



---

Rousseau and the Problem of Bourgeois Society

Author(s): Arthur M. Melzer

Source: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Dec., 1980), pp. 1018-1033

Published by: [American Political Science Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1954321>

Accessed: 30/09/2010 12:00

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=apsa>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*American Political Science Association* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The American Political Science Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# Rousseau and the Problem of Bourgeois Society

ARTHUR M. MELZER

Michigan State University

*The heart of Rousseau's thought, as he himself declared, is the claim that society (especially bourgeois society), while necessary now to man's preservation, corrupts the life it fosters. What, then, is this corruption? What, in Rousseau's view, is the problem of bourgeois society? The corruption, I argue, is disunity of soul, through which men lose the fullness of existence they seek by nature. Unity of soul, which is natural, is lost in society through the contradiction of personal dependence: using others entails serving them. Thus modern or bourgeois society, which builds on this contradiction by deriving men's sociability from their selfishness, necessarily divides their souls. There can be no psychic unity in society without true social unity. (Hence Rousseau's analysis of unity is also his defense of justice.) Psychic and social unity are more or less attainable in the just state through patriotism and virtue ("morality"), but perfect psychic unity is possible only beyond society and morality.*

Rousseau is the prototype of the modern *homme revolté* (Shklar, 1969, pp. 1-12; Stelling-Michaud, 1962). In tones of anger and bitter contempt, he gave a radical and profound critique of modern political culture, a critique that defined the problem which Rousseau and most later thinkers attempted to solve. The need for a precise statement of that critique is obvious—but the task has proven extremely difficult; for on examination, Rousseau's writings seem to present not a unified critique, but a disparate array of accusations. Men are actors and hypocrites. Men are troubled by ceaseless desires and labors. They are effeminate, enervated and lacking in "force and vigor of the soul." They are unjust and exploitative. They are overly concerned with their image in the eyes of others. While there is surely some truth to each of these accusations, it is difficult to see what links them, or what in them is so terrible as to justify the vehemence of Rousseau's protest and the extremism of his proposed solutions.

Among Rousseau scholars, there have been two basic interpretations of his critique. The first, fixing on Rousseau's frequent discussions of happiness, views him as a eudemonist whose central concern is some notion of "alienation." The second views him as a moralist in the strict sense, a proto-Kantian, whose concern is with justice for its own sake.<sup>1</sup> The account I will give is of the former sort. I will argue that the heart of Rousseau's critique is the issue of psychic integration or unity of soul. While few scholars have failed to mention

unity as one of Rousseau's concerns, still fewer have made it the key to understanding him (Burgelin, 1952, and Bloom, 1979 being perhaps the most useful).

What underlies the variety of Rousseau's accusations, and constitutes the evil in each of them, is disunity of soul:

The cause of *human misery* is the contradiction that exists between our state and our desires, between our duties and our penchants, between nature and social institutions, between man and citizen; *render man one* and you will make him as happy as he is capable of being. Give him over entirely to the state or leave him entirely to himself, but if you *divide* his heart you will tear it (*Works*, Vol. 3, p. 510).<sup>2</sup>

Rousseau's critique comprises two general points. First, disunity of soul (or psyche) is the cause of man's misery in society, and unity the key to his health and happiness. Second, loss of unity results from a contradiction between human nature and our particular social institutions. Thus I will first describe what unity of soul is and why it is good. Then I will isolate the social cause of disunity and show it to be the heart of the "problem of bourgeois society."<sup>3</sup> In the course of these arguments, I will also incorporate the second line of Rousseau interpretation by showing how the issue of unity of soul includes that of justice.

<sup>2</sup>Translations of *Works*, *Confessions*, *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*, *Narcisse*, *Héloïse*, and *Reveries* are my own. Emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup>For reasons that will become clear, the divided modern man is characteristically a "bourgeois," not in the narrow sense of "middle-class," but in the broader one originated by Rousseau: an urban non-citizen, any selfish man who is very dependent on society (unlike the peasant or the savage) but who does not live (and die) for it (as does the citizen). See *Social Contract*, pp. 54 n., 114; *Emile*, p. 40.

<sup>1</sup>Recent eudemonistic interpretations include Starobinski (1971), Shklar (1969), Burgelin (1952), Bloom (1979), Manuel (1978), Berman (1970) and Ellenburg (1976). For the moralistic or Kantian interpretation, see Gurvitch (1932, pp. 260-79), Cassirer (1954 and 1963), and Levine (1976). See also Hendel (1962), Green (1941), Derathe (1948) and Galston (1975, pp. 103-31).

### Justice and Unity

Before turning to the account of unity, it is necessary to defend the claim that it is Rousseau's primary concern by considering briefly the alternative, "moralistic" interpretation of his critique. Ernst Cassirer, its most forceful proponent, argues that Rousseau's deepest concern was not to "inquire into happiness or utility; he was concerned with the dignity of man." Rousseau's vehement protest against society stems from his belief that "there is no value to human existence on this earth if justice is not brought to triumph" (Cassirer, 1954, pp. 70-71; see also 1963, p. 56).

It is certainly true that Rousseau attacks men and society for their injustice, for the "violence of powerful men and the oppression of the weak" (*Second Discourse*, p. 97). Indeed, this is the aspect of Rousseau's critique most readily intelligible to us. He protests the obvious injustice of "a handful of men glutted with superfluities while the starving multitude lacks necessities" (*Second Discourse*, p. 181). Where these extremes are absent, he sees that injustice and exploitation have only become more secret and more general. The whole apparatus of the state and all the fine trappings of "civilization" are only tools that the strong have invented for extending and strengthening their powers of exploitation. "All these grand words of society, of justice, of law, of mutual defense, of help for the weak, of philosophy and of the progress of reason are only lures invented by clever politicians or by base flatterers to impose themselves on the simple" (*Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 475, 478, 54, 73, 98; *Emile*, p. 473; *Second Discourse*, p. 159).

In charging society with injustice, however, Rousseau is less concerned with the triumph of justice for its own sake, as Cassirer claims, than with the *consequences* of injustice. He is not complaining merely that the distribution of goods in society does not conform to some abstract principle of justice or fairness. He is concerned with the *bodily harm* and especially with the *corruption of soul* men suffer due to their subjection to others. Unjust relations between men "engender all the vices, and by them, master and slave are mutually corrupted" (*Emile*, p. 85; *Héloïse*, p. 568; *Second Discourse*, pp. 193-203, 181, 173-77, 156-57, 97).

Similarly, any positive value justice has derives from its good effects. Rousseau clearly states that justice should be demanded of men only if good for them:

If moral goodness is in conformity with our nature, man could be *healthy of spirit* or *well-constituted* only to the extent that he is good. If it is not and man is naturally wicked, he cannot

cease to be so without being corrupted, and goodness in him is only a vice contrary to nature. If he were made to do harm to his kind as a wolf is made to slaughter his prey, a humane man would be an animal as depraved as a pitying wolf, and only virtue would leave us with remorse (*Emile*, p. 287).<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Kant, Rousseau acknowledges the priority of the good to the just. He praises justice or blames its opposite for the good or harm they do—to the actor as well as the beneficiary.

Thus, Rousseau's demand for justice is (and must be) based on a prior belief in the goodness of justice. To hold such a belief, Rousseau must defend justice against the moral skeptics—such as Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, and his own "violent reasoner" (*Geneva Manuscript*, pp. 157-63)—who argue that the demands of justice are not good for those upon whom they are made, so not compelling or real.

Thrasymachus, for example, quite agrees with Rousseau that most men in existing societies seek to get the better of others, that the most successful among these become the rulers, and that they use the state to exploit the weak. Yet Thrasymachus, scarcely an *homme revolté*, makes this observation not to demand justice but attack it. What does the observation prove if not that men are wolves whose true natural good consists in preying upon others? Were the wolves "just" to their prey, they would severely harm themselves. Justice is not good for them; hence it is not binding—indeed, it is not justice. What is good for the wolves is bad for their prey, and conversely. Justice, the good of all, does not exist. One is forced, then, to take sides. And since the wolves are the healthy and happy ones who have succeeded in doing only what their prey would do if they could, it makes sense to be their partisan. To take the side of the weak, the "party of humanity," and self-righteously demand they not be oppressed could only be an act of self-interest or *ressentiment*. It is not an act of "justice."<sup>5</sup>

Against such arguments, Rousseau defends the goodness, hence the reality, of justice through a

<sup>4</sup>The Savoyard Vicar is speaking. For the same view in Rousseau's own name see *Geneva Manuscript*, pp. 157-63; *Emile*, pp. 235, 235n., 314-15, 314n. See Masters (1968, pp. 261-76) for a good analysis.

<sup>5</sup>Plato, *Republic* 336b-354c, *Gorgias* 481c-486e. See Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* I-13. One might, of course, prefer the "prey" on the basis of a utilitarian notion of collective happiness, constructed by summing the private happiness of all individuals. Rousseau did not take this view. Where there is no common good, such a construct corresponds to nothing real; therefore, there is no reason for the individual to prefer it to his private good.

critique of mastery. It is *better* for a man to be just than to exploit others. This crucial assertion appears at the beginning of the *Social Contract* (p. 46): "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. One who believes himself the *master* of others is nonetheless *a greater slave than they*."<sup>6</sup> And, in *Emile* (p. 85): "Dependence on men, since it is without order, engenders *all the vices*, and by it, master and slave are *mutually corrupted*." Corruption of soul, which we saw to be the major harm done the victim of injustice, afflicts the oppressor as well as the oppressed. Since mastery leads to corruption and unhappiness, justice is good and its demands are binding or compelling.

Corruption of soul, therefore, is the more fundamental evil which serves as the basis for the evil of injustice. This conclusion is confirmed by the striking fact that, in the rare cases where injustice and oppression do not cause corruption, but rather prevent it, Rousseau does not condemn them. In a manner more reminiscent of Nietzsche than Kant, Rousseau praises Rome as the "model of all free peoples" and Sparta as a "republic of demi-gods rather than men" (*Second Discourse*, p. 80; *First Discourse*, p. 43). To be sure, Rousseau regarded the constant imperialism of Rome and especially the slavery of Sparta as unjust, but in the end what counted more for him was the magnificent freedom and health of the men they produced.<sup>7</sup>

Rousseau's vital concern with the problem of injustice stems from the eudemonistic and non-Kantian consideration that injustice is harmful and corrupting to the unjust and their victims. If we now ask what this corruption is, we are led back to the issue of disunity of soul. Hence, in analyzing Rousseau's notion of unity and, after that, the sources of disunity, we will at the same time be examining the basis for the value of justice.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>These two famous and crucial assertions are assumed and never proved in the *Social Contract*. This work presupposes the critique of mastery given in the *Second Discourse* and in *Emile*, and "should be considered as a kind of appendix to [*Emile*]" (letter to Duchesne, May 23, 1762). If one reads it as if meant to be complete and self-contained, one will be misled in the direction of a Kantian interpretation.

<sup>7</sup>For Rousseau's defense of slavery, see n. 15.

<sup>8</sup>Cassirer, of course, does not deny there are eudemonistic *elements* in Rousseau. He claims Rousseau's radical demand for Law and Freedom can only be understood in terms of an underlying Kantianism (Cassirer, 1954, pp. 55-58, 62, 69-71, 126-27; 1963, p. 57). I will show Rousseau a *consistent* eudemonist by explaining his emphasis on law and freedom in terms of unity of soul.

### The Negative Interpretation of Unity

What unity of soul is and why it is good emerge most clearly at the beginning of *Emile* (p. 40) where Rousseau describes modern or bourgeois man:

He who in the civil order wants to preserve the primacy of the sentiments of nature does not know what he wants. Always in contradiction with himself, always floating between his inclinations and his duties, he will never be either man or citizen. He will be good neither for himself nor for others. He will be one of these men of our days: A Frenchman, an Englishman, a bourgeois. He will be nothing.

To be something, to be oneself and always one, a man must act as he speaks; he must always be decisive in making his choice, make it in a lofty style and always stick to it.

One might interpret this passage as follows: Disunity of soul—the bourgeois' affliction—is the internal opposition of the inclinations, so that he is at war with himself or pulled in opposite directions. Unity, then, would appear to be merely a *negative* good: the lack of disunity and of the torment it brings. The bourgeois needs unity to relieve him of the pain of inner conflict. For illustration, one might think of the torments endured by Julie in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* due to the conflict between her love for St.-Preux and her respect for her parents.

This negative interpretation of unity, however, does not square well with Rousseau's descriptions of modern men in the *First* and *Second Discourses*. It is not said in the above passage, nor in the *Discourses*, that the bourgeois' problem is that he is tormented. All of the exertions of Rousseau's rhetoric are necessary precisely because modern men are "happy slaves," strangely indifferent to their own unhealthiness (*First Discourse*, p. 36; *Second Discourse*, p. 179; *Geneva Manuscript*, p. 184). Moreover, the strength of passion necessary for torments like Julie's arises only in simple and isolated environments, and not amid the complexity and urbanity of the towns. The bourgeois is accused of having extensive, restless and impatient desires, but not deep, strong or tormenting ones (*Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 15-16; *R. Juge de J.-J.*, p. 818). The passage above suggests that modern man, though divided, is *not* tormented, because he is "*floating*" between his two ends. As Rousseau goes on to say, he is "not precisely double, but composite," having compromised his conflicting ends to attain a measure of internal peace.

Furthermore, the negative interpretation of unity cannot explain the important fact that Rousseau regards the just or virtuous citizen as

one of the possible forms of unity; for Rousseau emphasizes repeatedly that such virtue requires inner struggle and is painful (*Emile*, pp. 441, 291).<sup>9</sup>

Unity, and the benefit of unity, must be something more than the mere absence of conflict and pain. It must be something positive. Rousseau says in the passage from *Emile* that to be divided like the bourgeois is to "be nothing," and to be unified is to "be something." The further significance of unity will emerge from a consideration of Rousseau's psychological first principles.

### The Positive Meaning of Unity: Existence

According to Rousseau, self-love (*amour de soi-même*) is the "source of our passions, the origin and the principle of all the others" (*Emile*, pp. 212-13). It is "a natural sentiment which inclines every animal to watch over its own preservation" (*Second Discourse*, p. 222). The familiar notion of self-preservation contains more complexities than at first appears. That our fundamental desire is for preservation means, first of all, that it is not for pleasure. We do not desire life for the sake of pleasure (as Hedonism maintains), but rather pleasant things for the sake of life (see Cicero, *De Finibus*, Bk. 3, Secs. 4-5; Bk. 5, Secs. 7-10, 13). Furthermore, for Rousseau, the desire for self-preservation is not a bundle of instincts and reflexes that lead us blindly to the things we need. It is a conscious desire. And it is not a conscious fleeing of harm and death, as it is for Hobbes (*De Cive* I, 7), but a *positive desire for life*. Self-love is "the desire to exist. All that seems to extend or strengthen our existence flatters us, all that seems to destroy or compress it distresses us. That is the primitive source of all our passions" (*Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 1324-25). The positive goal of life is to live. Such a view may seem strange, but the more familiar notions of "alienation" and "self-realization" also presuppose that the ultimate good is being or existing (Burgelin, 1952, pp. 115-48).

What, then, do we desire in desiring to exist? Is life or existence an object that can be desired directly? Rousseau claims our existence is a constant, positive object of our awareness. We have a "sentiment of existence": an awareness of the conscious self and of the brute fact that one *is*. Self-love, the desire to exist, takes the form of a joy and pleasure in this awareness. The whole end

of life is to exist and to love existence.

Yet in what sense is existence an object of *desire*, since in order to desire one must already exist? Rousseau argues that we desire a greater or more complete existence than we already have. All men are not equally alive. We desire to be more real, more awake, more intensely *there*. Self-love is a hunger for life that seeks a *fullness* of existence.

The view that men seek self-realization or a fullness of existence might seem to require a doctrine of being, and of a hierarchy of being, to give sense to the notion of degrees of reality or existence. But Rousseau did not develop such a doctrine—either because he considered metaphysics impossible if not unnecessary; or because, as Burgelin suggests (1952, p. 32), he found traditional metaphysics inadequate to the phenomenon of human existence without being able to replace it with a "philosophy of existence"; or because, on the contrary, he adhered to modern natural science and therefore thought the experience of one's existence as a unique, independent being could not be metaphysically valid in the homogeneous world of matter in motion. Whatever the case, Rousseau confined himself to the apparently psychological view that the degree of existence is "in the sentiment which appreciates it." To exist more is only to be more aware of our existence, to have a heightened sentiment of our existence. "The man who has lived most is . . . he who has most *felt* life" (*Emile*, p. 42). Some ambiguity remains, however, since Rousseau tends to equate the sentiment of our existence with our existence itself (*Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 1324-25; *R. Juge de J.-J.*, p. 805).

Whether the increase in existence is to be understood in metaphysical or psychological terms, the causes of it are fairly clear, and that is what concerns us here. According to Rousseau, we increase our existence in two ways: through "expansion" and through unity.<sup>10</sup>

Briefly, we "expand" our existence by actualizing the capacities within us. "To live is not to breathe; it is to act; it is to make use of our organs, our senses, our faculties, of all the parts of ourselves which give us the sentiment of our existence" (*Emile*, p. 42). We further expand our

<sup>9</sup>The citizen, who is "given over entirely to the state," is unified (see the passage quoted at the beginning). But unity must not be confused with "wholeness." The citizen is far from self-sufficient or whole. He is unified internally precisely by being completely a part in relation to the larger whole of the state (*Emile*, pp. 39-40).

<sup>10</sup>Regarding "unity" and "extent" as the two determinants of existence or reality, see F. H. Bradley (1968, pp. 364, 214-17). See also St. Augustine for whom the *summum bonum* is "peace in eternal life or eternal life in peace" (*City of God* XIX, 10-13). Gilson shows that the importance of peace follows from Augustine's metaphysical view that "to exist is to be one" (1960, pp. 210-12, n. 9). See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1001a, 1053b 10-35.

existence by attaching ourselves to or identifying with beings beyond ourselves.

It is very natural that he who loves himself seeks to extend his being and his enjoyments, and to appropriate to himself by attachment that which he senses must be a good for him (*R. Juge de J.-J.*, pp. 805-06).

Self-extension is accomplished through the identification with others involved in friendship and pity, as well as through the identification with nature. Through it, one seeks both to expand the self so as to include within it everything the self needs for preservation, and to project the self onto the world so as to be more fully present to oneself (*R. Juge de J.-J.*, p. 845; *Reveries*, pp. 1065-66, 1056; *Emile*, pp. 67, 80, 98, 159, 168, 192, 213).

The second and more basic factor determining the degree of existence is unity of soul. Before we can expand our self, we must first have a self to expand. But to have a self necessarily means to have a single self. *To be, we must be one.* We cannot be two things at once, nor can we be a different thing at every instant: we need *unity of will or inclination* and also *unity over time.*

The importance of unity for existence is perhaps clearer in the second respect: unity over time. To live in the extensionless point of the present, immersed in the flux of time and sensations, is to perish every instant. To truly exist, to have some being, to have a self, one must have duration. The self cannot exist in the instant; it *is* an identity or self-sameness over time. To be oneself is precisely to be what one was. Therefore, "the life of the individual begins," and he becomes "capable of happiness or unhappiness" only when "memory extends the sentiment of identity to all the moments of his existence, and he becomes truly one" (*Emile*, p. 78).

Yet this elementary unity over time is not complete, hence not sufficient for full existence. Part of us is still caught in the flux. We identify with our loves and attachments; we *are* what we love and live for—our goals, loved ones, reputation, possessions. But these things—and our love for them—are in flux. "Everything around us changes. We ourselves change, and no one can assure himself that he will love tomorrow what he loves today" (*Reveries*, p. 1085). As a result, our identity has an uncertainty and inconstancy that led Rousseau to complain of his "weekly souls" (*Works*, Vol. 1, p. 1110).

Another difficulty with the simple unity forged by memory is that the self is given such stability as it has by being spread over past and future. This creates the possibility of losing part of oneself to the past, through nostalgic longing, and especially to the future through desire and hope. We are al-

ways ahead of or behind ourselves—never wholly *with* ourselves.

The bourgeois is the classic example. One of Rousseau's principal "accusations" against him is that his vanity has extended his desires so far beyond his powers that his life is filled with ceaseless desires, labors and anxieties. Unlike the idle savage who "breathes only repose and freedom," the bourgeois is "always active, sweats, agitates himself" (*Second Discourse*, p. 178). The evil of this condition is not, or not simply, the frustration or pain that results from it, but the loss of unity over time, the loss of "repose" or "peace" and of the plenitude of existence found in them. Think of his life. His constant desires and labors thrust him into the future and away from his present self. They make him say: tomorrow I will *live*, today I will *prepare* to live. In this way, the bourgeois continually postpones his existence. Spending his life "on the way," he is never "there" and at rest. He never knows a moment when he possesses all that he wants and thus possesses himself; never a moment when, complete and at end, he can say to himself: let this moment last forever. He dies without ever having begun to live (*Second Discourse*, pp. 179, 193, 195; *Emile*, pp. 82-83, 411; *Works*, Vol. 2, p. 1326).

The fullness of existence our self-love seeks requires the perfect unity over time Rousseau calls having a "state." In this condition the two difficulties just discussed are overcome. The awareness of one's self and existence is freed of any alteration by the passage of time. And the self is no longer scattered between past and future, but is complete and wholly present in every moment. In the *Reveries* (p. 1046), Rousseau described the condition as

a simple and permanent *state* . . . where the soul finds a place sufficiently solid on which to *rest entirely* and to *gather there all its being*, without the need to recall the past or climb onto the future; where time counts for nothing, where the present lasts forever without in any way marking its duration and without any trace of succession, without any sentiment of privation or of enjoyment, of pleasure or of pain, of desire or fear except this alone of *our existence*, which sentiment *fills the soul* entirely.

The perfect unity over time—and resulting fullness of existence—described here is that of Rousseau the solitary dreamer. It is not a condition accessible to ordinary human beings, who are not capable of ridding themselves of all worldly passions and attachments. Neither is it compatible with life in civil society. Unity, however, is capable of degrees and there are lesser forms of it closer to ordinary life. Indeed, all the many human types Rousseau praises in his works—the

peasant, the savage, the citizen, the lover, the family man—approximate in different ways and different degrees this perfect unity over time.

Consider, for example, the life of rustic and domestic simplicity led by Julie at Clarens or by the peasants of the Haut Valais (*D'Alembert*, pp. 60–63; *Héloïse*, pp. 527–57). It is a quiet, simple and uniform life of daily routines and seasonal festivities. There is nothing in it exciting, impressive or intensely pleasant. Yet there is a great charm to the picture of the life as a whole. And the charm is precisely that: the life is a *whole*. It is not a mere sequence of disconnected activities and experiences, but a “life,” a unified manner of being, a kind of “state.” There is an order and necessity to all one’s actions. Each of the day’s various tasks contributes in a different way to the preservation and expression of the same way of life. Each activity is like a different note in a single melody. In such a life one has a “state” because the self is neither changing in time nor scattered over it. In all the different times and aspects of one’s life one is always living the same life, always being the same person. And each moment of one’s life is lived in its contribution to one’s life as a whole.

Through such temporal unity, one “feels life” more—not because one has filled it with extraneous pleasures and excitement, but because life’s own native power has been gathered up and unified. The full reality of one’s existence is allowed to shine through unscattered and undiminished.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above, the unity necessary for full existence is not only unity over time but also unity at each time. One cannot be two things at once; to be is to be some one single thing. And since, on one level, we *are* what we love and live for, if we are to be one single thing our basic desires must be harmonious and noncontradictory. We need *unity of inclination*. We must have the same goal—and be the same person—in every part of our self, or else we cannot be at all. If the soul is not one, either due to natural causes (as Plato, for instance, maintains) or to historical ones (as, for instance, in Freud); if instead, it is some monstrous combination of heterogeneous parts, each with its own nature and tendency, each warring with the others to rule the soul and direct our lives; and if one fails to impose order on this inner flux and chaos, then one can, quite literally, have no *existence* at all. It is the total disintegration of the self—madness.

For one to exist, one’s soul must cohere, with all parts loving and hating the same things. The fullness of existence our self-love desires requires

<sup>11</sup>For somewhat different treatments of the theme of time in Rousseau, see Poulet (1956, pp. 158–84), Van Laere (1968) and Temmer (1958).

total oneness with oneself. All the desires and inclinations must form a coherent whole around a comprehensive end, so that one has a single focus and center of being. One should be single-minded, wholehearted and simple, so as to “be oneself” without exception or contradiction.<sup>12</sup> For he is most who is most fully what he is.

The bourgeois, in Rousseau’s description, lacks unity of will or inclination, just as he lacks unity over time. The latter is caused by the extent and inconstancy of his desires, the former—which will concern us more in what follows—by the opposition among his desires. As stated in the passage from *Emile*, the bourgeois floats between his inclinations and his duties, or his selfish and unselfish desires. He has not wholly “fallen to pieces,” but the fragmentation of his self severely attenuates his existence. He “feels life” less, because he lives two lives.

This decrease in life shows itself in the bourgeois’ enervation, “spiritual pettiness” and lack of “force and vigor of the soul”—another of Rousseau’s accusations (*First Discourse*, pp. 36–37, 54–56; *Second Discourse*, p. 164). In unified souls, the total energy of their self-love is harnessed in a single direction. They are

healthy souls, whose force, without perhaps exceeding that of common souls, produces much more effect, because it acts *wholly along the same line*, it loses none of its effect in oblique directions, and it always strikes *all at the same point* (*R. Juge de J.-J.*, p. 669, variant c).

The bourgeois lacks a single focus of care and energy. The force of his soul is both scattered and turned against itself.

In sum, self-love, the root of all desire, seeks a plenitude of existence, a heightened sense of reality, a perfect immediacy and presence, which comes from being *all there*, from gathering together one’s whole being. To do so one needs unity over time and unity of inclination: one must be wholly where one is and wholly what one is, one must live in the present and be one with oneself. Fullness of existence, therefore, is the positive good of unity, lacking which the bourgeois is a “nothing.” He is not tormented, but suffers from a failure to live.

<sup>12</sup>Describing Socrates and Cato, the twin peaks of human excellence, Rousseau speaks of the “*simplicity* which was the soul of their characters and which they put into all of the actions of their lives” (*Works*, Vol. 3, p. 1896). See also the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1094a1–1095a30) where Aristotle argues for the necessity of ordering all our goods in a single hierarchy. In scholastic terms, we need a “*summum bonum*.”

### The Cause of Disunity: Society, and Not Nature

All the novelty of Rousseau's thought, as he himself proclaimed, stems from his principle that man is by nature good and that society makes him miserable and wicked (*Second Discourse*, p. 193; *R. Juge de J.-J.*, pp. 933-34; *Confessions*, pp. 388-89; *Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 1135-36; Vol. 4, pp. 935-36, 966). This means, in part, that the cause of disunity of soul—the source of man's misery—is in society rather than nature. Man is one by nature because all his inclinations serve the unitary end of self-love.

The significance of such a position is best seen in light of the traditional view Rousseau is implicitly contradicting, to wit, that the causes of disunity are natural. Rousseau himself states this view in the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar":

In meditating on the nature of man I believed I discovered in it *two distinct principles*; one of which raised him to the study of eternal truths, to the love of justice and moral beauty, to the regions of the intellectual world whose contemplation is the wise man's delight; while the other took him basely into himself, subjected him to the empire of the senses and to the passions which are their ministers, and by means of these hindered all that the sentiment of the former inspired in him. In sensing myself carried away and caught up in the combat of these *two contrary motions*, I said to myself, "No, *man is not one*. . . ." If to prefer oneself to everything is an inclination natural to man, and if nevertheless the first sentiment of justice is innate in the human heart, let him who regards man as a *simple being* overcome these contradictions, and I shall no longer acknowledge more than one substance (*Emile*, pp. 278-79; cf. *Works*, Vol. 4, p. 936).

Here (and also in the *Letter to Beaumont*) Rousseau makes a fairly traditional statement of the dualistic view of human nature. Man is not naturally one or unified, but composed of the disparate and antipathetic elements of body and soul. This dualism causes a division within the soul between passion and reason. The soul is known to have two parts because man desires opposite things simultaneously, and by the principle of noncontradiction, the same thing cannot do contrary things at the same time.<sup>13</sup>

But these arguments for the natural duality of the soul, which Rousseau makes only in religious and apologetic contexts, are contradicted in the body of *Emile*, where man is not said to have

"two distinct principles." Self-love, which is said to aim simply at self-preservation, is the "source of our passions, the origin and the principle of *all the others*" (*Emile*, p. 213). Rousseau does speak a great deal about conscience, but describes it as deriving from bodily self-love in the form of pity and not from an independent principle (*Emile*, pp. 235, 235n).<sup>14</sup>

To the traditional view, that the passions are bad as judged by a second principle in our nature, Rousseau responds as follows in *Emile* (p. 213):

Our passions are the principal instruments of our preservation. It is, therefore, an enterprise as vain as it is ridiculous to want to destroy them. It is to control nature, it is to reform the work of God. If God were to tell man to annihilate the passions which He gives him, God would will and not will; He would contradict Himself. Never did He give this senseless order. Nothing of the kind is written in the human heart. . . . The love of oneself is always good and always in conformity with order.

<sup>14</sup>Since I assume, as many scholars do not, a distinction between Rousseau's thought and that of the Savoyard Vicar, I am forced to say a few words about this question.

With thinkers such as Rousseau who insist so strongly that religion is absolutely necessary to the happiness and decency of ordinary men (the case of extraordinary men, like Wolmar, is different), one must suspect that even if they did not believe, they might say they did. This is especially the case with Rousseau who so openly talks about the necessity for just such lies and myths in his discussions of the Legislator and the Civil Religion in the *Social Contract*. Furthermore, Rousseau, who extended the Enlightenment critique of dogmatism to dogmatic atheism, clearly thought it an important lesson for the world to see that an intelligent man could be a believer, and a believer gentle and tolerant. So we must wonder whether "Rousseau the believer" is not a posture in the manner of "J. J. Rousseau *citoyen de Genève*," or whether the Profession of Faith is not a civil religion for bourgeois society (*Emile*, pp. 312 n., 314-15; *Geneva Manuscript*, p. 195; *Social Contract*, pp. 67-70, 124-32; *Héloïse*, p. 588; *Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 700-06; Vol. 4, pp. 1142-43; *Confessions*, pp. 435-36).

Whatever the case, one must at least make the following distinction. In the Profession of Faith, Rousseau makes appeal, in his reasonings, not to revelation, but to an "inner sentiment," prior to reason (*Emile*, pp. 269-70). In his other works, he relies upon unaided human reason, and makes no such use of the inner sentiment. Following from the use of this "sentiment," the doctrine of the Profession of Faith departs from that of the other works in the ways indicated and in others as well. Even P. M. Masson acknowledges these differences exist and that he cannot explain them (1914, pp. 167 n. 1, 169 n. 2). At the very least, then, one must distinguish between Rousseau's philosophical thought based on reason alone, and his religious thought based on the inner sentiment. The position described in the text belongs to the former.

<sup>13</sup>See Plato, *Republic* 436a-442a; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I qu. 8a2, II-I qu. 23a1.



Here Rousseau applies the principle of noncontradiction to man's Creator to prove that man's nature is one or unified. If man as we know him suffers from disunity of soul, it is because self-love, the single principle of all desire, undergoes certain modifications in society which have

*alien causes* without which they would never have come to pass; and these same modifications, far from being advantageous for us, are harmful. They change the first object [of self-love] and go against their principle. It is *then* that man finds himself *outside of nature* and sets himself in *contradiction with himself* (*Emile*, p. 213).

"Alien causes," and not nature, are the source of disunity.

Rousseau's belief in the natural unity of the soul is based on the denial of the existence of the second and higher element of the soul asserted by the traditional view. Man is asocial and unmetaphysical: he has no natural love of order, justice or "eternal truths." Sharing the cynicism of most other modern thinkers, Rousseau considered these supposedly higher inclinations to be modifications of *amour-propre* (vanity), itself a modification of self-love (*Emile*, p. 213; *First Discourse*, p. 63; *Second Discourse*, p. 175; *Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 503, 937).

Furthermore, Rousseau denied man had any *need* for higher inclinations or attachments. This point follows from certain important and difficult arguments in Rousseau, which cannot be developed here. They culminate in the claim that through moderation and resignation to necessity, men can remain fully loyal to themselves and their particular attachments. There is no need, from fear of loss and death, to overcome the desires that attach us to ourselves and our fragile possessions. Since nature has made man happy and good by making him love himself, there is no reason to suppose it has also made him love order or virtue.

If man is by nature a single, unified thing, as Rousseau claims, how does disunity arise? What are the "alien causes" that give rise to contradiction in the soul? We have already heard a general answer: men acquire a second, contradictory inclination through the demands of society. The precise workings of this process remain to be explained.

#### The Social Cause of Disunity: Personal Dependence or Using Other Men

As we have seen, for Rousseau, human nature has only one end: self-preservation; that is, maintaining and heightening one's existence. The oneness of this end is the basis for the natural harmony of man's desires, which constitute the na-

tural unity of his soul. Having received unity from nature, men lose it, according to Rousseau, through their own actions, through their efforts to use other men as means. The fall from unity involves two stages: the loss of self-sufficiency due to the rise of unnatural desires; then the loss of unity through the pursuit of social means.

In man's primitive, natural state his desires—limited to those for food, sleep and sex—were well within the reach of his powers. Consequently, man was free, self-sufficient or whole. The invention of huts, the "first revolution," gave rise to love, the family and other primitive social relations, as well as to the first developments of reason. These changes, especially the first and last, led in turn to a revolution within man's soul: the rise of *amour-propre* (vanity or pride). Man came to desire honor and preference for their own sake. *Amour-propre*, when combined with the right economic conditions, so extended the desires as to destroy men's primitive self-sufficiency (*Second Discourse*, pp. 146–52).

It might seem, as many have maintained, that *amour-propre* is also the direct cause of disunity. *Amour-propre* gives rise to the "relative self"—one's position in comparison with others or one's place in their eyes—which can stand in opposition to the absolute, natural self. It might seem the division within the bourgeois is one between natural inclination and vanity, between self-preservation and honor. This view is seriously mistaken, however.

By giving men the new goal of honor, *amour-propre* does tend to destroy their original, natural unity. If one is trying to maintain such perfect unity—as Rousseau is in *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*, the *Reveries* and the first half of *Emile*—then *amour-propre* is indeed the enemy. Nevertheless, the demands of nature and of pride can be placed in reasonable harmony so that the tribal savage and Emile, for instance, attain a high degree of unity despite their *amour-propre*. In the patriotic citizen, a somewhat different case, it is even an aid to unity. *Amour-propre* alone cannot suffice to explain the bourgeois' disunity.

While *amour-propre* extends men's desires beyond their natural powers, severe disunity of soul arises only when men seek to restore the balance by using other men as means. Using other men—what Rousseau calls "personal dependence"—is self-contradictory and enslaving, according to Rousseau. And disunity arises from the internalization of this contradiction or enslavement.

The use of social means or power is self-contradictory because the power needed to acquire, maintain and use such means is most often greater than, or different from, the power one acquires *from* them, so that the acquisition of power

increases one's need for power. For instance, in seeking power one acquires things; in acquiring things one extends oneself; in extending oneself one increases one's insecurity, hence one's need for power. A man thus comes to seek not power, but power after power because, in Hobbes' more succinct formulation, "He cannot assure the power and means . . . which he hath present, without the acquisition of more" (*Leviathan*, Ch. 11). Thus the first consequence of using others to satisfy one's needs is the indefinite extension of one's needs, desires and dependence on others.

The same contradiction of personal dependence eventually enslaves men to others or to society. Being weak, men seek to use others; but being weak, they cannot easily do so. Only by an *all-consuming attention to others* can one succeed in getting them to serve oneself. Power is a kind of selfish selflessness. This contradiction takes several forms. Most generally, men render lifelong *obedience to society* and are "anxious to oblige one another from dawn to dark"—all from the *selfish* desire to win the acceptance and services of others (*First Discourse*, p. 39). Moreover, men acquire what power they have over some, only by submitting to the power of others: "Domination becomes dearer to them than independence, and they consent to wear chains in order to give them to others in turn" (*Second Discourse*, p. 173). "A little parvenu gives himself a hundred masters to acquire ten valets" (*Works*, Vol. 3, p. 842 n.).

Even those, like kings, whose power seems to require of them no such obedience, do in fact obey. "The strongest is never strong enough to be the master forever unless he transforms his force into right and obedience into duty" (*Social Contract*, p. 48). All political power is dependent on publicly accepted, legitimating opinions. And "[public] opinion, queen of the world, is not subject to the power of kings; they are themselves her first slaves" (*D'Alembert*, pp. 73-74). For an illustration, one should consider Rousseau's claim that, since the rise of Christianity, the monarchies of the West have been ruined by the power of the priests (*Social Contract*, p. 126). Tyrants too are slaves of their power, spending all their days trying to protect it. The tyrant *appears* to have power since he frequently makes others do what they do not want; in fact, he is enslaved because, to keep and use this "power," he must continually do what *he* does not want.

Rousseau summarized this critique of mastery as follows, in *Emile*:

Your freedom and your power, extend only as far as your natural strength and not beyond. All the rest is only slavery, illusion and deception. Even *domination is servile* when it is connected

with opinion, for you depend on the prejudices of those you govern by prejudices. To lead them *as you please* you must conduct yourself *as they please*. . . . You will always say "we want," and you will always do *what the others want*. The only one who does his will is he who, in order to do it, has no need to put *another's arms* at the end of his own; from which it follows that the first of all goods is not authority but freedom. The truly free man wants only what he can do and does what he pleases. That is my *fundamental maxim* (pp. 83-84; cf. *Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 841-42).

Mastery is slavery, for to command one must obey. All need to use other men, all personal dependence is contradictory and enslaving. That is Rousseau's fundamental maxim.<sup>15</sup>

It follows that all men in bourgeois society—which is rife with personal dependence—are slaves. Yet this famous accusation seems to bring to a head the questionableness of Rousseau's argument. One is inclined to say that whatever discomfort Rousseau himself may have felt in the drawing-rooms of eighteenth-century Paris, the average bourgeois does not feel enslaved. And why should he? Perhaps the task of controlling and using others is at times difficult; it is not so demanding as to be enslaving. On the contrary, the task is often quite enjoyable, especially for those skilled at it, those combining the courage and cleverness extolled by Thrasymachus. Moreover, if the pursuit of power were as futile and enslaving as Rousseau claims, men long ago would have seen this and given it up.

Rousseau knows quite well, however, that modern men are "happy slaves" who do not see the point of his accusations (*First Discourse*, p. 36; *Second Discourse*, p. 104). The bourgeois does not feel his enslavement, Rousseau's argument continues, because he has *internalized* it. From infancy he has felt the necessity of serving and manipulating others to satisfy his own selfish desires. Long before he could understand what was happening to him, he became "socialized." While he remains fundamentally selfish, the constant and pressing demands of society have molded his

<sup>15</sup>Rousseau's argument applies only to the power of individuals and not to that of states. A state, through numbers and unity, can be genuinely stronger than those it enslaves; thus it can genuinely enslave them and thereby truly increase its freedom. "There are some unfortunate situations when one cannot preserve one's freedom except at the expense of others, and when the citizen can only be perfectly free if the slave is completely enslaved. Such was Sparta's situation. As for you, modern peoples, you *have* no slaves, but you *are* slaves. You pay for their freedom with your own. You boast of that preference in vain; I find it more cowardly than humane" (*Social Contract*, p. 103).

habits so that he instinctively acts as society requires. He does not genuinely love and live for society as does the patriotic citizen. Society remains for him a *means*—but a means so necessary and general as to be more important to him than any momentary and particular selfish end. Thus his very selfishness has trained him to serve society eagerly and habitually, though ultimately insincerely.

*Desiring* to serve, the bourgeois no longer feels enslaved by society's demands. Only men of unbroken unity of soul, like the savage and like Rousseau, recognize, suffer under and flee the enslavement of society and power. "What a sight the difficult and envied labors of a European minister are for a Carib! How many cruel deaths would that indolent savage not prefer to the horror of such a life. . ." (*Second Discourse*, p. 179). But the bourgeois, broken and tamed, does not see the horror. Having long since fallen from the plenitude of uncompromised unity and selfhood, he no longer remembers or regrets what he has lost in submitting to the yoke of his social position and power.

Thus the bourgeois is enslaved by his effort to use other men, though he does not know it. The internalization of his enslavement—which conceals it from him—splits his soul. Here, then, is the source of disunity. The bourgeois is divided between the inclinations of his selfishness and the internalized need to serve others that very selfishness produces. He spends his life concerned with others—to control them—though he loves only himself. As Rousseau says, he floats between being good for himself and good for others. Having internalized the self-contradiction of using other men, he is divided by selfish selflessness.

The nature of disunity can be clarified further by examining more closely the selfishly motivated service to others the bourgeois performs. He must not only perform certain actions, but also adopt certain attitudes and postures. Men seeking to supply their weakness by using others cannot do so through force alone; they must use fraud. Man's capacity to lie and pretend is the primary source of his power to exploit; hence, in accordance with Rousseau's accusation, the bourgeois is an actor and a hypocrite. He must constantly hide his selfishness and affect that disinterested concern for others known as politeness: "Incessantly politeness requires, propriety demands; incessantly usage is followed, never one's own inclinations. One no longer dares to appear as he is" (*First Discourse*, p. 38). Further, he must find out what morals and talents attract consideration: "It is necessary to have them or affect them; for one's own advantage it was necessary to appear to be other than what one in fact was, to be and to seem became two altogether different things" (*Second*

*Discourse*, p. 155).

The split between seeming and being, inner and outer, takes root deep within men and destroys the unity and sincerity of their selfhood. For the dissimulation involved is not an occasional lie, nor the sort of deceit that can be undertaken in a calculated, detached and self-possessed manner. It is the full-time "act" or "role" men unconsciously adopt through socialization (*Works*, Vol. 4, p. 56 variant b); it is the ingrained pretense to concern for others and to "bourgeois respectability" that makes one an accepted member of society, entitled to its benefits and good opinion. The bourgeois—needing security, desiring honor and caught up in the self-augmenting pursuit of power—is utterly dependent on society. He feels this dependence so deeply and constantly as to be barely conscious of it. His dissimulation is correspondingly deep, requiring him to falsify his inner inclinations and beliefs to the point where he scarcely has desires and beliefs of his own. He is left with the negative and formal selfishness of the pursuit of power. The positive, concrete notion of who he is and what he wants has been yielded up for use as a means for the manipulation of others.

Due to his role-playing, the bourgeois has lost his natural self, but he *is* not his role. He is neither himself nor what he pretends to be; therefore, he is nothing. This means he spends his life claiming to others, and to himself, that he cares about what he does not care about, that he feels what he does not feel, and that he believes what he does not believe. He somehow knows, all the while, the falseness of his inner life—because he feels within himself the readiness to change in the face of changed social circumstances—but he no longer knows how to find his true cares, feelings and beliefs. He has nothing inside: he is empty and hollow. When alone, he is lost: "The man of the world is entirely in his mask. Almost never being in himself, he is always alien and ill at ease when forced to go back there. What he is is nothing; what he appears to be is everything for him" (*Emile*, p. 230). Thus, the only mode of caring, feeling and believing that the bourgeois knows is based on *pretending*:

Everything being reduced to appearances, everything becomes factitious and deceptive: honor, friendship, virtue, and often even vices, about which men finally discover the secret of boasting; in a word, always asking others what we are and never daring to question ourselves on this subject, in the midst of so much philosophy, humanity, politeness, and sublime maxims, we have only a deceitful and frivolous exterior (*Second Discourse*, p. 180).

Everything the bourgeois claims to live for and care about is ultimately only a pretense. He does

not live; he only pretends to live.

The importance of lying and dissimulation is indicated by the brief description of the unified man in the passage from *Emile*: "To be something, to be oneself and always one, a man must *act as he speaks*" (cf. *Works*, Vol. 4, p. 59).

Disunity arises, then, from personal dependence and not—to elaborate an earlier point—from *amour-propre* as such. Where men do not use one another, *amour-propre* is not divisive. Compare, for example, the bourgeois with the patriotic citizen. They are alike in the strength of their *amour-propre* or their concern for other men's opinions of them. The citizen, however, loves his fellow-citizens and does not try to use them. He is sincere and unified because his desire to serve others in order to win honor coincides with—and becomes a part of—his love of them. But the bourgeois' "devotion" to others—his politeness, solicitude, conformity and moralism—is merely the contradictory, hence hypocritical and divisive, product of his selfishness. He is divided, not between self-love and *amour-propre*, but between his selfish ends of security, honor and power (which stem from *both* self-love and *amour-propre*) and the all-consuming "services" to others, the phony "social self" required by his use of men as means.<sup>16</sup>

### The Problem of Bourgeois Society

Having analyzed the nature and cause of disunity of soul, we are now in a position to state what "bourgeois society" is, according to Rousseau, and what are its defects.

Rousseau's conception of bourgeois or modern society is based on a distinction implicit in much of the preceding discussion. There are two reasons why one man might care about another. The first is caring for the other as an end in himself; the second, needing the other as a *means* to some selfish interest of one's own (personal dependence). Rousseau did not regard this distinction as theoretically fundamental. He thought the two motives stemmed from the common source of self-love—the former resulting when the self is extended over other men through identification or

affection. But Rousseau did regard the distinction as of fundamental practical importance: the two motives are mutually exclusive to a high degree; and they have dramatically opposite effects, as we shall see.

The former point may be explained as follows. Men's selfish interests never completely coincide (their bodies being separate), so the more one man needs and depends on the services of another, the more he must be driven to wish (if only secretly) that the other serve him without reciprocity, in short, that the other be his slave. A man's selfish need of others may begin moderately enough, but as we have seen, it tends to "snowball" due to the self-contradictoriness of power. Hence, Rousseau claims "the moral picture, if not of human life, at least of the secret pretensions of the heart of every civilized man" is to be "the sole master of the universe" (*Second Discourse*, p. 195). The necessary, if secret, desire to enslave others destroys all genuine respect and affection for them. For example, excessive sexual desire leads one to treat as objects those one seeks to love; and more generally, a high degree of self-sufficiency is necessary for genuine friendship. The second motive (needing to use others) excludes the first (loving others). Conversely, the more one truly loves and lives for others, the less one needs to use them, because the larger whole for which one lives is more self-sufficient than one's individual self.

Based on these two opposite motives for caring about others, Rousseau distinguishes two kinds of social bonds, and thus two kinds of society. One is based on "mutual esteem and benevolence" or the "love of society"; the other on enlightened selfishness, "mutual dependence" or "personal interest." These bonds are also opposites: "One cannot tighten one of these bonds without the other relaxing as much" (*Narcisse*, p. 968n.). The first kind of social bond is found, according to Rousseau, in two historical conditions. It exists in the most primitive, savage societies, where mutual affection has not yet been destroyed by the development of property, the advancement of reason, the invention of dissimulation and the increase in men's selfish desires. It can also be found in civilized times in those rare cases where the perfection of the art of legislation has led to the creation of a genuine city united by virtue and patriotism (*Narcisse*, p. 969n.; *Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 936–37; *Second Discourse*, pp. 148–51; *Social Contract*, p. 68; *Political Economy*, pp. 217–24). The second, selfish kind of social bond is found wherever primitive societies have decayed—as they inevitably must—and imperfect states have been established. It is found, then, more or less *everywhere* in civilized times. Indeed, when Rousseau speaks in general about "society," he usually means this second kind of society.

<sup>16</sup>The primacy of the problem of personal dependence explains the importance of economics in Rousseau's analysis of society and culture. In the *Second Discourse*, for example (pp. 150–51), Rousseau claims the tribal stage was the "happiest and most durable epoch" and that tribal man—who had already developed *amour-propre*—still "lived free, healthy, good and happy." Slavery and disunity did not arise until "the moment when one man *needed the help* of another," a moment which came with the invention of the division of labor and private property.

But Rousseau also distinguishes "modern" or "bourgeois" societies from such societies in general. The defining characteristic of modern societies is that the selfish kind of social bond is especially and even unnaturally predominant. "Ancient politicians incessantly talked about morals and virtue, those of our time talk only of business and money" (*First Discourse*, p. 51). In Rousseau's view the exaggerated reliance on the bond of mutual dependence has been produced by the conscious efforts of modern philosophers and statesmen (beginning with Hobbes). To analyze its effects is the primary purpose of Rousseau's critical works.

Rousseau understood very well the attractions of the modern view. He agreed one could more or less hold men together in society through bonds of personal dependence and self-interest. And he appreciated the ingenuity of a social system which, by building on the low but solid motives of vanity and greed, could avoid the difficulties attending reliance upon "morals and virtue." He saw, for instance, the usefulness of this system for ridding politics of intolerance, fanaticism and the other evils of a priestly and otherworldly religion. Furthermore, free of the need to maintain morals and virtue, such a system could allow intellectual as well as economic free enterprise: the free flowering of arts and sciences, the enlightenment and "high culture" that make bourgeois society so pleasant to people of taste and intellect, so congenial to those of genius (*First Discourse*, pp. 35-36; *Narcisse*, pp. 971-72; *Social Contract*, pp. 126-30; *Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 224-25, 227).

In spite of these advantages and his century's enthusiasm for them, Rousseau opposed and sought to reverse this basic tendency of modern thought and statecraft.

Of all the truths that I have proposed for the consideration of the wise, here is the most astonishing and the most cruel. Our writers all regard as the masterpiece of the statecraft of our century the sciences, arts, luxury, commerce, laws and other bonds which, by tightening among men those knots of society based on *personal interest*, place them all in a *mutual dependence*, give them *reciprocal needs* and common *interests*, and oblige each of them to contribute to the happiness of others in order to secure his own. These ideas are fine, no doubt, and are set forth in a favorable light. But, in examining them with attention and without partiality, one finds much to counteract the advantages which they seem at first to present.

It is indeed a very wonderful thing to have placed mankind under the impossibility of living together without hindering, supplanting, deceiving, betraying and destroying each other! It is now necessary for us to keep ourselves from ever being *seen such as we are*: as, for two men whose

interests may coincide, a hundred thousand, perhaps, have interests opposed to them, and there is no other means of succeeding except by *deceiving and ruining* all these men. Such is the deadly source of violences, treasons, villainies and of all the horrors which are necessitated by a state of things where each man, *pretending* to work for the fortune or reputation of others, seeks only to raise his own above that of the others and at their expense (*Narcisse*, pp. 968-69; cf. *First Discourse*, p. 51; *Second Discourse*, pp. 156, 172-75; *Works*, Vol. 4, p. 936; *Political Economy*, pp. 216-17).<sup>17</sup>

Modern bourgeois society, based on personal interest and mutual dependence makes men unjust. There may well be a reasonably stable social order; there may be toleration, fine manners, sophisticated works of art, and high-minded discourses. It will all be bourgeois hypocrisy. Beneath this social order and the high culture that adorns it, men will manipulate, exploit, oppress and devour one another. Mutual enmity and injustice are inevitable, not because man is by nature wicked, but because this system, by building on and encouraging personal dependence, has so arranged things that each man can make himself happy only by harming others.

Furthermore, the injustice of modern society is *condemnable* because it is as bad for the wolves as for their prey, for masters as for slaves: in both it is accompanied by disunity of soul. For the cause of men's injustice is the same as of disunity: personal dependence or the need to use other men as means.

Rousseau's overall critique of bourgeois society may be formulated as follows. The essence and genius of modern politics was to build society on the contradiction of personal dependence: to derive men's selflessness and sociability from their very selfishness. This social bond has indeed succeeded in holding men together, but because it is a contradiction it has resulted in both injustice among society's members and disunity within them; it has destroyed social and psychic unity. In modern society "our needs bring us together in proportion as our passions divide us, and the more we become enemies of our fellow men, the less we can do without them" (*Geneva Manuscript*, p. 158). This simple but oddly elusive statement summarizes the whole of Rousseau's social analysis.

Modern society rests upon men's selfish interests, and infinitely increases them. Now the greater our selfishness, the less we love others, but the

<sup>17</sup>For a discussion of this passage and related ideas, see Keohane (1978). See also Lovejoy (1961, pp. 153-215).

more we need them. Needing to use others, wishing secretly to enslave them if we could, and also being in competition with them, we become their enemies. Yet though we are enemies, we cannot separate, for our *need of* each other is precisely what makes us enemies. Thus the more we are enemies, the closer we are bound to each other. We are brought and held together by our need to harm each other. As a result, society becomes nothing but a system for secret exploitation. Modern society pushes us simultaneously toward and away from others; it binds us together by making us opposed; it thus organizes us for mutual crime and injustice.

Looked at from the other side of the contradiction, modern society pushes us simultaneously toward and away from ourselves. It makes us selfish, hence it makes us need to use others. And lacking the force to enslave others or to be unjust all the time, we must become "sociable," we must serve, court and flatter others. Politeness is Rousseau's image for this aspect of society: doing everything to please others, but all for our own interest. One is never "polite" with those one truly cares for (*Works*, Vol. 3, p. 74). Politeness—and all the other forms of "socialization" and conformism—is selfish selflessness; and that is the contradiction within the bourgeois. He spends his life serving others, precisely because he cares only about himself.

The problem of bourgeois society is the contradiction that lies at its base: the contradiction of personal dependence or of sociability produced from selfishness. Due to the contradiction, men are good neither for themselves nor for others. Because they are sociable as well as selfish, they lack unity; because they are selfish as well as sociable, they lack justice. Injustice and disunity are two sides of the same coin, and bourgeois society—based, as it is, on personal dependence—is the cause of both.<sup>18</sup>

### The Political Solution

The character of Rousseau's various solutions to the problem of unity and justice follows directly from the above analysis. The contradiction of society can be resolved in the direction of either

of its terms: complete selfishness or complete sociability. This fact leads to the well-known bifurcation of Rousseau's thought into the alternatives of the good, solitary, natural man (the pre-tribal savage or "*pauvre Jean-Jacques*" the romantic dreamer and lover of nature), and the denatured, virtuous and patriotic citizen (J. J. Rousseau *citoyen de Genève*, last of the Romans or first of the Kantians).

I will conclude by briefly showing how the preceding analysis of the problem can be used to explain the major features—and ultimate limitations—of Rousseau's political solution. We have seen that social men are disunified (and unjust) because they have a selfish need for social means. To restore them to unity of soul in the context of society, one must uproot the selfish "pole" of the contradiction and transform their concern with social means into an end in itself. Hence the primary task of politics and legislation is to transform men into citizens by eliminating all need to use other men, while promoting the love of other men (*Emile*, p. 85; *Social Contract*, p. 77).

The major features of Rousseau's politics follow from this task. To eliminate personal dependence on the economic level, a relative *equality of fortunes* must be maintained, and sumptuary laws should be used to prevent the immoderation, selfishness and mutual dependence caused by luxury, "the worst of all evils in any state whatever" (*Second Discourse*, p. 199). On the political level, personal dependence can be eliminated by the comprehensive and absolute *rule of law*, popularly enacted. Law must be comprehensive so that men's mutual relations will be guided, as much as possible, by impersonal principle and not by selfish or personal interests. Law should be popularly enacted so as not to become a means by which the strong use the weak. And it must be absolute—the General Will must be sovereign in the strict sense—so that no clever politician, sophist or priest can evade it through appeal to his "natural rights" or to his "superior wisdom" regarding the Natural Law or the Will of God (*Second Discourse*, pp. 79–80, 171–76; *First Discourse*, pp. 48–52; *Social Contract*, pp. 55, 77; *Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 510–11; *Confessions*, pp. 404–05).

These same institutions will also promote love of one's fellow-citizens or patriotism. The citizens possess the sovereign power, enjoy the dignity and safety coming from the equal protection of the laws, and are not economically enslaved to anyone; therefore, they will love the city as their own and as the source of all good things. To be lovable, the city should also be *small*, so that the "sweet habit of seeing and knowing one another turn[s] love of the fatherland into love of the citizens" (*Second Discourse*, p. 79); and it must be *unified*, so there is a single city to love, and not a

<sup>18</sup>I have not stopped to show, at each point, how the various elements of Rousseau's description of the bourgeois have been developed by later social critics. One may form a good idea of the influence of Rousseau's description, or at least of the importance of the phenomena he described, by considering the terms of analysis made current by later thinkers; terms such as: "Divided self," "hollow men," "alienation," "identity crisis," "loss of simplicity," "inauthenticity," "other-directedness," and so forth.

pluralistic collection of competing parties and rival interest groups. Patriotism should also be fostered by *public education* which, from an early age, attaches men's hearts and ambitions to the city. Finally, these morals, inherently fragile because contrary to nature, need to be supported by a *civil religion* and protected through *censorship* of the arts and sciences (*Political Economy*, pp. 217–24; *Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 966–70; *Social Contract*, pp. 124–32; *First Discourse*, pp. 36–37, 62–64).

Such institutions, and the patriotism they foster, produce a unified city. Each man works together with the others for a common end: the preservation, freedom and union of the city. Each lives for the others, or rather for the communal self which, together, they compose and share. Their love of the city will find its greatest consummation in *public festivals* and celebrations, where “each sees and loves himself in the others” and where the city, gathering all its being in one place, gives itself over to the sentiment of its collective existence (*D'Alembert*, pp. 126–37).

The patriotic unity of the city will produce, in turn, unity of soul in its members. Since each citizen lives for the whole, each is unselfish and thus in little (selfish) need of other men. And since all live for the whole, each can trust it—working through impersonal laws—to provide him with what little he does need. Therefore, men have no need to use others, no self-augmenting pursuit of power, no selfish need to serve others—hence no disunity of soul. Each lives for the single and unified end of the city's good. In other words, disunity is the internalization of our enslavement to what is outside and opposed to us, following from our loss of our primitive self-sufficiency. It is overcome by extending the self to that larger, ordered and self-sufficient whole which includes within it the individual self and all that it depends on. Unity with other men leads to unity within the soul (*Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 510–11; *Social Contract*, p. 55; *Emile*, pp. 39–40).

This condition of perfect unity and justice, however, would be possible only if one could truly denature men, truly uproot their selfishness. But, as Rousseau explains,

Art, which can disguise, bend and even stifle nature, cannot change it altogether. It extends the germ of our passions rather than giving it a contrary direction as would be necessary to make us truly civil, that is to give us that civility of heart which would make us prefer others to ourselves (*Works*, Vol. 4, p. 56).

Invincible nature sets a limit to men's capacity to transform the natural self into the communal self. Men are separate individuals; and the city is not a natural organism or genuine whole with “a kind

of central nervous system” which could truly unite the good and bad, pleasure and pain, life and death of its parts (*Geneva Manuscript*, pp. 158–60). Even in the best city the citizens must be divided, in their inclinations, between the city's good and their own. It would seem Rousseau has only succeeded in replacing one form of disunity with another. The citizen may not have the full-blown “needy selfishness” that splits the bourgeois, but he will be torn in his desires between his genuine love for the city and his ineradicable love of himself.

Unity of soul (and of the city) *can*, however, be achieved according to Rousseau; but only in a fundamentally new way. It must be based on *force* rather than inclination or desire. Patriotism, love of the city, can never be complete; men must be forced to be free and unified—in the city, by the government, in the soul, by “will.” Through will, men can forcibly *repress* their inevitable selfish desires in the name of duty or moral obligation. Such moral self-conquest through force of will Rousseau calls “virtue” or “moral freedom” (*Emile*, p. 444; *Social Contract*, p. 56; *Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 1142–43).

Force or virtue, in this sense, unifies men's souls in two ways. First, reinforcing their spontaneous love of the city with a moral commitment to the city, it prevents citizens from reverting to the injustice and exploitation that splits the bourgeois. However, in doing so through force, through repressing and not uprooting men's selfish desires, virtue still leaves men divided in their inclinations.

The second and more significant contribution of virtue to unity is to make unity possible in spite of the division among the inclinations. As we have just seen, virtue consists in forcibly resisting one's desires. Such resistance is possible because men are, as Rousseau (sometimes) says, “free agents.” While animals are wholly determined by their inclinations, men seem to have something in their souls in addition to inclination—will—which enables them to determine themselves; that is, to act and also to *define themselves* independently of their desires. They can, as it were, create or assert a new self and then choose or reject their inclinations in accordance with it. They can act “on principle” (*Second Discourse*, p. 114; *Social Contract*, pp. 55–56; *Emile*, pp. 444, 280–81). The new self or unity thus produced is a new kind of self. It is no longer a “sensuous” or “natural” self based on what one desires and is, but a “moral” and “ideal” self based on what one wills and respects.

Hence the moral man can fix his identity above the flux and conflict of his desires. He attains unity of will in place of unity of inclination by adhering to a moral principle or law. Furthermore,

over time, the “man of principle” is always doing and being the same thing because his various choices and actions are adopted as so many particular applications of the same universal principle. Through virtue, then, the citizen attains a forced and self-imposed unity that replaces the spontaneous harmony of inclination he has irretrievably lost.

This view, that virtue—based as it is on self-conquest—gives men unity of soul, would be unintelligible on the negative interpretation of unity, which understands it as the absence of the pain of inner conflict. It is intelligible only in terms of the positive meaning of unity: existence.

Virtue may require a painful self-conquest, but it makes one more real and alive. Through “integrity” the virtuous man overcomes the bourgeois’ disintegration. In contrast to the phoniness, vacillation, emptiness and enervation of the bourgeois, the virtuous man knows who he is and what he stands for. He has the characteristics of unity described in the passage from *Emile*: “A man must act as he speaks; he must always be decisive in making his choice, make it in a lofty style and always stick to it.” The unity and selfhood coming from virtue is strict and forceful because morality allows no compromise with rival inclinations. One cannot be “half-moral.” Moreover, the desires and feelings may change over time, but the moral self is forever what it does today. In short, moral obligation is “unitary”: the whole of it is at stake in each of one’s momentary duties. Hence, the virtuous man necessarily gathers up and acts for his whole self in every moral action. He is unified, concentrated and intensely *there*.

Thus Rousseau’s political solution to the problem of bourgeois society requires virtue as well as patriotism. Though virtue or justice requires pain, self-overcoming and the neglect of one’s interest in the narrow sense, it gives to social men the greatest unity, hence the fullest existence, of which they are capable. The just man, then, is happy, and justice is good. Consequently, justice is binding on social men.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, however, Rousseau found the unity attainable through virtue to be imperfect. So long as men are in pain, their souls can never truly come to rest. And since men can never really detach themselves from their desires, virtue is too repressive of the self. The virtuous man asserts that he is his will and not his desires; that he has created or re-created his own self through will and

commitment. But Rousseau was too materialistic and sensual a thinker to believe him (*Confessions*, pp. 408–09).<sup>20</sup> Virtue, like love, is an illusion, if a useful and noble one. Man cannot cease to care about the things he desires, nor abandon his individual, sensuous self and wholly relocate his existence. In Rousseau’s view nature is malleable in that one can easily fail to be oneself, but invincible in that one can never *truly* be anything other than oneself (*Héloïse*, pp. 563–64; *Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 56–57; *Emile*, pp. 38–39). The ultimate invincibility of nature and of the natural self, which led Rousseau from patriotism to virtue, finally leads him to abandon the moral-political realm altogether and to turn to the perfect natural unity of the solitary dreamer (*Works*, Vol. 3, p. 1894; *R. Juge de J.-J.*, pp. 667–72, 810–25; *Reveries*, pp. 1042–49, 1052–53).<sup>21</sup>

### References

- Bergson, Henri (1935, first published 1932). *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Translated by R. A. Audra and C. Brereton. Garden City: Anchor.
- Berman, Marshall (1970). *The Politics of Authenticity*. New York: Atheneum.
- Bloom, Allan, trans. (1979). *Emile or On Education*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bradley, F. H. (1968, first published 1893). *Appearance and Reality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Burgelin, Pierre (1952). *La Philosophie de l’Existence de J.-J. Rousseau*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Cassirer, Ernst (1954). *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Translated by Peter Gay. New York: Columbia University Press.
- (1963). *Rousseau, Kant and Goethe*. Translated

<sup>20</sup>Rousseau never unambiguously asserts, let alone proves, the existence of free will (except, of course, in the Profession of Faith where Rousseau’s argument relies upon the “inner sentiment”). In a “fragment on liberty” (*Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 1894–95, only in the post-1975 editions) he claims that “whether the acts of my will are in my own power or whether they follow a foreign impulse I do not know and I care very little to know.” Furthermore, in several places, Rousseau admits virtue is based on passion or inclination (*Héloïse*, p. 493; *Emile*, pp. 397, 445; *Works*, Vol. 3, p. 501). He also claims it is humanly impossible to be virtuous without believing in Divine rewards (*Emile*, pp. 314–15; *Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 636–37, 1142–43; *Geneva Manuscript*, p. 195).

<sup>21</sup>It is true that Rousseau presents his rejection of the life of virtue as due to a personal incapacity for self-conquest (*Reveries*, pp. 1052–53; *Confessions*, pp. 416–17). But he also claims this “incapacity” is rational (*R. Juge de J.-J.*, p. 822), that he is the best of men (*Confessions*, p. 517) and that the inhabitants of an “ideal world” would have a similar “incapacity” (*R. Juge de J.-J.*, pp. 668–72).

<sup>19</sup>The argument that morality is good because it unifies the soul is similar to that of Plato’s *Republic* (see 350d–352b, 441d–444a). See also Bergson (1935, p. 15): “Obligation, which we look upon as a bond between men, first binds us to ourselves.”



- by J. Gutmann, P. Kristeller and J. Randall, Jr. New York: Harper and Row.
- Charvet, John (1974). *The Social Problem in the Philosophy of Rousseau*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Derathe, Robert (1948). *Le Rationalisme de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Ellenburg, Stephen (1976). *Rousseau's Political Philosophy: An Interpretation From Within*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Galston, William (1975). *Kant and the Problem of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilson, Etienne (1960). *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*. New York: Random House.
- Green, T. H. (1941). *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*. London: Longmans, Green.
- Gurvitch, Georges (1932). *L'Idée du Droit Social. Notion et Système du Droit Social. Histoire Doctrinale Depuis Le XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle Jusqu'à la Fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey.
- Hendel, Charles W. (1962, first published 1934). *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Moralists*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Keohane, Nannerl (1978). "The Masterpiece of Policy in Our Century": Rousseau on the Morality of the Enlightenment." *Political Theory* 6: 457-84.
- Levine, Andrew (1976). *The Politics of Autonomy: A Kantian Reading of Rousseau's Social Contract*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Lovejoy, Arthur (1961). *Reflections on Human Nature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- Manuel, Frank E. (1978). "A Dream of Eupychia." *Daedalus* 107: 1-12.
- Masson, P. M., ed. (1914). *La Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard*. Fribourg: Université de Fribourg.
- Masters, Roger (1968). *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Poulet, Georges (1956). *Studies in Human Time*. Translated by Elliot Coleman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Confessions*. In *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-656.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1978). *Discourse on Political Economy*. In Roger Masters (ed.) and Judith Masters (trans.), *On the Social Contract, with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1979). *Emile or On Education*. Translated by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1964). *The First and Second Discourses*. Edited and translated by Roger Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1978). *The Geneva Manuscript*. In Roger Masters (ed.) and Judith Masters (trans.), *On the Social Contract, with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1960). *Letter to M. d'Alembert*. In Allan Bloom (trans.), *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Preface to *Narcisse*. In *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 2, pp. 959-74.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. In *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 2, pp. 3-760.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1959-69). *Oeuvres Complètes*. Edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Paris: Bibliothèque de Pléiade. (Cited as *Works*; translations by the author).
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*. In *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 1, pp. 993-1099.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*. In *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 1, pp. 657-992.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1978). *The Social Contract*. In Roger Masters (ed.) and Judith Masters (trans.), *On the Social Contract, with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Shklar, Judith (1969). *Men and Citizens. A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Starobinski, Jean (1971, first published 1957). *J.-J. Rousseau: la Transparence et l'Obstacle*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Stelling-Michaud, S. (1962). "Rousseau et l'Injustice Sociale." In *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Neuchâtel: La Baconnière.
- Temmer, Mark (1958). *Time in Rousseau and Kant*. Paris: Librairie Minard.
- Van Laere, Francois (1968). *Une Lecture du Temps Dans la Nouvelle Héloïse*. Neuchâtel: La Baconnière.