

## THE MEANING OF ROUSSEAU

Great ideas are more often well-received than they are properly understood, and the reputations which their authors enjoy seldom do them justice. In political and social thought, especially, theories that are reputedly profound too frequently do not bear a true resemblance to the ideas of those men who are supposed to have conceived them, and the contributions to their subject which are thought to have been made by political theorists of distinction are seldom quite like those which they had it in mind to make.

Together with other important thinkers, Rousseau comes to the attention of his readers "précédé de son nom".<sup>1</sup> But he has been called upon to answer to more names than most of the major political theorists have had to do, and far too many of his readers have neglected to look beyond the 'renommée' he has acquired - have taken up positions on either side of him, that is, even before they have discovered the location of his own. If we are to believe Joseph de Maistre, for example, then it is the primitivism of Rousseau's thought which we must see as its most central feature,<sup>2</sup> while for Bertrand de Jouvenel, on the other hand, he was a pessimistic

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1. The reference is from a poem by Marmontel on Gluck which begins "Il arrive ce jongleur de Bohême, il arrive précédé de son nom". I am indebted to Sir Isaiah Berlin for recounting it to me, but I have not been able to locate its original source.

2. See especially his Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg in the Paris 1960 edition, pp. 54, 65, and 213-214. Cf. Irving Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism (New York 1919), pp. 79-80. This conception of Rousseau's social theory has, however, been much criticised by, among others, Arthur Lovejoy in 'The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality', Modern Philology, XXI (1923), pp. 165-186. ←

evolutionist.<sup>3</sup> Yet if we follow Jacob Talmon we shall have to turn instead to Rousseau's totalitarian democracy,<sup>4</sup> whereas Carole Pateman would lead us to his theory of participation.<sup>5</sup> And whether we choose to proceed along these paths or prefer as an alternative those that point to his collectivism, his individualism, his conservatism, or his liberalism,<sup>6</sup> we shall find that not a single one of them will take us

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3. See 'Rousseau the Pessimistic Evolutionist', Yale French Studies, XXVIII (1961-62), pp. 83-96. Cf. Henry Vyverberg, Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment (Cambridge, Mass. 1958), pp. 57-61, and Lionel Gossman, 'Time and history in Rousseau', SVEC, XXX (1964), p. 340.

4. See The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy (London 1952), p. 43. This argument was put forward for the first time, I believe, by Robert Nisbet in his 'Rousseau and Totalitarianism', Journal of Politics, V (1943), pp. 93-114, and it has since become probably the most fashionable of all the prevailing interpretations of Rousseau's political thought. Cf. Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London 1946), p. 711; Lester G. Crocker, An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought (Baltimore 1959), p. 464, and 'Rousseau et la voie du totalitarisme', in Rousseau et la philosophie politique (Paris 1965), pp. 99-136; and Sergio Cotta, 'La position du problème de la politique chez Rousseau', in Etudes sur le 'Contrat social' de Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Paris 1964), p. 187. John W. Chapman, however, remarks (Rousseau - Totalitarian or Liberal? [New York 1956], p. 85) that "Rousseau, far from being a totalitarian, is not even a majoritarian democrat". And Peter Gay, R. A. Leigh, and Quentin Skinner, among many recent scholars, have also attacked this interpretation. See Gay, The Party of Humanity: Studies in the French Enlightenment (Princeton 1964), p. 286, note 6; Leigh, 'Liberté et autorité dans le Contrat social', in Jean-Jacques Rousseau et son oeuvre (Paris 1964), pp. 249-264; and Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', History and Theory, VIII (1969), p. 23.

5. See Participation and Democratic Theory (Cambridge 1970), p. 22: "Rousseau might be called the theorist par excellence of participation."

6. On Rousseau's collectivism and individualism, see notes 21, 32, and 42 below. On his conservatism, see, for instance, Iring Fetscher, Rousseaus politische Philosophie. Zur Geschichte des demokratischen Freiheitsbegriffs (Neuweid 1960), and the following passage from Joan McDonald, Rousseau and the French Revolution, 1762-1791 (London 1965), p. 37: "Essentially, Rousseau was a conservative...looking to the past rather than to the future." On his liberalism, see Otto Vossler, Rousseaus Freiheitslehre (Göttingen 1963), or Chapman, p. 92: "Our contention is that although Rousseau's political theory differs...from that of classical liberalism, his theory of the general will is remarkably similar to the modern liberal doctrine of the deliberative state." For John Plamenatz (Man and Society, 2 vols. [London 1963], I, p. 436), however, it is clear that "we must not call Rousseau a liberal because others have called him a totalitarian". And still many more doctrines than these, literary and psychological as well as political, have also been ascribed to Rousseau's social theory. See, for example, his romanticism as described by Babbitt or his sadism as described by William Blanchard (Rousseau and the Spirit of Revolt [Ann Arbor 1967], pp. 155 ff.).

directly to Rousseau. For the doctrines to which his name has been attached hardly ever appear in any of the pages of his works, and the relevance of his thought to the social theories that came after him is commonly established only through a neglect of the meaning which he intended his ideas to have.<sup>7</sup>

The principal mistake which we commit when we look at Rousseau's meaning in the light of later theories is not so much that of ascribing to him a more varied collection of ideas than he could possibly have held at once, for it will be of no great matter from this point of view that the doctrines with which we associate his works may all be inconsistent. Did he not, after all, project "the contradictions and maladjustments of his own nature upon the society about him"?<sup>8</sup> Why, indeed, should we expect a systematic theory from a writer who "could never make up his mind whether man was made better or worse, happier or more miserable"<sup>9</sup> by society? For Rousseau, we are told, was

one of the most ill-adjusted...natures who have left a record of their predicament. He was a bundle of contradictions, a recluse and anarchist...given to reverie, in revolt against...conventions, sentimental and lacrimose, abjectly self-conscious and...the preacher of discipline and the submergence of the individual in the collective entity.

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7. My aim is not, of course, to deny that Rousseau's political writings have had some influence upon theorists who came after him. Indeed, the influence which his works did in fact exercise upon his readers, or upon men who may have called themselves his followers, does not depend upon whether the meaning of his arguments was correctly understood. In her Rousseau and the French Revolution (p. 94), McDonald, for instance, contends that Rousseau did not have much influence upon the revolutionary figures who referred to him because they fundamentally misinterpreted his meaning. But the fact that Rousseau's followers may not really have grasped the sense which he intended his statements to have is rather like the fact that the busts which were installed to honour him in the Assemblée Nationale did not sufficiently resemble him, and to consider his influence in this matter one wants to know not so much why the busts were of poor quality but why, rather, they were put there at all. If it is true, moreover, that Rousseau's historical influence may sometimes have little connection with the sense of his theory, then his supposed contemporary relevance will often be still less dependant on his meaning.

8. George Sabine, A History of Political Theory, third edition (London 1963), p. 577.

9. Talmon, p. 38.

Hence "the secret of this dual personality was that the disciplinarian was the envious dream of the tormented paranoiac".<sup>10</sup> If we are to derive Rousseau's meaning, then, from a study of any one of his reputations, it will be quite in order for us to account for those ideas which appear to be incompatible with the rest as if they were the views of a writer who did not clearly know his own mind.<sup>11</sup>

The real mistake which we make when we confuse Rousseau's apparent significance with his intended meaning is that of ascribing to his words a sense which they could not possibly have had, as if he in some way anticipated, or discovered, or implied claims that we know

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10. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39. For other general accounts of Rousseau's contradictions see, for instance, John Morley, *Rousseau*, 2 vols. (London 1873), II, p. 119, and Albert Schinz, 'La Question du Contrat social', RHLF, XIX (1912), pp. 741-790.

11. Other explanations that might account for the apparent inconsistencies within a theory have also been advanced. C. B. Macpherson, for instance, suggests (see The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke [Oxford 1962], pp. 4-8) that we should bear in mind the social assumptions which may be only implicit in a writer's theory but which could lend some coherence to propositions that otherwise do not hold together. Leo Strauss, on the other hand, supposes (see Persecution and the Art of Writing [Glencoe 1952], pp. 24-32) that great thinkers are rarely inconsistent except on those occasions when they might be persecuted and hence obliged to conceal their true opinions. And whereas for Macpherson we may implant a set of assumptions into a writer's theory in order to make it properly coherent, for Strauss we might instead discover the true meaning of that theory by somehow focusing upon those of its elements which the censor could not see. It seems to me rather more plausible, however, to suppose that a writer may change his mind, or forget a point that he once maintained, in the course of developing a theory which is expressed in several works that might span, sometimes, a quite considerable number of years. In the next chapter I hope to show that Rousseau did in fact change his mind about some rather central concepts in his theory within the space of a very short time. But we could even suppose, as James Mill informs us (Commerce Defended, second edition [London 1808], p. 1), that Rousseau's inconsistencies were deliberately introduced into his theory in order to deceive his readers: "Rousseau confessed to Mr. Hume, and Mr. Hume repeated the conversation to Mr. Burke, that the secret of which he availed himself in his writings to excite the attention of mankind, was the employment of paradoxes. When a proposition is so expressed as to bear the appearance of absurdity, but by certain reasonings and explanations is made to assume the semblance of truth, the inexperienced hearers are, in general, wonderfully delighted, give credit to the author for the highest ingenuity, and congratulate themselves on a surprising discovery."



to be true or false today.<sup>12</sup> We are sometimes told, for example, that

nearly two hundred years after his death, Rousseau has come of age, as the times and problems of organized societies have...developed in ways that [he] often anticipated.<sup>13</sup>

And from this it appears to follow that

implicit in Rousseau's political thought is the main problem of twentieth-century political life.<sup>14</sup>

It may, of course, be the case that these supposed anticipations provide many of Rousseau's interpreters with their reasons for holding him in high or low esteem.<sup>15</sup> But his social theory was not actually

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12. See Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding', p. 11: "The tendency to search for approximations to the ideal type yields a form of non-history which is almost entirely given over to pointing out earlier 'anticipations' of later doctrines, and to crediting each writer in terms of this clairvoyance." Skinner's numerous references in his article are a useful reminder of the extent to which this mistake is a feature of our histories of political and social thought. Cf. Judith Shklar, Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory (Cambridge 1969), pp. 218-219. For E. H. Carr (What is History? [London 1962], p. 31), however, this is not a mistake, but clearly the best method for the historian to adopt: "Great history is written precisely when the historian's vision of the past is illuminated by insights into the problems of the present."

13. Mario Einaudi, The Early Rousseau (Ithaca 1967), p. 2. For a general, and in my view quite superficial, interpretation of Rousseau's contemporary significance, see Charles H. Dobinson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: his thought and its relevance today (London 1969). In his Rousseau: An Introduction to his Political Philosophy (London 1973), pp. 138-148, John C. Hall has drawn a few, perhaps more useful, contrasts between the views of Rousseau and certain recent contributions to political theory.

14. Alfred Cobban, Rousseau and the Modern State, second edition (London 1964), p. 170.

15. Compare, for instance, Michel Launay with Jules Lemaître on this point. According to Launay (Jean-Jacques Rousseau et son temps, [Paris 1969], p. 11), "Ce qui fait toujours la grandeur de Rousseau, c'est le mépris de l'argent", while Lemaître (Jean-Jacques Rousseau [Paris c.1905], p. 1) remarks, "Quand je promis de parler de Jean-Jacques, je me proposais d'étudier surtout en lui le père de quelques-unes des plus fortes erreurs du XVIII<sup>e</sup> et du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle".

conceived to imply what might be true about a world that was unknown to him, and if he had in fact anticipated our mistakes he would no doubt have made every effort to correct them. The significance that comes to be attached to the meaning of his works depends upon the material that readers at different times are looking to find in them, and when they are looking either for the underlying sources of their present discontents, or alternatively for some solutions to them, the study of what Rousseau may have come to mean in their world has already been confused with the study of the sense of his ideas.

A failure to distinguish between the meaning of Rousseau's arguments and their relevance to later theories is, I think, the most striking feature of the work of C. E. Vaughan.<sup>16</sup> For in the introduction to his Political Writings of Rousseau Vaughan was primarily concerned with what he called the "heart and soul" of Rousseau's theory<sup>17</sup> and with its affinity to the age in which he himself was writing. Let us look, he proclaimed, to

the debt which the world owes to Rousseau....the  
glory which nothing can take from him.<sup>18</sup>

And according to Vaughan, the significance of this theory - its major achievement as a work of political and social thought - is that it provided a response to Locke's "charter of individualism".<sup>19</sup> Whereas the social contract of Locke, wrote Vaughan,

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16. The Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, edited from the original MSS. & authentic editions, 2 vols. (Cambridge 1915).

17. See *ibid.*, I, p. 111.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

is expressly devised to preserve and confirm the rights of the individual, that of Rousseau ends, and is intended to end, in their destruction...for the sake of a greater and higher benefit.<sup>20</sup>

The political claims of Rousseau must thus be understood as constituting "an extreme form of collectivism".<sup>21</sup> To be sure, they may not have been collectivist in every possible respect, and some of Rousseau's writings, Vaughan reminds us, will perhaps appear to be no less individualist than were the works of Locke himself. But

strike out the Discours sur l'inégalité with the first few pages of the Contrat social, and the 'individualism' of Rousseau will be seen to be nothing better than a myth.<sup>22</sup>

Vaughan, it should be noted, was quite generally sympathetic to the doctrine which he had located in at least some of the pages of Rousseau,<sup>23</sup>

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20. Ibid.

21. Ibid. By 'collectivism' Vaughan means the doctrine that all rights and duties are creations of the State and that both the freedom and the humanity of man are in some sense constituted by his membership of it. By 'individualism', on the other hand, he means the doctrine that (ibid., p. 40) "the State is...wholly external" to the moral life of man so that its activity, "beyond the bare protection of life and property, is regarded with the bitterest suspicion". Vaughan, who was not by training a political theorist, borrowed these distinctions from the English Idealists, and in particular from Bernard Bosanquet, to whom Vaughan's own interpretation of Rousseau is also much indebted. See Bosanquet's The Philosophical Theory of the State (London 1899), chs. iv-v, especially pp. 84-102. Bosanquet exercised a considerable influence on French interpreters of Rousseau's politics as well. In 1912 he published an article, 'Les idées politiques de Rousseau', in the Revue de métaphysique et de morale, XX, pp. 321-340; six years later the same journal published two now celebrated articles by Emile Durkheim which were drawn, at least in part, from the work of Bosanquet. See 'Le Contrat social de Rousseau', Revue, XXV (1918), pp. 1-23 and 129-161. Bosanquet, however, might well have described the theory which Vaughan so readily attached to Rousseau as a form of "uncritical collectivism". See The Philosophical Theory of the State, p. 70.

22. Vaughan, I, p. 1. See also p. 111: "So far from being the charter of individualism, the Contrat social is a defiant statement of the collectivist ideal."

23. Vaughan's work on Rousseau was, after all, largely completed before the outbreak of the First World War, at a time when political theorists were not so much concerned with the practical outcomes of doctrines as they were to be a short while later. In an epilogue to The Political Writings of Rousseau which was added after the beginning of the War, Vaughan addressed himself to the new critics of collectivism. It was not, he

but he believed that Rousseau's contribution to collectivism could well have been still more substantial if only he had managed to recognise the real implications of his thought. For a true collectivist doctrine, Vaughan supposed, could not properly incorporate a number of concepts that still had somehow found their way into the pages of Rousseau - such concepts as the 'state of nature' and the 'social contract', for example, which could only figure rightly in an individualist theory of society of the kind that had been held by Locke.

And since Rousseau correctly 'swept away' the assumption of a natural law that had been the 'corner-stone' of Locke's philosophy,<sup>24</sup> the individualist conception of a social contract which he nonetheless

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wrote (II, pp. 522 and 526), Rousseau's theory of the general will but rather Fichte's theory of the 'absolute State' that lay at the heart of German policy: "In the civic ideal of Rousseau, we have the guarantee of a Law...imposed not from above but by the 'general will', freely expressing itself, of the community at large....With Fichte, the sacrifice of the individual, to exalt the State whatever be the nature of the ends which it pursues....Such is the conflict between the ideals of Rousseau and of Fichte." After the publication of The Metaphysical Theory of the State by Leonard Hobhouse (London 1918), Bosanquet also felt impelled to defend his work from some misguided charges which had been provoked by the War, and in the preface to the third edition of The Philosophical Theory of the State (London 1920), pp. xi-xii, he remarked that "criticism, suggested by historical events, has attacked the writer's views...as attributing...a fictitious sovereignty to the State....it has...become difficult...to bear steadily in mind that the original intention of the book was neither to magnify the State nor to decry it, but to explain how its functions flow from its nature". Political theories, which in times of peace are held to have no practical utility, are frequently discredited by wars and revolution, and 'collectivism' is but one of many doctrines that have gone entirely out of fashion. According to J. H. Burns ('Du côté de chez Vaughan: Rousseau Revisited', Political Studies, XII (1964), p. 230) the theory which Vaughan attached so happily to Rousseau "belongs to the autumn of English Idealism".

24. See Vaughan, I, p. 16. The putative individualism of Locke and the extent to which his theory is in fact based upon a concept of the natural law, are not in question here. But misconceived interpretations of a theory are often just as much mistaken about the arguments against which it is supposed to have been levelled as they are wrong about its own meaning. For some widely varied recent accounts of Locke's individualism and his conception of the natural law, see especially the following works: Hans Aarsleff, 'The state of nature and the nature of man in Locke', in John W. Yolton, ed., John Locke: Problems and Perspectives (Cambridge 1969), pp. 99-136; John Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Two Treatises of Government (Cambridge 1969); Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, ch. v; Massimo Salvadori, ed., Locke and



retained could not continue, Vaughan imagined, to serve the purpose for which it was in fact designed.<sup>25</sup> Without the sanction of a natural law, the social contract, in his view, would have no morally binding force and could not therefore provide any real foundation for men's political rights and duties.<sup>26</sup> "Thus on Rousseau's own shewing", Vaughan continued,

the Contract and the state of nature are only disturbing elements in his theory...There was nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by their importation.<sup>27</sup>

If, therefore, we choose to adopt this perspective, our proper understanding of Rousseau's social theory will require that we delete from consideration not only the Discours sur l'inégalité and the opening pages of the Contrat social but also every reference in the remaining works to the 'natural law', the 'state of nature', and the 'social contract' too.

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Liberty: Selections from the Works of John Locke (London 1960), preface; Martin Seliger, 'Locke's Natural Law and the Foundation of Politics', Journal of the History of Ideas, XXIV (1963), pp. 337-354; Raghuvver Singh, 'John Locke and the Theory of Natural Law', Political Studies, IX (1961), pp. 105-118; Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago 1953), pp. 202-251; W. von Leyden, 'John Locke and Natural Law', Philosophy, XXXI (1956), pp. 23-35; and Yolton, 'Locke on the Law of Nature', Philosophical Review, LXVII (1958), pp. 477-498.

25. Vaughan actually suggested that Rousseau was himself aware of this particular dilemma. For Rousseau, he supposed (I, pp. 441-442), chose to delete from the final version of the Contrat that chapter of his first draft in which he had attacked the theory of natural law most fiercely, since this would, in the end, be "fatally relevant" to his argument: "He became aware that, in refuting the idea of natural law, he had unwittingly made a deadly breach in the binding force of the Contract; and...having no other principle to put in place of the Contract as the foundation of civil society, he felt that his only course was to silence the battery which he had incautiously unmasked against it: in one word, to strike out the refutation, and to let the Social Contract stand." See also ch. II, note 146.

26. "It is", Vaughan observed (I, pp. 42 and 43), "to provide a foundation of Right for the State that he has recourse to the Contract...But we have it from Rousseau's own lips that, at the time when the Contract is made, man is entirely lacking in all that constitutes the moral sense. And that can only mean that he is incapable of recognising any moral obligation. The moral sanction, therefore, falls to the ground".

27. *Ibid.*, p. 44. Italics mine.

Now Vaughan's account of Rousseau's collectivism, moreover, equally requires that we add to his works no less than we subtract from them.

Strike out the state of nature and the Contract from the opening pages of the treatise. Replace them by the idea of a gradual growth from barbarism to what may fairly be called the 'civil state'. Admit that the discipline which slowly brought men to that state was, in its earlier stages, largely a discipline of force....Make these changes in Rousseau's argument, and its inconsistencies, its other inherent blemishes, will have largely disappeared. He would no longer have been hampered by the necessity of basing a collectivist structure upon a foundation of individualism....But to have recast his argument in this fashion would have been to accept the idea of progress.

And, sadly,

the idea of progress was wholly alien to his way of thought.<sup>28</sup>

We shall, in short, have some grasp of Rousseau's collectivism only if we recognise it as that of Vaughan. Indeed, since Rousseau failed to develop a theory of progress without which his doctrine could not make much sense, we shall only be able to understand his contribution to political and social thought if we keep constantly at hand the corrections and improvements that are provided by Vaughan.

It must follow from this interpretation of Rousseau's meaning that he could not, in fact, have intended what he meant. For a doctrine<sup>29</sup> which lacks sense until its subsequent significance is

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28. Ibid., p. 115. Italics mine. There have been few contributions to Rousseau studies that are more remarkable than this paragraph. To my knowledge only Albert Schinz (see note 102 below and note 114 in ch. II) can match Vaughan at his best.

29. Of course doctrines, whatever they might be, are never produced by a single writer, nor are they ever held consistently in any single work. The virtue of an invariably orthodox position, if it were actually possible to maintain one, must in any case be like the strength of a consistent pudding. Vaughan, however, remarks upon Rousseau's 'doctrine' or 'doctrines' without hesitation. See, for example, I, pp. 20 and 21, and II, p. 522.

known can have no meaning for its author, and despite the occasional reference which Vaughan makes to the intended sense of Rousseau's statements,<sup>30</sup> their meaning, on his account, could be fixed correctly only in the light of what he and others might perceive to be of interest in them. We can at least, with the assistance of Vaughan, now make some sense of why Rousseau's works were so poorly construed in his own day. For since he did not mean what he intended, and what he in fact meant could not strictly have been intended by any writer before Vaughan, and since, in any case, his meaning was not everywhere consistent, it is at least clear that he could not have been well understood by his contemporaries.<sup>31</sup> If Vaughan is to be our guide we shall have to interpret Rousseau's writings, not with respect to their original purpose or in the context of their first appearance, but rather in the light of the significance they have acquired and the uses to which they have been put by other, later, figures.

In 1950 Robert Derathé produced an account of Rousseau's political theory<sup>32</sup> which has come to exercise at least as much influence

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30. See, for instance, *ibid.*, I, pp. 70-71. Vaughan has much to say about Rousseau's mental states in general. Thus he tells us (*ibid.*, p. 77) that "two strands of thought, the abstract and the concrete, lie side by side in his mind, for ever crossing each other, yet never completely interwoven" and (*ibid.*, p. 91) that "what Rousseau professes to seek in the civil religion is a living faith, a faith that shall issue not in words, but in deeds".

31. This was certainly apparent to Rousseau as well. See, for instance, the following passage from 'Mon Portrait' (Neuchâtel Ms R 42: ancienne cote 7866), O.C.I, p. 1121: "Je vois que les gens qui vivent le plus intimement avec moi ne me connoissent pas, et qu'ils attribuent la pluspart de mes actions... à de tout autres motifs que ceux qui les ont produites. Cela m'a fait penser que la pluspart des caractères et des portraits qu'on trouve dans les historiens ne sont que des chimères qu'avec de l'esprit un auteur rend aisément vraisemblables."

32. Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps (Paris 1950). Derathé has occupied a prominent and, to be sure, probably the most commanding, position among interpreters of Rousseau's

upon Rousseau studies since that time as Vaughan's commentary had done in the period before. In fact, one of the central arguments that Derathé puts forward in his work is designed to correct a misconception which lies at the heart of the interpretation set forth by Vaughan.

For it was Vaughan's belief that the collectivist doctrine of Rousseau had been founded securely upon a single principle - namely, his rejection of the concept of a natural law<sup>33</sup> - even if Rousseau himself did not always perceive what were, to Vaughan, the unavoidable implications of that fact. For Derathé, however, those implications are unfounded,

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political thought since the publication of this work. In the second edition of his Rousseau and the Modern State published thirty years after the first (1934), Cobban remarked (p. 76) that "the view, which I formerly shared with Vaughan and many others, that Rousseau rejected the idea of Natural Law, has been shown by M. Derathé to be untenable". Cf. Burns, 'Du côté de chez Vaughan', pp. 229-234. And on the strength of the praise which Cobban, Burns, and others have lavished upon Derathé's study, the work was reissued in 1970 without even the slightest textual alteration. "Cette appréciation", remarked the editor (p. vi), "justifie la réédition de l'ouvrage sous sa forme primitive". Derathé's standing as the most distinguished living interpreter of Rousseau's political writings has been equally confirmed by his fine introductions and notes to the Discours sur l'économie politique, the two versions of the Contrat social, and a collection of 'Fragments politiques' for O.C.III. Just the same, Vaughan's reputation, especially in the period before the appearance of Derathé's study, should not be underestimated. The Political Writings of Rousseau is still an indispensable work of reference, even now after the appearance of the more comprehensive edition in O.C.III, and it was itself reprinted in Oxford in 1962. Certainly the faults in Vaughan's interpretation of Rousseau's writings are seldom repeated in the annotations which he provides to them, and there are perhaps even fewer mistakes in his transcription of the texts and their variants than can be found in O.C.III. Then, too, Vaughan's own edition of the Contrat social (Manchester 1918) has been widely available for the past fifty years and has been reprinted more often (in 1926, 1947, 1955, and 1962) than any other French edition of that work - apart, of course, from what in my view remains the best of them all, that of Georges Beaulavon, which was published five times in Paris between 1903 and 1938. Vaughan's account, moreover, of the collectivist doctrine of Rousseau has also had, in its time, a number of adherents. See, for instance, J. W. Gough, The Social Contract: A Critical Study of its Development, second edition (Oxford 1957), p. 173: "The ultimate significance of Rousseau in the history of political thought is as a precursor of a collectivist attitude to man's place in society rather than as a vindicator of individual liberty."

33. See Vaughan, I, p. 17: "The argument is a striking proof of Rousseau's originality. The idea of natural Law had held the field since the days of the Roman Jurists. With the political philosophers of



since Rousseau never actually abandoned an assumption of the natural law. On the contrary,

Tous les efforts de Rousseau tendent à trouver un système politique qui reste conforme à l'idéal du droit naturel.<sup>34</sup>

So far from their repudiating the natural law tradition, Rousseau's political writings

contiennent une multitude d'allusions aux théories soutenues par les jurisconsultes. En réalité c'est dans...les traités de droit naturel, que Rousseau a puisé l'essentiel de son érudition politique.<sup>35</sup>

Pour lui, comme pour Locke ou Pufendorf, la loi civile ne doit rien commander qui soit contraire à la loi naturelle.<sup>36</sup>

According to Derathé the consequences that should be drawn from this truth are as crucial for an understanding of Rousseau's politics as were the implications of its opposite according to Vaughan. For if the obligation of men to respect the provisions of the social contract is founded upon a principle of natural law,<sup>37</sup> then the terms of the contract cannot require that men entirely renounce the rights which they enjoy under that law. It is clear, therefore, that

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more recent times, it had been a commonplace since the days of Hooker and Grotius....The authority of Locke had given it a new sanction. And even apart from the almost unbroken tradition in its favour, there was much in it that could not but appeal strongly to the spirit of Rousseau. It is therefore the clearest proof both of his speculative genius and of his intellectual honesty that he should have decisively rejected it." Vaughan does not stand alone among Rousseau's interpreters in holding to this view, for Beaulavon, Gough, and Jean Starobinski, among others, have also stated that Rousseau rejected the concept of a natural law in his political theory. See Beaulavon, 'La Question du Contrat social. Une fausse solution', RHLF, XX (1913), p. 597; Gough, The Social Contract, p. 166; and Starobinski, 'Langage, nature et société selon Rousseau', in Le Langage: Actes du XIII<sup>e</sup> Congrès des sociétés de philosophie de langue française (Neuchâtel 1966), I, p. 146.

34. Derathé, p. 171.

35. Ibid., p. 27.

36. Ibid., p. 165.

37. See *ibid.*, p. 159: "Ainsi, l'obligation de respecter le pacte a son unique fondement dans la loi naturelle et dans le devoir de tenir ses engagements."

'l'aliénation totale de chaque associé avec tous ses droits à toute la communauté' n'aboutit pas dans la doctrine de Rousseau à la suppression des droits naturels de l'individu.<sup>38</sup>

Hence Vaughan and his followers are seen to have been mistaken in their belief that for Rousseau the liberty of individuals in the state of nature was absolutely lost when men collectively joined together to form the sovereign.<sup>39</sup> The claim that Rousseau propounded a collectivist doctrine in reply to Locke's "charter of individualism" is misconceived, Derathé contends, since it is built entirely upon a false assumption. Rousseau's political theory, we are told, is actually the work of one of Locke's disciples,<sup>40</sup> and the conception of natural law which he drew from Locke and others remained a constant feature of his thought.<sup>41</sup>

For some scholars who have followed Derathé the rediscovery of natural law in Rousseau's politics implies not only that Vaughan's account of his thought is mistaken but even that it is the opposite of the truth. Hence inasmuch as Rousseau's doctrine of collectivism was supposed to have been founded on a rejection of the natural law, then the fact of his acceptance of that law will permit us to look anew at the individualism of his thought. This, in essence, is the argument which was outlined a few years ago by J. H. Burns:

If natural law and the contract have indeed a central place...Rousseau's individualism is to be regarded, not as an early phase lingering on to complicate and

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38. Ibid., p. 228.

39. See *ibid.*, p. 348.

40. See *ibid.*, p. 116: "Quoi qu'il en soit, il est clair que Rousseau a commencé par être le disciple de Locke." Vaughan also remarked (I, p. 2) that Rousseau "began as the pupil of Locke", but in his view all trace of Locke's influence had vanished by the time Rousseau wrote the Contrat social.

41. See Derathé, p. 342. To be sure, Derathé does not suggest that Locke's influence was preponderant since (p. 120) "la pensée politique de Rousseau est issue de la rencontre de deux courants contraires, l'un individualiste, l'autre étatiste" (following Hobbes). Unlike Vaughan, however, Derathé believes that Rousseau's writings are consistent and that the influence of Locke's ideas upon them was continuous.

obscure the essential collectivism of his mature thought, but as an intrinsic part of his interpretation of man and society.<sup>42</sup>

And while Derathé himself never attaches the term 'individualism' directly to Rousseau, he does, in his discussion of Rousseau's concept of authority, refer to the

principe individualiste que Rousseau emprunte à Locke, Pufendorf et Burlamaqui, et qu'il hérite de la tradition du droit naturel.<sup>43</sup>

Now the account of Rousseau's conception of the natural law that Derathé puts forward is based upon his reading of a number of passages that had apparently escaped the attention of Vaughan.<sup>44</sup> By connecting

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42. 'Du côté de chez Vaughan', p. 233. The same view is also held by Cobban (Rousseau and the Modern State, p. 69), for whom Derathé "shows clearly that Rousseau's conception of natural man gave an individualist bent to the whole development of his thought".

43. Derathé, pp. 180-181. Cf. p. 119: "Des traces d'individualisme subsistent même dans le Contrat social où l'on retrouve en particulier l'idée si chère à Locke que seul le consentement de ceux qui s'y soumettent peut rendre légitime l'autorité politique." On the individualist and collectivist interpreters of Rousseau, see also Gay, The Party of Humanity, pp. 211-238.

44. Derathé (see pp. 157-159) cites six passages which are drawn from different sources: the Nouvelle Héloïse, Emile, the Lettres de la montagne, the Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne, and a letter which Rousseau addressed to some unknown lawyers in 1758. Much the most important of these is the following paragraph from the sixth Lettre de la montagne (O.C.III, p. 807): "Mais par cette condition de la liberté, qui en renferme d'autres, toutes sortes d'engagemens ne sont pas valides, mêmes devant les Tribunaux humains. Ainsi pour déterminer celui-ci l'on doit en expliquer la nature, on doit en trouver l'usage et la fin, on doit prouver qu'il est convenable à des hommes, et qu'il n'a rien de contraire aux Loix naturelles: car il n'est plus permis d'enfreindre les Loix naturelles par le Contract Social, qu'il n'est permis d'enfreindre les Loix positives par les Contracts des particuliers, et ce n'est que par ces Loix-mêmes qu'existe la liberté qui donne force à l'engagement." For his part, Vaughan did not entirely overlook this passage since, in his own edition of the work, he noted (II, p. 200, note 2) that the paragraph does not appear in the original rough draft manuscript of the fifth to ninth Lettres (Neuchâtel Ms R 16: ancienne cote 7840, pp. 12-55). And the fact that Rousseau added his remarks on the natural law at some stage after he completed this draft copy of the Lettres is a matter of interest in itself, though it is one which has escaped the attention, on this occasion, of Derathé. Nonetheless, it remains somewhat surprising that Vaughan made no attempt to consider how this passage might be reconciled to his interpretation of Rousseau's theory.

these passages, moreover, to a literature of speculation about law that comprises at least a part of the background upon which Rousseau's own works were forged, Derathé has made a most important contribution to the study of his political ideas.<sup>45</sup> For he has undertaken to establish the meaning of Rousseau in a way that Vaughan entirely failed to do, that is, by focusing carefully upon an intellectual context of Rousseau's works. Yet despite the obvious scholarship that underlies his study, Derathé's interpretation is marked, I think, by a fundamentally mistaken perspective of Rousseau's theory which is, in fact, the counterpart of the mistake that Vaughan had made. For Derathé confuses an account of Rousseau's sources with a study of his meaning, and whereas Vaughan attributed to Rousseau a theory which he could not as yet have adopted, Derathé, on the other hand, attributes to him a theory which it was his intention to refute.

In the view of the natural law philosophers whom Derathé considers the laws of nature were moral principles which applied to

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45. Derathé is not the first among Rousseau scholars to have looked closely upon his theory in the context of the natural law tradition, even if his treatment of the subject is the most comprehensive which has appeared to date. In this century alone at least three other important studies of Rousseau's place among the theorists of natural law appeared before the publication of Rousseau et la science politique, and Derathé in fact acknowledges a certain debt to each of them. See Jean Morel, 'Recherches sur les sources du Discours de l'inégalité', Annales, V (1909), pp. 160-179; René Hubert, Rousseau et l'Encyclopédie: Essai sur la formation des idées politiques de Rousseau, 1742-1756 (Paris 1928); and Paul-L. Léon, 'Rousseau et les fondements de l'Etat moderne', Archives, III-IV (1934), pp. 205-238. (Hubert also devotes a number of pages to the theory of natural law at the time of Rousseau in his Sciences sociales dans l'Encyclopédie [Lille and Paris 1923] - see especially pp. 166-190, 191-219, 250-269, and 285-316.) Derathé's account of the natural law has profited most of all, however, from a study which is more concerned with Rousseau's use of the concept than with its origins. This is the interpretation by Franz Haymann that was translated from the original German and appeared in the Annales, XXX (1943-1945), pp. 65-110, under the title 'La loi naturelle dans la philosophie politique de Rousseau'. Derathé's selection of quotations from Rousseau, as well as his general conclusions about Rousseau's meaning, are very similar to those of Haymann, a fact which he acknowledges himself (see p. 151, note 3). Haymann's article, it should be noted, was also conceived, in large measure, as a critique of Vaughan.



men as members of the society of mankind.<sup>46</sup> They were not specific statutes promulgated by any particular civil power, but rather general rules prescribed by God<sup>47</sup> to all men in the state of nature in virtue of their common traits. Thus

toute la théorie du droit naturel repose sur l'affirmation qu'il existe indépendamment des lois civiles et antérieurement à toutes les conventions humaines, un ordre moral universel, une règle de justice immuable, la 'loi naturelle', à laquelle tout homme est tenu de se conformer dans ses rapports avec ses semblables.<sup>48</sup>

According to the theorists of the natural law whom Derathé describes as the precursors of Rousseau it was the essential rationality and sociability of each man in the state of nature which made possible his acceptance of such a law. Hence for Grotius,

Ius naturale est dictatum rectae rationis indicans, actui alicui, ex ejus convenientia aut disconvenientia cum ipsa natura rationali, inesse moralem turpitudinem aut necessitatem moralem, ac consequenter ab auctore naturae Deo talem actum aut vetari aut praecipere.<sup>49</sup>

For Locke,

The State of Nature has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason... is that Law.<sup>50</sup>

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46. Strictly, for both Grotius and Pufendorf the state of nature is one of socialitas only rather than societas, though it is marked by a desiderium societatis or an appetitus societatis. See, for instance, Grotius's De jure belli ac pacis (Amsterdam 1646, reprinted Washington 1913), Prolegomena, p. 2. In the translation by Jean Barbeyrac which would have been the most familiar version to Rousseau, the appetitus societatis is described as "une certaine inclination à vivre avec ses semblables...dans une communauté de vie aussi bien réglée que ses lumières le lui suggèrent". Cf. Derathé, pp. 142-143.

47. Sometimes, however, they were prescribed in virtue of His Being (the sanctitas divina) rather than His Will (the voluntas divina). And Grotius believed (see De jure belli ac pacis, I, c.i, §10, p. 4) that there must be a natural law even if - per impossibile - God was unjust or did not exist. Cf. Christian Thomasius, Fundamenta juris naturae et gentium (Halle and Leipzig 1705), I, c.v.

48. Derathé, p. 151. See also p. 390.

49. De jure belli ac pacis, I, c.i, §10, p. 4.

50. Second Treatise of Civil Government, c.ii, §6, in Peter Laslett's edition of the Two Treatises (Cambridge 1960), p. 289.

And for Pufendorf,

Cum enim status naturalis hominis usum rationis includat, non potest quoque aut debet ab eo separari obligatio, quam ratio subinde ostentat.<sup>51</sup>

But there could be no such natural law in the political theory of Rousseau since, for him, men in the state of nature were incapable of following a moral rule.

Les hommes dans cet état n'ayant entre eux aucune sorte de relation morale, ni de devoirs connus, ne pouvoient être ni bons ni méchants, et n'avoient ni vices ni vertus.<sup>52</sup>

It was in society alone, when the relations between men were made permanent and binding, that they could recognise and perform their obligations under law.<sup>53</sup> Thus it followed for Rousseau that

les notions de la Loi naturelle, qu'il faudroit plustot appeller la loi de raison, ne commencent à se développer que quand le développement antérieur des passions rend impuissans tous ses preceptes. Par où l'on voit que ce prétendu traité social dicté par la nature est une véritable chimère.<sup>54</sup>

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51. De jure naturae et gentium (Amsterdam 1688, reprinted Oxford 1934), II, c.ii, §9, p. 118.

52. Discours sur l'inégalité, O.C.III, p. 152.

53. Derathé himself remarks (p. 244) that for Rousseau "c'est seulement avec la vie sociale que commence la vie morale".

54. Contrat social (Manuscrit de Genève), I.ii, O.C.III, p. 284. According to Vaughan (I, p. 42, note 4) Rousseau's "prétendu traité social" in this passage refers directly to the natural law. For Haymann ('La loi naturelle chez Rousseau', p. 87) it refers to the "société générale du genre humain", that is, to the subject of the whole chapter in which the passage appears, while Derathé believes (see p. 155, note 2) that it refers directly to the "sociabilité naturelle" which Pufendorf and Diderot had described. Rousseau's exact reference here is admittedly not entirely clear, and Vaughan's interpretation - which would, incidentally, include the others too - seems in this context to be no less accurate than they are. But even if Derathé is correct to suppose that Rousseau generally accepts a concept of the natural law while rejecting any principle of sociability in the natural state, he must surely be mistaken to describe Rousseau's concept as if it were derived from the natural law philosophers. For the fact that Rousseau speaks of a "prétendu traité social" at all points precisely to the difference between his theory and the others.

The mistake which had been made by the philosophers of natural law was to suppose that all the social attributes of men must be a feature of the state of nature too.

Les Philosophes qui ont examiné les fondemens de la société, ont tous senti la nécessité de remonter jusqu'à l'état de Nature, mais aucun d'eux n'y est arrivé. Les uns....ont parlé du Droit Naturel que chacun a de conserver ce qui lui appartient, sans expliquer ce qu'ils entendoient par appartenir.... tous...ont transporté à l'état de Nature, des idées qu'ils avoient prises dans la société; Ils parloient de l'Homme Sauvage et ils peignoient l'homme Civil.<sup>55</sup>

In Rousseau's view it was only man's passage from the natural to the civil state which, "donnant à ses actions la moralité qui leur manquoit auparavant",<sup>56</sup> bestowed upon his conduct a sense of duty under law. Indeed, as we could do no more than speculate about the natural condition of mankind it was impossible for us to have any knowledge at all about the law which Locke and others had supposed was prescribed to every man by Nature.

Connoissant si peu la Nature et s'accordant si mal sur le sens du mot Loi, il seroit bien difficile de convenir d'une bonne définition de la Loi naturelle...tant que nous ne connoïtrons point l'homme naturel, c'est en vain que nous voudrions déterminer la Loi qu'il a reçue ou celle qui convient le mieux à sa constitution.<sup>57</sup>

For Rousseau, but not for his precursors, as Derathé admits,

Dans l'indépendance de l'état de nature, les hommes ne savent pas ce qu'est une loi.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, Derathé continues, if in that case

la loi naturelle...ne saurait être antérieure aux lois civiles...cela n'empêche pas qu'elle leur soit supérieure.<sup>59</sup>

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55. Discours sur l'inégalité, O.C.III, p. 132.

56. Contrat social, I.viii, *ibid.*, p. 364.

57. Discours sur l'inégalité, *ibid.*, p. 125.

58. Derathé, p. 165.

59. *Ibid.*

And the distinction which Rousseau draws between an apparently superior "droit naturel raisonné" and an ostensibly anterior "droit naturel proprement dit"<sup>60</sup> still allows that his conclusions "rejoignent entièrement celles de l'école du droit naturel".<sup>61</sup> It is difficult to see, however, why Derathé should tie Rousseau on this point to a tradition of thought in which it has no proper place, since Rousseau's distinction between two kinds of natural law is not one which Derathé has found among the works of Grotius, Locke, or Pufendorf. This distinction is in fact incompatible with their conception of the natural law as Derathé describes it. For on the one hand the "droit naturel raisonné" cannot be enjoyed by men in their natural state, and on the other the "droit naturel proprement dit" is not a moral right at all. It thus seems odd that Derathé should look particularly upon these differences between Rousseau and his precursors to buttress an argument about their fundamental similarity.<sup>62</sup>

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60. Manuscrit de Genève, II.iv, O.C.III, p. 329. See Derathé, p. 167.

61. Ibid., p. 165.

62. In an appendix (p. 393) to his study Derathé also acknowledges the importance of these differences: "Sur un point essentiel toutefois Rousseau s'écarte de la théorie des jurisconsultes. Ceux-ci insistent sur le caractère rationnel du droit naturel. Rousseau admet au contraire qu'il y a un droit naturel d'origine instinctive." Certainly the distinction is of some consequence in Rousseau's thought, and while the passage in which it appears in the Manuscrit de Genève was not reproduced in the final version of the Contrat, it can at least be found again, though in a slightly different formulation, in the Discours sur l'inégalité (see O.C.III, pp. 125-126). Despite Derathé's conclusions, moreover, it seems to me quite clear that Rousseau's aim here was to distinguish two kinds of natural law, and in both passages it is the discontinuity rather than the similarity between the laws which is most crucial. Thus in the Manuscrit de Genève (O.C.III, p. 329) Rousseau speaks of "les règles du droit naturel raisonné" which is "différent du droit naturel proprement dit, qui n'est fondé que sur un sentiment vrai mais très vague et souvent étouffé par l'amour de nous-mêmes", and in the Discours sur l'inégalité (p. 126) he writes of the "règles du droit naturel...que la raison est ensuite forcée de rétablir sur d'autres fondemens, quand par ses développemens successifs elle est venue à bout d'étouffer la Nature". Derathé's attempt, therefore, to connect a superior to an anterior natural law in Rousseau's theory, or, as he remarks elsewhere (see p. 168 and also his notes to the Manuscrit de Genève in O.C.III, pp. 1424-1425), a law which subsists in civil society and exists in the state of nature, seems to me misconceived. It is true



By transforming the discrepancies between Rousseau and the philosophers of natural law into affinities, Derathé is, I think, unable to hold consistently to his claim. Thus, for instance, he sometimes forgets his own distinction between a superior and an anterior natural law when he remarks that for Rousseau

cette loi primitive doit être antérieure au contrat social et à l'établissement des sociétés civiles.<sup>63</sup>

that similar distinctions between two kinds of natural law had been drawn by other writers before Rousseau. In the Prodromus jurisprudentiae gentium communis (Stralsund 1671 - see V, §§5-9) of David Mevius, for instance, we shall find the jus naturale secundarium vel voluntarium (which includes international law) distinguished from the jus naturale primaevum (which applies to the state of nature only). And Gottfried Achenwall, in his Prolegomena juris naturalis in usum auditorum (Göttingen 1758 - see §§82-97) contends that the jus mere naturale and the jus sociale naturale were to be divided just insofar as the state of nature and the state of society required different laws. Cf. Otto von Gierke, Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht, 4 vols. (Berlin 1868-1913) IV, pp. 384-385, note 19. Léon (see 'Rousseau et les fondements de l'Etat moderne', p. 232), finally, believes that Rousseau's distinction has to do with the difference between a natural law secundum motus sensualitatis and a natural law secundum motus rationis, though to my knowledge he does not, as Derathé suggests, draw this distinction from any medieval work. In any event, if there is a real connection between the ideas of Rousseau and those of Mevius or Achenwall - neither of whom are mentioned anywhere in Rousseau's works - this has still to be established. Indeed, Rousseau's distinction between two kinds of natural law has not been connected by Derathé to any of the works from which Rousseau is alleged to have drawn his theory. The only source from which he might conceivably have borrowed this distinction is a passage in Burlamaqui's Principes du droit naturel (Genève 1747 - see II, c.iv, §24, pp. 203-204). In this passage Burlamaqui divides the natural law into the 'droit naturel primitif ou premier', which stems directly from God, and the 'droit naturel second', which, like the jus gentium, presupposes a community of men. And while the distinction which Rousseau himself draws is between a natural impulse and a moral obligation rather than a duty to God and a duty to other men, he does nonetheless refer directly to Burlamaqui in the Discours sur l'inégalité a few paragraphs before he makes his remarks upon the rules of natural law (see O.C.III, p. 124). Cf. Léon, 'Le Problème du Contrat social chez Rousseau', Archives, III-IV (1935), pp. 180 and 185. Derathé seems to have overlooked the possible connection between Rousseau and Burlamaqui on this point, since he wrongly supposes (p. 395) that the passage in which Burlamaqui's distinction is made did not appear in print until the posthumous publication of his Eléments du droit naturel in 1775. In any case, writes Derathé (p. 89), "L'influence de Burlamaqui sur Rousseau se réduit, somme toute, à fort peu de chose".

63. Ibid., p. 160.

And he forgets Rousseau's distinction between the natural and the civil liberty of men when he states that

la liberté est un droit naturel de l'homme, et  
il est de l'essence d'un tel droit d'être  
inaliénable.<sup>64</sup>

For we cannot understand the meaning of Rousseau if we imagine that in his view the natural independence of men was like their moral freedom.

Ces deux choses sont si différentes que même  
elles s'excluent mutuellement.<sup>65</sup>

The social contract required that the one liberty be renounced in order for the other to be gained<sup>66</sup> so that

plus ces forces naturelles sont mortes et anéanties,  
plus les acquises sont grandes et durables.<sup>67</sup>

The mistake made by Derathé and his followers is to suppose that the references to natural law in Rousseau's works commit him to much the same use of the concept as can be found in the theories of the natural law philosophers before him.<sup>68</sup> Hence whereas the significance of Rousseau's doctrine implied nothing less, for Vaughan, than a

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64. Ibid., p. 372. See also p. 171.

65. Lettres de la montagne, Huitième Lettre, O.C.III, p. 841. Burns still argues ('Du côté de chez Vaughan', p. 234), nevertheless, that for Rousseau "there is a qualitative continuity between 'independence' and 'liberty': the actual freedom of the citizen is the unfolding of what was potentially present in the independence of the natural man".

66. See the Contrat social, I.viii, O.C.III, pp. 364-365.

67. Ibid., II. vii, p. 382.

68. For Cobban (Rousseau and the Modern State, p. 69), "Rousseau was merely borrowing an idea which was a commonplace of the Natural Law jurists, and employing it in exactly the same sense". I have, of course, accepted here what is at least not obviously the case - that the natural law precursors of Rousseau whom Derathé considers all share the same interpretation of that concept. Yet Pufendorf himself remarks (De jure naturae et gentium, II, c.iii, §19, p. 148) that he cannot subscribe entirely to the idea of Grotius: "Neque enim adstipulari possumus Grotio,

"revolution in political speculation",<sup>69</sup> for Derathé the inescapable truth about Rousseau is quite the opposite.<sup>70</sup> No writer, however original he might seem, can break entirely with the past, and, Derathé insists,

Il subsiste toujours dans la doctrine de tout novateur des éléments traditionnels qu'il n'a pas réussi à éliminer. Il en est ainsi chez Rousseau.<sup>71</sup>

Rousseau's political thought thus belongs essentially to the philosophical school of natural law from which he is said to have drawn so

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qui in prolegomenis autumat, jura naturalia locum aliquem habitura, etiamsi daremus, quod sine summo scelere dari nequit, non esse Deum, aut non curari ab eo negotia humana." And in his First Treatise (c.vi, §§50-51, p. 195) Locke contends that the claim, advanced by Grotius and endorsed by Filmer, that generacione jus acquiritur parentibus in liberos provides no true principle of authority.

69. Vaughan, I, p. 41.

70. Bernard Bosanquet, in his discussion of the concept of 'right' (The Philosophical Theory of the State, first edition, pp. 70-71), remarks upon a distinction between Jeremy Bentham and Herbert Spencer which is very much like that which I have been trying to draw here between Vaughan and Derathé on Rousseau's concept of the 'droit naturel'. In the following passage Bentham may be replaced for my purpose by Vaughan, and Spencer by Derathé: "Bentham, seeing clearly that the claims of the actual individual, taken as he happens to be, are casual and unregulated, fulminates against the idea of natural right as representing those claims. Right is for him a creation of the State, and there can be no right which is not constituted by law. And the truth of the contention seems obvious. How, in fact, could individual claims or wishes constitute a right, except as in some way ratified by a more general recognition? But to Mr. Herbert Spencer the contrary proposition is absolutely convincing, and, indeed, on their common premises, with equal reason. It is ridiculous, he points out, to think of a people as creating rights, which it had not before, by the process of creating a government in order to create them. It is absurd to treat an individual as having a share of rights qua member of the people, while in his private capacity he has no rights at all." Bosanquet's interpretation of the concept of 'right' has, to be sure, more in common with Rousseau's 'droit naturel' than have the accounts of either Vaughan or Derathé: "If it is a plain fact that 'a right' can only be recognised by a society, it is no less plain that it can only be real in an individual. If individual claims, apart from social adjustment, are arbitrary, yet social recognitions, apart from individual qualities and relations, are meaningless. As long as the self and the law are alien and hostile, it is hopeless to do more than choose at random in which of the two we are to locate the essence of right."

71. Derathé, p. 377.

many of his ideas.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, in Derathé's opinion, there cannot really be much doubt of Rousseau's intellectual debt. One of the connections between his work and that of his precursors, for instance, which Derathé at first describes as "bien probable" becomes "incontestable" in the end.<sup>73</sup> And Rousseau himself could not object to this interpretation of his thought since he remained,

plus qu'il ne l'a cru lui-même, le débiteur et le disciple<sup>74</sup>

of the natural law philosophers.

In this fashion, Derathé's corrections to Vaughan still lead him to make some similar conclusions about the meaning of Rousseau's thought. For he joins with Vaughan in supposing that a proper understanding of Rousseau can only be achieved if we establish a connection between his theory and other theories devised before which may not, in fact, have been apparent to him. If, on the one hand, this connection has to do with the implications, while on the other hand it has to do with the sources, of his ideas, in both case it nonetheless remains a connection which divorces Rousseau's meaning from what he says.<sup>75</sup> Yet Rousseau did not anticipate what his collectivist followers would some day choose to make of his political and social thought, nor at the same time did he repeat what had been said before him by the philosophers of natural law.

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72. See *ibid.*, p. 165. Cf. Burns, 'Du côté de chez Vaughan', p. 232: "Derathé shows convincingly that Rousseau, however original and personal his use of the conceptual equipment of the natural-law school, belongs essentially to that school."

73. See Derathé, pp. 205-206. The supposed connection is, in this case, between Rousseau and Montesquieu.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 379. Italics mine.

75. Schinz (see 'Encore la question du Contrat social', RHLF, XXI (1914), p. 195), whose own interpretation requires this distinction, does not hesitate to recommend it as a rule: "Certes soyons fidèles au texte, mais réservons notre jugement pour l'interpréter; certes respectons les mots, mais cherchons-en attentivement l'esprit."



On the contrary, what he actually did was to attack their views, to oppose his own conception of the natural law to theirs, and to put forward a political theory which was distinct from the doctrines that prevailed in his own day.

In a passage from the Discours sur l'inégalité which Derathé cites as evidence of Rousseau's debt to his precursors, Rousseau in fact observes that we shall only understand the concept of the 'droit naturel' by

laissant... tous les livres scientifiques qui ne nous apprennent qu'à voir les hommes tels qu'ils se sont faits.<sup>76</sup>

Such disrespect for the authority of books is shown by him in many other places too. In the Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont, for instance, he writes,

J'ai cherché la vérité dans les Livres; je n'y ai trouvé que le mensonge et l'erreur. J'ai consulté les Auteurs; je n'ai trouvé que des Charlatans.<sup>77</sup>

We should not be surprised, therefore, to learn that Rousseau believed his own account of law would be entirely new.<sup>78</sup> And the concept of the 'droit naturel' which he introduced in the Discours was to be based

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76. O.C.III, p. 125.

77. O.C.IV, p. 967. The same opinion is shared, moreover, by both the tutor and the Vicaire savoyard in Emile. Cf. Livre III, O.C.IV, p. 454: "Je hais les livres; ils n'apprennent qu'à parler de ce qu'on ne sait pas." And Livre IV, *ibid.*, p. 568: "Je consultai les philosophes, je feuilletai leurs livres, j'examinai leurs diverses opinions. Je les trouvai tous fiers, affirmatifs, dogmatiques... n'ignorant rien, ne prouvant rien, se moquant les uns des autres, et ce point, commun à tous, me parut le seul sur lequel ils ont tous raison." This distrust of specious learning was not uncommon, of course, in the age which followed that of Descartes. In Emile again (Livre IV, *ibid.*, p. 567) Rousseau has the Vicaire remark that he was moved by "ces dispositions... de doute que Descartes exige pour la recherche de la vérité".

78. See *ibid.*, Livre V, p. 842: "Ce sujet est tout neuf: la définition de la loi est encore à faire."

upon some principles,

sans qu'il soit nécessaire d'y faire entrer celui  
de la sociabilité,<sup>79</sup>

that were distinct from those which were held by the philosophers of natural law.

Rousseau sometimes feared that his own political ideas might seem too bold, too revolutionary, for his day, and in his Confessions he suggested that this was at least one reason why he had not completed his Institutions politiques for publication.<sup>80</sup> He had been so apprehensive about this, he reflects, that he could not even dare to let the work be seen by any of his friends.

Je n'avois voulu communiquer mon projet à  
personne, pas même à Diderot. Je craignois  
qu'il ne parut trop hardi pour le siècle et  
le pays où j'écrivois.<sup>81</sup>

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79. Discours sur l'inégalité, O.C.III, p. 126. Rousseau's new principles were 'l'amour de soi-même' and 'la pitié'; in the Discours these took the place of the ideas of natural reason and sociability to which the philosophers of natural law had all adhered. I shall discuss these principles in more detail in ch. III (see especially pp. 196-200). For Rousseau's own account of them in the Discours, see O.C.III, pp. 125-126, 154, and 219-220. Cf. the notes of Starobinski in *ibid.*, pp. 1298-1299 and 1376.

80. This was not, of course, his only reason. In his Confessions (see O.C.I, p. 516) Rousseau also remarks that the task of completing the Institutions politiques eventually became too daunting and that, after saving those sections which were later to form most of the Contrat social, he burnt the rest.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 405. On this subject see George Havens, 'Diderot, Rousseau, and the Discours sur l'inégalité', Diderot Studies, III (1961), pp. 226-227. With respect to Rousseau's own conception of the novelty of his ideas, see his letter to the Prince of Wurtemberg of 10 November 1763 (Correspondance complète, XVIII, p. 124) in which he proclaims, "Dans une route toute nouvelle il ne faut pas chercher des chemins battus, et jamais entreprise extraordinaire et difficile ne s'exécutera par des moyens aisés et communs....ce ne sont peut-être ici que les délires d'un fiévreux. La comparaison de ce qui est à ce qui doit être m'a donné l'esprit romanesque et m'a toujours jeté loin de tout ce qui se fait". In my view, Fetscher (see 'Rousseau, auteur d'intention conservatrice et d'action révolutionnaire', in Rousseau et la philosophie politique, pp. 51-75) misunderstands Rousseau's intention on this point.

And notwithstanding whatever he might have been able to conceal, the originality of his thought was unmistakably clear, both to his friends and to his critics alike, from the moment that his Premier Discours on the arts and sciences appeared.<sup>82</sup> Kant described him as the Newton of the philosophy of ethics,<sup>83</sup> Boswell wrote that he had ideas which were "completely visionary and...unsuitable for a man in his position",<sup>84</sup> and long before his seditious books were banned in Paris and Geneva the King of France thought it would be wise to have the philosopher of "poverty, liberty, and truth" incarcerated at the lunatic asylum of Bicêtre.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the debt which Rousseau owed to his precursors "plus qu'il ne l'a cru lui-même", I think that Derathé would have provided a

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82. The Discours sur les sciences et les arts may, perhaps, have been the least original of Rousseau's major works, but it was probably more widely read, and was certainly more widely challenged - by a range of critics from the mathematician Gautier to King Stanislas of Poland - than any of his other works. From the moment that he became known to the world of European letters, Rousseau was praised or blamed for holding to ideas that had not been heard of, or at any rate not listened to, much before.

83. See the 'Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen' in Kant's gesammelte Schriften (Berlin 1902-), XX, pp. 58-59: "Rousseau entdeckte zu allererst unter der Mannigfaltigkeit der Menschlichen angenommenen Gestalten die tief verborgene Natur desselben und das versteckte Gesetz nach welchem die Vorsehung durch seine Beobachtungen gerechtfertigt wird....Nach Newton und Rousseau ist Gott gerechtfertigt und nunmehr ist Popens Lehrsatz wahr." Cf. Ernst Cassirer, Rousseau, Kant, Goethe (Princeton 1945), pp. 1-60, and 'Das Problem Jean Jacques Rousseau', Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie, XLI (1932), pp. 177-213 and 479-513, published in an English edition as The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with an introduction, translation, and notes by Gay (New York 1954). Cassirer, like Vaughan, interprets Rousseau in the light of his subsequent significance, but the perspective of a Kantian ethic which he employs has much more to commend it - for it comes closer to Rousseau's meaning - than the perspective of collectivism.

84. Boswell to Alexandre Deleyre, 15 October 1766. See Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France, 1765-1766, edited by Frank Brady and Frederick Pottle (London 1955), p. 317.

85. This is noted by the Marquis d'Argenson in his journal on 16 April 1753 (see d'Argenson's Journal et mémoires, 9 vols. [Paris 1859-67], VII, p. 457): "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, de Genève...dit que les gens de lettres doivent faire ces trois voeux: pauvreté, liberté et vérité. Cela a indisposé le gouvernement contre lui...le Roi a dit qu'il ferait bien de le faire enfermer à Bicêtre....L'on craint ces sortes de philosophes libres."

more accurate interpretation of his meaning if only he had looked more closely at Rousseau's own statements about the creditors of his ideas. For Rousseau rarely refers to Grotius, Locke, or Pufendorf except when it is to correct their errors. About Grotius, he writes, for instance, that

sa plus constante maniere de raisonner est d'établir toujours le droit par le fait. On pourroit employer une méthode plus conséquente, mais non pas plus favorable aux Tirans.<sup>86</sup>

On Locke, he exclaims,

Je trouve dans le Gouvernement Civil de Locke une objection que me paroît trop spécieuse pour qu'il me soit permis de la dissimuler.<sup>87</sup>

And Pufendorf

dit que tout de même qu'on transfère son bien à autrui par des conventions et des Contracts, on

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86. Contrat social, I.ii, O.C.III, p. 353. See also the other references to Grotius in the Contrat social (ibid., pp.355, 356, 358, 359, 370, and 436) and the critique which appears in one of Rousseau's fragments on war (ibid., p. 615).

87. Discours sur l'inégalité, ibid., p. 214. The whole of the next five pages is devoted to a critique of Locke's claim in c. vii, §§79-80 (pp. 337-338) of the Second Treatise that "the end of conjunction between Male and Female" is "not barely Procreation, but the continuation of the Species". It is true, on the other hand, that in his sixth Lettre de la montagne (O.C.III, p. 812) Rousseau notes that Locke, in the company of Althusius, Sidney, the abbé de Saint-Pierre, and Montesquieu, had dealt with the same matters of abstract political thought as he himself had done and that "Locke en particulier les a traitées exactement dans les mêmes principes que moi". But Rousseau does not provide a single clue in this passage as to what might be the actual connection between Locke's principles and his own, and he seems to have in mind not so much the substance of Locke's theory as the circumstances of his life. For by the time Rousseau wrote these lines in 1764 he had been driven into exile from several cities in two countries, and the writers to whom he refers had all been criticised, persecuted, or exiled for their political ideas. Thus in the same passage he observes that "l'infortuné Sydeni pensoit comme moi, mais il agissoit; c'est pour son fait et non pour son Livre qu'il eut l'honneur de verser son sang. Althusius en Allemagne s'attira des ennemis, mais on ne s'avisa pas de le poursuivre criminellement".



peut aussi se dépouiller de sa liberté en faveur  
de quelqu'un. C'est-là...un fort mauvais  
raisonnement.<sup>88</sup>

The intellectual debt which Rousseau owed, in short, was not one which he felt he ought to pay.

Vaughan and Derathé, in my view, are thus mistaken about the meaning of Rousseau, and they are both mistaken because they falsely attach his ideas to other claims that he never really shared. The one looks at his writings in the light of the significance which they acquired later, the other in the light of the philosophies which had prevailed before, as if the sense of his contentions could be established by focusing upon his influence or sources rather than with reference specifically to what he said. Yet Rousseau's theory was not conceived either to anticipate the present or to reflect the past, and by looking too near, on the one hand, and too far on the other, for a context of his thought, both Vaughan and Derathé have passed by the meaning which he considered to be his own.

My argument, then, is that in order to understand Rousseau's ideas we shall have to take account of the sense that he intended his statements should have in the particular contexts in which they were actually made.<sup>89</sup> The distinction that is sometimes drawn between what

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88. Discours sur l'inégalité, *ibid.*, p. 183. See also the eighth Lettre de la montagne, *ibid.*, p. 844. Why, indeed, should Rousseau have thought more highly of Pufendorf than Leibniz had done? And Leibniz, who knew Pufendorf better, did not think highly of him at all. See the 'Epistolae ad Henricum Kestnerum' in Leibniz's Opera omnia, 6 vols. (Genève 1768), IV.iii, p. 261: "Vir parum Jurisconsultus, & minimè Philosophus."

89. On this point I am convinced that Peter Winch is entirely correct when he states (The Idea of a Social Science [London 1958], p. 107) that "ideas cannot be torn out of their context...the relation between idea and context is an internal one". Cf. H. P. Grice, 'Meaning', Philosophical Review, LXVI (1957), p. 387.

a man says and why he is saying it - if that is supposed to be a distinction between what in fact he means by his statement and what perhaps he may have intended in the making of it - seems to me fallacious.<sup>90</sup> There is, of course, much that could help to explain why a belief is expressed in a particular way at a certain time which an interpreter of its meaning will not be obliged to know, and some distinctions between the sense of an idea and the reasons for which it might be advanced are obviously both correct and indispensable.<sup>91</sup>

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90. See Alan Ryan, 'Locke and the Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie', Political Studies, XIII (1965), p. 219. In a similar vein J. W. N. Watkins remarks (Hobbes's System of Ideas [London 1965], pp. 22-23) that an idea "transcends" the "thinking which went into it...It has infinitely many logical consequences, only a finite number of which can have been consciously thought of by its author". Plamenatz (Man and Society, I, p. ix) also distinguishes "what a man is saying" from "why he is saying it", but to be fair the 'why' he has in mind is not the intention expressed in a statement but "the conditions in which it was produced". Cf. too John Dunn, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas', Philosophy, XLIII (1968), p. 92. I am, however, unable to follow Skinner, whose ideas I otherwise share, and indeed adopt in this section, when he suggests ('Meaning and Understanding', pp. 31 and 45-47) that in order to understand any statement which was made in the past, we shall have to add to our grasp of what was said some further grasp of "how what was said was meant". If a writer's meaning is not expressed in his statement then the sense of what he does say must either be confused or hypocritical, and in such a case our interpretation of his remarks will provide us with an incorrect impression of what he in fact believes, denies, prefers, or would like us to do. We can only attempt to correct our misunderstanding of a statement that is unclear or insincere by looking even more closely at the contextual place it occupies among the other statements of its author, so that we shall not be able to grasp what is or was said by any speaker unless we have an understanding of what his statement means. And to know what a statement means we must have some idea of how its terms are used, and therefore some comprehension of the sense which the author intends to express. The meaning of a statement is not something that is added to its terms by the manner in which they might be used. It is the sense of those terms in their appropriate use, apart from which it would be incorrect to describe them at all as comprising the elements of a statement. Cf. L. J. Cohen, 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', Philosophical Quarterly, XIV (1964), pp. 118-137.

91. To make this point clear Grice (see 'Meaning', p. 386) would have us draw a distinction between the primary and secondary intentions of a speaker - that is, between his aim to produce an effect in his audience and his aim to have "this effect...lead to a further effect". The speaker's meaning, we are told, can be attached only to his primary intention. (Cf. also Grice's 'Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning', Foundations of Language IV, (1968), pp. 225-242,

In his Confessions, for instance, Rousseau remarks that

des divers ouvrages que j'avois sur le chantier,  
celui...qui devoit selon moi mettre le sceau à ma  
réputation étoit mes Institutions politiques.<sup>92</sup>

Yet if he intended that the work which was to become the Contrat social should possess qualities that would make it the most highly esteemed of all his writings, then for the period of his own lifetime, at any rate, he was certainly to fail in his purpose.<sup>93</sup> Thus insofar as he may

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reprinted in J. R. Searle, ed., The Philosophy of Language [London 1971], pp. 54-70.) I have in mind here some distinction of this kind too, between, let us say, the intentions which are expressed by Rousseau in a statement and the intentions which might accompany that statement when it is made. One should certainly keep apart the sense in which Rousseau intended to refute or elucidate a proposition from the sense in which he intended to be honoured for having done this task well, even if the first intention does not really seem to take the form, which Grice would perhaps ascribe to it, of a design to induce an effect in an audience. In any event, we must put aside from Rousseau's meaning those of his purposes which can only count as his reasons for making statements, and if we disregard these aims, then we shall obviously have no place left for any of his motives, whether caused by his poor health, commanded to him by God, or forced upon him by his class, which might account for his true virtues or afflictions but never for the sense of what he said. Even if we suppose, for instance, that his beliefs were somehow affected by a mental illness, we might then investigate the cause of this disease but not its effect upon the meaning of his ideas. Some of the least illuminating accounts of the sense of Rousseau's theoretical remarks have been invented by his medical interpreters. See, in particular, Paul Möbius, J. J. Rousseau's Krankheitsgeschichte (Leipzig 1889); Suzanne Elosu, La maladie de Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Paris 1928); René Laforgue, Jean Jacques Rousseau: Eine psychoanalytische Studie (Wien 1930); and Crocker, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Quest (1712-1758) (New York 1968), pp. 13-15.

92. O.C.I., p. 404. D'Alembert, in a letter to Rousseau of 10 February 1761 (Correspondance complète, VIII, p. 76), uses the same expression but with reference to La Nouvelle Héloïse: "Cette éloquence du coeur, cette chaleur, cette vie, qui fait le caractere de vos ouvrages, brille surtout dans celui-ci, qui doit, ce me semble, mettre le sceau à votre reputation."

93. See Daniel Mornet, 'L'influence de J.-J. Rousseau au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', Annales, VIII (1912), p. 44: "On a répété volontiers...que toutes les fureurs de la Révolution grondaient déjà dans le Contrat social. Elles y étaient peut-être, mais le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle ne les a point vues. De ce livre redoutable, c'est à peine si l'on parle avant 1789." Cf. Mornet, 'Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées (1750-1780)', RHLF, XVII (1910), pp. 465-468; Eugène Ritter, 'La condamnation du Contrat social et d'Emile prononcée par le Conseil de Genève', Annales, XI (1916-1917), pp. 201-208; David Williams, 'The Influence of Rousseau on Political Opinion, 1760-95', English Historical Review, XLVIII (1933), pp. 414-430; Derathé, 'Les réfutations du

have misjudged the effect which his work was to have upon his readers, it could properly be said that he was under an illusion as to how his meaning would be grasped or understood. But however much Rousseau might be responsible for misdirecting his interpreters, however much his statements might be unclear, or inconsistent, or indeed mistaken with respect to what they claim, it could not be correct to say of them that their real meaning is distinct from the sense which he himself gave to them.<sup>94</sup> For whenever we divorce Rousseau's intended sense from the statements that he made we deprive them of their meaning altogether just as if we were to put aside the grounds for his beliefs.<sup>95</sup> If we neglect the sense which he attached to his own theory we thereby come to look upon it as nothing more than a collection of unwarranted beliefs, and in this way we make impossible the task of understanding what it means. In order to interpret his social theory we shall therefore have to take account of what his statements are designed to do in the particular formulations he employs.<sup>96</sup> And to avoid a confusion between the meaning of his works and the significance that subsequently may have come to be placed upon them, we shall have to take some care that the sense which we ascribe to his ideas does not differ from the appropriate expressed intentions

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Contrat social au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Annales, XXXII (1950-1952), pp. 7-54; Louis Trenard, 'La diffusion du Contrat social, 1762-1832', in Etudes sur le 'Contrat social', pp. 425-458; and John Lough, 'The earliest refutation of Rousseau's Contrat social', French Studies, XXIII (1969), pp. 23-34.

94. See Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding', p. 28: "No agent can...be said to have meant...something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant." Cf. A. J. Ayer, 'Meaning and Intentionality', in Metaphysics and Common Sense (London 1969), p. 39: "There can be no general answer to the question what do words, or sentences, mean, for the very good reason that they do not all mean the same."

95. See Stuart Hampshire, Thought and Action (London 1959), p. 140.

96. See Dunn, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas', p. 93.



that we impute to him. As Rousseau himself put this point in one of his letters to Voltaire,

Je sais La distinction qu'il faut faire entre les intentions d'un Auteur, et les conséquences qui peuvent se tirer de sa doctrine.<sup>97</sup>

Now if it is true that the meaning of Rousseau's statements is identical with the sense which he intended they should have, then it ought to follow that his avowed aim to refute the arguments made by the natural law philosophers must also be included in the meaning of his theory. Any account of his conception of the natural law which does not point specifically to the sense in which it is designed to be a refutation of some other concepts cannot, therefore, provide us with an adequate understanding of that theory. We shall find solutions in Rousseau, or at least what he supposed might be solutions, only to those problems which he himself had it in mind to solve. And the questions which for him were posed in the writings of other thinkers must be understood correctly if his own answers are to be made clear.

If you cannot tell what a proposition means unless you know what question it is meant to answer, you will mistake its meaning if you make a mistake about that question.<sup>98</sup>

To the extent that Rousseau's ideas were conceived as answers to particular problems which other writers brought to his attention - to that extent our own comprehension of his meaning must therefore include

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97. Correspondance complète, IV, p. 38. The distinction in English between 'meaning' in the sense of signification (to mean that) and 'meaning' in the sense of intention (to mean to) does not permit us to dispense with the intended sense of an author's statement, since it is the referential meaning that which will be incorporated in his own particular formulation of the statement. In French there is no distinction at all between the questions 'Que signifie ce mot?' and 'Que veut dire ce mot?'. Of course a word has no intention of its own, but neither has it any meaning, and there is no answer to the question 'Que signifie un mot?'. To know the meaning of this or that particular word, however, it is indispensable to have some grasp of how it is used in its appropriate context. See J.L. Austin, 'The Meaning of a Word', in his Philosophical Papers (Oxford 1961), pp. 23-43.

98. R.G. Collingwood, An Autobiography (London 1939), p. 33.

some grasp of how he interpreted these other works. Derathé is mistaken, I think, about the debt which Rousseau owed to his precursors, but the figures to whom he refers directly in his writings do still have their place in the intellectual context of his theory. Particularly where his own ideas are most sharply and deliberately contrasted with those that came before him, it is precisely that distinction which is central to his meaning.<sup>99</sup>

In this study of Rousseau I shall be concerned above all with those features of his social thought which incorporate some reference to his intellectual precursors, and my principal aim will be to show that an account of Rousseau's meaning cannot properly be divorced from a careful study of the context in which his ideas were developed. Of course the elements of Rousseau's theory, articulated as they were in several places over many years, do not all share a single context, and the precise meaning of each of these elements differs from the rest in the same fashion as the distinction between each of the particular objects which Rousseau had in mind when he composed his various works.<sup>100</sup> Comprehensive social doctrines of one kind or another have indeed been ascribed to Rousseau far more often than the meaning of

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99. See Shklar, Men and Citizens, p. 221: "The first question one might well ask in considering a political theorist's public biography is...against whom did he write? Political theory is inherently contentious and persuasive. Most great political theorists have a special bête noire, as Locke has his Filmer and Bentham his Blackstone."

100. Naturally the Lettre sur les spectacles, for instance, is recognisably by the same author as the Lettres de la montagne. But unless the first text is understood as a critique of another essay by d'Alembert, and the second as a reply to a critique of Rousseau's own views by Tronchin, it will be impossible to grasp the specific meaning which Rousseau intended to impart to either work.

his ideas has been established,<sup>101</sup> but what is thought to be the central theme of all his works is very commonly a single system of ideas that cannot be found in any one of them. If it is a mistake, moreover, to imagine that his writings form the elements of a theory which he never managed to present in a specific text, then so too is it a mistake to suppose that the theme of a particular work was always intended by him to imply the meaning of the next.<sup>102</sup> Rousseau's ideas are not connected to each other as fragments in a methodical elaboration of some grand design, and unless we are prepared to argue that in certain works the essence of his theory was not yet expressed, and at the same time see that it has disappeared from others, it cannot be correct for us to speak of the comprehensive social theory of Rousseau.

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101. According to Gustave Lanson (see 'L'Unité de la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau', Annales, VIII (1912), p. 29) the systematic theory of Rousseau can be grasped as an expression of his "vie intérieure". Thus (p. 9) "toutes ou presque toutes ses pensées...sont, à l'origine, l'expression d'un malaise sentimental; ses doctrines les plus abstraites sont les prolongements de ses émotions, qui elles-mêmes sont des réactions contre des réalités dont il est froissé ou blessé". Nevertheless, Lanson admits (p. 29), "Il est vrai que Rousseau ne fait pas d'ordinaire la synthèse, et qu'il ne nous laisse pas toujours le sang-froid nécessaire pour la faire". For Ernest Wright (The Meaning of Rousseau [London 1929], p. 7), on the other hand, the central concept which prevails throughout Rousseau's thought is that "Nature is right. If we will take the words as Rousseau meant them, we shall have a key to all he has to say". The chapters of Wright's study, therefore, are quite predictably entitled 'The Natural Man', 'The Natural Education', 'The Natural Society', etc. But at the same time Wright himself admits (p. 30) that "what we have now put together is not to be found intact at any given place in Rousseau's work".

102. Among the interpreters of Rousseau's thought who have undertaken to establish a 'chronologie logique' of all his works, Schinz, in my view, has no equal. Impressed, for instance, by the statement "on n'en sait rien" which appears in Livre I, ch. ii of the Manuscrit de Genève (O.C.III, p. 289) after the lines, "L'homme est né libre, et cependant partout il est dans les fers....Comment ce changement s'est-il fait?", Schinz argues ('La Question du Contrat social', p. 760) that the Manuscrit must have been composed before the Discours sur l'inégalité, because after he had written that work Rousseau would have known the answer to his question. The fact that in the Contrat social, I.i (O.C.III, p. 351) he asked the same question and again professed the same ignorance, must therefore have been an oversight since, according to Schinz, Rousseau could by then have consulted the Discours for an answer. The mistake in this argument is clearly explained by Beaulavon ('La Question du Contrat social. Une fausse solution', p. 591): "Quand

I should like, therefore, to consider the real connections between Rousseau's ideas as I perceive them, and for that reason I shall be concerned here not with some overriding theory that could be ascribed to his political writings generally,<sup>103</sup> nor with the supposedly shared characteristics of all his philosophical or educational writings,<sup>104</sup> or indeed with any collection of his works from which we might draw out a single theme or topic, but rather with some features which I believe were common to a large proportion of his early writings.<sup>105</sup> In the years between 1750 and 1756 - that is, during the period roughly delimited by the composition of his Discours

Rousseau...déclare 'ignorer' dans le Contrat ce qu'il a développé dans l'Inégalité, cela ne prouve sans doute ni qu'il ait oublié, ni qu'il ait changé, mais seulement qu'il se place sur un autre terrain. La valeur de toutes ces prétendues preuves est donc toujours subordonnée à l'acceptation préalable du système proposé." See also ibid., pp. 588-591. The final text, of course, does not read "on n'en sait rien" but rather "je l'ignore", and so far from this proving that Rousseau neglected to strike out the sentence from his revised account the slight change of terms shows only that he paid renewed attention to it. Cf. Pierre-Maurice Masson, 'Questions de chronologie rousseauiste', Annales, IX (1913), pp. 50-51.

103. The most substantial attempts in recent years to provide an interpretation of this kind are those of Fetscher (Rousseaus politische Philosophie); Roger Masters (The Political Philosophy of Rousseau [Princeton 1968]); Launay (Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Ecrivain politique (1712-1762) [Cannes and Grenoble 1971]); and Bronisław Baczko (Rousseau. Solitude et communauté [Paris 1974]).

104. With regard to his philosophical writings as a whole, see, for instance, Pierre Burgelin, La philosophie de l'existence de J.-J. Rousseau (Paris 1952); Jacques-François Thomas, Le pélagianisme de Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Paris 1956); and R. J. Howells, 'The Metaphysic of nature: basic values and their application in the social philosophy of Rousseau', SVEC, LX (1968), pp. 109-200. With regard to his educational writings, see especially William Boyd, The Educational Theory of Rousseau (London 1911), and Jean Château, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Sa philosophie de l'éducation (Paris 1962).

105. The best work devoted to a systematic treatment of Rousseau's early writings is still, in my view, Hubert's Rousseau et l'Encyclopédie. Einaudi's The Early Rousseau is also very useful on some topics, and while it is not so rigorous in construction or so perceptive in detail as the study by Hubert it provides information about a larger number of Rousseau's writings. See also Louis Ducros, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. De Genève à l'Hermitage (1712-1757) (Paris 1908); Crocker, Rousseau: The Quest; and Launay, Rousseau: Ecrivain politique.



- Rousseau produced several essays that are related to each other both by a certain style of argument and by some substantive ideas that figure in his treatment of matters which might today appear to be quite separate and discrete. I hope to show that in most of his principal early works he actually developed a number of accounts of what he took to be the origin and nature of our social and political conventions, and I shall argue that these accounts bear a marked similarity to other ideas which he propounded at the same time about the genesis and character of culture and language. Some of these pages will thus be devoted, for example, to a study of Rousseau's early reflections about music in the context of his early writings about politics, since I believe that the connection between his reflections on these matters forms a central part of the theory about culture and society which he conceived in that short but very fruitful period of his life.

My scope of reference, then, will span the time from Rousseau's abrupt rise to public acclaim following the appearance of his first prize essay to his equally abrupt break, some six years later, with the society in which this acclaim was initially realized.<sup>106</sup> And while the period which I shall cover is also marked by a certain biographical unity, it is essentially the conceptual coherence of the works which he produced in those years that will be my concern here.<sup>107</sup>

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106. See ch. II, pp. 80-81.

107. For this reason I do not propose to take account of Rousseau's writings in strict chronological order, and I shall in fact turn to the first of his major works, that is, the Discours sur les sciences et les arts, only in my final chapter (see pp. 381-403 below). I mean to show that this is the one work which touches at least superficially upon most of the problems that the others treat in depth, and I hope, therefore, that a discussion of the essay which actually heralded his social theory may also serve to introduce a general assessment of its meaning. In any case the point of establishing the appropriate

Yet the very fact that most of these works were composed by Rousseau around the early or mid-1750s seems to me of great importance to an understanding of the theoretical relations that underlie them. For their temporal proximity in a common historical setting helps to supply them with conceptual affinities as well, and I shall maintain that in the form of their exposition the most prominent ideas of Rousseau's early writings are conjoined in a way which is not characteristic of those texts around a supposedly central theme that he produced in different periods of his life. It is a mistake, in short, to imagine that his views can be related to each other only when they apply to the same subject, since the limits between subjects which are found in his works are too often set by nothing more than the special interests and acquired competence of his interpreters.

Perhaps two brief and very general points ought to be made, finally, by way of a defence of this approach to an understanding of Rousseau's meaning. The first is that the intellectual coherence of his ideas should not be confused with their consistency as elements of a deductive system. If the propositions of a theory have necessarily to be constructed as the implications or entailments of other propositions, then most of the major contributions to our social thought

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contexts for a study of Rousseau's writings must surely remain distinct from that of recounting the temporal sequence in which they were first published or conceived. We must have a grasp of the relevant circumstances surrounding each of Rousseau's works, since these circumstances figure among his reasons for composing those works at a specific time in a particular way and to that extent constitute an aspect of the sense or purpose which he gave to them. To have a sense of the occasion of ideas, however, does not demand that we regard them as events. Often we mistake the meaning of ideas because we hold to false assumptions about the way in which the pattern of their development must follow the sequence of their composition; a few scholars are sometimes so transfixed by such assumptions that they even attempt to infer the dates around which a text must have been composed from premises about its logical compatibility with other works by the same author (see, for instance, note 102 above and ch. II, notes 73 and 104). Cf. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford 1946), pp. 282-302, and Maurice Mandelbaum, 'A Note on History as Narrative', History and Theory, VI (1967), pp. 413-419.

could not really be described as proper theories at all. I believe that Rousseau's early writings do have a theoretical coherence in the sense that the proposed solutions which they offer to some quite distinct conceptual problems are fixed upon a broadly common base and follow a substantially shared method. But the elements of his theory are certainly not consistent throughout, and that this is so can be attributed only in small measure to his philosophical blunders, obscurities, and oversights. Most of it is due, rather, to the facts that the affiliated principles which he adopted in his early writings can never be reduced with accuracy to the same plan in every case, that the related arguments which he set forth must still ultimately be distinguished because each proposes a solution to a different problem, and that the refinements and elaborations with which he compounded his theory render it impossible for us to match the ideas expressed in his early works as if they constitute the parts of just one plot or puzzle. With regard to certain ideas, for instance that of the 'volonté générale', I mean to show that Rousseau actually changed his mind in the course of developing his views, so that even within his early writings we shall find two inconsistent interpretations of one concept. Yet in order to understand these two interpretations it will still be necessary to take account of the ways in which both were conceived in response to a particular problem set for him by Diderot, and I shall contend that unless we view the inconsistency in the light of this problem the nature of the difference between the interpretations, and hence their meaning, will not be apparent to us. Ideas are not incoherent for the same reason that they are inconsistent, and it is as much a mistake to suppose that all conceptual relations must involve entailments as it is to imagine that all historical relations require unbroken continuities.

The second and associated point is that we should refrain from any attempt to establish the theoretical coherence of Rousseau's work at the expense of historical precision in reconstructing its appropriate contexts. I mean to show that even some of Rousseau's most abstract conceptions were generated and amplified in polemical controversies with other thinkers, and I shall argue that the sense in which his observations were designed to challenge claims that had been made by, for instance, Hobbes, Locke, Rameau, Buffon, Diderot, and Condillac, is central rather than incidental to their meaning. Unless we recognise the polemical nature of Rousseau's work the associations which we draw between his ideas and others will be spurious and misconceived, and we shall then be unable to find their meaning because we have located them in the wrong place. Of course it would be absurd to maintain that all interpreters of Rousseau's thought should have no other interest in his work but that of establishing his precise meaning, and the stress which I put here upon the need for an historical approach is not intended to preclude other studies which focus instead upon the ways in which his theory might have been mistaken or profound. My claim on behalf of an historical perspective is not that it should dominate or supersede all other methods but only that it should serve as their foundation insofar as they purport to be concerned with the precise sense of his ideas. To that extent the differences between the academic or even practical interests and competence of those who turn to a study of his social theory make any division of labour between them inappropriate to their task.

My treatment of Rousseau's thought here will therefore be concerned with only a part of what he wrote in a limited period of his life, but it is not my aim to subtract that part from the meaning of



his ideas in general. I hope, on the contrary, that an interpretation of something less than the whole of his work can still be added to an appreciation of his other writings, and I should simply like to make more clear some features of his meaning so that these might be distinguished from the doctrines with which his several reputations have encumbered him. The social thought of Rousseau is, I think, worthy of "the dispassionate criticism which a philosophy without a reputation to be feared may reasonably expect",<sup>108</sup> and it is that kind of criticism, but only that kind, which I should like to claim here on his behalf.

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108. Michael Oakeshott, Experience and its Modes (Cambridge 1933), p. 7.