Introduction

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This book began with the sense that freedom, one of the longest-standing ideals in the West, is in today's world increasingly compromised and a subject for deep concern; revisiting the past, and thereby bringing it into the present, can provide a means of reflecting on this issue beyond the soundbite. Debates about freedom were first set out in their modern version by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who sought to investigate the relationship between freedom and equality in two potentially conflicting arenas: that of humankind and that of citizen. His ideas and analyses were taken up during the philosophical Enlightenment, were often invoked during the French Revolution, and still resonate, we believe, in contemporary discussions of freedom.

In English we use the words "freedom" and "liberty" interchangeably. Rousseau received the word and concept of *liberté* as it had developed from the Greek *eleutheria* and the Latin *libertas* ("freedom") *libertus* ("freedman"). The political sense of freedom, how much or how little should be allowed, goes back to the Greeks, as do questions of social dependence and about inner freedom as a means to happiness. The meaning of the related words *libertin* and *libertinage* in French, derived from *libertinus* ("pertaining to a freedman"), evolved from "freed slave" to one who indulges in excessive freedom concerning religious matters and, later, to intellectual and sexual freedom; Rousseau brings all of these meanings into play within different contexts. He inscribes the history of the concept and the word through metaphors of enslavement and yoking in order to test the possibilities and limits of freedom for the individual and within society. The *Second Discourse* opens with the Delphic oracle's exhortation to "know thyself," setting forth a program to re-examine not only political and social structures but the tensions and contradictions of inner life that underpin these structures as well.

Throughout his works, Rousseau writes about the conditions for and the constraints on liberty as he formulates ways in which to change the

relationship of the individual to society. In this volume, we challenge the sense of an "either–or" philosophy that opposes the private and the public, the mind and the body. These essays show that, contrary to a Jacobin or "totalitarian" interpretation of Rousseau's work, according to which the individual has little or no place, Rousseau's writings reflect on the role of feeling and passion in relation to reason, free will in relation to natural goodness, and a practice of being in the world necessary to existence. Rousseau offers not one, but several conceptions of liberty.

The authors here explore how different forms of liberty emerge in Rousseau's writings from the early to the late works. First, there is the liberty of man in the state of nature, before the development of a moral sense and of a social sense going beyond compassion. Second, there is the liberty of man in a perfect society – the society described in the *Social Contract*, in which man is part of a community ruled by the general will:

> Anyone who dares to institute a people must feel capable of, so to speak, changing human nature; of transforming each individual who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole into part of a larger whole from which that individual would, as it were, receive his life and his being; of weakening man's constitution in order to strengthen it; of substituting a partial and moral existence for the independent and physical existence we have all received from nature. In a word, he must take from man his own forces in order to give him forces which are foreign to him and of which he cannot make use without the help of others.[1]

This is Rousseau's conception of what Isaiah Berlin will later call "positive liberty,"[2] of what Benjamin Constant had called "la liberté des anciens."[3] It goes further than the democratic citizen's participation in community decisions; it involves almost a fusion with the other citizens' notion of the common good.

Third, and finally, when society is imperfect – based not on the general will but on fraud or force – or when it is corrupt and decadent, as was the case, Rousseau believed, for the society within which he lived, there is still a third kind of freedom: not that of the citizen, but that of the individual, now endowed with a sense of morality, and trying to live (along with his family) an independent life amidst an unsavory society. This third sense of freedom merges with an autonomous sense of will and the development of an inner moral life based on sentiment and individual reason more flexible than its rigid universalization would suggest.

This volume explores these various forms of liberty and how they differ from one another. Rousseau experiments with the idea that men and women try to be both citizens (part-time) and private individuals, and even form private groups. He has been read as a firm enemy both

of representation and of parties – exemplifying a conflict between the liberalism characteristic of British and French Enlightenment thinkers. But does Rousseau really go so far, or can we not also be individuals, and form groups in all the areas not included in the realm of the general will? In other words, is the city of the *Social Contract* a preview of a totalitarian Orwellian nightmare, or is it an idealized form of the Swiss cantons?

This volume grew out of a conference held in May 2007 at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy. The authors include both social scientists and humanists, and, although sometimes scholars in these two disciplines speak quite different languages, the conference participants exchanged thoughts and interpretations based on common areas of inquiry from productively different perspectives. It was a magical few days, not only because of the beauty of the location, but because something wonderful happened intellectually during the sessions that could not have been predicted.

Many of the essays directly question or go beyond traditional readings of Rousseau's work on the problem of freedom. From varying points of view, they show that concern with both the word and the concept of freedom runs from the beginning of his anthropological work, through the great sociopolitical works, to the final autobiographical writings. If, historically, the anthropological writings have often been read in departments of anthropology and sociology, the sociopolitical works in departments of political science, and the novel (*Julie, or the New Heloïse*) and final autobiographical works in literature departments, we believe that these essays demonstrate the need to reach across the disciplines in order to understand the diverse meanings of "freedom" for Rousseau, and the way in which he elaborates them. Reading them across disciplines – the autobiographical with the sociopolitical, the anthropological with the literary – the essays address the role of music, pedagogy, politics, philosophy, and the place of religion. That Rousseau deliberately blurred the lines between the public and the private is part of what fascinates readers about his ideas. That he continues to provoke readers (whether negatively or positively), for example on such issues as the role of women in society, there is little doubt.

Rousseau continually turned from the real to the ideal as a triggering mechanism for his innovative thinking: "Let us … begin by setting all the facts aside…"[4] Here is the call to a methodology of hypothesis and theory beyond experience and historical evidence – even though Rousseau himself draws incessantly on both. He gave up his own children yet wrote a novel-treatise about pedagogy; he suffused his writings with the metaphor

of slavery[5] while largely ignoring the reality of a flourishing slave trade – to name only two salient examples. The turn toward an abstracted form of thought has also endured through the French Revolution to the present, whether revered or resisted.

The essays included here bring out, among other things, the importance of hypothesis and conjecture in Rousseau's works; what is taken as given and what contingent in his rewriting of history; definitions of nature and natural law, and the invention of sociopolitical thought; how Rousseau read authors from antiquity and foreshadowed thought from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. They reflect upon the language with which he discusses freedom, equality, and the status of the human; the individual in relation to others within the social context; the role of affect in analyzing the human condition; and what it means to reflect on inner freedom, or conscience, in the context of shared humanity.

Important to this volume is the sense that, far from abandoning his first work in his last, Rousseau arrived at a sense of internal freedom within the individual through the logic of the works that he had already written. This does not mean that one can find a linear, causal relationship between one work and the next; Rousseau's thought makes logical leaps from one work to another, and creates ruptures even within a single work. Nor can one explain fully how a thought or work came about through the authors and the works that Rousseau read (he read widely, but also selectively and critically), or through his biography, although the relationship of his biography to his autobiography is clearly important. Rather, what this means is that Rousseau confronts questions about freedom and necessity, individual conscience, and social relations within the public sphere in complex and important ways. He offers a panoply of ideas that continue to enrich us today as we engage with our present-day concerns about individuals within vastly differing societies.

NOTES

1 Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings,* ed. and trans. by V. Gourevitch (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 69.
2 I. Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 118–73.
3 B. Constant, *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. by Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 302–7.
4 Rousseau "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men," in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed. R. D. Masters and C. Kelly, 12 vols. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990–).

5 O. Patterson's *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) and K. Raaflaub's *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece* (University of Chicago Press, 2004) give a sense of the long history of the concept of freedom and the metaphor of slavery; C. L. Miller's *The French Atlantic Triangle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) analyzes the relationship between culture and the actual slave trade.

PART I

CHAPTER 1

Freeing man from sin: Rousseau on the natural condition of mankind

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> Men are wicked; a sad and constant experience makes proof unnecessary; yet man is naturally good, I believe I have proved it.
>
> Jean-Jacques Rousseau[1]

In 1753, the Academy of Dijon wondered, "What is the origin of inequality among men?" and "whether it is authorized by natural law."[2] Surprised by the Academy's audacity, Rousseau took it upon himself to respond with a treatise so much longer than what the Academy had asked for, that his entry was dismissed without being read in its entirety by the jury.[3] The length of what came to be known as the *Second Discourse*, however, is not its only curious characteristic. This work is extraordinarily fragmented: according to Rousseau's own divisions of the text, it consists of (1) an epistle dedicatory; (2) a preface; (3) an exordium; (4) Part I; (5) Part II; and (6) Rousseau's notes. In addition to these parts, the reader is faced with a frontispiece, a title page which contains a second picture and an epigraph from Aristotle's *Politics*, a rather curious note on the notes, as well as an explicit challenge to choose the correct path through the work, and thereby avoid joining the ranks of the "vulgar Readers."[4] These structural curiosities, in turn, house certain well-known substantive oddities, the most notorious of which is the relationship between Part I and Part II of the *Discourse*. Therein, Rousseau proposes to seek out natural man by means of an extended examination of his natural condition. Yet, in his hands, the state of nature – which is usually but a brief prelude to political theories – becomes a drawn-out story that begins in one set of colors and ends much later, in very different shades.[5]

Commentators have pointed to these and many other challenges, and have offered a broad range of interpretations of this difficult work. These vary widely, but as Christopher Kelly has pointed out, they tend to share one characteristic: they attempt to make sense of the *Second Discourse* by "explaining away parts of [Rousseau's] argument."[6] Thus, to take but

one example, commentators often choose between two parts of the work that seem impossible to reconcile, Part I and Rousseau's notes, dismissing the one and stressing the significance of the other. As if difficulties with what Rousseau does offer in the *Second Discourse* were not enough, one has to consider also the significance of certain conspicuous absences. For instance, as Robert Wokler observes, it is more than a little curious that Rousseau is virtually silent therein when it comes to two related themes that are central to the rest of his oeuvre, music and religion.[7] After all, Rousseau claims in the *Confessions* that the *Second Discourse* was a work "of the greatest importance," in which he was able to develop his principles "completely," and he insists at every opportunity that those principles are always and everywhere the same.[8]

The most challenging problem with this work, however, as Victor Gourevitch notes, is "how to make coherent sense of what Rousseau says about the state of nature: is it conjectural or is it factual?"[9] Having charged state-of-nature theorists with a failure to reach the true natural condition of mankind, Rousseau sets out to do so himself.[10] The result is the "pure state of nature" of Part I, a condition

> which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions in order accurately to judge of our present state.[11]

Skeptical readers might wonder whether Rousseau's return to the state of nature is merely a bow to literary convention, but there is ample reason to think otherwise. For Rousseau,

> [The] study of original man, of his true needs, and of the fundamental principles of his duties is also *the only effective means available* to dispel the host of difficulties that arise regarding the origin of moral inequality, the true foundations of the Body politic, the reciprocal rights of its members, and a thousand similar questions, as important as they are badly elucidated.[12]

Rousseau may sound as though he is exaggerating here, but I wish to suggest that he means what he says about the significance of the state of nature quite literally. The first question, then, that requires an answer is the one that Kelly asks: what does Rousseau mean when he tells us that the pure state of nature "perhaps never did exist"? Kelly argues that to understand Rousseau's *peut-être* properly, we have to take "seriously the actual possibility, but not necessarily the historical reality, of the pure state of nature."[13] This crucial distinction allows us to begin to untangle the relationship between the two states of nature of the *Second Discourse*.

NATURAL MAN

On the frontispiece of the *Second Discourse*, the reader finds two clues as to the meaning of the pure state of nature, which usually pass unnoticed. The first of these is a quotation from Aristotle's *Politics*, which warns that it is necessary to observe what is by nature not in the corrupted but rather in those things that are in accordance with nature.[14] The second clue appears to be unintentional, since in the first edition of the *Second Discourse* the quotation is attributed to Book II, rather than Book I of the *Politics*, which is the correct source.[15] Aristotle makes this statement in the context of his controversial discussion of slavery, so Rousseau's choice of this text as his epigraph might be interpreted as a comment on the human condition. It is, in fact, a statement of method for Rousseau, just as it is for Aristotle.

Aristotle's discussion of slavery in the *Politics* is as good an example as any of why this method is contentious. If there is such a thing as natural slavery, then some slaves are properly enslaved, and some are not. As Aristotle explains, observing a wide variety of actual slaves in very different circumstances is, by itself, insufficient if we want to assess them thus. In addition to that information, one would have to know something about the nature of man and the nature of a slave, and only a comparison between these and the actual cases would permit one to judge whether a particular slave was so by nature or not. This kind of comparison is essential to Aristotle's procedure in every area of inquiry. In Book II of the *Politics*, to which Rousseau's publisher, Rey, misattributes the original statement, for example, Aristotle explains that in order to understand forms of government and their suitability to different circumstances, one must know not only those circumstances and actual regimes, but also others that have been proposed in speech and are thought to be good.[16] In that context, Aristotle is thinking of Plato's *Republic*, which he proceeds to criticize, but, more generally, he considers it the task of any branch of knowledge to know not only what is actual but, first and foremost, what is the best without qualifications or restrictions.[17]

Where the nature of things is concerned, it is clear why these signposts would matter. To use the example invoked most often in this regard, knowing that it is in the nature of an acorn to become an oak tree, one can proceed to characterize the careers of different acorns as natural or unnatural, successful or unsuccessful, and so on. Extending this logic to human nature invites all kinds of trouble, but it is clear that the author of the prize-winning *First Discourse* is far from reluctant to do so. What is

at stake in the determination of the true natural condition of mankind? If natural man is A, actual specimens of the A variety can be pronounced natural, whereas specimens of the M and Y varieties can be ruled deviations. In fact, however, this determination is far more contentious, since Rousseau's description of that natural condition is not offered in a vacuum; where the rest of the world says that natural man is one thing, Rousseau wants to say that he is something altogether different.

TWO VARIETIES OF MISANTHROPY

Attempting to temper the negative reaction to what readers interpreted as his suggestion that human beings are evil by nature, Hobbes declared,

> we cannot tell the good and the bad apart, hence even if there were fewer evil men than good men, good, decent people would still be saddled with the constant need to watch, distrust, anticipate and get the better of others, and to protect themselves by all possible means.[18]

Hobbes's backhanded compliment did little to make those good, decent people feel better, and this situation presented Rousseau with an odd problem. Having realized that "[i]t is not so much what is horrible and false as what is just and true in [Hobbes's] politics that has made it odious," Rousseau was clearly aware of the limits that Hobbes's reputation imposed on the effectiveness of his message.[19] If that message contained something useful, then that would have to be dissociated from Hobbes in order to be made appealing. As it turns out, Rousseau found much that was useful in Hobbes, but, as he was preparing to respond to the Academy's question, Hobbes's most significant bequest was his unassailable demonstration that men are by nature equal.[20] The only problem was that, in the state of nature, as Hobbes saw it, natural equality led very quickly to a life that is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[21]

Regardless of where one situates Rousseau in relation to his near contemporaries, there is widespread agreement that he, along with more or less everyone else, at least felt the need to adopt a Hobbist vocabulary and to engage Hobbes. Beyond that, however, most commentators would proceed to place Rousseau and Hobbes in opposite camps rather quickly.[22] Rousseau's treatment of Hobbes in the *Second Discourse* is perhaps most responsible for this classification, since therein Rousseau identifies Hobbes as the chief culprit among those who misunderstand and misuse the concept of the state of nature.[23] All those who had resorted to the study of the state of nature before him, Rousseau argues, had committed the same