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0521531381 - Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the 'Well-Ordered Society'

Maurizio Viroli

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Maurizio Viroli

Assistant Professor of Politics, Princeton University

Translated by Derek Hanson



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What is called union in a body politic is a very equivocal thing. The true kind is a union of harmony, whereby all the parts, however opposed they may appear, co-operate for the general good of society – as dissonances in music co-operate in producing overall concord. In a State where we seem to see nothing but commotion there can be union – that is, a harmony resulting in happiness, which alone is true peace. It is as with the parts of the universe, eternally linked together by the action of some and the reaction of others. But in the concord of Asiatic despotism – that is, of all government which is not moderate – there is always real dissension. The worker, the soldier, the lawyer, the magistrate, the noble are joined only inasmuch as some oppress the others without resistance. And, if we see any union there, it is not citizens who are united but dead bodies buried one next to the other.

Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, translated by D. Lowenthal, New York, 1965, pp. 93–4.

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Preface

An earlier version of this book was presented as a doctoral thesis at the European University Institute in Florence. I should like to record, first of all, a very great debt of gratitude to Werner Maihofer, President of the Institute, who supervised my thesis throughout its development and patiently assisted me at every stage of its composition. I also learned much from discussions with Maurice Cranston and Athanasios Moulakis.

My greatest single debt, however, is to Quentin Skinner, who read several drafts of this work while it was still in manuscript and compelled me to a greater understanding of Rousseau's place within the tradition of both classical and modern republicanism. The final version of this work was composed while I was in Cambridge as a Research Fellow of Clare Hall. I would like to thank the President and the Fellows of the College for their generosity in having appointed me to their number. The intellectual atmosphere of the College has provided an ideal environment for the completion of this work.

I would also like to express my very sincerest thanks to Norberto Bobbio for having agreed to be one of my examiners and for his comments on my thesis, which were of great help to me when I came to make the final revisions. My thanks are also due to Salvatore Veca for his invaluable observations on the theoretical problems which I encountered during my research. I would also like to mention my friends of the Political Philosophy Seminar in the Feltrinelli Foundation, who will immediately recognize in these pages an echo of the many discussions we have had.

Finally, I record my thanks to Mme Colette Kleemann, who not only corrected my French (in itself an unenviable task) but also succeeded in improving the shape of my text.

It goes without saying that I alone bear the responsibility for whatever faults this work may contain. But, if what I have written is of any interest, the merit must go to those who guided my research with such skill and enthusiasm.

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Note on the text

The terms *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* have been translated as 'self-love' and 'egotism', respectively.

For quotations, already published translations have sometimes been used. Where this is the case, details are given in the notes.

Humanity in general is referred to throughout this book as 'man', 'men', 'mankind' for the sake of convenience only, and with the sincere wish that this will give no offence.