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Rousseau against the Enlightenment: Another Look at Both

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Abstract

This article examines the nuances in the philosophy of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It aims to refute the conception of Rousseau being either an Enlightenment philosopher or an autocritique of the Enlightenment, a concept proposed by a Rousseau scholar Mark Hulliung. Through close analysis of Rousseau's political and literary writings, as well as comparative studies between them and those of other Enlightenment philosophers, this article reveals several foundational assumptions that Rousseau held, which are so contradictory to the mainstream of the Enlightenment that Rousseau can be considered no less than an utter antithesis to the Enlightenment. The article starts by presenting and negating the two traditional conceptions of Rousseau, and it moves on to attributes the cause of such misconceptions to the provocative nature of Rousseau's writings. Then, the article lays out the essential characteristics of the Enlightenment, using leading figures such as Immanuel Kant and Dennis Diderot as examples, which reveal a conflict between the Enlightenment centrality of intellectual pursuit and Rousseau's assumption of intellectual distinctions. The second part of the article examines the difference of Rousseau's moral and political philosophy from that of the Enlightenment, which the article presents in a three-phase framework. It will show that Rousseau is against all three of the phases that led to and constituted the Enlightenment. The third part of the article focuses on contrasting Rousseau's ideal political body to that which the other philosophes favored, while also pointing out a possible cause for the mistaken inclusion of Rousseau into the Enlightenment. Overall this article mostly relies on primary sources of Rousseau's and other philosophes' writings, though it also takes into consideration recent scholars' comments on each of those figures. To support the conclusion of Rousseau's exclusion from the Enlightenment, this article also employs inductive reasoning to generalize the essence of the Enlightenment thinking and contrasts it to Rousseau's political ideas.

Keywords: Political philosophy, Rousseau, enlightenment, 18th century Europe

1. Introduction

Jean-Jacques Rousseau has traditionally been regarded as one of the leading figures of Enlightenment, but in recent years scholars have begun to take notice of Rousseau's deviation, both in writing and in lifestyle, from the mainstream of that movement. As a result, two conflicting images of Rousseau now coexist: one is a popular philosophe, a contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, and a supporter of individual liberty and equality; the other lives in isolation, quarrels with the philosophes, and makes vehement attacks on science, progress, and even reason itself. The continual debate over the true characterization of Rousseau gives rise to a new theory as a form of reconciliation: Rousseau is an "autocritique" of Enlightenment, that is to say, Rousseau — while criticizing and seeming to deviate from the Enlightenment — was in essence consistent with and loyal to that movement. However reconciliatory, the autocritique theory fails to stand its ground; Rousseau was not so much an autocritique as an utter antithesis to the Enlightenment. Some of Rousseau's ideas and terminologies were adopted by supporters of the Enlightenment, and, in hindsight, integrated into the arsenal of this widespread movement, but the adoption was partial and the integration misleading. In fact, those ideas and words were used in a manner far from Rousseau's original intention, which is elusive owing to the commonly accepted fact that his writings are provocative, inconsistent, and often aimed at different audiences.

Three principles, understood together, are the key to deciphering Rousseau's rhetorical writings: first, he insisted on the natural inequality of intellect among people; second, he believed the goal of reason was fundamentally incompatible with that of society; and third, he envisioned such society to be strictly local. All of these challenged the core of Enlightenment mentality, which was neatly summarized in Immanuel Kant's "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity," or even neater "*Sapere aude!*" ("Have courage to use your own reason!") (Kramnick, 1996, p. 1). Kant's "man" was universal: everyone could and should use their reason and be enlightened; thus, spoke the thinkers of Enlightenment. The underlying motif of Rousseau's three principles was precisely the rejection of this universality which was the common theme of all philosophes and cornerstone of Enlightenment: what Rousseau criticized was not only the "everyone could" and the "everyone should," but essentially the "everyone" itself.

1.1. The Age of Reason

The context of Rousseau's first principle was the height of "The Age of Reason" — the age of philosophes who believed the rational world of Bacon and Newton could be fully understood by rational minds. The French term for Enlightenment is "*les lumières*," meaning "lights," which Diderot wrote about enthusiastically as he used the image of "philosophy advancing with giant strides while *lumières* spread all around." (Damrosch, 2007, p. 218). These lights were lights of human reason, which "alone was cultivated," and "mankind could only be his pupil, not his enemy," wrote Voltaire as he praised Bacon, Newton, and Locke, whom he considered the cultivators of reason and prophets of Enlightenment. Many philosophes paid this homage to those three English men: Diderot and D'Alembert dedicated their *Encyclopédie* to them, and Jefferson, an American disciple of the Enlightenment, called them "the three greatest men that have ever lived." (Jefferson, 1950, p. 561). The significance of these three Englishmen to the philosophes and hence to Enlightenment lay in their views that the mind was rational, knowledge achievable, and thus the world understandable. Bacon laid the foundation for systematic, methodological, and empirical knowledge, upon which Newton based his *Principia* and the rational and mechanical view of world upheld by many philosophes. Locke, on the other hand, focused on the observer rather than the observed: building upon Descartes' epistemology, *cogito ergo sum*, which placed individual mind at the center of reality and knowledge, Locke developed his sensationalism, viewing the mind as a "blank slate" that accumulated knowledge by receiving sensations from the external world and by reflecting on those experiences through "understanding," the rational ability of mind. (Kramnick, 1996, pp. 186-187).

Lockean psychology on one hand and Newtonian physics on the other buttressed a soaring belief in progress, both scientific and moral. It was a consensus of the philosophes that such progress was, almost by definition, good. "The human mind emerged from barbarism," wrote D'Alembert as he celebrated progress in his introduction for the very first volume of the *Encyclopédie*. (Kramnick, 1996, p. 7). Some even believed, as Condorcet did, that the trend of progress they were witnessing would one day achieve "the true perfection of mankind." (Kramnick, 1996, p. 27). Such optimism was innate to empiricist epistemology, which asserted not only that unassisted human reason could acquire knowledge and thus make scientific and technological advancement, but also that such advancement had both an intrinsic value — as an end in itself — and an instrumental value in promoting the well-being of humanity.

1.2. First Principle: Inequality Of Intellect

It was this distinction between the intrinsic value and the instrumental value of scientific advancements that led to Rousseau's seemingly oxymoronic argument at the end of his *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, known as the *First Discourse*. After dedicating a whole discourse to criticizing the corruptive effect of science and art (which at that time period meant technique or artisanship) and condemning the "philosophers and orators," Rousseau took a surprising turn, arguing that those very philosophers, "the likes of Verulam (Bacon), Descartes, Newton," were "honorable" and should be recompensed for their work. Rousseau was not self-contradictory here. (Rousseau, 2011, p. 23). From the distinction between two types of values of progress, Rousseau took a step further and made an essential distinction between "learned men" and "ordinary men." The learned men, like Verulam, Descartes, and Newton, were those of "vast genius," "whom nature destined to be her disciples," and who made all the scientific progress and raised "monuments to the glory of the human mind." Ordinary men, with whom Rousseau identified himself, included everyone else. "For us, ordinary men," Rousseau commanded, "let us remain in our obscurity," and "confine ourselves to fulfilling our duties well." (Rousseau, 2011, pp. 24-25).

The point of contention between philosophes, who embraced the fruits of human intellect, and Rousseau, who insisted on the natural inequality of minds, was the public use of reason: both acknowledged and praised scientific and intellectual advancement, but they disagreed on whether such advancement was beneficial for — and thus should be accessible to — the public. Although the use of reason to guide human conduct was not the philosophes' invention — it could be traced at least back to classical philosophy, especially to the words and deeds of Socrates as portrayed by Plato — the belief that all humankind were suited for and in need of reason and that spreading *les lumières* of this universal reason was a mission or vocation distinguished the philosophes from philosophers of the classical era. Plato's tripartite theory of soul and polis explicitly stated that people were different in their "qualities of mind and soul": some were better suited to be the "guardians," while others belonged to the class of farmers and artisans. (Plato, trans. 2016). The guardians were the reason, the logos, that should rule the well-ordered soul and the polis, while the "appetite" should be tamed and the people who corresponded to it were naturally unsuited for reason. To maintain this harmony, a myth, a "noble lie," must be propagated and a form of censorship established. (Plato, trans. 2016).

Plato's well-ordered soul was not meant to remove the people, the *dēmos*, from his famous cave. In fact, the philosophers who returned to the cave would only find out that others were perfectly satisfied with the false images and would mistake those who had seen the sunlight as blind. While Plato assumed that most men were unreasonable and the best society was one where the reasonable elite ruled the unreasonable mass, the philosophes believed it possible and desirable to make all men reasonable. Alluding to Plato's tripartite theory, Kant called for a complete equalization of reason, predicting that the guardians themselves would "disseminate the spirit of the rational appreciation of both their own worth and every man's vocation for thinking for himself." Diderot referred to the *Encyclopédie* as a work that would "perfect man's knowledge" and concerned the "entire human race." (Kramnick, 1996, pp. 2, 19).

Contrary to his contemporaries, Rousseau sided with Plato — with whom he was much more familiar than most other philosophes were — making a vivid analogy in his *First Discourse* between the publicization of reason among ordinary men and Prometheus' stealing of fire. Attributing to Prometheus the title of "the inventor of the sciences," Rousseau deemed him to be "the god who was antagonistic toward the tranquility of men"; as the principal character on the

frontispiece of the *First Discourse*, Prometheus cried out to the Satyr who was trying to embrace the fire "*Satyr, tu ne le connais pas* (Satyr, you don't know it)." (Rousseau, 2011, p. 14). What the Satyr did not know was how powerful, how destructive the fire would be — that is, how the fire of science and artisanship would corrupt the people, the ordinary men and hence undermine the harmony of society. From there, Rousseau ended the *First Discourse* with the controversial conclusion that while the learned men should devote themselves to the study of the sciences and the arts, the ordinary men should "remain in obscurity and learn only how to act well" — a "glorious distinction observed long ago" that would preserve the virtue of both. (Rousseau, 2011, p. 25).

The fundamental distinction between ordinary men and learned men could account for how Rousseau seemed to be advocating for the cause of Enlightenment while in fact he was not. This distinction also undermined one argument of the theory that Mark Hulliung, one of the first to consider Rousseau an autocrisure, makes in his book *The Autocrisure of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes*. Hulliung points out that Rousseau "borrowed and supplemented the words of personages in his milieu," and by adopting the very words of the philosophes, Rousseau "remained staunchly loyal" to their ideals of "freedom, individual autonomy, and toleration which typified the 'century of philosophy.'" (Hulliung, 1994, p. 242). Hulliung hence interprets Rousseau's criticisms on the philosophes as disputes only on the means to achieve the goals of Enlightenment, in which Rousseau never failed to believe. (Hulliung, 1994, p. 3). Rousseau did use, and in fact invent, in his writings some of the notions that are now seen as ideals of the Enlightenment, but Hulliung ignores the presumption of inequality Rousseau held, which made Rousseau loyal to those ideals only inasmuch as they were applied to a few learned men; yet those learned men, according to Rousseau, were fundamentally incompatible with society.

1.3. Second Principle: The Incompatibility of Reason and Society

The second principle — the incompatibility of the goal of reason with that of society — was built on the long-established tension between the few intellectual elites and the public, between learned men and ordinary men, between the philosopher and the people, and essentially, between thought and civil society. Such tension could be traced back at least two millennia before the Enlightenment and Rousseau, when a few Greeks started to look at the natural world in a somewhat scientific way. Thales, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Parmenides had different ideas on the nature of the world, but they agreed on two things: first, there existed a nature that was beyond the reach of gods and that could be investigated by the human mind; and second, their investigations into such nature was entirely private and apolitical. The former distinguished them from the people, the *dēmos*, and the latter protected them from the *dēmos*, which was hostile to ideas that were skeptical, impious, destructive to their religion, and corruptive to their community.

The first among the early philosophers who caught the attention of the *dēmos* was Socrates, who as a result of his ideas was accused of corrupting the youth and impiety and, after making a famous yet futile defense of himself, sentenced to death. It is worth noting that in his *Apology*, Socrates never stood confidently rejecting religion and prejudices in the name of philosophy; instead he denied he was an atheist and tried to reconcile his way of life with the gods, particularly Apollo, the oracle of Delphi. This, along with Socrates' distinction between public and private life and his preference for the latter, bespoke the impotence of reason in the public sphere: people always lived with prejudices of one form or another, and it was for philosophers to know the truth but not to tell it. Therefore, philosophers could either live privately on the fringes of society to avoid persecution, as most did, or, as Plato envisioned in *The Republic*, rule the city as philosopher kings to force the *dēmos* to accept reason. However, the regime of philosopher kings would never be established, as Plato never made it realistic enough to be possible. For Socrates and Plato, along with many other ancients, the goal of reason was to contemplate for the sake of contemplating, which was entirely detached from, if not contradictory to, the goal of society.

1.3.1. The Enlightenment Mentality

The mentality of the Enlightenment was the opposite of that of the ancients. The philosophes believed that reason was not only compatible with society, but fundamental to the very foundation of society and beneficial to its goal. This belief was founded on three interrelated steps which paved the way for, and were themselves part of, the Enlightenment. The first was Machiavelli's paradigm shift of political philosophy. Machiavelli ridiculed the impotence of reason and the subordinate status of philosophers among the ancients, attributing such weakness of thought in relation to civil society to the fact that the political philosophy of Socrates and his followers was politically ineffective: wise men saw clearly what was wrong, but their wisdom did not generate the power to anything about it. According to Machiavelli, modern philosophy was to be politically effective, meaning that philosophers should somehow make their ideas understood and their commands obeyed by the people. To do so, the philosopher, the "unarmed prophets," and reason needed to educate society, particularly the princes; and the first step would be for the philosophers to lower their goal and to make their teachings understandable and acceptable to the princes. (Machiavelli, 2008, p. 28). However, compromised, reason was allowed to survive and prosper in Machiavelli's scheme; the goal of reason changed from contemplating the best possible outside of society to achieving the best probable within society.

The second step was the rise of contractarianism as an influential political philosophy. The idea that rational selfishness binds people together and forms society originated in the writings of Hobbes, the first of the modern contractarians, who argued that the passionate desire of self-preservation forces people to become rational in their deliberations on the means to self-preservation, and the ultimate result of their deliberations is a rational agreement that lays the cornerstone of society. (Hobbes, 2007, p. 79). The desire for self-preservation is born from the strong passion called "fear of violent death," the opposite of which is a similarly strong passion, the "desire for a desire," the pride and vanity of men in the state of nature. (Strauss, 1963, pp. 57-58). The "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" life is a result

of the latter triumphing over the former, of men who are driven more by desire for recognition than by aversion to death; the establishment of a social contract and sovereign is the fruit of the former triumphing over the latter, of men who fear death more than they want glory. (Hobbes, 2007, p. 76). Hobbes agreed with Socrates that fear of death is the most powerful passion of most men. However, Socrates believed that because of this fear, those men need the superstructure of beliefs and prejudices that make death less unbearable and the people less rational. Hobbes, on the contrary, suggested that it is precisely out of this fear that men become rational; and such rationality is robust because it is founded on the firm ground of passion. The rational deliberations they make culminate in a *Leviathan* who demands them to give up their freedom, but who also promises them safety and stability by granting them society and order. Reason, or deliberation, is hence the building block of the Hobbesian society. It is even more so in that of Locke.

Locke largely inherited Hobbes' idea that rational calculation is the foundation of society and went even further, suggesting that the rationality of men is not simply a derivative of the passionate wish of self-preservation, but is itself the essence of human nature. Man is already rational in the state of nature, and their rationality drives them not only to avoid death, but also to accumulate wealth and property. The cause of violence and insecurity is not so much the Hobbesian "desire for a desire" as the conflicts of interests with others that occur as people claim more and more land and property for themselves. The foundation of society is calculated self-preservation rather than passionate self-preservation, a positive protection of property rather than a negative fear of death, a discreet consent to a legislative power rather than a total surrender to a *Leviathan*. (Locke, 1980, pp. 17,65-66). The Lockean state of nature and society left no room for passion, and crowned reason as the supreme force that drives human conduct and lays the foundation of society.

Locke's view of human nature also contributed to the third step, one that made reason complementary, if not equivalent, to utility. By equating man's rationality with his desire for comfortable self-preservation — namely, life, liberty, and property — Locke made a point that became one of the central beliefs of Enlightenment: reason does, and is meant to, better man's condition, which is also the goal of society. Two emerging disciplines embodied this belief: natural science and economics. The philosophes' optimism in natural science's potential to benefit humanity was built on Bacon's assertion that the goal of science is to "ease man's estate" and Descartes' belief that science would make man "master and possessor of nature." (Bacon & Kitchin, 2001, p. 51). Many of the philosophes were themselves scientists, and they saw utility in what they studied. Marquis de Condorcet, a mathematician and a popular philosophe, offered a comprehensive discourse on how each of the different subjects in science — mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and physical sciences — was useful "in their application to the arts (technology and artisanship); Priestley and Turgot, both prominent philosophes, agreed and suggested that those useful sciences would create a people "more easy and comfortable." (Kramnick, 1996, p. 69). Benjamin Franklin, an American philosophe and a polymath in science, envisioned a future where "the power of man over matter" would be unimaginable, where "agriculture may diminish its labor and double its produce; all diseases may be sure means be prevented or cured," and where "our lives lengthened at pleasure even beyond the antediluvian standard." (Kramnick, 1996, p. 74).

The transformation of philosophers to scientists made reason suit the appetite's interest, while that of philosophers to economists made the two utterly inseparable. The philosophes embraced material gain, by which they specifically meant those made by self-interest. As early as half a century before Adam Smith, Bernard Mandeville argued in favor of self-interest in his *The Fable of the Bees*. "Bare virtue can't make nations live," according to Mandeville, but self-interest allowed people to "live in luxury and ease." (Kramnick, 1996, p. 254). This "doctrine of self-interest" was then adopted by Voltaire, whose defense of luxury in *Le Mondain* made the goodness of material gain one of the central ideas of the Enlightenment. (Force, 2007, pp. 14-15). Adam Smith went further by arguing that self-interest would result in public good if people were allowed to freely engage in commerce, reconciling the rational, calculating goal of individuals to the goal of society as a whole. Such reconciliation between the goal of reason and that of society was completed when the "principle of utility" became the sole guide for reason in the writings of Jeremy Bentham, whose utilitarianism pushed Mandeville's and Smith's arguments to their extreme.

1.3.2. Rousseau's Objections

By the time Rousseau emerged as a prominent writer with the publication of his *First Discourse* in 1750, the three steps mentioned above — led by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke, respectively — were largely accomplished in theory. The philosophes, followers of those three men, were striving to establish the centrality of reason in practice; D'Alembert made this clear in his introduction to the first volume of *Encyclopédie* when he wrote that the Enlightenment project was a "conspiracy" of reason. (Kramnick, 1996, p. 11). Through the *Encyclopédie*, the philosophes put into practice what Machiavelli could only put onto paper and what Plato could only fantasize. However, regarding the relation between reason and society, Rousseau again favored the ancients over his contemporaries. Even in the *Discourse on Political Economy*, his only political writing for the *Encyclopédie*, Rousseau insisted on the separation of reason and society, as well as the priority of the latter to the former. In the choice between Socrates the philosopher and Cato the good citizen, "we ought to be led by the latter.... For a people consisting of wise men has never been produced; however, it is not impossible to make a people happy." (Rousseau, 2011, p. 134). Rousseau built his argument against the harmony of reason and society on his criticisms of the three steps that led to the belief in this harmony.

Rousseau had serious doubt about the complementary relation between utility and society. Such doubt was based on his rejection of the assumed equivalence of utility and genuine felicity of people and on his preference for the latter, which he believed could be found in nature and preserved by virtue. The *First Discourse* was Rousseau's answer not so much to the question of whether the "sciences and arts" of Condorcet actually creates a people "more easy and comfortable," but of whether such ease and comfort are worth attaining. Sciences and arts lead to leisure and luxury, and

vice versa, but leisure and luxury are the source of vice rather than virtue, for as arts develop and luxury increases, "true courage is enervated" and "military virtues disappear." (Rousseau, 2011, p. 18). Although people do become more easy and comfortable, such ease and comfort lead to their collective degradation and destruction. In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (trans. 2011), known as the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau focused on the corrupting and degenerating effect of science on each individual, showing how "weak and servile" civilized man is compared to his simple and savage counterpart, and how, as he alienates himself from nature, he becomes a "depraved animal." Therefore, Rousseau concluded that the sciences and the arts, the fruits of reason, have "added nothing to our genuine felicity" and would only "end in our destruction." Along with his criticism of science, Rousseau also denounced the other aspect of utility, the doctrine of self-interest and economic gain, in the name of virtue and nature. "Ancient politicians spoke incessantly about mores and virtue; ours speak only of commerce and money." (Rousseau, 2011, p. 16). He argued not only that luxury leads to idleness and degeneration, but that the force behind self-interest is itself a vice: *amour-propre*, as Rousseau called it, is what transforms "natural man" into rational, calculating "civilized man," driven by self-interest, and is what causes man to deviate from nature and to lose his true self. (Rousseau, 2011, p. 68).

It is necessary to look at Rousseau's idea of the state of nature to fully understand his notion of *amour-propre*. Rousseau accepted Hobbes' and Locke's assumption of the importance of the state of nature in understanding the state of modern society, but the Rousseauian state of nature was radically different from those of his predecessors. He believed his was the most primitive and thus natural state of nature, which "none of them has reached": "They spoke about savage man, and it was civilized man they depicted." (Rousseau, 2011, p. 45). The civilized quality that was wrongly assigned to uncivilized man by Hobbes and Locke is rationality, which Rousseau believed to be the product of society and not the other way around. This argument is a logical continuation of Rousseau's assertion on the qualitative difference between felicity and utility, between genuine needs and imaginary needs, and between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*. *Amour de soi* is the desire to fulfill the elementary needs of life, and it is neither passionate nor rational, but pre-rational; *amour-propre*, on the other hand, is both rational and passionate: rational in that it is calculating, passionate in that it is blind and imaginary. What Locke assumed to be one single quality of human nature therefore consists of two distinct parts: one that precedes society but is irrelevant to society, the other that is central to society yet is brought about by society. Rousseau sided with Hobbes (and against Locke) on the idea that the instinct of self-preservation itself is irrational, but he arrived at a different conclusion: such an irrational state is "by nature good," by which Rousseau meant that the savages in the state of nature "knew not good or evil," and were driven by their compassion only once their basic needs were fulfilled. (Strauss, 1971, p. 271). The modern phrase that best encompasses the qualities of Rousseau's primitive men is "noble savage," referring to those who are free from civilization and are better off for it.

Where Rousseau disagreed with Hobbes, therefore, is in the need and desirability of society. Although Rousseau never denied that society is inevitable, he did not believe it desirable, and dedicated his entire *Second Discourse* on returning to the innocent, good, and beautiful state of nature. The cause of the emergence of society for Rousseau is not *amour-propre*, the self-interest that urges people to use rational means to achieve the irrational purpose of pride and recognition; society inevitably emerges by itself as population grows, as people naturally live closer to each other, and as they start to have to compete for resources to fulfill *amour de soi*. With society comes language and property: the former enables men to form the idea of recognition, envy, and superiority, and the latter provides them with the object of such recognition, of *amour-propre*. The passionate selfishness that rationally seeks property is thus the daughter, and not the mother, of society — such is what Rousseau meant when he criticized Locke for "not explaining what belonging (property) means." (Rousseau, 2011, p. 45). Therefore, far from being the solution to the problems of Hobbes' and Locke's savage men, society is the problem. Reason in the Rousseauian society is important, but only because society makes it so; and to make things worse, that society is corrupt and that reason blind. In his beautiful prose, Rousseau borrowed the contractarians' methodology but rejected their conclusions on the centrality and desirability of reason to society.

By dissociating reason from society, Rousseau attempted to counter the intellectual trend started by Machiavelli that contrived to forge reason into society. Although Rousseau had much respect for Machiavelli and agreed with him on the need of educating society, what Rousseau meant by "educating" was principally different from that of the philosophes, the heirs of Machiavelli, who carried forward his education project in an only slightly altered form. The "conspiracy" of Encyclopedists like D'Alembert was not so much a scientific one to gain knowledge as an educational one to teach knowledge. With the teaching of universal knowledge, came the universal acceptance of reason; thus, the Encyclopedists accomplished through the people what Machiavelli could not through the princes. While none of the writers of the great textbook of the century were actual experts in what is now considered education, Rousseau was, being the author of one of the best books on education ever written. The Rousseauian education is not simply a political scheme aimed at spreading the use of reason but a way of attaining virtue, which is often susceptible to the corruption of reason. Therefore, instead of giving his *Émile* a book of all knowledge in the world, Jean-Jacques keeps his pupil away from books, from "the cause of sorrow." (Rousseau, 1979, p. 116). The pupil in *Émile* was analogous to the *dēmos* in the real world, who, Rousseau suggested, were not ready to fully embrace reason but prone to take advantage of it, making it the source of vice.

The tutor in Rousseau's *Émile* controls every aspect of *Émile*'s life, making it possible to perfectly protect "his heart from vice and his mind from error," while also making such education impossible to virtually anyone in society. (Rousseau, 1979, p. 93). But this by no means indicates Rousseau did not intend to be effective — he was an effective teacher in his own way. Instead of educating the public with facts and knowledge, he appealed to them through rhetoric and stories, in the same way Machiavelli did his audience, as Rousseau believed that Machiavelli's *Prince* was not a handbook for tyrants but a satirical piece intended to provoke hatred toward tyranny. While the philosophes imitated Machiavelli the educator and wrote a handbook to allow the people to obtain knowledge, Rousseau followed his own

version of Machiavelli and wrote provocative essays, a popular fictional novel, and narratives that read like a novel to teach people the wisdom of staying away from knowledge. Rousseau's education in theory was to be accomplished by his education in practice, which, to an impressive extent, took advantage of the print culture that flourished in France at his time. Although both the philosophes and Rousseau owed their influence to this print culture, their intentions in publishing were vastly different: one was to inform, the other to provoke; one was for reason, the other for virtue.

For Rousseau, the mutually beneficial relationship between reason and society — which was taken for granted by many of the philosophes — was never obvious, and he rejected the spread of reason in society in the name of nature and virtue. However, Rousseau realized, as he investigated the state of nature in the *Second Discourse*, that the very possibility of society entails reason and all its negative effects: *amour-propre* is in effect as soon as people start to live together. He thus began his masterpiece on society, *On the Social Contract*, with the acknowledgement that “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” (Rousseau, 2003, p. 1). Once man is in the chains of society, he has no way of going back to a state of nature; however, it is these very chains that make virtue possible to him. What Rousseau addressed in *Social Contract* was the nature of a virtuous society, and what he discovered was that only in a strictly local society — with a homogeneous population, a uniform civil religion, and a legislator — could virtue be possible.

1.4. *The Local Society in the Social Contract*

The central theme of *On the Social Contract* is the concept of “general will.” This term came from Diderot's article “Natural Right” in the *Encyclopédie*, where it was defined as universal “principles of law written by all civilized nations.” (Diderot, 2009). Diderot's general will be universal in that it was a “pure act of understanding,” and its legitimacy came from the universal jurisdiction of reason. However, as Hulliung has noted, Rousseau's use of the term “general will” had no such universality as Diderot envisioned and was “limited to the citizens of a political entity, the city-state.” (Hulliung, 1994, p. 1). Rousseau's ideal form of society was indeed a local city-state, a community of “proximity, equality, and similarity” — like ancient Sparta and Rousseau's hometown Geneva — because for the general will to be expressed, there needs to be a “sufficiently informed populace,” and that populace could not have “partial associations,” which exist “at the expense of the large association.” (Rousseau, 2003, pp. 15-17). What is especially banned in this homogeneous population is the corruptive fire of Prometheus and the associations of philosophers, the destructive nature to society of which Rousseau had repeatedly articulated in his two *Discourses*.

Besides its homogeneous population, Rousseau's republic has another distinguishing feature: a unitary civil religion. Since reason always points them toward self-interest and away from the public good, citizens of Rousseau's republic need an emotional belief that helps them express their general will and facilitate virtue. Virtue, embodied in this *religion civile*, bonds citizens — not mere men, but citizens — together, as it did in the Greek *poleis*, and it could only work in a community that is comparable to a Greek *polis* in terms of size and particularity. (Rousseau, 2003, p. 96). Reason is detrimental to such civil religion — which sounds a lot like, and in fact serves the same purpose of, Plato's “noble lie” — because of its innate universality and skepticism. Once again, Rousseau sided with the ancients and against his contemporaries: while Diderot and Hume advocated for the elimination of superstition, Rousseau spent great length arguing that people should remain in obscurity in favor of virtue; while Voltaire believed freedom of speech and religious toleration for all could improve the human situation, Rousseau asked for a legislator, a “superior intelligence,” who, “by reason of his genius,” “draws up the laws” with “recourse to divine intervention.” (Barnard, 2018)

A legislator is the leader that Rousseau envisioned for his ideal society. The actual leaders of the European society Rousseau lived in were monarchs, some of whom were enlightened despots, which Enlightenment thinkers from Hobbes to Hume to Voltaire considered necessary, if not all that desirable. Besides the obvious difference that one existed and the other could not possibly do so, the distinction of Rousseau's ideal leader from that of the philosophes centers on the relation between reason and society. By arguing that the “men of letters” were harmless to the power of the monarchs and by personally befriending them, Voltaire requested from the enlightened despots one thing that the philosophes needed the most: freedom of speech, or in essence, the freedom of the public use of reason. (Kramnick, 1996, p. 421). A “benevolent despot” should, as some of them — Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia — did, protect the philosophers from the repressive force of religious fanaticism and aristocratic coercion. This political libertarianism the philosophes desired would be an ideal environment for their project of the spread of reason.

Rousseau's legislator, on the contrary, could not be further from a libertarian. The legislator possesses “superior intelligence,” but in no way would he share this intelligence with the public. (Rousseau, 2003, p. 25). The legislator is to promote a civil religion that would facilitate virtue, but such civil religion must be fanatical to be effective. In order to maintain a homogeneous environment in which no partial association of philosophers was possible, the legislator, himself a philosopher, must not be part of the society — like Lycurgus of Sparta, who resigned the throne once he created a law for his city-state. Instead of granting society the freedom of reason, Rousseau's legislator is the supreme epitome of reason who nevertheless limited this privilege — or misfortune — to himself for the sake of virtue in society. Instead of promoting a universal libertarian principle, the legislator would create a cult of virtue for his local, homogenous city-state.

1.5. *Confusions in Classification*

Rousseau's legislator appeared to be more radical than philosophes' enlightened despots, but this is not to say the philosophes were simply defending the status quo. In the eyes of the conservatives, Voltaire's “crush the infamous thing” was just as subversive as Rousseau's “man is born free.” This us vs. them mentality, together with the fact that the ideas of both the philosophes and Rousseau contributed significantly to producing the French Revolution, makes it easy to mistake Rousseau as simply one of the philosophes. Edmund Burke started this confusion when he classified the Revolution as the

product of a conspiracy of "men of letters" and called the British "not the converts of Rousseau, not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvétius has made no progress amongst us. Atheists are not our preachers." (Burke, 2009, p. 95). Burke's classification was based on the political outcome of all the preceding intellectual debates, in which sense Rousseau did seem to be part of the conspiracy, especially as many of Rousseau's terms and concepts were adopted by revolutionaries, most famously Robespierre.

2. Conclusion

Nevertheless, in his intention, Rousseau was more concerned about the society Enlightenment would and did give rise to — that of *Bourgeois* — than the society it intended to destroy — the *Ancien Regime*. What he saw as the nature of the intellectual movement of his time was, in essence, a continuation of the rationalizing project started by Machiavelli. This project offered a possible reconciliation of the thought-civil society dichotomy that was left unresolved in classical philosophy, yet Rousseau sided with the ancients and rejected his contemporaries' optimism in their solution. With his provocative writings, Rousseau attempted to counter the intellectual trend of his time: although he used terms like "freedom," "contract," and "general will," he used them in a completely different sense; in the sense of nature rather than reason, virtue rather than self-interest, and locality rather than universality. The autocritique theory — that Rousseau only disagreed with other philosophes on the "route to Enlightenment" and not on the goal of it — overlooks the underlying assumptions Rousseau held. (Hulliang, 1994, p. 3). Rousseau intended to and did, to some degree, lead humanity into what came after the Enlightenment; but such age was, and was intended to be, altogether different from what was proposed by the philosophes. Therefore, Rousseau was neither an Enlightenment philosopher nor an autocritique to the Enlightenment. He fundamentally deviated from that movement, and his criticism of it was no so much an autocritique as an utter antithesis to it.

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