to as *Discourse*. Rousseau’s second discourse on inequality is a revised version of the original essay submitted to the Academy of Dijon.

⁷ E. Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. P. Gay, Bloomington 1963, p. 50.

animal, possessing its strength, vigor and full adjustment to nature. His needs were simple and easily satisfied. He did not know continuous work because he did not think in terms of the future. He was idle and happy. “The only goods he knows in the universe are nourishment, a woman and rest. The only evils he fears are pain and hunger.” Since nature provided him with plenty of food, he had many occasions for leisure. Sex in these conditions was obtainable just as easily as the rest of his simple needs.⁸

Rousseau asserts that sex was “a purely animal act” in the state of nature. It had no implications for the male and bore little consequence for the female: once their lust “had been satisfied, the two sexes no longer took cognizance of one another.” With the arrogance of an abstract thinker, he dispenses with the problem of pregnancy and child rearing. According to him, the mother and child were only briefly with each other, and then they parted as soon as the child had the strength to find its own food. “The child no longer meant anything to the mother once it could do without her.”⁹ In line with this narrow perspective, our *philosophe* does not bother to tell us if the child was three, seven or more, when it could survive without maternal care. However, the separation must have taken place very early, for man – and, by extension, we can assume, woman – was fully adjusted to nature, and this could not have been achieved without painful experiences, including the death of weaker individuals. Furthermore, since parents did not pass on their experience to the younger generation (they did not even develop language, and their speech comprised only sounds and gestures), children had to be left alone before they could learn anything.¹⁰

Jean-Jacques maintains that individuals were not naturally hostile toward others of their kind. Contacts were rare and unless a basic conflict of interests was involved (self-preservation), they did no harm to each other. Moreover, natural man “tempers the ardor he has for his own well-being by an innate repugnance to seeing his fellow men suffer.” Deprived of any sort of enlightenment, man thus had only two passions that come from the simplest impulses: the desire for self-preservation and a certain pity for the suffering of others of his kind. These qualities made him a noble savage.¹¹ Noble savages were self-sufficient and, therefore, had no use for one another. They had no family or property, and knew no authority or labor. They were equal, free and happy. Rousseau summarizes this powerful vision of the natural individual in the following words:

Wandering in the forest, without speech, without dwelling, without war, without relationships, with no need for his fellow men, and correspondingly with no desire to do them harm... savage man, subject to few passions and self-sufficient, had only the sentiments and enlightenment appropriate to that state; he felt only his true needs, took notice of only what he believed he had an interest in seeing... If by chance he made some discovery, he was all the less able to communicate

⁸ J.-J. Rousseau, *Discourse*, p. 126, 135–138.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 128, 140.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 128–129.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 133, 135, 137–138. The term “noble savage” was never used by Rousseau himself but was coined soon after him, and is commonly applied to his notion of natural man.

it to others because he did not even know his own children. Art perished with its inventor... The species was already old, and man remained ever a child.¹²

Yet the idyllic life of the noble savage ended when “the first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him.” Unlike Locke, who finds private property in the state of nature, our *philosophe* treats it as “the first sin” which terminated the state of nature and, with it, the innocence of humankind. Symbolically, this “first person” became “the true founder of civil society.”¹³ To be precise, though, property only ends the pristine phase of the state of nature; the state itself continues, but in a tainted form, constituting a kind of an intermediate period leading to a social contract and the establishment of civil society. Rousseau seems purposely vague at this point, although his remarks on brutal warfare in international relations – which alone has preserved the rules of the state of nature – do not leave much room for other interpretations.¹⁴ How did this transformation happen?

The turning point in human history that ended the original conditions and led to those corrupted by property resulted from a series of accidents as well as slow processes. “In proportion as the human race spread, difficulties multiplied with the men. Differences in soils, climates and seasons could force them to inculcate these difficulties in their lifestyles.” For a growing number of individuals, nature could no longer provide plenty of food; therefore, they could not stay idle anymore. They began to fish and hunt, first making primitive tools and, finally, as we can deduce (Rousseau is again unclear in this respect), they took possession of land for their private use. With the emergence of property, they also had to abandon nomad-like life and engage in continuous work. Furthermore, appropriation of various things allowed men and women to form basic terms, such as “‘large,’ ‘small,’ ‘strong,’ ‘weak,’ ‘fast,’ ‘slow’” and others. Thus, humankind gradually developed language as well.¹⁵

The hardships, challenges and dangers of these early conditions made individuals use their two other qualities which distinguish them from animals: free will and accumulation of experience. Man and woman can challenge their instincts while animals cannot.

A pigeon would die of hunger near a bowl filled with choice meats, and so would a cat perched atop of pile of fruit or grain even though both could nourish themselves with the food they

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 137–138.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 150: “Remaining ... in the state of nature, the bodies politic soon experienced the inconveniences that had forced private individuals to leave it; and that state became even more deadly among these great bodies ... national wars, battles, murders, and reprisals that make nature tremble and offend reason, and all those horrible prejudices that rank the honor of shedding human blood among the virtues.”

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 140–141.

disdain... Nature commands every animal, and beasts obey. Man feels the same impetus, but he knows he is free to go along or to resist.

Furthermore, “the will speaks when nature is silent,” i.e., when there is no instinct to follow.¹⁶

The ability to accept or defy nature – free will – constitutes the first, distinctly human quality. As mentioned, the second human quality is the faculty to accumulate experience and pass it on to others. In order for that to happen, individuals must first lose their original self-sufficiency and abandon their solitary life. Private property, work and sedentary life bring exactly that effect. To overcome natural difficulties, individuals started to cooperate with each other, at first from time to time, later on, permanently. They began to form herds that eventually grew into nations, “united by mores and characteristic features.” Furthermore, men and women, living together in herds, abandoned their animal-like, “free” sex and gradually developed conjugal and parental love. In these new conditions, individual experiences and lessons did not vanish without trace or arts perish with their inventors. On the contrary, they were saved and passed on to children, and, subsequently, to the entire species. As a result, humankind grew in sophistication from generation to generation.¹⁷

Yet life in families and larger communities brought not only benefits for humankind. They lost natural vigor and became soft. Since they differed in skills and talents, some prospered more than others. This, in turn, undermined original equality. Moreover, having daily contact, individuals started to compare themselves with others. Unnatural passions, hitherto nonexistent, awakened among men and women. They became jealous and vain.¹⁸ As a result, they began to fight among themselves and strive for domination over others. “Consuming ambition” inspired “in all men a wicked tendency to harm one another.” Ill-will, rivalry and conflicts – the effects of property and inequality – gradually gained the upper hand. Humankind thus reached the point of “the most horrible state of war,” which Hobbes incorrectly viewed as a state of nature.¹⁹

Rousseau observes that the rich were actually more vulnerable in the state of war than the poor. For, while both could lose life, the former also risked property. Property, according to him, is nothing else but theft, acquired at the cost of the suffering, even the death of fellow men. Furthermore, he sees no justification for it. In direct contradiction to Locke, he dismisses labor as legitimization of property and the source of wealth for the entire community. On the contrary, he implies that the farmer who appropriated land and succeeded in cultivating it, in

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 124–125.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 141–143. Cf. A. Bloom, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, [in:] *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. L. Strauss, J. Cropsey, 3rd edition, Chicago 1987, p. 364.

¹⁸ J.-J. Rousseau, *Discourse*, pp. 143–147.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

fact, aggravated inequality and impoverished his neighbors. These ideas would soon powerfully reverberate among radical Jacobins, such as Jean-Paul Marat, who believed that the poor had the right to take property back from the rich and to severely punish them for the misery which they had inflicted on the destitute. In the state of war that followed the state of nature, the propertied class therefore pressured much harder than the poor to enter into the social contract.²⁰ For while both had to sacrifice their natural liberty in order to gain security, the rich achieved something extra: they legitimized and secured their wealth.

Such was... the origin of society and laws, which gave new fetters to the weak and new forces to the rich, irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, established forever the law of property and of inequality, changed adroit usurpation into an irrevocable right, and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjected the entire human race to labor, servitude and misery.²¹

Although entry into the social contract that established civil society was tarnished by the first sin – property and its consequences – Rousseau does not believe that it created an arbitrary government, giving the powerful an open right to plunder the weak. Unlike property, which is based on convention, liberty is a gift of nature, just like life, and therefore inalienable. The original authority was thus limited (even if some clauses of the contract seemed to anticipate the future concept of the general will) and had a republican form.²² However, the contract “consisted merely of some general conventions” which could easily be avoided or twisted, and the lawbreakers could go unpunished. Usurpation inherent in the contract was bound to invite corruption and abuse. In addition to property, comparing oneself with others was again the principal reason for growing antagonisms and conflicts. Rousseau the psychologist, so clearly visible in *Emile* and *Confessions*, comes to the fore even in this early essay on inequality. Civil society produces a corrupted man:

the savage lives in himself; the man accustomed to the way of society is always outside himself and knows how to live only in the opinion of others... Everything [is] reduced to appearances, becomes factitious and bogus: honor, friendship, virtues, and often even our vices.

From this disorder of the soul, despotism gradually raises its “hideous head” and establishes itself “on the ruins of the republic.” Under despotic rule and in “the final stage of inequality,” the people achieve equality once more: “Here all private individuals become equals again, because they are nothing.”²³

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 149, 151. Cf. J. E. Edwards Dalberg-Acton, *Lectures on the French Revolution*, pp. 226–227.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 152, 154. “The populace has united all its wills into a single one” (p. 155).

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 151, 159, 161.

On the surface, the central idea of the second *Discourse* contradicts the message of *On the Social Contract*.²⁴ The former stresses liberty, the rights of the individual and condemns any form of arbitrary government, while the latter justifies “the chains” which civil society imposes on man and woman, extols the general (collective) will over the individual will and freedom, and seems to outline a totalitarian regime. The nature of this contradiction and its solution requires a broader explanation.

Civil society cannot be justified by nature. Man and woman are self-sufficient and therefore not political beings. Nature only dictates their self-interest to them. Furthermore, the original self-love (*amour de soi*) of the noble savage degenerates in society into an alienated self, dependent on appearances and on the opinions of others (*amour-propre*). Ultimately, this leads to the most debased form of man, the *bourgeois*, who has neither harmless self-love, nor civic virtue and indeed needs leviathan to curb his passions.²⁵ Hence, to avoid tyranny or anarchy, society must create morality that, while not depriving individuals of their freedom, would find grounds for demanding their devotion to the common good.²⁶

Rousseau opens his discourse *On the Social Contract* with a review of various alternatives from human past and present that could serve as the foundation for his theory. First, the original state of nature exists no more, and man and woman have no chance of returning to this happy past. Moreover, his aim and ideal is not to make man and woman beast-like creatures again, but civilized, virtuous individuals who own natural, self-love. Therefore, the state of nature cannot serve as the foundation for authority and morality. Second, the next phase of human history – state of war – is not an alternative either. Anarchy threatens all (even if unequally), and besides, it was that “horrible state” which made people enter into the original social compact in the first place. Third, despotism, or the rule of the strongest that emerged from the degeneration of the social compact, cannot be an option at all. Might does not make right, even if prudence sometimes dictates that we should yield. Slavery is totally illegitimate and cannot justify authority of one individual over others. Each argument in favor of its legitimacy is “absurd and meaningless,” stresses the *philosophe*. Rejecting all these alternatives in the first four chapters of his treatise, Jean-Jacques finally concludes the necessity of returning to the first, original contract, the one that ended the state of war. We should construe a similar convention, yet this time we must avoid mistakes of the past.²⁷

²⁴ J.-J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract. Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. Discourse on Political Economy*, hereafter referred to as *Social Contract*.

²⁵ The terms *amour de soi*, *amour-propre* and *bourgeois* were not introduced by Rousseau in *On the Social Contract* but were defined in *Emile* (mainly book I and IV), cf. J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, trans. A. Bloom, New York 1979, hereafter referred to as *Emile*.

²⁶ Cf. *History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 566–567; J. V. Schall, *Reason, Revelation, and the Foundation of Political Philosophy*, Baton Rouge 1987, pp. 134–135.

²⁷ J.-J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, pp. 17–23.

The challenges facing this new convention are daunting. The convention's task is to create a regime that will not only prevent its self-degeneration into despotism, as happened with the original compact, but will also bring all the benefits of civilization without corrupting man's and woman's souls, and without taking away their freedom. Our *philosophe* is more ambitious than Hobbes or Locke, who clearly stated that the compact ends natural rights and begins civil rights. Rousseau describes his task in the following way: "[how to] find a form of association which defends and protects with all common forces the person and goods of each associate, and by means of which each one, while uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before?"²⁸ The solution to this dilemma is a social contract of a singular kind, different from anything hitherto known. This contract requires:

The total alienation of each associate, together with all of his rights, to the entire community... Since each person gives himself whole and entire... and since the condition is equal for everyone, no one has an interest in making it burdensome for the others... Since the alienation is made without reservation, the union is as perfect as possible, and no associate has anything further to demand... In giving himself to all, each person gives himself to no one... If, therefore, one eliminates from the social compact whatever is not essential, one will find... the following terms. Each of us places his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and as one we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.²⁹

The newly created union – we might call it commune or collective – forms a person-like entity that, like any individual, has a will of its own, the general will (*la volonté générale*). The general will differs from an individual will only in that it is a collective will, i.e., it wills what all (everyone) could conceivably will. Yet, it is not the will of all. The latter is merely a sum of all private interests, which could be mutually exclusive and lead to impotence. No, the commune acts for its self-interest, just as any man or woman, and just like them does everything in its power to protect itself and to take care of its needs. Jean-Jacques purposefully omits, however, one more possibility: that the community, like any man or woman, may sacrifice some parts of its body for the good of the whole.³⁰

Our *philosophe* views with extreme suspicion any particular interests – private or, especially, corporate – within the collective. All such partial interests must yield if the general will is to be well articulated: "it is important that there should be no partial society in the state and that each citizen make up his own mind."³¹

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

²⁹ *Ibidem*. The compact formally requires the consensus of all participants, but Rousseau seems strangely equivocal in this respect: "If there were no prior convention, then unless the vote were unanimous, what would become of the minority's obligation to submit to the majority's choice, and where do one hundred who want a master get the right to vote for ten who do not? The law of majority rule is itself an established convention, and presupposes unanimity on at least one occasion" (p. 23).

³⁰ Rousseau is aware of this "option" ("just as a wounded man has his arm amputated to save the rest of his body," *idem*, *Discourse*, p. 150) but "overlooks" it the *On the Social Contract*, p. 23 ff.

³¹ *Idem*, *On the Social Contract*, p. 32.

Where Tocqueville sees remedies for democracy's deficiencies, Rousseau discerns the source of corruption. Each individual is left alone vis-à-vis the general will and acts without a cushion of associations, clubs, parties and self-governments, which Tocqueville views as indispensable for the protection of individual liberty, and for learning citizenship.

As if power belonging to the collective were still insufficient, Jean-Jacques emphasizes that the general will is infallible, inalienable and indivisible. It is either total or non-existent, and that totality also extends to the power over life and property of its participants. He seems unconcerned about the possibility of abuse: sheer participation in the general will and equal treatment of each associate appear to him an adequate shield against the abuse of power. He had no premonition that his concept of general will would some day produce a slogan that the communist party cannot err.³² On the contrary, proud of this design, the *philosophe* audaciously claims that it preserves natural liberty and adds civil liberty to it. Further, it transforms each associate participating in it from "a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man."³³ And if an individual does not appreciate the design, if he still "refuses to obey the general will... he will be forced to be free."³⁴ No wonder that Robespierre's "republic of virtue" saw in Rousseau its prophet.

Although the general will is indivisible in principle, Rousseau separates the various facets that show what it is and how it operates. Thus, another name for the collective will is a body public or a republic. It is called sovereign when it acts (governs) and state when it does not. The associates who participate in the republic are citizens when they act, and people (subjects) when they obey. However indivisible itself, sovereignty has different "powers," such as legislative, executive, judicial and others (going beyond Montesquieu's division, Rousseau also mentions imposing taxes, making war, internal administration and foreign policy).³⁵ Legislation is the exclusive domain of the citizens. It cannot be delegated to agents or representatives. Thus, for Rousseau, "every state ruled by law [is] a republic, regardless of the form its administration may take."³⁶ The executive authority, in turn, cannot be exercised by all. The government – which does have the executive authority – is, however, not a separate power, but an agent of the sovereign, "an intermediate body between the subjects and the sovereign." It receives orders from the latter and administers it to the former. Individually, those

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 27–32, 35–36. Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* comes to mind when one contemplates Rousseau's thought that the general will cannot err if properly enlightened. A devoted Bolshevik Rubashov, accused of treason during Stalinist purges, is sure of his innocence, yet his resistance vanishes when the interrogator reminds him that the party never errs.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 27. Rousseau admits, however, that each associate of this compact will lose "several of the advantages belonging to him in the state of nature."

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 24–25, 30–31.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 38, 73–76. The parliamentary system does not express the general will.

serving in the government are called magistrates, governors or kings; collectively as a body, they bear the name prince.³⁷

Following well-established tradition in earlier political thought, Rousseau reiterates that smaller states are healthier and stronger. They also enable greater participation in the power of the sovereign. Since one shares sovereignty with others citizens, the larger the number, the smaller the share; while as a subject, each individual must obey as whole, without reducing their obedience by the number of fellow subjects.³⁸ Increasing the number of magistrates and thus the direct participation in government would not help, though. For each individual has three wills: the first – the private and the strongest – which tends to its own advantage; the second – corporate – will of the magistrates, which mainly cares about the interests of the prince; and the third – common to all – will of the people or of the sovereign, which is the weakest. Multiplication of magistrates leads to a slack government, rather than a change in the subject's nature, i.e., one's duty to obey. That is why democracy, in which legislative power coincides with the executive agent (prince), is the worst regime, although in theory it should be the best. When the entire people or the majority participate in the government, their private and corporate will is corrupted, and that corruption affects their common will as the people-sovereign.³⁹ Jean-Jacques deems this corruption as the worst because “the abuse of the laws by the government is a lesser evil than the corruption of the legislator, which is the inevitable outcome of particular perspectives.” Virtue, which Montesquieu made the principle for democracy, is beyond the reach of all, and in reality, democracy is the most susceptible to agitations and civil wars. Very pessimistic about this form of government, Rousseau issues the following maxim: “Were there a people of gods, it would govern itself democratically. So perfect a government is not suited to men.”⁴⁰

After such a devastating evaluation of democracy, the alternatives to democracy, mentioned by the *philosophe* – monarchy and aristocracy – seem somewhat better. Monarchy, because “all springs” of government are in one pair of hands, is the most active and efficient form of administration. That is why it is the most suitable for large states which need a strong government protecting them from disintegration. However, this is also a form in which the distance between the sovereign and its agent is the greatest. What is more, echoing Machiavelli's teaching on the prince's reliance on fear, rather than love, Rousseau states that because people's love is “precarious and conditional,” the king always aims at absolute power, and therefore, it is a dangerous form of rule. Aristocracy, in turn, is treated mildly. Of the three kinds of aristocracy – natural, elective and hereditary – Jean-Jacques chooses the second as his preferable system. It is the best not

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 49–50.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 43, 50–51.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 53–56.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 55–56.

only among aristocracies, but, it seems Rousseau's best practical regime, or to use his terminology, the best form of administration. Since the executive cannot be run by all or by the majority (democracy), and is dangerous in the hands of one (monarchy), elective aristocracy, by its very nature, appears the most suitable agent of the sovereign.⁴¹ Rousseau would have probably been shocked, seeing how his concept of an elective aristocracy evolved into a Jacobin dictatorship during the French Revolution and the concept of the vanguard of the proletariat – the Communist party – in the Marx-Engels-Lenin model.

Emile or on Education is a pedagogical treatise on how to raise a child so that it will grow into a man freed from unnatural passions, prejudices and superstitions, i.e., purified of the corruption wrought by history. Deprived of the chance to nurture his own children, Rousseau seems to compensate for this self-inflicted wound with a vision of bringing up an ideal man. The book also gives Jean-Jacques an opportunity to rethink human nature and the relation of an individual to polity.

Even a baby is capable of developing *amour-propre*. Its cry, which initially expresses physical discomfort, is easily transformed into an expression of will, when the baby learns that its tears make things work for it. Tears then become a test of power rather than the communication of real needs. If its wishes are not fulfilled, it becomes angry and resentful. Once the *amour-propre* begins to act, it does not know limits. It expects that others will submit their self-interests to its own. Ultimately, it revolts against nature and, through commands and prayers, seeks control over the entire universe. Gradually, the *bourgeois* is thus born. One has to note at this point a striking difference between Marx and Rousseau. For the former, the *bourgeois* is created exclusively by economic relations, while for the latter, it is a product of all inter-human relations, economic included, and of emotional drives occurring in one's psyche. Rousseau's definition is thus psychological as well as sociological.⁴² The experiment undertaken on Rousseau's pupil, Emile, was meant to show that proper education could prevent this process, and save humankind from the domination of this debased form of individual.

In the course of his education, Emile must learn, right from birth, that everything which happens to him is an inevitable effect of nature. Like the noble savage, he must recognize the necessity and submit to it. The actions of the educator must be hidden, because, if Emile's *amour de soi* is to be preserved, he cannot be confronted with the will of others. According to Rousseau, a child naturally ac-

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 57–62. Cf. J. N. Shklar, *Rousseau's Two Models: Sparta and the Age of Gold*, "Political Science Quarterly" 1966, Vol. 81, No. 1, p. 38.

⁴² J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 64–69. Except for the true philosopher and the noble savage, all men, regardless of the class to which they belong, are bourgeois, cf. A. Bloom, *Introduction*, [in:] J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 3–7.

cepts necessity and would not rebel against the fact that “there is no more” (unless suspecting a lie). It would, however, resent and revolt against the will of others, who would forbid it to enjoy more.⁴³ Emile does not share the company of other children so that he would not compare himself with others. To isolate him further from civilization, he does not even have books, except Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*.⁴⁴ Plutarch’s heroes have virtue but also terrible passions. Emile does not need the former because in his natural state, he has more wisdom than others can achieve through a life of struggle, while the latter (passions) should be unknown to him.

The “Eden” which Jean-Jacques created for Emile shapes his pupil into a noble savage. Although he develops no virtues, he has natural wisdom, which makes him equal to a true philosopher. At the age of fifteen, he is full of energy, healthy, selfish – though with a natural compassion for others, ignorant and self-sufficient. This is not, however, Rousseau’s final aim. He wants to make him a man and a citizen. How then, is the perfectly self-sufficient Emile to be connected to society and the polity? Rousseau finds in sex the power that, if sublimated, could socialize the savage. Emile has become by now a physically mature person. His sexual desire produces in him a need for other human beings.⁴⁵ Hence, Rousseau uses this power to introduce him into society.

The destitute are the first whom Emile meets outside of his “Eden.” Contacts with others always activate the *amour-propre* – one compares oneself with them. Yet, this leads to alienation only if the comparison is unfavorable. A dissatisfied individual becomes envious. Jean-Jacques therefore introduces Emile to the life of the poor, the sick, and the oppressed in order to make him feel good about himself, and, at the same time, to develop his compassion.⁴⁶ Soon, he begins his education, and, finally, may read history. At this stage, he meets Plutarch’s heroes, yet by now he is able to see their suffering, passions and vanity, hence their greatness does not animate his jealousy.⁴⁷

Finally, Emile meets his woman, and his love for Sophie becomes the last motive allowing him to complete his socialization. His sexual tensions, turned into Eros, are used to teach him responsibility toward others. Emile must know how to be a husband and father. The pages on the differences between the sexes are one of the most remarkable in Rousseau’s writing. Jean-Jacques is afraid that in the bourgeois culture the ascending notion of equality will pervert relations between the sexes. In order to form a lasting union, man and woman have to be different by nature. If they were the same and whole, they would not need each other. Like savages, they would only satisfy their sexual appetites and then part.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 91, 219.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 214 ff.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 230 ff.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 235–244.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 357–363, 415–416. The full magnitude of this thought can be better com-

Once Emile is aware of his responsibilities, he has good reason to be interested in politics because he and his family will be a part of the polity. He travels to experience different political regimes and confronts his hopes with reality. This confrontation also serves him as a basis for reflection on a just regime. Not surprisingly, he comes to the conclusion that the best regime is that which strikingly resembles the republic depicted in the *Social Contract*.⁴⁹ Having learned his duties as a citizen, he unites with Sophie and lastly consummates the marriage.⁵⁰

Like other men of the Enlightenment, Rousseau rejects the transcendent basis for man's nature and politics. Man has no preordained ends; therefore, the philosopher has to find another foundation for the political order. The state of nature and the general will are Rousseau's first principles that allow him to erect the entire structure of his theory.

Rousseau points in two directions: the happy past and the enlightened future. In the past, man did not have to learn virtue, for he had the natural wisdom that made him equal to the philosopher. The noble savage was simply born outside of the Platonic cave and, therefore, was capable of seeing the true order of things, without knowledge, virtues and heroic efforts. The future will bring another kind of liberty and happiness. The general will terminates the *bourgeois* and creates an intelligent individual and citizen, freed from the prison of false ideals. The body public, erected by the general will, makes people one and powerful, free and happy, building a new, secular Eden. Everything in between is corrupted, degenerated and wicked, and deserves to be destroyed.

Rousseau i korzenie nowoczesności

W artykule przeanalizowano tematykę źródeł współczesnych wojen o kulturę w myśli Jana Jakuba Rousseau. Autor wskazuje, w jaki sposób myśl osiemnastowiecznego Francuza stanowi punkt odniesienia dla współczesnych stron dyskursu na temat wojen kulturowych.

prehended now, two centuries later, for in modern Western society it sounds like a prophesy. Cf. A. Bloom, *Introduction*, [in:] J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 20–25.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 450–471.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 471–480.