

TIGHTENING THE SOCIAL KNOT:
ROUSSEAU
AND
THE POLITICS OF IMAGINATION

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TIGHTENING THE SOCIAL KNOT

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ABSTRACT

Jean-Jacques Rousseau maintained that he was a consistent thinker, even if he presented his ideas in an unsystematic fashion. My work is a demonstration of the coherence of Rousseau's writing that highlights how his views on the nature and form of human imagination connect various aspects of his political philosophy. Moreover, by exploring his concept of imagination, it becomes clear that one of Rousseau's main philosophical preoccupations was the problem of social cooperation. In particular, Rousseau sought ways of controlling and directing human imagination in order to foster and nurture the emotions he thought central to harmonious social and political life. In the course of establishing my interpretation, I describe the relationship between imagination and emotional development as well as the role imagination plays in preserving social order. In the process I defend Rousseau from criticisms that see his position as favouring a narrow and restricted vision of human life and human community. Part of this effort includes a discussion of imagination as central to his model of political decision making and his ideal of citizenship. I conclude with a consideration of how an understanding of these issues provides a new perspective on Rousseau's views on the general will and personal autonomy.

Acknowledgements

The writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau fluctuate between concerns for public life and personal life. He offers insights regarding interactions of a political or professional kind as well as those of a more intimate nature. It seems fitting in acknowledging support for a work on Rousseau to follow his lead. Much gratitude is due people I know mostly through my public life. The members of my committee have far exceeded my expectations. They have all provided valuable insights and direction. My advisor, Dr. Evan Simpson, has demonstrated a devotion to academic ideals that would make even a hardened critic such as Rousseau revise his bitter indictment of professional philosophy. I must also gratefully acknowledge the support I received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

On the personal level, Rousseau thought that the family was the foundation of all virtue and success, and on this point I fully agree. My parents, Ted and Hazel, and my brother, Wayne, have made sacrifices that have ensured that my work could be completed in a secure and comfortable environment. My in-laws, Jim and Dolores Anderson, have always been there with support and encouragement. But more than anybody, this thesis has been sustained by the devotion and love of my wife, Anastasia. I dedicate this work to her and to my son, Maximilian, who both prove everyday that Rousseau may have been right about the natural goodness of human beings.

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Preface

Arthur Melzer, in a recent study of Rousseau, begins his preface by noting that "I am not a Rousseauian, nor do I know anyone who is"¹. Melzer's reasons for issuing such a disclaimer include that Rousseau's thought is "too full of complexities and paradoxes, too extreme and dangerous (in the view of both Right and Left) and in the end, just too strange to be embraced and inscribed as the final truth regarding human affairs"². For Melzer, Rousseau is a philosopher that inspires reflection on political matters, rather than one who presents an acceptable and tangible solution to political questions. He is to be read, rather than followed.

In some ways, Melzer's approach may have pleased Rousseau. Rousseau was not involved explicitly in a contest for disciples. His life ended in self-imposed exile from intellectual circles and he used his status as an outsider to criticize, and even belittle, the tendency people have to embrace the thought of others. However, in the course of my dissertation, I choose to ignore the soundness of Melzer's starting point and Rousseau's own distrust of disciples. In other words, I am quite willing to describe myself as a Rousseauian. I do so, because it seems to me that human

¹ Melzer, The Natural Goodness of Man, p.ix

² Ibid.

affairs, at this point in time, call for an approach that upsets our expectations. The strangeness and danger inherent in Rousseau's thought injects into the discussion of political problems a unique and worrisome set of proposals. As for the contradictions and paradoxes that haunt Rousseau, I think they too have a function in demonstrating that no answer to a political question is free of tension. Any solution that we accept to a political or social problem is also the source of other difficulties. The genius of Rousseau is that he had a gift for making these difficulties apparent at the same time that he presented his answers. He embraced paradox, because he seemed to sense that it could not be eliminated without ignoring the complexity of the world.

My professed admiration for Rousseau indicates that I intend to take his position seriously. In this respect, I believe that if Rousseau is to be more than an historical curiosity, his views must be shown to have contemporary relevance. For my part, I present a reading of Rousseau that is inspired by a basic consideration of what I term problems of social cooperation. These problems surface from considerations of how effective group activities, on a large scale, can be fostered and preserved. My interest in the philosophical aspects of such problems arises from an encounter with recent work on questions raised by what is commonly referred to as game or decision theory. My encounter

with this material, however, has been brief and my discussion of the free-rider problem is only meant as an introduction to broader concerns. I cannot claim to have the final word on this subject. I can only claim to have what I take to be Rousseau's word on the kinds of challenges such problems present.

Claiming to have Rousseau's word creates difficulties of its own. Philosophers of late seem to be preoccupied with questions concerning authorship. In presenting an interpretation of an historical figure's life and work, it is now standard practice to preface one's writing with a preface on writing. Not being too familiar with the nuances of literary theory, all I can offer is a sketch of the relationship I think my text has with those of Rousseau. First, as someone cognizant of Rousseau's devotion to paradox, I cannot hold that my reading dissolves all of the difficulties his writing generates. Moreover, I cannot even claim to have the final word on Rousseau. Instead, what I present is a reasonable interpretation of Rousseau if we take problems of social cooperation to be a major motivation for his writing. He may also be preoccupied with other issues that may have tilted parts of his work in other directions. Nevertheless, I defend my approach by pointing out that I am developing a strain that I see present in his thought. Strains do not develop in isolation, however. They come in contact

with each other, and often collide, when written passages can be used for divergent purposes. Put less obliquely, an interpretation must engage with other interpretations when it is possible to read texts in different ways. The ambiguity of Rousseau's work makes this need even more obvious. Although I am not in a position to say that other dominant renderings of Rousseau's work have to be disqualified, I can still show the advantages of my viewpoint. My reading has positive results that others lack, especially when problems of social cooperation are assumed to be Rousseau's motivating assumption.

I encounter another roadblock at this point. There may seem to be reason not to assume, as I do, that Rousseau was concerned primarily with problems of social cooperation. Two responses are possible to this accusation. I could, rather unsatisfactorily, say that motivating assumptions, unless made explicit, are always a matter of speculation and that one is as good as another. As well, even if motivations are made obvious, it is often possible to question them and point in the direction of the "true", but hidden, motivation. Such suspicious approaches to historical texts are presently in vogue, but they seem to me to be a bit harsh. Rather than move in that direction, what I claim in favour of my method is the observation that if my interpretation is consistent and convincing, then that in itself is evidence for the

plausibility of the starting point I have selected. Such a justification may seem to run in a circle, but it is not necessarily a vicious one. I am not, after all, offering a final and foundational truth. I am merely presenting an interpretation.

My opening remarks demonstrate a willingness on my behalf to temper the claims I make regarding my interpretation. I avoid the temptation of attributing everything I write to Rousseau. I am not speaking as Rousseau, nor am I uncovering a hidden doctrine to which he secretly subscribed. Rather, I am presenting a possible viewpoint on his work that I think is well supported by his writing. Indeed, much of what I write could not have been thought or put in words by Rousseau, because it flows from modern considerations that he could not anticipate. Hence when I devote substantial energy to defeating criticisms of Rousseau that arise from current philosophical preoccupations, I am extrapolating from what he has written. But such extrapolations are necessary for showing the value of Rousseau's work in contemporary contexts. If, in the end, my position seems contrary to Rousseau's own declared intentions, my only response is to claim that the logic of his works demands the conclusions I have reached.

Interpreting Rousseau is complicated, as well, by the diversity of his writing. How does one construct a thorough

and consistent reading of a body of work that includes a political manifesto, a tract on education, a critique of intellectual culture, a speculative history of human development, a discourse on the origins of language as well as a novel, a play and numerous autobiographical pieces? Traditionally, this problem has not been so pronounced. Certain texts have been more influential and thus have been given a privileged role in determining overall interpretations. Add to this situation, Rousseau's own belief that some of his works are more important than others, and it seems fairly clear where the lines are to be drawn. The Emile and The Social Contract take centre stage and unfinished works, such as the Discourse on the Origins of Language, and earlier works, such as the First Discourse, recede into the background. For some, we can also ignore Rousseau's later autobiographical works, because they present more his personal psychological imbalance than his final word on matters philosophical.

In contending with the vastness and variety of Rousseau's writing, I suggest a simple, though perhaps controversial, approach. Because I am exploring a particular strain of his thought, I treat all of the works I examine equally. My research has been a search for clues that point in the direction of a tangible answer to the problems at hand and such clues are sometimes more numerous in works that others

have classified as less significant. In this respect, I may appear to be somewhat mercenary, in that I measure the worth of particular works by how they suit my purposes. But if part of the value in returning to historical texts is to revitalize them and find something new that fuels further discussion, then being selective is essential. Constructing a new reading requires unearthing what has been overlooked, wherever it can be found.

As for what I have found, it can be sketched quite simply. Chapter One begins with a definition of social cooperation and includes a brief discussion of certain views of human motivation that make social cooperation, at best, a tenuous achievement. Against this background, I introduce Rousseau's position. While I cannot claim to have made the acceptance of Rousseau's views contingent on the rejection of other approaches, I think it is clear that it is at least an interesting alternative. Chapter Two builds on this material with the intention of making sense of the two pivotal concepts of pity and imagination. I show that pity and imagination, from Rousseau's perspective, are necessary for sustaining the relationships essential for social cooperation. Chapter Three combines Rousseau's discussion of imagination with his views on the socializing function of celebratory and ceremonial ritual to give some idea of how social cooperation can be fostered. Chapters Four and Five focus primarily on answering

objections that might be raised against Rousseau's position in order to make his work more palatable to modern liberal tastes. In particular, I concentrate on ways of interpreting Rousseau's outlook on emotions and social control to establish that they are not as odd or as reprehensible as they may at times seem. Chapter Six tackles the issue of personal autonomy and incorporates Rousseau's opinions on the subject into the previous discussion of ritual. The theme that unites all of the various issues explored through the course of the thesis is the role imagination has in making social cooperation viable. The emotions that make cooperation possible require the intervention of imagination. Imagination and social cooperation are, in conclusion, presented as unavoidably linked. Finding, in Rousseau's work, that imagination is so closely connected to the emotions essential for social cooperation is not a startling result. He does, after all, attribute much of our moral and psychological condition to the workings of the imagination. As he so eloquently claims,

such is the empire and influence of the imagination over us that it gives birth not only to the virtues and vices, but to the goods and ills of human life; and it is mainly in the manner in which men yield to it that makes them good or bad, happy or unhappy on this earth (Dialogues, p.120).

I. The Fragility of Cooperation.

1. Visions of Social Cooperation.

During the 1992 Democratic convention, Bill Clinton exclaimed that George Bush's use of the expression "vision thing" to refer to "political vision" demonstrated a severely limited understanding of that concept. Clinton's complaint was that Bush's choice of words failed to convey the significance of vision as a political force. Robert Reich also holds that vision is important and urges policy makers to do more to provide "the public with alternative visions of what is desirable and possible..."¹. For both Clinton and Reich, political vision performs the vital function of providing a society with a renewed sense of public purpose. A nation, it is suggested, can solve its problems by exploring alternative visions. Such rhetoric gives the impression, however, that constructive social change must begin with the presentation of new insights. Political vision is, therefore, intimately connected to innovation. The public can improve its condition as long as it has a proper supply of original ideas. Without innovative vision, the public is unable to fashion a future that improves on the past.

Although I do not deny that the dissemination of new ideas can lead to change, ideas will be ineffective if the proper conditions for their enactment do not exist. In the

¹
Ideas, p.4.

Robert Reich, "Introduction" The Power of Public

course of this introductory chapter, I will consider obstacles to cooperative political actions. My motivating assumption is that political vision, as it is described by Clinton and Reich, requires that major hindrances to social cooperation must be removed². In particular, measures must be taken to ensure that cooperative spirit exists. Jean-Jacques Rousseau has such measures in mind when he claims that the success of political enterprise depends on the visionary's success at

changing human nature, so to speak; of transforming each individual, who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole, into part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and his being. (Social Contract, p.68.)

Rousseau emphasizes that change begins by altering human existence. He assumes that individuals are not by nature interested in belonging to social groups, and, if cooperation is to be successful, people must be transformed. Solutions to other political problems require that such a transformation is achieved. On this account, the primary political vision should be a vision of social cooperation and my task is to explicate Rousseau's primary vision.

² There is the possibility, however, that obstacles to cooperation may actually sustain certain political visions. For example, capitalism could be seen from a Marxist perspective as requiring limits to cooperation so that workers are unable to organize and achieve cooperative goals. But such a claim does not negate the fact that capitalism requires cooperation in the form of adherence to the norms and laws of a market economy. This cooperation may not be the variety cherished by Marxists, but it still qualifies as cooperation.

My task begins with a brief demonstration of how Rousseau's vision can be extracted from a consideration of basic problems of social cooperation. As I explore difficulties related to the definition of social cooperation and practical problems that the fostering of cooperation encounters, I show where Rousseau stood on such matters. The first section of this chapter introduces some of Rousseau's most fundamental observations and contributes to the assertion that he was concerned with problems of social cooperation. The second half of the chapter contrasts Rousseau's position with opposing views that ignore or object to his major claims. After exploring some common objections to these alternatives, I conclude by showing how Rousseau thought of other positions as misplaced and how his vision arose from his dissatisfaction with existing approaches.

An examination of Rousseau's vision of social cooperation should start by establishing what qualifies as social cooperation. Given my emphasis on the political value of fostering cooperation, the bulk of my analysis concerns rather expansive groups. As for the cooperation that is indicative of family life or other personal relationships, such as friendship or marriage, it will be discussed in terms of how it relates to larger social concerns. For my purposes, social cooperation is defined as the joining together of individuals for the sake of shared purposes. Social

cooperation, so loosely understood, can be accidental. We cooperate in our everyday life without presupposing that our activities are deliberately orchestrated. However, ordinary forms of cooperation can be easily undone. As I demonstrate shortly, if individual actions are not directed deliberately toward explicit ends, cooperation falters. Thus, while there is no need to exclude ordinary cooperation from a discussion of social cooperation, there is reason to seek means for ensuring that cooperation can be deliberately controlled. Rousseau's analysis of social ills is a demonstration of the ways in which cooperation can be rendered problematic.

Social cooperation, that is not spontaneous or organic in nature, requires that members of a social group have some awareness of their existence as a group and recognize that desirable results are to be achieved if they act in a unified and cohesive fashion. They must know that certain goods are made possible through group activity and that failure to act as a group makes those goods unavailable. On this understanding, numerous activities can qualify as instances of social cooperation. First, a group is said to be engaged in social cooperation if it undertakes any form of collective action. For example, a group of tax-payers staging a protest is engaged in social cooperation. Second, the actual formation of a group can be a form of social cooperation. Although we may refrain from calling the act of group formation a

collective action, since the act of formation is what creates the collective, we can still call it an act of social cooperation. Third, the preservation of the group's existence as a group is a form of social cooperation. Underlying all of these conceptions of social cooperation is the need for groups to achieve some form of unity. The unification of the group as a group is what enables it to exist and allows it to pursue other goals.

Social cooperation, both as a spontaneous occurrence and as a result of deliberate orchestration, does not require the direct face-to-face interaction of all the members of a group. A group does not have to be assembled in one place in order to qualify as a group. A large group can exist even if members of the group remain fairly isolated and have little opportunity for direct contact with each other. Groups are appropriately conceived, not only as actual physical gatherings, but as the sum of numerous intersecting and overlapping relationships between individuals³. However, once size and complexity become factors in describing groups,

³ Richard Grafstein defines social institutions as "physical wholes composed of human parts". (Institutional Realism, p.22) The institution is composed of the individuals present in that institution at a given time. He also claims that they can be understood as "collections of relations understood in terms of relational descriptions"(p.22). My basic description of social groups seems to emphasize the latter formulation in that I make a group a function of the direct and indirect relationships between its members.

problems of social cooperation become pronounced. In particular, group size contributes to the possibility of individuals not identifying with the group to which they belong. A lack of sufficient acquaintance with other members of the group may eliminate group-directed motives and undermine collective efforts. Unity suffers when people do not think of themselves as part of a well-defined and cohesive group.

It is at this point that models of cooperation derived from examples of intimate social relationships may fall short. For example, models of simple reciprocity that make cooperation a function of a fear of retaliation for non-cooperation fail to embrace large, complex groups. A strategy of "tit for tat", through which non-cooperation by one individual is rewarded with non-cooperation by other individuals, not only presupposes that non-cooperators can be identified⁴, it also requires that personal losses are commensurable. In other words, if the failure of one agent to cooperate deprives others of a certain good, then in the future, when others seek to retaliate, they must be able to identify the agent as a non-cooperator and designate a good of comparable value of which that agent will be deprived.

⁴ Robert Axelrod lists as a central assumption of basic "tit for tat" strategies in cooperation games that a "player is assumed to recognize another player and to remember how the two of them have interacted" (The Evolution of Cooperation, p.11)

Identifying the agent may be difficult in social environments where individuals can, so to speak, disappear into the crowd. Deciding on appropriate retaliatory measures may be equally impractical if such environments allow individual preferences and goals to differ dramatically⁵.

Given that social cooperation does not depend on direct interaction, it follows that the active participation of all members of a group is not required for social cooperation. The number of individuals required for successful action depends on the nature of the group and on the type of action undertaken. The problems most commonly associated with social cooperation are connected with consideration of the number of individuals required for the success of a cooperative endeavor. With every act of social cooperation, it seems reasonable to stipulate that a certain number of cooperating individuals is needed for the action to take place⁶. If individuals, acting together, wish to bring about

⁵ Robert Goodin raises similar concerns and describes problems related to complexity and size as the "twin pressures" of "diverse tastes and resources" and "imperfect implementation" (Motivating Political Morality, p.23).

⁶ As with any case of designating a threshold to be reached, it is possible to ask why the number designated is the correct amount. Hence, if we say that n individuals are required, we may be asked why $n-1$ individuals were not sufficient. What does the extra person add? For my purposes, I assume that such accounts are not necessary. They raise a conceptual problem concerning thresholds that for practical purposes does not have to be answered.

a desired result, they must ensure that a sufficient number of them do what is required to achieve their goal. Anything less than this number will lead to failure. Similar problems emerge for more basic examples of creating and sustaining a group. Unity and cohesion can exist in a group without implying that all group members are actively devoted to the group. However, it is still necessary that a certain number of individuals seek to maintain the group. As I shall demonstrate in the second part of this chapter, guaranteeing that enough individuals cooperate to cross the threshold between success and failure can face serious obstacles. In particular, certain models of human agency make it difficult to imagine that the numbers required in any situation will be available. Problems of social cooperation, so understood, are problems generated by the potential for lack of compliance.

An analysis of problems of social cooperation must acknowledge that not all failures of cooperation result purely from the absence of cooperative spirit. Intentional acts of social cooperation succeed when people do what is required for the group to achieve its ends. Exactly what each individual must do can be a matter of individual decision or determined by centralized leadership. In either case, individual actions must be coordinated in such a way as to avoid self-defeating or unproductive results. Problems concerning coordination of actions can be formidable

impediments to social cooperation. People, for various reasons, may not be able to discover ways to coordinate their actions. Individuals may wish to join in collective actions or form groups, but practical restraints may hinder their actions. Lack of material resources, inadequate lines of communication between group members and insufficient membership are just a few examples of practical barriers to social cooperation. Labelling obstacles "practical", however, does not mean that they are easy to overcome. Rousseau exhibits an understanding of the seriousness of practical difficulties when he attributes the downfall of political communities to the size of their territories⁷. He declares:

Large Populations, vast territories! There you have the first and foremost reason for the misfortunes of mankind, above all the countless calamities that weaken and destroy polite peoples. (Government of Poland, p.25)

Size, in this context, is problematic for numerous reasons. In the Social Contract, Rousseau points to the loss of administrative efficiency and the extra fiscal burdens generated by the need for governments to conduct their business across great distances⁸. A nation suffering from such defects may find itself collapsing even if it has the cooperative support of its citizens. Social cooperation cannot

⁷ See Social Contract, pp. 167-168 and The Government of Poland, pp.25-26.

⁸ Social Contract, p.72.

thrive in all environments.

The practical limits to social cooperation cannot be answered completely by a general theory of social cooperation. Practical problems are too varied and too detailed to be absorbed by an abstract treatment. Empirical investigation must supplement any attempt to implement a political vision. As Rousseau notes, the first stage of political action involves judging the nature of the community.

Just as an architect, before putting up a big building, observes and tests the ground to see whether it can bear the weight, the wise founder does not start by drafting laws that are good in themselves, but he first examines whether the people for whom he intends them is suited to bear them. (Social Contract, p.70)

Anyone undertaking social reform must begin with a study of the character of the people being affected and their circumstances in order to make effective decisions. Social cooperation is not achieved through universal means. It is produced through an understanding of the individuals in question.

A general theory of social cooperation may not solve all practical problems, but knowledge of these problems provides a better understanding of how social cooperation can be sustained. Past failures in the realm of political action reveal that certain forms of organization may not be conducive to social cooperation. Rousseau's remarks concerning the deficiencies of large states are not merely historical

observations of problems faced by actual nations. They also serve as a general illustration of how circumstances can erode an existing source of cooperative spirit. In the Discourse on Political Economy, Rousseau states that:

It seems that the sentiment of humanity evaporates and weakens in being extended over the entire world and that we cannot be affected by the calamities in Tartary or Japan the way we are by those of a European People. Interest and commiseration must somehow be limited and restrained to be active. (Discourse on Political Economy, p.121)

The farther away people are, the more foreign they seem, the less we identify with and feel for their situation⁹. In terms of cooperative spirit, the lack of attachment to absent and distant individuals undermines our desire for or interest in cooperation. Rousseau argues that an expansive nation makes its citizens into strangers. Therefore, even though social cooperation does not presuppose face-to-face interaction, without the appropriate level of such interaction, social cohesion suffers¹⁰.

Another dimension of social cooperation is revealed through Rousseau's comments on the size of nations. He has

⁹ A similar point is made in the Emile (p.233). Emile's feelings for others are at first limited to those with whom he has constant contact.

¹⁰ Mary Douglas doubts that problems related to cooperation are unique to larger groups. However, her observation is based on how difficulties emerge from particular models of motivation that stress self-interest. Small societies may remain immune from such problems if we do not emphasize certain forms of self-interest. See Douglas How Institutions Think, pp.41-43.

connected the presence of cooperative spirit in political contexts with the level of communal feeling. Social cooperation is describable as a function of emotional attachments. An individual's propensity to cooperate is an extension of feelings for others with whom that individual engages in cooperative acts. The maintenance of cooperative spirit, therefore, appears to require the upkeep of these feelings and the best way of doing so is through increased interaction that reminds people of their shared identity. In Rousseau's words, "the humanity concentrated among fellow citizens takes on a new force through the habit of seeing each other and through the common interest that unites them" (Discourse on Political Economy, p.121). Social cooperation is a product of an intimacy that intensifies feelings.

Personal contact with other members of one's group, social unit, or nation, does not put an end, however, to problems associated with social cooperation. The emotions engendered by such contact can be the source of social strife, as easily as they can give rise to social cohesion. Consider the Emile where Rousseau writes "With love and friendship are born dissensions, enmity and hate" (Emile, p.215) and the Second Discourse where he gives an equally dark description of the costs romantic attraction has for lovers.

By dint of seeing one another, they can no longer do without seeing one another again. A tender and gentle sentiment is gradually introduced into the soul and

at the least obstacle becomes an impetuous fury.
 Jealousy awakens with love; discord triumphs and the
 gentlest of passions receives sacrifices of human blood.
 (Second Discourse, pp.148-149)

These remarks are countered elsewhere when romantic love is championed as a source of human sociability¹¹ and when friendship is given a vital role in our lives¹². The question that is central for Rousseau's project concerns the possibility of cultivating positive socializing emotions, such as feelings of love and friendship, without also engendering the negative emotions of jealousy and envy that undo social cohesion. I explore suggestions offered by Rousseau as to how positive emotions can be activated and sustained in later chapters. For the time being, however, it is important to note that Rousseau believes that the redemption of socializing emotions is itself a social act. In other words, the positive function of emotion in social circumstances is a product of those circumstances. Such a declaration is not very provocative. Emotions that involve feelings for others require the presence of others, and their presence will influence the way such emotions manifest themselves. The triviality of this

¹¹ I discuss this aspect of romantic attachment in Chapter Two.

¹² For example, in the Emile, where Rousseau states that, "Nothing has so much weight in the human heart as the voice of clearly recognized friendship, for we know that it never speaks to us for anything other than our interest." (pp.234-235).

basic observation does not carry over into Rousseau's description of methods for cultivating positive emotions. He, as we shall see, provides detailed demonstrations of how the emotions that sustain social cohesion can be produced in social environments that are not immediately conducive to such feelings.

Rousseau, to a large extent, hinges the development of socializing emotions on the deliberate activities of political leaders and educators. For example, the young Emile's emotions are regulated almost entirely by the artifice of his educator¹³ and in The Government of Poland, Rousseau describes how a love of country is created by the efforts of talented leaders. In reference to the citizens of Sparta, he writes that Lycurgus

saw to it that they never had an instant of free time they could call their own. And out of this ceaseless constraint, made noble by the purpose it served, was born the burning love of country which was always the strongest -or rather the only- passion of the Spartans... (Government of Poland, p.7)

Patriotism, on this account, is not an accidental emotion. It requires the efforts of those who influence the populace. Social cooperation inspired by such emotions depends on the systematic and calculated organization of the environment to facilitate the correct operation of feelings and passions. Emotions that are socially useful require some degree of

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Emile, p.92.

social design.

The nurturing of socializing emotions can be upset by the presence of opposing allegiances. Emotions that are functioning appropriately can lead to conflicting loyalties. Proper feelings for different individuals or different groups can undermine social stability. This problem is made evident by Rousseau's apparently contradictory remarks concerning factions within a community. In The Social Contract, Rousseau is emphatic that partisan associations harm the "general will". The general will is the objective expression of the communal interest that governs a legitimate state and it is determined, not by personal opinions, but by a search for what is best for the community as a whole¹⁴. In order for the general will to function effectively, it must not be challenged by partisan associations. Such groups express the particular, self-interested opinions of their members. The will of these groups competes with the will of the community and what is in the best interest of the community as a whole is obscured by this struggle. The result is that "there is no longer a general will, and the opinion that dominates is merely a private opinion" (Social Contract, p.61). For this reason it is "important that there should be no partial society in the state..." (Social Contract, p.61). Partisan

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Social Contract, pp.61-62.

associations are not to be tolerated.

An opposing viewpoint is found in the Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre. As a morally acceptable alternative to the presence of a public theatre in Geneva, Rousseau points to the Genevan social clubs of his times. These "cercles" are described as "decent and innocent institutions" which succeed in making "friends, citizens and soldiers" (Letter to d'Alembert, p.105) out of their members. It is curious that these institutions are not said to undermine their members' attachments to the state. Richard Fralin thinks that Rousseau accepts these institutions because they nurture the virtues of citizenship¹⁵. Even if this is the case, it does not entail that these clubs cannot be the breeding grounds for more politically undesirable activities. Moreover, the example of the "cercles" points in the direction of a greater conceptual problem. These clubs cultivate friendship through increased social interaction. Friendship of this sort is a product of the frequency of contact that has already been seen as the source of cooperative sentiments in nations. The inference invited by Rousseau's position is that what bonds people together in political unions bonds them together in lesser organizations. Therefore, whether Rousseau allows partisan associations or not is irrelevant, since the impetus behind

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Frailin, Rousseau and Representation, pp. 67-68.

these groups is also responsible for the larger associations that he seeks to protect. Rousseau gives no clear indication of which set of attachments should be taken as primary. Individuals may experience conflicting emotions regarding the various associations and organizations to which they belong. Love of community is inspired by the same interaction and intimacy that inspires partisan associations.

Rousseau encounters trouble because he concentrates on the assumption that only direct contact and interaction can engender and preserve sentiments. The people we care for must be in our vicinity to have a place in our emotions. Partisan associations may deflect us from communal concerns because we feel more for those individuals we come in contact with more often. Rousseau, however, supplies a means for deciding between competing loyalties elsewhere when he admits that imagination aids the proper development of passions by making what is not present appear present. We can have feelings for something that is only present in our imaginations. The size of our social arena does not necessarily determine our emotions¹⁶. If we use imagination as a way of supplementing our experiences, we have the basis for expanded concern. Feeling for others can be extended indefinitely as long as imagination provides us with compelling images of individuals

¹⁶ Benedict Anderson discusses the role imagination plays in nationalism. See Imagined Communities, p.6.

with whom we do not have direct contact. Partisan associations are not obstacles if they are not the stopping point of emotional attachment. To make someone see beyond the narrow opinion of their group requires appealing to their imagination to arouse and intensify feelings for others outside their immediate circle.

I explore the details of Rousseau's views on imagination in subsequent chapters. In Chapter Two, imagination as a faculty is defined and discussed as part of Rousseau's theory of emotional development. In Chapter Three, imagination is given a central role in maintaining social order because it is a source of socially useful emotions. Central to this function is the role of ritual in stimulating imaginative identification with other members of a group. Chapter Four addresses Rousseau's animosity toward reflective, intellectual activities and shows how a certain variety of experience provides an effective, but limited, means for imagining alternatives to established practices. In Chapter Five, I outline how imaginative identification supplements personal experience to deepen concern for other human beings. As well, I return to the problem of limited attachment to demonstrate how imagination even takes us beyond Rousseau's narrow conception of community. Rousseau, contrary to his own

disdain for cosmopolitanism¹⁷, supplies the foundation of a more open world view by increasing our capacity to identify with others. Chapter Six concludes the work with a discussion of the concealed function of imagination in fostering cohesion through feelings of personal autonomy. I suggest that Rousseau gives freedom a mythic or ritual function in political life so that interests in personal gain cease to be a disruptive force. In the end, Rousseau's claims regarding the importance of imagination and ritual are repeated in his views on the significance of appeals to freedom as a unifying influence.

17 Cobban sees Rousseau's nationalism as a revolt against the cosmopolitanism extolled by the philosophes. According to Cobban, for Rousseau, denouncing attachment to one's country in favour of an overall love of humanity weakens communal attachments. See Rousseau and the Modern State, p.103.

2. Egoism and Rationality.

My emphasis on the emotional dimension of Rousseau's vision puts his views at odds with positions that label self-interest as the source of social cooperation. These positions, as it turns out, present the greatest theoretical challenge to a vision of social cooperation. On such accounts, individuals decide to engage in group activities on the basis of calculations that reveal the benefits accrued through these activities. A self-interested agent seeks only his own personal gain. Hobbes makes the social contract, the genesis of political order, a product of such supposed prudential reasoning. He argues that prior to social agreement, human existence is "the warre of every man against every man"¹⁸. Since this condition is to no one's advantage, it is "a precept, or generall rule of Reason"¹⁹ that individuals should seek some compromise that serves their interests. Reason, therefore, informs us of the need for cooperation. Emotional attachment to other individuals is not necessarily relevant to the decision made. The measure of value of any course of action is how it serves self-interest.

Emphasizing personal gain as the basis of social

¹⁸ Hobbes, Leviathan, p.188.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.190.

cooperation is less enticing than making it the product of emotions. We seem to endorse an impoverished view of our social existence if we accept that all actions are self-interested. Reactions to the claim that human beings are entirely self-serving can range from "common-sense" observations to moral outrage²⁰. Benjamin Barber provides an example of the latter when he condemns the modern depiction of human beings as self-interested "consumers".

The consumer is a creature of great reason devoted to small ends. His cherished freedom is chained to the most banal need. He uses the gift of choice to multiply his options in and to transform the material conditions of the world, but never to transform himself or to create a world of mutuality with his fellow humans.²¹

My view of social cooperation is sympathetic with Barber's complaint. My treatment, however, does not issue from a strong dislike of self-interested motives. I accept Rousseau's position, not solely on normative grounds, but because he does not opt for a simplified vision of human motivation. I develop this vision in subsequent chapters. In the ensuing discussion I set the stage for Rousseau's views by exploring some of the potential limitations to narrow accounts of human motivation.

Hobbes offers an account of human social interaction

²⁰ A survey of historical sources that deny the centrality of self-interest can be found in Stephen Holmes' "The Secret History of Self-Interest" Holmes, using Hume as an inspiration, describes various motives that do not fit into traditional egoist\altruist dichotomies.

²¹ Barber, Strong Democracy, p.22.

that does not require the presence of the emotions central to my interpretation of Rousseau. However, a curious aspect of Rousseau's position is that he seems to accept Hobbes' assumptions regarding the origin of political order. In the Second Discourse, Rousseau considers the social contract to be the invention of the wealthy and powerful to ensure their continued dominance through mutual consent. They are able to convince the poor and powerless that a system of laws that protects property and privilege is to everyone's benefit. All parties, therefore, are motivated to join in the agreement by self-interest, even though some may not really know what is in their best interest²². In the Social Contract, the incentive for agreement takes the form of the individual's interest in personal survival. The social compact comes about when changes in their physical environment force human beings to join together "to form, by aggregation, a sum of forces that can prevail over the resistance" (Social Contract, pp.52-53) that thwarts individual efforts. Individuals band together to create, as a group, means of achieving benefits that are not available to them as individuals. They do so because of interest in their own well-being and security. Self-interest seems to guide both of Rousseau's versions of the original contract.

Rousseau's description of the social contract can be misleading. His position in the Second Discourse must be read as part of a critical examination of corrupt social practices. In this regard, the acceptance of civil order by parties to the contract is fuelled by a misconception of their situation. Rousseau does not endorse the enactment of such a contract because he sees it as an extension of the gross inequalities endemic to improperly functioning society. In the Social Contract, on the other hand, Rousseau presents the foundations of a legitimate civil order. Self-interest, under these conditions, ceases to be preoccupied with individual gain and is rendered conducive to a social order that cultivates the emotions necessary for cooperation. The contract that gives rise to society may be inspired by a variety of self-interest, but society itself is not maintained by self-interest. As Rousseau notes in the Emile, "For what private interests have in common is so slight that it will never outweigh what sets them in opposition." (Emile, p.312)²³. Self-interest does not dominate a legitimate, post-contract community. I shall return

23 Rousseau makes a similar, though stronger, claim elsewhere when he remarks on the power patriotism has in overriding self-interest for the common good. He writes, "There is, to be sure, something in the heart of man that clings more stubbornly to individual privileges than to those advantages that, though greater, are less exclusive; nor can anything save patriotism, enlightened by experience, teach him to give up, in favour of greater goods, a once glorious right that has become pernicious through abuse and is now inseparable from that abuse" (Government of Poland, p.56)

to the differences between the contract of the Second Discourse and the Social Contract in Chapter Six, but for the time being all I need note is that neither position is, as de Jasay claims, an "intellectually weaker, in some ways decadent"²⁴ retelling of Hobbes. Rousseau proposes a different social order than Hobbes' theory of human agency allows.

We can, in fact, see Hobbes as making two distinct claims regarding human agency. The first is that human beings are naturally selfish. This claim is central to a position I refer to as "egoism". An egoist is someone who accepts the claim that the only genuine motives are self-interested ones. From the perspective of egoism, all human action is self-interested. Hobbes' second claim is that reason, understood as an innate human faculty, is an instrument of self-interest. Reason informs individuals as to how self-interest can be satisfied. Such a view of reason does not indicate automatically the standard used to measure the satisfaction of self-interest. The kind of rationality most commonly associated with egoist motivations, and the one Hobbes favours, holds that reason should seek to maximize self-interest. I refer to this position as "maximal egoism". A maximal egoist believes that human beings seek to maximize

²⁴ Anthony de Jasay, Social Contract, Free Ride : A Study of the Public Goods Problem, p.73.

personal gain in all situations²⁵.

Both positions maintain that decisions regarding individual action are made to benefit the individual in question, and there is no reason to suppose that the welfare of other individuals will factor into the decision. With this stipulation in mind, egoism and maximal egoism are open to the initial charge that they are incoherent. The degree of individual isolation attributed to agents by my account may seem unfathomable. For some, the very idea of human agents making decisions without considering the situation of others is meaningless. As Amelie Rorty contends, "we are formed by a cultural ideal of mutual respect that requires our holding ourselves responsible for giving -or at any rate having- a socially oriented justification for the principles that guide our actions"²⁶. Agents act within a framework of expectations established prior to their actions and they must, to a certain extent, respect this framework. An egoist or maximal egoist is not in a position to discount the needs and interests of others, because individual decisions are formed through encounters with others. Complete egoism ignores the social

²⁵ The positions I label "egoism" and "maximal egoism" are similar to positions given different labels. I am not claiming to have discovered these positions and I only intend my labels to be useful abbreviations that aid my analysis.

²⁶ Amelie Rorty "Virtues and their Vicissitudes" Mind in Action, p.325.

basis of human action.

While there may be reason to accept the broad claims regarding social influences that underlie Rorty's position, such observations do not render egoism or maximal egoism impossible. Agents may see themselves as part of a social order and may even have concern for the feelings of others, but may still choose to cast their decisions in terms of self-satisfaction. They may obey the laws of their community and sustain emotional relationships, but only because they deem these to be worthwhile for personal gain. It may seem as if they are victims of self-delusion, in that they misdescribe their situation and ignore the centrality of social influences on their lives, but this accusation does not entail that their actions are unfathomable. All that it means is that they act in a self-interested manner without possessing a great deal of self-awareness. Both egoism and maximal egoism are, on the surface, coherent positions, even if it is admitted that social forces have a role in determining the behavior of agents.

In terms of the forms of behavior advocated by maximal egoism and egoism there is, however, a major difference. Maximal egoism entails that not acting as self-interest

dictates is unnatural and irrational²⁷. Egoism, on the other hand, merely holds that all motives are self-interested and makes no explicit claims about rationality. Maximal egoism's two-pronged attack on the claim that human motives are not entirely self-interested makes it appear to be a more formidable opponent than straightforward egoism. In what follows, I explore objections to the main assumptions of maximal egoism. Although I cannot claim to discount maximal egoism entirely, I do show why it may not hold the promise that some may think it does. As well, I offer the conclusion that irrespective of how we treat maximal egoism, it remains necessary to address questions regarding self-interested motives in general. In other words, some of the problems identified with maximal egoism persist even if maximal egoism is believed to be lacking in important areas.

A starting point for an analysis of maximal egoism is provided by Jon Elster. Elster questions the feasibility of the model of rationality I link with maximal egoism. A model of rationality, in this context, is a practical method for deciding on a course of action. The model employed by maximal

²⁷ A weaker form of egoism, similar to maximal egoism, does not hold that unselfish actions are irrational. It only claims that if someone acts unselfishly, they cannot rely on reason to guide them, given that reason only tells them what to do when they seek to act in a self-interested fashion. Non-selfish acts on this view would be "arrational" rather than irrational. Nevertheless, it still makes a strong connection between reason and self-interest.

egoism stresses that maximization of personal benefit guides all actions. This model is, for some, a way of making human behavior less opaque. Albert Hirschman has argued that such models have been widely accepted because they are seen as rendering human behavior more predictable than the models they replaced²⁸. The actions of individuals perceived through these models are no longer seen as the product of hidden desires or capricious whims, but instead as the result of self-interested assessments which are objectively accessible²⁹. Elster doubts, however, whether reason can always determine which decisions are the best in terms of self-interest. He argues that such a model faces problems when it is unable to yield definite predictions or prescriptions³⁰. Adhering to this model in all situations leads to a condition he terms "hyperrationality", the irrational insistence that a model of rationality must be used despite its undesirable or unexpected costs³¹.

²⁸ Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests, p.49.

²⁹ Gary Orren has recently shown that predictions made on the basis of egoist assumptions often require the postulating of hidden or capricious self-interested motives. This is visible in his discussion of rational egoist accounts of charity. See "Beyond Self-Interest", pp.16-17.

³⁰ See Elster, Solomonic Judgements, pp.7-17. His examples of indeterminacy include situations where there is more than one optimal choice, where there is no optimal choice and where individuals lack appropriate preference rankings.

³¹ Ibid., p.17.

Evidence of hyperrationality similar to the kind Elster describes underlies concerns over the degree of cooperation possible amongst maximal egoists. Although Hobbes assumes that maximal egoists can willingly cooperate, his own assumptions indicate otherwise. Rational agents who always seek to maximize self-interest are capable of producing results that actually reduce personal benefits. The hyperrationality associated with this situation arises, not because of problems of indeterminacy, but because adhering to this model of rationality leads to self-defeating results. The example that I have in mind is commonly referred to as the "free-rider problem". A free-rider is someone who seeks the benefits of cooperative actions but does not contribute to the production of those benefits. From the maximal egoist perspective, being a free-rider makes sense in situations where the good created by cooperative action is made available regardless of individual contribution. For example, in Hobbes' account the result of cooperation is the replacement of a destructive competitive struggle with a political order that ensures peace. Any individual living under such an arrangement will enjoy its benefits. Moreover, given the large number of individuals involved in this kind of cooperative endeavor, the absence of one individual's contribution will not affect the overall success of the project. Operating with the assumption that the effort of cooperating is a cost to be avoided if

possible³², the maximal egoist concludes that personal gain is greater when one refrains from cooperating. Others will do the work, but the individual still benefits. The self-defeating outcome of the free-rider's reasoning arises from the fact that if maximal egoism is correct, all rational, self-interested agents should in principle act the same way³³. All agents will seek personal benefit without cooperating. All will refrain from contributing to the cooperative action. The rationality of the free-rider leads to a counterproductive result in that the calculation of personal gains results in a less than optimal situation. In terms of the social contract, maximal egoists will wait for others to make the sacrifices necessary for the existence of political order. The contract fails since no one will contribute to the cooperative action. There will be no cooperative action to be exploited.

The free-rider problem raises questions concerning the empirical accuracy of maximal egoism. If it is the correct model of human agency, then acts of social cooperation should

³² Hirschman, in Shifting Involvements, questions whether effort should be classified as a cost or is itself part of the benefit of cooperative action. If individuals enjoy the labour essential for the success of group actions, it ceases to be a negative factor.

³³ There are, of course, problems with the knowledge attributed to rational agents. Maximal egoism assumes that the knowledge acquired for forecasting the outcomes of actions is readily available.

not take place in environments where the undetected withdrawal of individual contributions to communal actions is possible. Agents whose actions go unobserved would not be inclined to live up to their cooperative obligations. Given that the complexity and size of modern political and social institutions allow for a significant level of individual anonymity, the assumptions of maximal egoism should entail a near catastrophic level of non-cooperation. Although non-cooperation may reach levels high enough to cause concern, it is not as bad as maximal egoism would make us believe. Maximal egoism, however, can attribute the actual level of social cooperation to factors external to the goods created through cooperative endeavor. The measures that would make a maximal egoist cooperate are further appeals to self-interest. In other words, a free-rider would be more willing to cooperate if compliance generated more benefits than those initially promised by the cooperative action or if lack of compliance led to penalties greater than the losses anticipated as the personal costs of cooperating. Therefore, cooperation takes place, on the maximal egoist account, when added incentives or sanctions influence the agent's decision. In terms of Hobbes' social contract, an individual who fails to abide by the terms of the initial agreement invites the repressive reprisals of the sovereign authority created by the contract. The individual does not free-ride because a calculated increase in

personal well-being follows from doing what is required.

The weakness of the appeal to incentives and sanctions is that they are only as powerful as the organization that seeks to employ them. In some contexts, there is little reason to suppose that the forces ensuring cooperation are able to overcome the calculations of completely rational, self-interested agents. In reference to the social contract, David Braybrooke has argued that a newly emerging political union will always be undermined by the "uncertainty that an agent who departs from the convention will be identified by the agent or agents who suffer the loss entailed"³⁴. According to Braybrooke, no one will cooperate unless they are confident that non-compliance will be detected. Therefore, if we consider problems of non-compliance as problems related to assuring³⁵ or ensuring that agents live up to their promises or obligations, then the power of a group or organization to enforce agreements is only as great as their ability to detect non-compliance. The social contract is threatened because the creation of the power that detects non-compliance and enforces the agreement occurs after the agreement is ratified. From Braybrooke's perspective, ratification itself is impossible

³⁴ Braybrooke, "The Insoluble Problem of the Social Contract", p.283.

³⁵ See John Rawls, Theory of Justice, pp.267-270 for a discussion of the problems related to assuring that agents cooperate.

without the force that is created by ratification³⁶.

Following Braybrooke's analysis is helpful as a way of further understanding Rousseau's version of the social contract. Runciman and Sen, for example, confuse Rousseau with Hobbes when they argue that the initial act of agreement, for Rousseau, creates a sovereign power that enforces the agreement³⁷. Hilail Gildin seems to have a similar conclusion in mind when he describes the main benefit of the social contract as the enacting of laws that ensure that everyone enjoys the newly created public goods of organized society³⁸. In both cases, the operative assumption is that rational agents will reduce their self-interested activities because of a fear of or respect for the powers created by their act of agreement. Rousseau is presented as accepting Hobbes' claim that individuals come together to create a sovereign power to "keep them in awe"³⁹. Braybrooke, on the other hand, argues

³⁶ It seems to be this problem that prompts Cobban to accept Derathe's claim that, for Rousseau, people must recognize the existence of a natural law enforcing promising, otherwise, social existence would be impossible. See Cobban, Rousseau and the Modern State, p.76.

³⁷ Runciman and Sen, "Games, Justice and the General Will", p.556.

³⁸ Hilail Gildin, Rousseau's Social Contract: The Design of the Argument, pp.32-34.

³⁹ Hobbes, Leviathan, p.227. For an interpretation of Rousseau that puts a greater emphasis than I do on the power of fear, see Peter Emberly's "Rousseau and the Management of Passions".

that having a sovereign or a body of laws in place does not guarantee compliance unless the emerging power is in a position to constantly enforce the agreement.

Braybrooke's problem might be resolved by claiming that the contract does not create the force needed to ensure compliance, but rather bestows legitimacy on existing forces. This claim reflects the tradition of contract theory that views it as a theory of justice rather than a theory of political origins. Society and the institutions that preserve society are not products of a contract, according to this view, but the idea of the contract is still useful as a means of demonstrating what kinds of social arrangements are viable and desirable. However, problems do not disappear by accepting such a conclusion, because there are still difficulties in ensuring that individual agents acknowledge the society legitimized as legitimate. In other words, the legitimizing of social forces does not hold unless agents are prepared to accept it. Free-riders remain possible in such a context, because they can continue to acknowledge their interest in their own betterment as the only legitimate control on their behavior. Powers that control individual behaviour must accompany any attempt to impose limits on individual action, regardless of whether or not we see these impositions as the

product of a contract.

Rousseau recognizes the limits to conventional models of the social contract and makes a point similar to the one presented by Braybrooke⁴⁰. Rousseau writes that:

In order for an emerging people to be capable of appreciating the healthy maxims of politics and to follow the fundamental rules of statecraft, the effect would have to become the cause; the social spirit which should be the result of that institution, would have to preside over the founding of the institution itself; and men would have to be prior to laws, what they ought to become by means of laws. (Social Contract, p.69).

Rousseau does not think that the success of political associations and social cooperation is a product of agreement alone. For agreements to be the sole factor, human beings would have to be so honest and trustworthy that they would not need agreements in the first place. Rousseau concludes that other mechanisms that inspire group loyalties must be in place to the maintain social order. In the following chapters, I will show how forces such as the experience of pity and the imaginative identification with others preserve human community and prevent or reduce free-riding.

The free-rider, we have seen, exemplifies the problem

⁴⁰ Rousseau's recognition of this problem leads William Connolly to conclude that "His critique of a politics founded merely upon the realism of self-interested individuals was grounded in the conviction that it offers a utopian solution to the problem of the free rider." (Political Theory and Modernity , pp.53-54). Runciman, Sen and Gildin follow such a utopian path in that they think sanctions provided by laws are enough to override self-interest.

of hyperrationality. The incessant search for personal gain sabotages actions that would improve the individual's condition. Clinging to the model of rationality proposed by maximal egoism in all circumstances leaves free-riders worse off than they would have otherwise been. In this context, there is good reason to suggest that accepting maximal egoism is irrational⁴¹. Appearing to be irrational is a result that should trouble proponents of maximal egoism. Maximal egoism predicates its rejection of non-selfish motives on the recognition of their supposed irrationality. If maximal egoism demonstrates that it is susceptible to similar failings, then it does little to eliminate alternative models of human agency. However, maximal egoism is not rendered invalid, even if it does appear to lapse into irrationality. Adjustments to the model can be made so that decisions made by maximal egoists cease to be self-defeating. A maximal egoist can hold in principle that maximizing self-interest entails the acceptance of rules that restrict subsequent decisions. Hence in a situation where gains can be made by defaulting on prior

⁴¹ Of course, we could say that a completely informed maximal egoist will understand the free-rider problem and act to avoid by contributing. But, it could also be said, that the true maximal egoist will realize that others will have this same understanding. In that case, he will perhaps be tempted to free-ride since he knows that others know the value of cooperating. The free-rider problem is, therefore, recreated. For an analytic statement of such problems see Michael Hechter's "The Insufficiency of Game Theory for the Resolution of Real-World Collective Action Problems".

agreements, agents will, in the name of reason, honour their obligations. Including more detail in the description of the model of rationality employed by maximal egoists makes it evident that the model cannot be dismissed on the basis of broad criticisms. The mere potential for maximal egoism to seem irrational does not entail that it can be rejected outright.

Other models of rationality are, however, available and they may have more intuitive appeal than the one employed by maximal egoists. A model of rationality that does not advocate maximization of self-interest is proposed by Michael Slote. He argues that intuitive judgments concerning appropriate levels of personal satisfaction demonstrate that an incessant drive to improve one's situation qualifies as irrational⁴². For Slote, we can find levels of satisfaction that are deemed acceptable and any attempt to increase satisfaction beyond these levels is contrary to our sense of what is rational. While it may be the case that our intuitions support such judgments, Slote's notion of rationality alone does not solve all the problems created by self-interest. In fact, if we accept the testimony of intuition, Slote's basic point does not allow us to address individuals with differing intuitions. If we could possibly find ourselves in a community

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Michael Slote, Beyond Optimizing, p.53.

of maximal egoists, the intuitions of those who do not seek to maximize will appear irrational. Concentrating on intuitions as a way of solving problems may not be that productive if we realize that intuitions are not permanent.

There is an even greater difficulty that accompanies Slote's approach. In terms of social cooperation, the satisfaction of self-interest within reasonable limits may engender the same problems that the maximization of self-interest does. Individuals who are content with a lesser amount of self-satisfaction than maximization dictates can still be acting in a fashion that is contrary to the interest of their group or community. Social cooperation may require us to constantly seek less than the satisfactory amount as defined by self-interest. As Rousseau puts it, "Very often one person's gain is another's loss and private interest is almost always in conflict with public good" (Reveries, p.67). This conflict is a problem if the obstacles that thwart individual actions, and prompt collective actions arise, as Rousseau seems to think, from conditions of scarcity⁴³. In such social climates, we may constantly have to do with less. We could in response stipulate that the level of satisfaction be defined according to what suits the group. In this regard, rational satisfaction is made to mesh with communal demands. But such

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See Social Contract, pp.52-53.

a solution is unappealing, quite simply, because it legislates satisfaction in order to avoid conflicts. It does not pay attention to intuitions that may not favour the group over the individual, but rather coerces these intuitions so that they meet communal needs.

If self-interest remains the drive behind human action, it can create obstacles for social cooperation, regardless of how we view rationality. Taking individual interests as primary implies that cooperative efforts are devalued. An individual who puts himself first threatens the possibility of successful group action, no matter how he reasons. To demonstrate that the motives assumed by egoism are a persistent problem, I propose another form of free-rider problem. Free-riders in this version do not seek to maximize personal gain. Rather, they avoid cooperation because of a lack of interest in the situation of others. Free-riders, so conceived, may be apathetic or lazy and shirk their responsibilities. They may also display a deep-seated preoccupation with their own well-being. They enjoy the benefits of cooperative action without sharing their good fortune with others and without returning anything to their community or group⁴⁴. Rousseau offers an example of free-

⁴⁴ For a brief, though impassioned, commentary on modern forms of apathy, see Solomon's A Passion For Justice, pp.xiiv-xv.

riders of this kind. He discusses the case of a stag hunt where a member of the hunting party forsakes his companions by abandoning his post to pursue his own personal bounty in the form of a hare⁴⁵. His decision to give chase is not necessarily the outcome of a rational calculating process. His basic impulse is toward self-satisfaction and self-preservation and it makes him forget his obligation to his group. The non-cooperative hunter is an egoist in the sense that he lets concern for his own well-being dominate his choices, but he is not a maximal egoist in that he does not think of his actions in terms of maximizing self-interest.

In outlining Rousseau's position, the example of the stag hunt is useful as an introduction to his views on human nature. It touches upon the difficulties he finds in trying to motivate agents that lack a sense of communal attachment. For Rousseau, however, the absence of such feelings is not necessarily an aberration. In social circumstances, attachments to others are a prerequisite for cooperative activities, but outside of society or in a pre-social environment, they are not necessary or even possible. Rousseau's depiction of "natural man" portrays him as a

solitary being unable to envision life in a community⁴⁶. I will develop this picture in more detail in the next chapter. What is important for the time being is to see that the actions of the hunter who defaults on his agreement are consistent with the character traits Rousseau attributes to natural man. The hunter's desire to find an easy means of fulfilling his needs can be seen as an extension of the "indolence of the primitive state" of human beings (Second Discourse, pp.150-151). Human beings are said by Rousseau to be prone to laziness that while not being a source of problems in the state of nature presents obstacles to social organization. Indolence aids self-interest by prompting individuals to do only what is required for personal satisfaction.

The indolence of natural man is of special significance to Rousseau, because it is something he observes in his own behavior. He writes in the Dialogues that as a young man he was prone to abandoning situations in which great effort was required. Referring to himself in the third person, he concludes that when it came to things he desired "his laziness made it impossible for him to spare the necessary efforts to get them" (Dialogues, p.152). Rousseau is unable to

⁴⁶ In the course of my work, I will for the most part follow Rousseau in using male pronouns to refer to the individuals he describes. I do this only because of the ease it allows me in moving from Rousseau's text to my own.

motivate himself to act on anything other than his most basic desires. He cannot make sacrifices to enjoy greater achievements. When this claim is coupled with his later observation that he, more than anybody, resembles natural man⁴⁷, the implication is that Rousseau himself represents the kind of agent that undermines cooperative activities. In other words, Rousseau, as a close relative of natural man, is himself a challenge to social cooperation because he is unable to live up to demands placed on him⁴⁸.

Rousseau's discussion of indolence anticipates modern psychological studies of human action. There is a body of experimental evidence to support the claim that human beings have a tendency to act on immediate desires, rather than wait for later, more substantial, rewards. They will sacrifice future gains for present satisfaction. Robert Frank, following the work of George Ainslie, describes this tendency as a case of accepting "speciously attractive awards"⁴⁹. Present

47 Dialogues, p.214

48 Albert Borgman notes of indolence that it "is often thought to be simply laziness. But as the etymology of the word suggests, indolent passivity is at bottom the incapacity to be pained by things undone and challenges unmet. One might think of this inability to respond as a sort of paralyzed irresponsibility" (Crossing the Post-Modern Divide, p.7). Borgman seems to capture some of what Rousseau takes to be "natural indolence". He realizes, as does Rousseau, that indolence is more than laziness. It is, rather, laziness that makes one avoid certain responsibilities.

49 Robert Frank, Passions within Reason, p.77.

rewards are always perceived to be better than future ones, but there is no reason to suppose that this is the proper assessment⁵⁰. Agents accept speciously attractive rewards because they avoid the rigorous calculations that would yield a more appropriate awareness of their desires. Such individuals automatically accept what is available and ignore future consequences. They differ from maximal egoists who carefully investigate their options. They are, however, similar to Rousseau, who cannot make the effort to do more than is immediately necessary, and the stag hunter, who can only think of the immediate satisfaction of capturing and consuming a hare.

The tendency to accept speciously attractive rewards demonstrates why certain forms of incentives and sanctions might not be capable of generating social cooperation. A reprisal or reward is something that will be experienced in the future. Others must know whether someone has cooperated or not in order to decide whether they are to be punished or commended. Given that immediate impulses govern choices, the

⁵⁰ There is perhaps reason to suppose that there is nothing wrong with privileging present desires over future ones. It could be said that just as past pains are less troubling than present ones, future pleasures are less significant than present ones. While this might be true, what it ignores is the fact that if cooperative interaction is to succeed, there must be a great deal of future orientation. Thus, accepting speciously attractive rewards may not always be irrational, but, if carried out consistently, it could be a persistent source of problems.

individual agent will not give much, if any, consideration to the possibility that his action will be judged by others in the future. He will just seek present satisfaction. On these grounds, the challenge a vision of social cooperation faces is to find a way of making individuals consider the consequences of their actions. Frank offers, in this context, a theory of moral sentiments in which certain emotions are highlighted as capable of counteracting the discounting of future rewards. Emotions, from his perspective, control immediate impulses⁵¹. A similar move is made by Rousseau. For Rousseau, the natural impulses that favour self-satisfaction at the expense of the group are to be countered by emotions that tether the individual to the group. The indolence that makes natural man an egoist is supplanted by emotions that make him a communally-minded citizen.

Rousseau locates the potential for the emotions that define the citizen, ironically, in the same place he finds their antithesis. They are products of human nature. In describing how feelings unite human beings, he notes of himself that he was capable of great feelings for others. He observes that, prior to his own rejection of human company, "(h)is heart, made for attachments, was given without reservation" (Dialogues, p.15). It seems that despite his

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Ibid., pp.81-84.

inability to transcend his indolence with regard to desire satisfaction, he was able to have compelling feelings for others that made him a sociable individual. These feelings coexisted with indolence because they were immediate and impulsive. He gave "his heart without reservation" in the sense that he did not think about the consequences of having certain feelings. He did not seek to restrain them. Although I shall later explore reasons why impulsive emotions should be tempered, it is still possible to hold that such feelings are the source of community. Moreover, given that Rousseau sees himself as resembling natural man, the result is a conception of human nature in which two competing impulses vie for dominance. If the heart triumphs over indolence, then social cooperation is sustainable. If the opposite happens, then egoism remains unaltered. The goal is to find means to ensure that citizens are emotional rather than slothful. It is this theme that guides the remainder of my work.

II. Nature and Imagination.

1. Self-Interest and Natural Pity.

Rousseau begins the Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men with a series of questions. In regard to his appointed task of revealing the sources of inequality between human beings, he asks a methodological question. If inequality involves a distortion of what is natural, how can what is natural be detected? It would seem that human nature would remain hidden or concealed beneath the changes it has undergone. As he puts it:

And how will man manage to see himself as nature formed him, through all the changes that the sequence of time and things must have produced in his original constitution, and to separate what he gets from his own stock from what circumstances and his progress have added to or changed in his primitive state?
(Second Discourse, p.91).

In searching for a distinction between what is natural and what is artificial for human beings, Rousseau raises a concern that affects any treatment of egoism. The claim that self-interest is the sole motivating factor behind human action is unnecessarily ambiguous. Some attempt must be made to determine whether egoism is unavoidable and natural or whether it is a product of non-natural influences and an artificial development.

In following Rousseau on this matter, the dissolution of the aforementioned ambiguity is not as would normally be

expected. His answer is both unorthodox and paradoxical. He, in effect, offers two different accounts of egoism. Egoism is, for Rousseau, both natural and artificial. As is apparent from my analysis in the previous chapter, egoism is natural in the sense that human beings in the state of nature remain preoccupied with their own well-being. Their indolence ensures that they seek only to satisfy their own immediate desires. Egoism can also be artificial in the sense that once human beings find themselves in social circumstances, they are subjected to new self-interested impulses. Social forces give rise to desires and needs that are alien to human beings in their most primitive condition. These desires and needs constitute a new artificial egoism. By providing these two different conceptions of egoism, Rousseau makes it possible to denounce one form without incriminating the other. In what follows, I demonstrate that Rousseau is not opposed to natural egoism. He believes that without natural self-interest, it is impossible to conceive of the emotions that bring people together in associations. In terms of social cooperation, the task is to discover how these emotions emerge from the ordinary operations of self-interest. The aim of this chapter is to trace Rousseau's views on the development of socializing emotions through an analysis of the changes that social circumstances can bring to natural self-interest.

The starting point of Rousseau's defense of natural

self-interest is a benign passion he terms "amour-de-soi". This form of "self-love" or "self-concern" is characterized as the innate desire to avoid physical unease and suffering. Amour-de-soi is operative in situations where we seek immediate desire satisfaction. We attempt to fulfil our wants and needs so as to eliminate or prevent feelings of privation and discomfort. These feelings can be painful, as is the case with extreme hunger, and we are tempted to do what is required to avoid prolonging them. Rousseau believes that amour-de-soi cannot, in its basic form, be a source of evil. In defense of his position, he is quick to stress that "the first movements of nature are good and right" and that actions brought about by natural passion "aim as directly as possible toward our preservation and our happiness" (Dialogues, p.9). Actions motivated by amour-de-soi reflect a healthy interest in one's own well-being¹.

Amour-de-soi is the form of self-interest that guides natural man. It is "the sole passion natural to man" (Emile, p.92). Since natural man does not possess foresight, he cannot

¹ The emphasis Rousseau places on the benign aspects of amour-de-soi seems to distance it from the more troubling form of egoism I outlined in the previous chapter. There is little to suggest that amour-de-soi has any connection with selfish actions. However, the reason for insisting that amour-de-soi is still a form of egoism is that it can create the problems associated with egoism if it is operative outside of the narrow and limited realm of action that Rousseau describes as the "state of nature". In other words, when agents act as natural man does, but in non-natural circumstances, they act as egoists.

plan ahead. He also lacks sophisticated awareness of other people, which prevents him from interfering with their activities. Rousseau remarks that,

without liaisons, with no need of his fellow men, likewise with no desire to harm them, perhaps never even recognizing anyone individually, savage man, subject to few passions and self-sufficient, had only the sentiments and intellect suited to that state... (Second Discourse, p.137).

Under these conditions, self-interest cannot make natural man do more than avoid present pain and discomfort². As well, his indolence leaves him no other option than to expend the minimal amount of effort to satisfy his needs. He retains his natural goodness by being limited in the kinds of actions he can undertake. Self-interest, in this context, is relatively harmless because it is concerned only with self-preservation.

Natural man's self-interest is aided by instinct. It is not, however, instinct defined as entirely innate. Instead, it is a form of instinct shaped in part by individual experience. Instinct has, therefore, two dimensions. First,

² Rousseau's sparse description of the cognitive situation of natural man may prompt the suggestion that he would also lack a sense of self. However, for Rousseau, an awareness of oneself as an "I" is something that is undeniable. In the Emile, as a thought-experiment, he considers what the life of a human being would be like if it sprung into existence completely developed, like "Pallas from the brain of Jupiter". Rousseau concludes that he would be confused by every sensation, and "would have only a single idea, that is, of the I to which he would relate all sensations" (p. 61). It is not difficult to suppose that a similar idea is available to natural man which enables him to start making some sense of his world.

there is what Rousseau calls the "common level of understanding" (Emile, p.62). The "common level" includes everything that is basic to human cognitive activity. Natural man possesses desires, such as hunger and sexual appetites, and certain innate capacities, such as the awareness of his own existence and the ability to perceive objects. However, his success at fulfilling his desires and his ability to utilize his innate capacities for his own benefit depend on the nature of his experiences. This acquired knowledge constitutes the other dimension of instinct, which Rousseau refers to as the "learned". It is manifest in the acquired habits and practical skills unique to each individual. Rousseau does not present the learned aspects of behavior as replacing instinct, because, even in civilized human beings, such knowledge is regularly "attained without thought" (Emile, p.62)³. Natural man's ability to survive depends on how well he is able to learn from experience, but what he learns is blended with his innate capacities in such a way that his behavior remains instinctual.

Instinct, on both levels of Rousseau's analysis, is non-reflective. Natural man does not think about his experiences. In the Second Discourse, natural man's instinct

³ Rousseau thinks animals must learn in a similar way. Thus, he does not tie learned instinct to intellectual reflection. (See Emile, p.62).

is introduced as "a mechanical prudence that indicated to him the precautions most necessary for his safety" (Second Discourse, p.144). Instinct is mechanical in that its judgments are immediate and reliable. It tells natural man what to do without having him draw inferences or hesitate. Such instinct is so trustworthy as a guide to action that Rousseau remarks that natural man "had, in instinct alone, everything necessary for him to live in the state of nature" (Second Discourse, pp.127-128). Instinct ensures survival by directing actions in the best way possible. In terms of natural man's tendency to act on immediate impulses, instinct determines the most reliable means for satisfying basic desires. In this respect, natural man is able to exist solely by following his instinctual reactions.

Amour-de-soi loses its command over human behavior when survival ceases to be our main concern and we stop listening to instinct. Amour-de-soi is transformed into "amour-propre", a destructive form of egoism, by social relations and institutions. The instincts that so well served natural man are undermined by misguided judgments inspired by a newly discovered sense of self-importance. Amour-propre, in other words, makes human beings into vain creatures. Such vanity arises from amour-propre's standing as a "relative feeling by which one makes comparisons" (Dialogues, p.9). When amour-propre guides our actions, our main preoccupation

becomes the satisfaction we receive from comparisons with others⁴. We give in to a passion that "demands preferences" and this becomes destructive because self-interest "no longer seeks satisfaction in our own benefit but solely in the harm of another" (Dialogues, p.9). Human society drives this transformation by giving human beings the opportunity to engage in such comparisons. As I demonstrate in the second part of this chapter, comparison, as a mental activity, emerges from the development of social relations. Prior to these developments, natural man is incapable of making the comparisons that feed amour-propre.

Individuals guided entirely by amour-propre are analogous to maximal egoists. They employ a sophisticated world-view to make calculations of what best satisfies their unnatural desires. In order to constantly enjoy the benefits of thriving at the expense of others, they must be able to determine which course of action yields maximum satisfaction. Rousseau is well aware of these machinations and his awareness is visible in his objections to Hobbes. Rousseau declares that Hobbes misunderstands natural man when he "improperly included in the savage man's care of self-preservation the need to

⁴ The drive to appear better than others is the source of passions that make social living problematic. Rousseau writes that competition for preference leads to vanity, contempt, shame and envy and that "the fermentation caused by these new leavens eventually produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence." (Second Discourse, p.149).

satisfy a multitude of passions which are the product of society and which made laws necessary" (Second Discourse, p.129). In this light, artificial egoism creates disorder because of the passionate forces unleashed by corrupted self-interest. Social influences unknown to natural man are responsible for this selfishness. The ironic result, therefore, is that the threat posed to society by anti-social acts of this sort is an entirely social product. Natural man, guided by benign self-love, is free of such destructive tendencies.

Concentrating on the distinction between amour-propre and amour-de-soi may seem to distort Rousseau's position. The more important point that may be obscured concerns the difference between a life of independence and a life of dependence. Human beings in the state of nature are independent of others. Their self-sufficiency entails that they are not preoccupied with how they might be perceived by others. Such psychological independence vanishes when vanity forces us to consider the opinions of others. Therefore, we can say that in the state of nature and in society, human beings are guided by self-love, but in the latter case it results in an undesirable dependency on others. Self-worth becomes a matter decided by the opinions of others.

While it is true that Rousseau bemoans the loss of independence brought about by socialization, what is more

urgent to him is the fact that vanity brings with it, not only dependency, but an expansion of selfishness to the point that the entire world, so to speak, must be concerned entirely with one individual. In other words, vain individuals live so that others will appreciate their qualities, whether perceived or real, and others only have value if they demonstrate this admiration. In political and social terms, the world of interpersonal interaction becomes a struggle for constant appreciation. Moreover, given that one must always appear better than others, each attempt to create a distance between oneself and others escalates competition. Looking better at another's expense guides actions, so that cooperative, peaceful coexistence is difficult. A war of all against all is waged in the name of vain self-interest. The vanity indicative of amour-propre, therefore, radically alters the nature of human existence by introducing motives that result in a clash of individual interests.

Even if Rousseau's distinction between amour-de-soi and amour-propre holds, praising the innocence of natural man is not, on the surface, the ideal solution to problems of social cooperation. Natural man's underdeveloped faculties and his uncorrupted passions do not provide a plausible role-model for inhabitants of eighteenth century Paris or twentieth century Canada. Natural man's situation, where his needs are

easily fulfilled⁵ and his cognitive development is limited, prevents him from requiring or envisioning social institutions and relations⁶. Natural man, so described, is an abstraction that appears to share little with his modern descendants⁷. Rousseau, quite rightly, realizes that modern political disorders cannot be eliminated by returning human beings to this supposed lost, natural state. In the Second Discourse, he defends himself from the accusation that he wishes that we flock to the forests and live the lives of animals⁸. What Rousseau instead recommends for the salvation of the corrupt social world is a reform of the forces that direct the development of members of political communities. So conceived, reform undoes corruption by producing the conditions necessary for uncorrupted human behavior. Natural man is relevant to the

⁵ Second Discourse, pp. 105-106.

⁶ Human socialization is, in fact, brought about by accident. Rousseau attributes the emergence of social institutions to natural disasters. He writes, "Human associations are due largely to accidents of nature: particular floods, extravasations of the sea, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, fires started by lightning and destroying forests, all were bound to frighten and disperse the savage inhabitants of a country, and were bound to bring them together afterward for a common effort to recoup their common losses". (Essay on the Origins of Language, p.40.)

⁷ Leo Rauch takes the suggestion that natural man is an abstraction seriously. He thinks that natural man is not remotely human (The Political Animal, pp.86-87.). My suggestion, on the other hand, is intended to show the distance between natural man and modern man.

⁸ Second Discourse, Author's note (i), pp.201-203.

discussion of social reform in that the innocence of natural man is to be reproduced or approximated in the citizens of a properly functioning social order. Effective social cooperation is grounded on a form of self-interest that resembles amour-de-soi, but which is available to socialized, denatured human beings. Central to this accomplishment is the nurturing of pity as a sentiment that creates social bonds but which is still a product of natural self-interest.

Pity is, for Rousseau, "an innate repugnance" (Second Discourse, p.130) we feel when exposed to the suffering of other creatures. It is introduced as "the sole natural virtue" (Second Discourse, p.130). It is "a virtue all the more universal and useful to man because it precedes in him the use of all reflection; and so natural that even beasts sometimes give perceptible signs of it" (Second Discourse, 130). Pity, so defined, is a natural and non-reflective reaction to suffering. Describing pity in this manner is convenient for Rousseau because it is another way of liberating natural man from Hobbes' dire vision. An individual capable of pity does not behave as if "every man is Enemy to every man"⁹. Destructive egoism is once again dismissed as an artificial development. However, in terms of Rousseau's overall philosophy, calling pity natural and non-reflective creates

⁹ Hobbes, Leviathan, p.186.

two problems. First, my discussion of amour-de-soi revealed that it is the sole natural passion and now it is said that pity is the sole natural virtue. Even though pity is seen as a virtue, it does seem to have an emotional quality that makes it a passion. Amour-de-soi is a love of or concern for oneself and pity is an expression of love of or concern for others. Can both be "natural" in the same way if they arise at different times and in different ways? Second, natural man is described as lacking a clear awareness of others. He only has an explicit awareness of his own existence¹⁰. For these reasons, he should be incapable of feeling concern for another. John Charvet raises this problem when he insists that pity, as Rousseau describes it, requires that natural man must somehow identify with others and know that they have experiences similar to his own. Charvet claims that pity "would have to involve the inclusion in a man's consciousness of other men as men and so destroy the isolated knowledge of consciousness"¹¹. If pity is natural, then natural man's psychological condition is more complicated than Rousseau thinks and his account of it appears inconsistent. Natural man requires the very faculties that Rousseau thinks he cannot have.

¹⁰ Second Discourse, p.117 , and Emile, p. 61.

¹¹ John Charvet, The Social Problem in the Philosophy of Rousseau, p.18.

The solution to both difficulties lies in a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between natural man's perceptual capacities and natural pity. Pity, in its natural form, is a reaction that does not require reason or reflection. In other words, the capacity to experience pity does not come from the intellect. We do not infer or decide that we should pity. Intellect can, in fact, hinder our ability to feel pity. Rousseau writes:

Reason engenders vanity and reflection fortifies it; reason turns man back upon himself, it separates him from all that bothers and afflicts him. Philosophy isolates him; because he says, in secret, at the sight of a suffering man: Perish if you will, I am safe. (Second Discourse, p.132).

Pity, as experienced in social environments, is undermined by certain ways of thinking, but in its natural form, pity arises from the unmediated awareness of another's suffering. We do not need to think about another's pain to feel pity. We merely need to see it.

How does natural man see another's pain? He cannot imagine himself in another's place, because he is not yet able to use imagination¹². As well, he cannot see the pain of others as a function of their sharing his nature. He does not possess a general idea of human nature. In fact, for Rousseau, general or abstract concepts presuppose the presence of

¹² "Imagination which causes so much havoc among us, does not speak to savage hearts." (Second Discourse, p.135.)

language and he contends that language can only evolve from social interaction. Without community, language is impossible¹³ and without language, concepts are impossible. Rousseau remarks that "general ideas can come into the mind only with the aid of words, and the understanding grasps them only through propositions" (Second Discourse, p.124). Without language and general concepts, natural man shares the cognitive capacities of animals¹⁴. Any recognition he has of objects is restricted to associations between sensations. What Rousseau says about the activities of monkeys applies equally to natural man.

When a monkey goes without hesitating from one nut to another, is it thought that he has a general idea of this kind of fruit and that he compares its archetype of these two individuals? Doubtless not; but the sight of one of these nuts recalls to his memory the sensations he received from the other, and his eyes, modified in a certain way, announce to his taste the modification it is going to receive. (Second Discourse, p.125)

Natural man only perceives particulars. He, however, does not know a particular as a certain particular. He cannot place particulars into general categories. Rather, encountering a particular informs him of some previous encounter with a similar particular.

Rousseau describes the instinct of natural man as

¹³ Second Discourse, pp.120-121.

¹⁴ "Every animal has ideas, since it has sense; it even combines its ideas up to a certain point, and in this regard man differs from a beast only in degree." (Second Discourse, p.114)

"mechanical prudence" and the activities of an animal searching for food are said to be guided by automatic responses to physical stimuli¹⁵. In both situations, direct responses to physical conditions govern behavior¹⁶. In the context of pity, I suggest a similar explanation. Natural man feels for the suffering of others because he associates their pain with past experiences, but he does not make this association on the recognition of shared nature. The association of experiences, felt as pity, is mechanical¹⁷. When natural man finds himself in the company of a suffering creature, he reacts because the situation resembles ones he associates with previous experiences of pain. The physical stimuli that cause pain are not acting directly on him, but enough of the same physical conditions are present to remind

¹⁵ As further evidence of Rousseau's acceptance of mechanistic explanations of human behavior, see his discussion of the "machine-like instinct" of infants (Emile Book I., esp. pp. 61 & 69).

¹⁶ In the Confessions, Rousseau explicitly acknowledges his interest in describing moral and psychological development in terms of changes brought about by physical stimuli. He writes, "Climates, seasons, sounds, colours, darkness, light, the elements, food, noise, silence, movement, repose: they all act on our machines, and consequently upon our souls..." (p.381). Our psychological states, on such a view, are ultimately the product of mechanical activities. Pity, thus, could be seen as starting with these affects.

¹⁷ Rousseau seems prepared to make experience in the state of nature purely a function of mechanical systems. "For physics explains in some way the mechanisms of the senses and the formation of ideas." (Second Discourse, p.114). The experiences related to pity are thus part of this mechanical process.

him of his own past experiences. For example, if someone is being attacked by a wild animal, observers of the attack may feel pity because they may have been victims of similar onslaughts or been in some analogous situation¹⁸. Seeing the animal act in a violent manner brings to mind his own previous suffering. An association arises due to the similarity of the two incidents¹⁹. The similarities an observer perceives are between a past experience and a present situation. The individual does not, therefore, project him or herself into the position of another, but actually experiences anew a painful experience. Charvet's problem is avoided by Rousseau because he offers a way of conceiving pity that makes no explicit use of imaginative identification or general concepts. The physical environment reminds natural man of his pain. Individuals feeling pity do not feel pain at the time they feel pity, but they do feel discomfort over being

¹⁸ The need for some sort of leeway in this account of association is required otherwise pity would only be felt when one saw another's situation as identical to what one has experienced. However, the fact that judgments about deviating patterns can be made may not create problems for Rousseau. Rather, all it suggests is that he thinks certain judgments regarding similarity can be made unconsciously and immediately.

¹⁹ This association arises from the same sort of association that informs the monkey of the presence of food. It also seems to be the same kind of association as the one operative in Rousseau's account of natural human mating practices. People engage in sexual activity because something about a situation informs them that a willing, biologically correct individual is present. See Second Discourse, p. 135.

reminded of previous suffering.

The mechanistic explanation of pity holds that what is felt is not a product of deliberation or any other reflective process. In order to be truly mechanical, pity must be a reaction to physical stimuli. However, describing pity as mechanical makes it difficult to describe the kind of memory involved in the association of experiences. Memory seems to be a reflective, conscious activity; the kind of activity alien to natural man. But memory can also be unconscious in the sense that we remember things without trying. We are prone to recalling things we do not wish to recall. Traumatic events, as Rousseau testifies in his autobiographical writings, can be a continual source of distress²⁰. More importantly, we can be reminded of things without having a definite idea of what it is that we are remembering. Memory, in this context, only gives us a sense of prior experiences without making it explicit what it is that troubles us. The mechanical reactions indicative of pity share much with these forms of unreflective memory.

Pity, as Rousseau conceives it, emerges as a sentiment as natural as amour-de-soi. Disturbances an individual feels when exposed to the suffering of others arise from a natural dislike of pain. Pity differs from amour-de-soi only in the

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See Reveries, p.131.

sense that pity is a feeling that requires the presence of others. It is this aspect that prompts the distinction between amour-de-soi as the sole natural passion and pity as the sole natural virtue. Pity is classified as a virtue because it is described from Rousseau's perspective as directed toward other individuals whereas amour-de-soi is an internalized form of self-love. Pity is a virtue we possess when we feel for the condition of others, and amour-de-soi is a passion that directs our behaviour by making us consider our own well-being. However, the distinction between the two is not that strong, given that they are both experienced by the individual in the same way. An individual naturally feels for others, but does not make a clear separation between his discomfort and that of another individual. Both feelings arise from the same innate dislike of suffering and deserve to be classed as natural in the same respect.

An objection raised against this position is that, by linking pity to self-concern, it distances pity from genuine compassion. Clifford Orwin rejects the apparent reduction of pity to self-interest.

We do feel for one another; that expression is not misleading. When my heart sinks at the troubles of a friend, ones which I may have long since surmounted or which I may in no sense anticipate, why must I doubt that it is in his pain I take pain? And when what I feel for him is quite distinct from all those passions I am used to feeling on my behalf, why

should I think that it is reducible to them?²¹

Orwin thinks Rousseau makes this mistake and reduces compassion to anxiety²². The connection Rousseau draws between pity and self-interest is presented, however, to make a rather simple point. Any disturbance felt over another's predicament presupposes that one can recognize and respond to it as a predicament. Prior experience somehow must provide this awareness. In the Emile, Rousseau states as a law of human psychology that "One pities in others only those ills from which one does not feel oneself exempt" (Emile, 224)²³. But there is nothing in this claim that prevents feelings for others from being "heartfelt". Claiming that I feel pity because I associate another's situation with my own, and thereby feel discomfort, does not entail that pity is devalued²⁴. Self-interest is, for Rousseau, the source of

²¹ Orwin, "Compassion", p.323.

²² Ibid., p.322.

²³ In a slightly different context, Rousseau asks "How am I to imagine ills of which I have no knowledge? How would I suffer in seeing another suffer, if I know not what he is suffering, if I am ignorant of what he and I have in common." Essay on the Origin of Language, p.32.

²⁴ In the Second Discourse, Rousseau does speak as if self-interest is not a factor in pity. He remarks that a witness unable to assist when a child is being attacked by a wild animal feels anguish even though he is not in danger. "What horrible agitation must be felt by this witness of an event in which he takes no personal interest" (p.131). However, it is first of all not clear whether this witness is a "natural man" or a "modern man". Second, not having a "personal interest" in an event does not imply

feelings of pity, not a substitute for them. Pity presupposes self-interest but is not identical to it.

Natural unreflective pity makes natural man feel for others, but it does not make him help them. Although Rousseau does say that pity "carries us without reflection to the aid of those whom we see suffer", he limits this aid to adhering to the maxim "Do what is good for you with the least possible harm to others" (Second Discourse, p.133). This maxim is consistent with natural man's self-interest and indolence. If his contact with others is plagued by their suffering, then his suffering increases. His own self-interest dictates avoiding the suffering of others. His indolence makes him avail himself of the easiest, quickest means to avoid suffering. His natural reaction is to flee any situation which makes him uncomfortable. In this respect, he cannot, like the artificial egoist, wilfully seek to cause another's suffering, because it involves effort and would be, in the end, equivalent to wilfully making himself suffer. While it is true that natural man will fight to protect himself and thus inflict suffering on others, this is not a situation he actively seeks. He fights only when flight is no longer an

that the individual does not feel for the child because of self-interest. Rousseau's point is merely that the child is not the child of the witness and, therefore, the feeling is not purely the product of a familial bond. His agitation can still be a product of his recognizing that he is open to similar dangers.

option.

The desire to avoid suffering, coincidentally, is aided by natural man's self-sufficiency. He is naturally inclined to avoid harming others and avoid their suffering, because he does not need them. The limits to human interaction allow natural man to live up to Rousseau's maxim. This lack of interaction is, in Rousseau's mind, a blessing. Natural man is praised for his self-sufficiency²⁵. If individuals in the state of nature interfered with each other, they would sacrifice their independence. Even if Rousseau did not value self-sufficiency, non-interference is important because it preserves a form of mutual respect by maintaining mutual indifference²⁶. Harm, in social environments, arises from actively interfering with the lives of others in order to achieve self-satisfaction²⁷. Natural man does not help others, nor does he seek to harm them. Limited contact ensures

²⁵ Second Discourse, p.110.

²⁶ Rousseau writes that "since the state of nature is that in which care of our self-preservation is the least prejudicial to the self-preservation of others, that state was consequently the best suited to peace and the most appropriate for the human race". Second Discourse, p.129.

²⁷ Rousseau, speaking of himself in the third person, writes that "his dominant vice is to pay more attention to himself than to others, and that of wicked men, in contrast, is to pay more attention to others than to themselves." (Dialogues, p.148). Rousseau's point is that harm is the product of a self-interest that steps outside of its natural indifference to make the comparisons that feed amour-propre.

an environment of respect, since no one interferes with the actions of others if it can be avoided²⁸.

My interpretation also makes it clear why Rousseau thinks animals are capable of experiencing pity. The physical causes of pain are apparently the same for human beings and for animals. As well, animals, on Rousseau's model, would perceive the suffering of other creatures through mechanical association. However, although pity is a feeling available to animals, Rousseau still separates natural man from animals. Rousseau asserts:

In every animal I see only an ingenious machine to which nature has given senses in order to revitalize itself and guarantee itself, to a certain point, from all that tends to destroy or upset it. I perceive precisely the same things in the human machine, with the difference that nature alone does everything in the operations of a beast, whereas man contributes to his operations by being a free agent. (Second Discourse, p.113).

Human beings and animals experience pain and pity and respond according to the natural dictates of self-interest. As creatures of instinct, both act and react in similar ways. But Rousseau does not think that human beings must remain on the animal level. They can rely on their ability to decide their own actions, whereas this capacity is permanently denied to animals. Free-will distinguishes human beings from animals.

²⁸ Interference is possible in the state of nature, but it only occurs when there is competition for the same desired object. But in such cases, tensions are diffused easily, given that scarcity is not a problem. Second Discourse, pp.132-133.

Rousseau's emphasis on human freedom is initially difficult to reconcile with my claim that his position is fundamentally mechanistic. If it is within the scope of human power to resist what nature tells us, then nothing we do can be seen as automatic and non-reflective. Autonomy replaces mechanical impulse as the source of human action. This difficulty, however, dissolves if we realize that Rousseau's picture of human behavior is dynamic. The Second Discourse and the Emile are stories of human transformation and where we start is not where we finish. Hence Rousseau notes that human beings in their most natural form remain creatures of instinct. He writes:

Savage man, by nature committed to instinct alone, or rather compensated for the instinct he perhaps lacks by faculties capable of substituting for it at first, and then of raising him far above nature, will therefore begin with purely animal functions. To perceive and feel will be his first state, which he will have in common with all animals. (Second Discourse, p. 115).

In this light, free-will may be part of the basic repertoire of human faculties, but its operations will not be felt until later stages of development. Instinct provides all that is required for survival in the state of nature, and, as it turns out, free-will only comes into play when things change²⁹.

It is only when social relations develop that free-

²⁹ Charvet notes that "Thus if natural man has in instinct alone all that is sufficient for him to lead a happy life, free will is certainly redundant..." (The Social Problem in the Philosophy of Rousseau, p.10).

will becomes a factor. The operations of free-will become meaningful when natural instinct is obsolete and human beings must cope with the new obstacles to their well-being that emerge with the development of society. Human beings have the ability to improve themselves by deciding whether or not to "acquiesce or resist" (Second Discourse, p.114) when they feel natural impulses. But in the state of nature such decisions are unnecessary because nature, when it is truly sovereign, commands only what is for the best. Further evidence of the benefits of acting as nature dictates is presented in the Emile, although in more traditional theological terms. In this context, nature is described as the creation of a divine force that has ensured its goodness. Rousseau thus exclaims at the very outset that "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man" (Emile, p.37). In this light, for human beings to act contrary to nature is to ignore what the source of goodness decries. When instinct remains reliable and is in harmony with nature, there is no need for human beings to exercise free-will.

The emphasis I place on human behaviour as governed by mechanical forces in the state of nature may seem to be an overstatement of the matter. The better interpretation of Rousseau on this issue may appear to be that human beings are naturally free, and capable of exercising freedom at all

times, but that it happens to be the case in the state of nature that they do not need to use their freedom. The world is laid out as such that things happen for the best and that natural man does not have to change the course of events. He behaves in accordance with nature without being controlled by nature and without having to act freely. He follows nature without being commanded by nature. However, this weaker reading of Rousseau leaves a central question unanswered. If natural man is not being controlled by nature and not freely willing his actions, what is directing his behaviour? In other words, something must be making him act and, if it is not nature or his own will, his actions appear to be uncontrolled. Moreover, if nature is not in full command of natural man's action, nothing seems to prevent capricious departures from the natural order prior to the introduction of social influences. Natural man could freely will to act contrary to nature at any point and it is just good luck for him that he does not. The need, therefore, is for some account of why natural man remains bound to nature before the emergence of society. The most appropriate answer seems to be that nature is commanding him so that he behaves naturally.

So far my discussion of Rousseau has not revealed the value of his position in terms of undoing the challenge to social cooperation raised by egoism. Understanding the psychology of natural man still seems irrelevant to social

reform. There is no obvious reason to suppose that a mechanistic model of pity has practical, political worth. However, presenting a consistent interpretation of Rousseau's writings on self-interest and pity does make clear two basic claims that point in the direction of improving social cooperation. First, human beings do not enjoy physical discomfort³⁰. They may endure pain, but it is not an experience they actively seek or welcome³¹. Second, human beings have the tendency to be disturbed by the physical suffering of others. Although we can debate the details of Rousseau's explanation of pity, he makes a case for pity as a natural reaction. I accept both of his claims. They are not radical claims about human nature. Rousseau is not engaging in rampant metaphysical speculation³². His claims are relatively uncontroversial³³. His examination of human nature and human

³⁰ Masochism is not a counterexample to this claim, because it involves a corruption of natural desire.

³¹ Certain individuals may seek painful experiences as part of a general program of self-improvement, but this active pursuit of pain is undertaken for the sake of overcoming pain. The pursuit of pain is not an end in itself.

³² In fact, Richard Rorty, in the course of presenting an alternative to metaphysics, claims that "pain is non-linguistic. It is what we human beings have that ties us to the non-language using beasts." (Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, p.94). Rorty seems to be in agreement with the tone of Rousseau's position.

³³ For further emphasis on how basic biological conditions shape political arrangements, see Ian Shapiro Political Criticism, pp.238-239.

development reveals that self-interest and pity can be classified according to their natural and social dimensions. In other words, both include aspects that are present by nature as well as those that are produced by social influences. In terms of social reform, the objective is to determine the form influences take so that the corruption Rousseau associates with most social environments can be avoided or eliminated.

The difficult aspect of Rousseau's position, therefore, is understanding how his simple assertions about human existence serve as the foundation for a vision of social cooperation. In particular, there are questions of how to expand pity so that it can be felt in situations where one is not directly exposed to suffering and when the suffering of others is not entirely physical. Without the capacity to feel for those who are absent, our social bonds would be limited in extent and duration. We could, in other words, only feel for the "here and now". And without an adequate way of accommodating forms of suffering that fail to qualify as physical, pity will have little value in overcoming challenges to social cooperation. The suffering created by non-cooperation is not always physical in nature and, therefore, pity, as it stands, may be not the answer to such problems. In the next section and in Chapter Three, I introduce Rousseau's views on the power of imagination as a way of increasing

feeling for others. In later chapters, I deal directly with setting the range of feeling required for effective social cooperation and with expanding the definition of suffering.

2. Romance, Social Pity and Emotion.

The significance of imagination, for Rousseau, rests in its ability to transcend the limitations of natural experience. In the Essay on the Origin of Language, Rousseau introduces the imagination as the source of pity. In an account that strays from the one proposed in the Second Discourse, Rousseau exclaims that, "We develop social feeling only as we become enlightened. Although pity is native to the human heart, it would remain eternally quiescent unless it were activated by imagination." (Essay, p.32). Pity, it is said, is a product of our capacity to see ourselves in the position of others. An individual "who imagines nothing is aware only of himself; he is isolated in the midst of mankind" (Essay, p.32). This description of pity seems to be inconsistent with my interpretation of Rousseau. Apparently, he is claiming that identifying with others is a prerequisite for feeling pity, whereas previously in discussing natural man, I stated that pity does not presuppose imagination.

Rousseau's explicit connection of pity with imagination, in the Essay on the Origin of Language, pertains to the nature of socialized human beings. Natural man is "isolated", but he is not "isolated in the midst of mankind". Pity, for such a being, is not a "social feeling". Rousseau

introduces imagination, not as the natural source of pity, but as the catalyst for pity in social settings. Human beings may be inclined to feel a form of pity outside of society. They may be unnerved by the suffering of others. But the pity that motivates human interaction, that brings us together, requires imagination. Without imagination, pity is unable to overcome the natural boundaries to social existence that I have outlined. Imagination is required to take us beyond the momentary feelings of distress and the lack of interest in others' affairs that defines our natural condition³⁴. Rousseau, therefore, distinguishes between natural pity, as an immediate mechanical reaction to perceived suffering, and socialized pity, as an imaginative identification with the condition of others made possible by the imagination. The imagination converts natural pity into the kind of feelings that can have social utility.

The socializing function of imagination is not without its own defects. There is the question of whether or not imagination can foster social interaction without being a

³⁴ In a slightly different context, Rousseau writes that "The existence of finite beings is so poor and so limited that when we see only what is, we are never moved. Chimeras adorn real objects; and if imagination does not add a charm to what strikes us, the sterile pleasure one takes in it is limited to the perceiving organ and always leaves the heart cold" (*Emile*, p.158). Transposing this claim into a discussion of natural pity, would entail that pity without imagination is restricted to a feeling of distress that does not excite lasting concern. This is compatible with my characterization of natural pity as a physical reaction.

source of destructive passions and a servant of amour-propre. Personal and social ills, related to disorders of the passions, have their roots in the operations of the imagination. Comparative judgments that expand the rule of amour-propre are made possible by imagination. Rousseau acknowledges these pitfalls, but still endorses the imagination as a practical aid in correcting the failings of passions and judgments. Before dealing with these issues, a brief excursion through Rousseau's account of the awakening of imagination is appropriate. Understanding how imagination surfaces from the disruption of day-to-day experience is useful. In particular, it is helpful to note how Rousseau finds the source of imagination in the very same place he puts it to work; namely in the context of social existence.

Imagination requires a deviation from natural perceptual processes. Imagination liberates us from the narrow cognition of natural man by giving us experiences no longer bound by the mechanical associations caused by direct physical stimuli. Given that imagination is foreign to natural man, some change in his environment must precede this development³⁵. The shape such an interruption of experience

³⁵ Charvet is correct to interpret Rousseau as needing to explain change in human nature as the product of "external causes operating on him in such a way as to bring about the development of faculties latent within him..." (The Social Problem in the Philosophy of Rousseau, p.14).

takes is similar in form to my earlier account of how free-will emerges. In introducing Rousseau's views on autonomy, I noted that, in the state of nature, human beings do not need to exercise free-will. Only when their world changes drastically does free choice become possible. Likewise, a change in environment is responsible for the emergence of imagination. This change, as with the others that Rousseau catalogues, comes about because of increased social interaction. More frequent contact with others alters human psychology in such a way as to make the experience of particulars no longer contingent on the physical presence of the objects being experienced. In a move typical of Rousseau, he attributes the discovery of the power of imagination to the emergence of social forces, and, as I have claimed, he sees these forces as sustained by the very faculty they activate.

Rousseau attributes the activation of imagination to the social forces associated with romantic love. In the Essay on the Origin of Language, Rousseau asserts that early on in the socialization process, prior to the development of organized, political communities, human beings lived in small family units. The perpetuation of the species in such circumstances depended on incestuous relationships that did not require shared affection. As Rousseau puts it, under such conditions, "natural inclination sufficed to unite them" (Essay, p.45). Sexual relations at this stage in our

prehistory were similar to those of natural man³⁶. In both cases, immediate needs, rather than emotional attachment, directed behavior. Moreover, the fulfilment of these needs did not require any recognition of the identity of one's partner. Having the appropriate physical features was all that was required for instinctual attraction. However, when interaction with members of different families increased, strong feelings of attraction developed from the recognition of attributes particular to certain individuals. The differences in appearance of newly encountered individuals alters the nature of attraction by making certain individuals more noticeable. Rousseau writes that one's "heart is moved by these novel objects; an unknown attraction renders it less savage; it feels pleasure at not being alone" (Essay, p.44)³⁷. Enjoyment results, therefore, from the introduction of unfamiliar individuals into one's life. The novelty of experience cultivates new social pleasures. The reign of instinctual attraction is undone by the feelings created through encounters with individuals outside one's ordinary area of interaction. Expanding social horizons expand one's ability to

³⁶ Second Discourse, p.135.

³⁷ See also the Second Discourse where Rousseau writes, "Young people of different sexes live in neighboring huts; the passing intercourse demanded by nature leads to another kind no less sweet and more permanent through mutual frequentation. People grow accustomed to consider different objects and make comparisons..." (p.148).

experience pleasure.

Social pleasures are sustained by the nascent ability to envision the object of one's affection when he or she is not physically present. When attraction is stimulated by the recognition of unique attributes, images of the beloved persist after contact ceases. Rousseau describes this phenomenon in the Emile, where he writes that the "memory of objects that have made an impression upon us, the ideas that we have acquired follow us in our retreat..." (Emile, p.333)³⁸. Without such a change in how others are perceived, feelings would fade in the same way that, in primitive times, the desire for coupling ceased after achieving what "natural inclination" dictated. Romantic attraction alters human existence by giving us a way of sustaining desire when the object of desire ceases to act directly on our senses. The realization that one can envision one's love when he or she is not present triggers the further realization that ideas can be experienced without the source of the idea being directly present. The power of imagination is made apparent by its ability to serve the individual in maintaining images of the object that inspire newly aroused emotions. Socialization, through romantic attraction, accounts for the emergence of

³⁸ Rousseau concludes this statement by noting that these objects are made more attractive by the imagination. In this regard, he links the basic operations of imagination with the dangers it creates.

imagination.

The cognitive principles underlying Rousseau's account may be more tenable than the account itself. For Rousseau, the ability to envision things that are absent is a function of the disruption of the commonplace. When the ordinary is replaced by the strange, we are prompted to compare the new and unfamiliar with the old and familiar. In terms of our mental activities, we move from cognition governed by mechanical association to cognition that allows for the comparison and conjunction of ideas. Rousseau's simple model of association defined experience as a series of ideas connected automatically by their similarity. Natural man, for example, locates food by associating particular sensory perceptions with earlier perceptions of the same things. Imagination, on the other hand, allows, among other things, for the connection of ideas that are essentially dissimilar. As well, imagination allows for the comparing and conjoining of ideas without limit. Ideas can be compared and connected in countless ways and it is by being open-ended that imagination acquires its freedom³⁹. In having this freedom, the mind is active in a way that it is not when it is passively

³⁹ The fact that imagination is an exercise of freedom dovetails nicely with my drawing the emergence of imagination out of a change analogous to the one that gives rise to the freedom of action. Freedom, on both levels, requires the liberation from mechanistic operations.

associating ideas. Moreover, imagination enables us to create ideas of things that we may not have or could not have experienced. As a creative faculty, imagination is not limited by the bounds of ordinary experience.

The discovery of the active dimension of our cognitive capacities issues from the shock of change. Rousseau thinks that all reflective activities are products of such disruption. He writes:

Reflection is born of the comparison of ideas, and it is the plurality of ideas that leads to their comparison. One who is aware of only a single object has no basis for comparison. And those whose experience remains confined to the limited range of their childhood also are incapable of such comparisons. Long familiarity deprives them of the attention requisite for such examination. (Essay, p.32).

The alteration of experience, initiated by the intensification of social interaction, creates the conditions required for the advanced forms of thought characteristic of socialized human beings. Burgeoning social relations activate cognitive capacities that were previously dormant. In this respect, the same forces that activate the imagination are also responsible for the development of what Rousseau calls "human reason". Reason is the capacity for reflective introspection that allows for the comparison of ideas that are not direct perceptions of physical objects. These ideas are "purely internal" and it is the "art of comparing them among themselves that is called 'human reason'" (Emile, pp.157-158).

Reason, so defined, demonstrates a freedom from mechanical processes of cognition that is analogous to the freedom inherent in imagination.

The realization that reason and imagination are not completely dissimilar in origin counteracts the temptation to see them as necessarily incompatible. Both involve the comparison of ideas through introspective reflection. By noting this similarity, it is possible to alleviate a tension in Rousseau's philosophy. In relation to his views on human emotional development, the split between reason and imagination seems highly pronounced. Rousseau claims, as I discuss shortly, that the operations of the imagination are responsible for the disorders of the passions. He claims that "It is the errors of imagination that transform into vices the passions of all limited beings" (Emile, p.219). In contrast, reason is said to be a means for regulating and controlling the passions. Rousseau, through a description of what he presents as God's divine plan, holds that reason provides salvation.

The Supreme Being wanted to do honor to the human species in everything. While giving man inclinations without limit, He gives him at the same time the law that regulates them, in order that he may be free and in command of himself. While abandoning man to immoderate passions, He joins reason to these passions in order to constrain them. (Emile, p.359)

Understood in these rather traditional terms, reason is given the task of corralling the passions that the imagination

unleashes. Reason controls desire, and the implication seems to be that it controls imagination as well.

The regulative function of reason arises from the fact that it imposes order on ideas so that mistaken judgments are prevented. Reason, so understood, seems to be a vehicle for what Rousseau calls "common sense". Common sense "results from the well-regulated use of the other senses" and it "instructs us about the nature of things by the conjunction of all their appearances" (Emile, p.157). In other words, individuals possess common sense when they are capable of arriving at an ordered and reliable picture of the world through judgments concerning experience. Reason aids common sense by allowing for a reflective and introspective knowledge of experience. However, the regulation of ideas that reason provides is not something unavailable to imagination. The imagination can be controlled in such a fashion that it too yields an ordered and reliable picture. Imagination can provide sound judgments and reliable guidance if it is cultivated and directed in the proper manner. If the correct influences are present, then imagination ceases to be a source of unruly passions. There are grounds, therefore, to suppose that the imagination plays an important part in the reform of emotions required for social cooperation. Imagination, as I shall explore in subsequent discussions, can help create an environment in which emotions aid virtue, rather than vice.

The connection drawn between reason and common sense makes possible another important conclusion. Common sense, as I understand it, is a name for a form of instinct available in social circumstances. Instinct provides reliable judgment for natural man concerning his experiences. Common sense does likewise, but with the aid of certain reflective capacities. Common sense uses faculties, such as reason and imagination, to make dependable decisions. However, if reflection is part of common sense it would seem to undo whatever similarities it had with instinct. After all, reflection is what destroys the hold instinct has over human behaviour by introducing freedom into the equation. Rousseau, I contend, allows reflection a place in common sense, because it has practical advantages. It enables us to effectively cope with changes in our environment by permitting us to reflect on our experiences. But Rousseau still seeks ways of ensuring that its unruly aspects do not upset the control he wishes to place on human cognition. In later chapters, I explore how Rousseau provides means of controlling reflection so that its disruptive influence is minimized or eliminated. Reflection is essential for human well-being in post-natural conditions, but Rousseau is only willing to tolerate an amount of reflection that is essential for common sense. Reflection as an aid to survival is possible, Rousseau thinks, without implying that all forms of reflection are acceptable. I return to this point when I

contrast philosophical reflection with what I term "political" and "emotional" reflection.

Rousseau may base the activation of reflective capacities on the disruption of ordinary associations, but he maintains that imagination is confined, as association is, to thoughts of particulars. In the Second Discourse, he claims that, "Every general idea is purely intellectual, if imagination is in the least involved, the idea immediately becomes particular" (Second Discourse, p.124). Hence envisioning the object of one's affection is not simply a matter of thinking of his or her gender. It, instead, requires summoning to mind an image of the loved one as a particular individual. I emphasize this aspect of Rousseau's position because it entails that any function imagination has in bringing people together is, by definition, limited in application. We cannot use imagination to furnish us with abstract notions, such as "humanity" or "sisterhood", that may cultivate social attachments. Any meaning that these terms have for the imagination will derive from their being translated into particular images. However, from Rousseau's perspective, this limitation is not problematic because it is consistent with his conclusion that emotional attachments intensify with increased contact with particulars. In Chapter One, I briefly sketched Rousseau's argument that such attachments are products of seeing and being with others.

Imagination supplements these feelings by providing the appearance of contact when contact is broken or non-existent. In both situations, feelings are produced by our relationship with particulars; whether they be actual or imagined.

A question arises as to what extent the imagining of a particular can be limited to thinking of a particular. Any judgments we make concerning a particular must involve comparing it to or distinguishing it from other particulars. We, therefore, find whatever thoughts we have of a particular entangled with thoughts of other particulars. Moreover, judgments pertaining to qualities, as is the case in romantic attraction, seem to presuppose the presence of abstract concepts, such as "beauty" and "charm". In this respect, it seems impossible for us to meaningfully consider a particular in isolation or independent of sophisticated abstractions. If so, Rousseau's model fails to provide an indication of how imagination would truly operate. As well, we will find in Rousseau's analysis of the ills created by imagination that the role imagination plays in the service of "amour-propre" is a function of comparisons made employing socially determined general ideas. People see others as more or less worthy of love, respect and attention on the basis of how they look in the light of established social standards. However, raising these concerns does not undermine Rousseau's position. All that need be said in his defense is that even if we do make

comparisons by utilizing generalized notions, we cannot divorce such notions from images of particulars. If I make a judgment concerning the attractiveness of my lover by comparing her image with a socially defined standard of beauty, that standard itself must be presented to me as a particular. I could not genuinely compare my image of a desirable lover with an abstract notion of the ideal lover simply because there would be no basis for comparison. It would be, in a sense, a category mistake. Judgments made by using the imagination can refer to more generalized ideas, but in the act of forming the judgment these ideas are translated in to images of particulars.

Imagination may be limited to envisioning particulars, but as alluded to earlier, it is not restricted in terms of how we can think of particulars. Creating images of particulars is not controlled by the requirements of ordinary experience. Rousseau notes that the "real world has its limits, the imaginary world is infinite" (Emile, p.81). The limitless creative power of the imagination implies that, in the context of social attachment, we are not left only with the images of individuals we know. In regard to patriotic sentiments, the love of other citizens can take the form of feelings for the images of individuals one does not know. The abstract notion of "love of country" becomes, in this account, a love for those individuals we imagine to be part of our

nation. Patriotic allegiance would, therefore, be built on these images. It is important to note, as well, that images of particulars also include images of non-human particulars. I return to this function of the imagination in the next chapter, since it raises questions concerning the symbolic dimension of political and social life.

The blessings of imagination in cultivating attachments, patriotic or romantic, are not fully welcomed by Rousseau. As with most aspects of our emotional life, he sees them as mixed. He often presents imagination in a dark light. In terms of human passions and desires, imagination is a source of unnecessary distress. In the Emile, Rousseau warns of how imagination brings about the loss of human innocence by multiplying desires.

Only in this original state are power and desire in equilibrium and man is not unhappy. As soon as his potential faculties are put in action, imagination, the most active of all, is awakened and outstrips them. It is imagination which extends for us the measure of the possible, whether for good or bad, and which consequently excites and nourishes the desires by the hope of satisfying them. (Emile, pp.80-81).

Rousseau counsels us to educate in such a way as to keep imagination in check. Only by restricting the exercise of imagination can we ensure that passions and desires do not exceed our power to act on them. Paradoxically, Rousseau finds the way to control the effects of imagination on the passions is through the passions themselves. He remarks that "Sentiment

must enchain imagination" (Emile, p.219). For Rousseau, the cultivation of proper feelings directs the imagination away from more destructive feelings. These proper feelings, in an equally paradoxical fashion, presuppose the activation of imagination. Imagination gives rise to feelings which in turn regulate the operation of imagination.

In Emile's case, imagination is called into service to create feelings of social attachment and belonging. These feelings function in such a way as to protect him from the dangers of sexual desire.

The first sentiment of which a carefully raised young man is capable is not love; it is friendship. The first act of his nascent imagination is to teach him that he has fellows; and the species affects him before the female sex. (Emile, p.220).

Fellow-feeling steers Emile away from sexual desires. Ironically, Rousseau enlists the imagination to avoid the very same romantic attachments that he thinks activate the imagination. Imagination takes on a fundamentally positive role in this context. It saves Emile from disaster by providing a less violent and physically draining passion⁴⁰. Therefore, despite Rousseau's misgivings about imagination, he does not refrain from enlisting its power as a means of avoiding other problems. Rousseau's initially negative characterization of imagination gives way, in the course of

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See Emile, p.216.

the Emile, to a realization of the practical power of imagination.

A few words on the nature of Emile's feelings for his fellow human beings are required at this point. First, the notion of friendship at work in this context is rather peculiar. Emile is given a sense of camaraderie without having any comrades. At this stage in his education, Emile's sole companion is his tutor. Their relationship resembles that of a father and son, or, as some claim, a master and slave⁴¹, more than that between two friends or equals. Second, given that Emile is without friends, the imaginative attachment he feels for others is not completely active. He does not yet find himself in a position where he feels compelled to help others or to engage in social activities. In fact, the appeal to fellow-feeling only provides him with feelings for imagined others. This inculcation of feeling is part of Emile's education. Rousseau concludes:

To become sensitive and pitying, the child must know that there are beings like him who suffer what he has suffered, who feel the pains he has felt, and that there are others whom he ought to conceive of as able to feel them too. (Emile, p.222).

Emile is provided with an imaginative understanding of the condition of others. He is made to know how others feel, without being directly exposed to them. For the young Emile,

⁴¹ See Thomas Kavanagh's Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau for this interpretation.

the lessons he learns prepare him for society. He develops the feelings required for social cooperation. But these lessons, in themselves, are only part of the process. Emile, so to speak, is no longer asocial, but, in order, to be truly social, he needs to be placed in society.

Pity, at this stage in Emile's development, only extends the boundaries of feeling, without necessarily increasing the impetus for social cooperation. He is like natural man who feels without attempting to aid others. In this respect, sophisticated socialized pity may be subject to the same failings as natural pity; namely it may be susceptible to the pull of natural indolence. We may imagine suffering, but do nothing to alleviate it or prevent it. However, imagination greatly reduces our chances of comfortably avoiding suffering. The quickest and easiest responses to suffering no longer guarantee that we are free of it. We cannot escape the suffering of others if our imaginations force us to think about it even when we are not directly experiencing it. Indeed, the significant outcome of adding imagination to natural pity is that, if it is acted upon in the proper way, it can be a constant source of emotionally moving images. Although, as we shall see shortly, Rousseau does not welcome all the disturbing images the imagination is capable of creating, he does not appear opposed to using powerful images to increase social harmony.

Imagination utilized in the correct fashion lessens our ability to shun others and leads instead to intensified social attachments.

A different, perhaps more serious, challenge to social cooperation is raised by amour-propre. Imagination is a source of concern because it can aid the growth of the vicious emotions that serve destructive self-interest. In this context, it is not a case of desires eclipsing one's power, but more a matter of imagination feeding unhealthy desires. In the Second Discourse, amour-propre is manifest in the desire to be preferred over others. There Rousseau offers a vision of the early stages of human socialization, similar to the one found in the Essay on the Origin of Language. He makes explicit that, in the process, human beings lose sight of the joy of community and turn their interaction into an opportunity for self-aggrandizement. The innocent pleasure that should flow from social activities, such as dancing, singing and playing, is destroyed by a desire to appear better than everyone else. He remarks:

From these first preferences were born on one hand vanity and contempt, on the other shame and envy; and the fermentation caused by these new leavens eventually produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence.
(Second Discourse, p.149)

Imagination plays a significant part in this drift toward corruption, because it allows us to make comparisons. We compare ideas of ourselves with those we form of others.

Without imagination, we would remain oblivious to differences in ability, appearance and other qualities.

The solution Rousseau presents to the problem of imagination as the servant of amour-propre moves away from the approach to imagination outlined in the Emile. Although Rousseau does not introduce a positive program in the course of his treatment of amour-propre in the Second Discourse, he does propose one in his autobiographical works. In The Confessions, the Dialogues, and Reveries of a Solitary Walker, he focuses on a use of imaginative reflection that removes the individual from the often painful world of social interaction. Imagination alleviates individual suffering by allowing for escape into a world of one's own making. In the Dialogues, Rousseau contrasts this healthy use of imagination with the perverse form he associates with corrupt social practices. He states:

Yielding to amour-propre and its pathetic retinue, men no longer know the charm and effect of the imagination. They pervert the use of this consoling faculty, and instead of using it to alleviate the feeling of their ills, they use it only to aggravate it. (Dialogues, p.120)

The informed student of the imagination, such as Rousseau himself, avoids the traps of imagination⁴² and employs the

⁴² These include, "Competitions, preferences, jealousies, rivalries, offenses, revenges, discontents of all sorts, ambition, desires, projects, means, obstacles" which affect people by filling "their brief hours with disquieting thoughts." (Dialogues, p.120)

imagination as a means of escaping into the untainted enjoyment of a fantasy world⁴³. In this way, amour-propre is left behind and imagination becomes a source of happiness rather than distress.

Rousseau's solution creates problems for my project. He seems to be abandoning hope for the improvement of social environments and choosing seclusion instead of cooperation. Although, in defense of the Second Discourse, he denies that a return to the "state of nature" is possible, he apparently opts for the next best thing. Personal isolation approximates our natural condition in that it removes us from the evils of society. While this interpretation of Rousseau's position is feasible, it does overlook one important point. For Rousseau, the worlds he constructs are not devoid of thoughts of other people. In the Reveries, for example, he describes his escape from his unpleasant memories and his sometimes overwhelming fears in the following way:

Apart from the brief moment when the objects around me recall my most painful anxieties, all the rest of the time, following the promptings of my natural affections, my heart continues to feed on the emotions for which it was created, and I enjoy them together with the imaginary beings who provoke them and share them with me, just as if those beings really existed. (Reveries, p.131)

Rousseau populates the world he imagines with ideas of human

⁴³ For a discussion of Rousseau's fantasy life, see Taylor Stoehr's "Masturbation, Pornography and the Novel"

beings⁴⁴. These imaginary beings have the same effect on the lonely Rousseau as the ideas of his fellow men have on the young Emile. In both cases, they inspire certain positive feelings toward other human beings. Rousseau's feelings for his imaginary friends are a variety of socialized pity. He identifies with their condition and with their experiences. Hence, Rousseau's autobiographical writings are not completely at odds with his philosophical position. Fellow-feeling is important, even for a recluse. Rousseau may prefer imagined to real human beings, but he does not resort to misanthropy, for as he exclaims, the hatred of mankind is "a perversion of nature, and the greatest of all vices" (Letter to d'Alembert, p.37.).

Building on Rousseau's willingness to maintain feelings for others and his rejection of misanthropy, I think we can argue that his project of pursuing solitude is a political decision. It is the society and culture of his times that leads him to accept isolation. On these grounds, his reference to imaginary worlds and their inhabitants can be read as suggestions for social reform. Until society starts to

⁴⁴ A similar account of the power imaginary individuals have over Rousseau is found in the Confessions. Describing the context in which he developed the central themes of La Nouvelle Heloise, Rousseau writes, "The impossibility of attaining the real persons precipitated me into a land of chimeras; and seeing nothing worthy of my exalted feelings, I fostered them in an ideal world which my creative imagination soon peopled with beings after my own heart." (Confessions, p.398).

approximate the ideal, he will be satisfied only with imaginary worlds where the ideal is obtained. This interpretation finds further support in the opening passages of the Dialogues, where he outlines a thought-experiment that involves imagining "an ideal world similar to ours, yet altogether different" (Dialogues, p.9). Part of this exercise is to envision individuals of moderate passion who are not governed by amour-propre. In its details, the ideal world emerges as one of emotional and political stability. It is, in fact, the kind of stability that Rousseau champions throughout his writings on political institutions and practices. The question, therefore, becomes what can be made of these proposals and do they offer a practical way of avoiding social ills, so that we can avoid making the choice between living with civil strife and living alone?

III. Imagination and Public Life.

1. Theatre, Ritual and Social Attachment.

In the Second Discourse, Rousseau contends that ordinary human reactions to tragic drama testify to the resilience of natural pity. He writes:

Such is the force of natural pity, which the most depraved morals still have the difficulty of destroying, since daily in our theaters one sees, moved and crying for the troubles of an unfortunate person, a man who, if he were in a tyrant's place would aggravate his enemy's torments even more... (Second Discourse, p.131)

Tragedy arouses feelings of care and concern in even the most hardened of hearts. It does so by recreating the conditions of suffering. We see others in painful circumstances and are moved by our experience. Evil dominates in dysfunctional social environments by obscuring these natural sentiments¹. These feelings, however, return when allowed. The privacy of the theatre, its darkness lets one watch without being watched, facilitates indulgence in emotions that are no longer applauded outside the theatre.

At first glance, therefore, theatre appears to be a proper vehicle for cultivating effective emotional responses to human suffering. The rehabilitation of a tyrant, for

¹ See Starobinski's interpretation of Rousseau's discussion of the god Glaucus for more on the concealment of natural goodness. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, pp.15-20.

example, would start with the lessons taught by tragedy. He would learn that contributing to the suffering of others is not acceptable. As well, he would be made to understand that feeling for others is an unavoidable part of human life. In this way, theatre would work in a manner similar to how Emile is taught the value of fellow-feeling. Imaginative exercises supplement experience to take one beyond narrow personal concerns. Furthermore, the imaginative activities of the solitary Rousseau function in the same way. He preserves a sense of concern for others, even though he believes he is compelled to live alone. Imagination, in these circumstances, aids pity by overcoming the obstacles that limit or undermine our natural propensity to feel for others.

It is surprising, given the apparent potential for theatre to guide moral development, to find Rousseau condemning it. He thinks that the theatre should be banned in any society that has some hope of remaining uncorrupted. The failings of theatre are related to its offering fictionalized presentations. Rousseau concludes that such presentations make virtues appear to have little relevance to the actual world. What takes place in these fictional works is deemed by the audience to be of no importance outside of the theatre. In the Letter to d'Alembert, he describes theatre as trivializing its subject matter and exclaims that "the most advantageous of the best impressions of the best tragedies is to reduce all the

duties of man to some passing and sterile emotions that have no consequences" (Letter to d'Alembert, p.26). Rousseau obviously thinks that theatre is beyond repair. It is the very nature of theatrical performances and not merely their content that disturbs him. Feeling pity in the dark confines of a theatre may show that natural pity is never completely quelled, but it is not the best environment for moral and political education².

Rousseau's comments on theatre seem to challenge my overall position. Imagining the suffering of others or using the imagination to create any sort of emotion may be further examples of the sterility Rousseau finds in theatre experiences. However, to draw this conclusion is to overlook the important fact that the sterility of emotions is a product of not sustaining them. Theatre is problematic because it invites us to feel pity with ease³. The tyrant must not expend his positive emotions solely on the fantasies presented in the theatre. These emotions must carry over into their proper realm, namely the realm of everyday social and

² In the Emile, the tutor allows his pupil to frequent the theatre, but it is only in the interest of making him aware of the amusements that other people enjoy. Rousseau writes that "I take him to the theater to study not morals but taste, for it is here that taste reveals itself to those who know how to reflect. 'Leave aside precepts and morality', I would say to him, 'it is not here that they are to be learned.'" (Emile, p.344).

³ For a discussion similar to Rousseau's, see Michael Tanner's "Sentimentality".

political interaction. Unless pity becomes an active interest in the condition of others, we have not gained anything. The need is for imaginative activities that truly convince individuals of the value of virtuous behaviour. Without this further motivation, socializing emotions may lose out to our natural indolence. We will refrain from doing what is required for the betterment of others and only seek to satisfy our individual desires. The aim of this chapter is to present Rousseau's alternatives to theatre with an eye on how they can foster the emotions that theatre seems incapable of sustaining. The political value of Rousseau's position is made apparent through an understanding of how such alternatives inspire emotional reactions that motivate proper actions.

In the place of theatre, Rousseau points to ways of influencing the imagination that convince more effectively. These methods avoid the suspension of belief indicative of reactions to theatre. In other words, they prevent the audience from dismissing what they observe or hear as make-believe. They lack the transparency of drama in that they do not appear to be works of fiction or staged events. Their paradigm is Rousseau's example of the verbal picture painting utilized by the tutor in the Emile. In an attempt to protect his student from the ravages of libertinism, the tutor supplies him with an image of his ideal female companion. The image is intended to distract the pupil in such a way that he

does not find the wrong women attractive. The success of the tutor's activities lies in the ability to make "skilful descriptions" which, for the pupil, "clothe this imaginary object with features he can grasp with his senses and give it a greater air of truth" (Emile, p.329). Given that the pupil is not in a position to deny the plausibility of what he is told, he acts in a fashion consistent with what he has been made to imagine. He ceases to find women other than his ideal attractive. In this case, therefore, the operations of the imagination guide actions in the real world.

The political utility of the imaginative exercises outlined in the Emile may seem questionable. In dealing with large numbers of individuals it may be difficult, if not impossible, to provide moving images for each individual. Emile's tutor achieves his goal because he knows his pupil so well that he knows "how to make agreeable and dear to him the qualities he ought to love..." (Emile, pp.328-329). Such detailed knowledge may be unavailable to someone attempting to motivate cooperative actions. At best, a law-maker or leader can be assumed to know the national character of a people; not the character of each individual. However, Rousseau claims that the method employed by the tutor is inspired by traditional practices of leaders and legislators. He prefaces his discussion of how to appeal to the imagination of the pupil with an analysis of a mode of communication that employs

signs rather than reasoned arguments or other forms of sophisticated discourse. He writes:

I observe in the modern age men no longer have a hold on one another except by force or self-interest; the ancients, by contrast, acted much more by persuasion and by the affections of the soul because they did not neglect the language of signs. (Emile, p.321)

Rousseau thinks that signs are better at persuading than sanctions or incentives. Signs speak to individuals without relying on coercion or direct appeals to self-interest. In this respect, they seem promising as a means of dealing with egoistic tendencies.

Rousseau, unfortunately, does not define what constitutes a sign. He does, nevertheless, provide examples. In reference to the practices of the Romans, he lists such things as styles of clothing, badges and other forms of ornamentation and decoration as signs (Emile, p.322)⁴. The ancients also endowed ordinary objects, such as trees and stones, with symbolic meaning⁵. The use of these signs is directly linked with ceremony and celebration. Once again, the

⁴ Rousseau makes a similar claim regarding appearance in the Government of Poland, where he observes that clothing can be an important part of social life. He advocates the use of clothing that is "distinctively Polish". (Government of Poland, p.14)

⁵ Rousseau describes religious practices that formed the basis of government prior to the establishment of modern political institutions. In a context similar to his discussion of civil religion in the Social Contract, he refers to how natural artifacts become endowed with symbolic significance. Thus, such things as stones and trees become witnesses to the power of leaders and signs that guide followers.

Romans serve as the paradigm. "Everything with them was display, show, ceremony, and everything made an impression on the hearts of the citizens" (Emile, p.322). Ritual activity allows leaders to exercise control by giving them access to a language of signs that appeals to the imagination of citizens. The language of signs is, for Rousseau, the language with which to "speak to the imagination" (Emile, p.321).

Rousseau does not explain fully why signs have power over the imagination. At most, he claims that signs captivate the imagination because of their primarily visual nature. He writes that "one speaks better to the heart through the eyes than through the ears" (Emile, p.321) and that the "object that is exhibited to the eyes shakes the imagination, arouses curiosity, keeps the mind attentive to what is going to be said. Often this object has said everything" (Emile, p.322). While it may be possible to point to examples of the use of signs as ways of communicating, this alone does not account for their effectiveness. However, on the basis of what I have said previously concerning the operations of imagination, the power of signs is attributable to their being tangible, physical particulars⁶ that awaken imagination by disrupting ordinary experience. A sign is a catalyst for imaginative

⁶ The emphasis on the physical dimension of a sign does not eliminate representations of objects from being considered signs.

activity because it liberates the mind from established associations. It generates curiosity by changing some aspect of the way the world appears. Properly employed, an object becomes a sign if it invites people to think of it, and the surrounding environment, differently. A tree, to use one of Rousseau's examples, functions as a sign if it is presented in such a way that it is no longer associated with prior experiences of a tree. The tree is a sign when it no longer appears to be an ordinary tree.

The emphasis I place on the transformation of the way objects appear makes explicit a connection between signs and ritual practices. Although Rousseau does not present a thorough theoretical treatment of ritual practices, he does offer detailed descriptions of rituals. In my analysis of Rousseau's position, I operate with the assumption that a ritual is an organized gathering defined by its publicly acknowledged ceremonial or celebratory purpose. A sign can be created by being part of such a ritual because the nature of the ritual indicates that the object has been altered. Ritual transforms an object by treating it in a way that removes it from the commonplace. When a participant in a ritual approaches or manipulates an object in a certain fashion, it is meant to show that the object has changed. As well, and more importantly for Rousseau's position, a sign can itself indicate that a ritual has commenced. In this regard, an

object appears as a sign when it is presented in such a manner as to suggest that aspects of the world have been changed. By presenting an object in an unusual light, individuals can start rituals by attracting the attention of other people in ways that inform them that a special event is going to take place. It is important, however, to distinguish these kinds of transformation from the kind employed in theatrical presentation. In order for a sign to work, it cannot be shown to observers to be make-believe. The audience must think that the change is genuine, otherwise they might see it as part of a fictional entertainment. A tree, or the image of a tree, cannot be a sign if it is looked at in the same way as a tree on a theatrical stage.

There is a difficulty that accompanies the description of the power that Rousseau attributes to signs. Given that the effectiveness of signs requires that viewers of signs employ their imaginations, there is the possibility that their reactions will be of a theatrical kind. Both ritual and theatre presuppose that individuals are capable of perceiving or believing the world to be different than it appears. Both call for an interruption of ordinary circumstances that makes possible the envisioning of new ones. Therefore, people may perceive a sign, not to be a representation of an alteration of the world, but associate it with make-believe. When presented with a sign in the context of a ritual, an audience

may suppose it to be similar to a prop in a performance and not attach any significance to it beyond its entertainment value. Throughout the remainder of my discussion, I highlight ways in which Rousseau attempts to keep ritual separate from theatre. However, it can be noted that these points of separation do not entail a rigid and complete distinction between ritual and theatre. A ritual may fail to maintain aspects that prevent it from being perceived as theatre. In political terms, the lesson of Rousseau's position is that it is always possible for practices to lose their socializing value. A ritual may lack positive appeal and fail to excite the proper emotions. But this shortcoming does not count against Rousseau's claims. Rather, it merely demonstrates that political solutions are never complete. Something can always go amiss.

Rousseau's beliefs about the socializing power of rituals are evident in the Letter to d'Alembert. As examples of acceptable celebratory activities, Rousseau proposes open-air festivals and organized athletic competitions. The nature of these events are to be determined, to a great extent, by the participants. Rousseau believes that by allowing individuals to exercise their liberty in these situations it is more likely that the participants will come to recognize their common identity as members of the same community. He writes:

With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, well-being also reigns. Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united. (Letter to d' Alembert, p.126)

The result of such a festival is the establishment or reconfirmation of social bonds. The citizens engage in the imaginative projection that is required for socialized pity. Imaginations are brought to life because the participants are in a situation unlike those they experience on a regular basis. The encounter with others in an unusual or novel setting activates imagination in much the same way as the disruption of mechanical association gives human beings access to imagination in the first place. The freedom felt during festive encounters carries over into the way the participants think and they are able to enjoy the pleasures of imagination. By singing, dancing and playing together, they cease to see each other as strangers or mere acquaintances and realize that they are united by a common connection. The interruption of ordinary experience that makes this realization of unity possible is brought about by the sign that signals the start of the celebration. In Rousseau's example, the planting of "a stake crowned with flowers" is sufficient to inform the community that ordinary life has been temporarily suspended.

The generation of fellow-feeling that is the product of Rousseau's festivals seems to be somewhat mysterious. There

is no reason to suppose that once numerous individuals are brought together in the settings Rousseau describes that powerful, socializing emotions will spontaneously arise. In this regard, Rousseau's position is susceptible to what Catherine Bell presents as a standard objection to the claim that rituals function to instill certain feelings in participants or observers. Responding to what she calls the "social solidarity thesis", Bell notes that it shares with other explanations of ritual the "tendency to see rite as a nearly magical mechanism of social alchemy by which the irksomeness of human experience is transformed into the desirable, the unmentionable, or the really real"⁷. To distance Rousseau from this criticism, it is necessary to understand how the conditions required for accomplishing the transformation of human behavior are provided by his concepts of amour-de-soi and pity. The feelings that accompany participation in celebratory rituals are made possible by the realization that everyone is susceptible to the same ills. When I see others enjoying themselves I realize that they are like me in that they have, for the time being, escaped from the pains and disappointments to which we are all vulnerable. The shared recognition of vulnerability is, therefore, a source of a mutual acknowledgement of the precious and

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p.176.

Catherine Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice,

temporary nature of human happiness. Socializing emotions are, in this context, extensions of a concern for suffering. We take joy in the relief from suffering and privation, whether our own or that of others, and the festivals that Rousseau describes provide for their participants a vivid reminder of how wonderful it is to be free to experience such pleasures.

The activation of concern based on the experience of shared happiness, that is the essence of Rousseau's festivals, is in itself a precarious achievement. Rousseau, himself, claims that we are more likely to experience feelings for others when they suffer than when they are happy. He advances as a maxim, that "It is not in the human heart to put ourselves in the place of people who are happier than we, but only in that of those who are more pitiable" (Emile, p.223). However, he is quick to note that human beings can be "touched by the happiness of certain conditions - for example, of the rustic and pastoral life" (Emile, p.223). The reason we do identify with this happiness is because "we feel we are masters of descending to this condition of peace and innocence and enjoying the same felicity" (Emile, p.223). It is a realization similar to this one that comes about through Rousseau's festivals. During the festival, which is made part of a "rural and pastoral life", individuals feel happiness because they see the happiness of others. Moreover, they know that it has been their interaction with others in an open

celebration that has permitted this happiness. They know that they have been, at least temporarily, "masters" of their condition. Happiness is intimately connected, in this context, with the communal labour that produces it.

The emphasis Rousseau places on the communal experience of happiness as a product of joint labour is equally visible in La Nouvelle Heloise. Rousseau explores the emotions that the principle characters of the novel experience when they work together to harvest grapes at the Clarens' estate. The labour expended in this pursuit allows them to enjoy a feast that celebrates their efforts. The character of Saint-Preux describes the setting and activities that inspired communal feelings in detail. He remarks:

All the vines laden with that wholesome fruit which Heaven offers to the unfortunate to make them forget their misery; the noise of the casks, the vats, the tuns that are being hooped on all sides; the song of the grape gatherers with which these slopes reverberate; the continuous tread of those who carry the harvest to the press; the raucous sound of the rustic instruments that inspire them to work; the pleasant and affecting picture of a general cheerfulness which seems at this time spread over the face of the earth; finally, the veil of mist which the sunlight lifts in the mornings like a theater curtain in order to discover such a charming sight to the eye- all conspire to give it a festive air, and this festival becomes only more pleasing upon reflection, when one observes that it is the only one in which men have been able to combine the agreeable and the useful.
(La Nouvelle Heloise, p.358)

In this extended passage, we encounter much of the same elements that I have already mentioned. The festival of La Nouvelle Heloise resembles that of the Letter to d'Alembert in

that a rural setting is an invitation for celebratory activities. As well, both settings inspire song and play that create a "general cheerfulness" that envelopes everything and everyone. What is made even more explicit in the description of the festival at Clarens is the connection of celebration to labour for communal purposes. The grape harvest festival combines "the agreeable and the useful" by making the celebration contingent on contributions to a shared effort. Individual labour, in group activities, is a vital source of socializing emotion.

The festival at Clarens is, quite ironically, compared to a theatrical event. Saint-Preux comments on how each day begins with the morning sun lifting the mist "like a theater curtain". This ordinary natural occurrence becomes part of the "festive air" by signalling the start of another day of labour and celebration. But, unlike a theatrical event, the "lifting of the curtain" informs everyone that they must work. There is no audience to the events that take place⁸. Everyone must participate and contribute. The emotions experienced through this activity have a genuineness lacking in theatrical experiences. Individuals who participate and contribute to group efforts are privy to emotions that result from this

⁸ One character ensures that everyone works. She is described as "never busy enough to suit her active nature, charges herself in addition with warning and scolding the lazy..." (La Nouvelle Heloise, p.358-359).

shared activity, whereas as theatre audiences only experience private emotions that they are quick to dismiss as trivial and diverting. Participating in public festivals is, from Rousseau's perspective, a better way of summoning emotions that serve society, because these festivals, by requiring individual contributions, generate a greater sense of involvement with the group. Individuals experience communal feelings because their direct participation in the festival ensures that they are part of the group. They cannot stand back and watch things happen; they must make things happen.

My appeal to the festival at Clarens as an example of celebratory rituals is challenged by Jean Starobinski. Although he does contrast Rousseau's endorsement of the festival with his rejection of the theatre⁹, Starobinski does not think that the festival qualifies as a ritual. He writes:

The harvest feast is in no sense a "ritual". It belongs to no tradition. Nothing is done according to custom. On the contrary, everything seems to be improvised... It is a pure invention, a free creation, unfettered by any preestablished form.¹⁰

Starobinski's interpretation of the Clarens' festival contrasts with my overall discussion of celebratory rituals. The weight that Rousseau puts on spontaneity may imply that the festivals he describes are not rituals. A ritual, for

⁹ See Jean Starobinski, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, pp.94-96.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.92.

some, requires adherence to a certain established pattern of events and behaviours. Paul Connerton shares Starobinski's misgivings about spontaneous rituals. He writes:

All rituals, it is true, have to be invented at some point and the details of their articulation may develop or vary in content and significance over the course of time. None the less, there remains a potential for invariance that is built into rites...by virtue of the fact that it is intrinsic to the nature of rituals ...that they specify the relationship between the performance of ritual and what it is the participants are performing.¹¹

In Rousseau's examples, there is no clear delineation of the link between the celebration and what the celebrants are doing. There are apparently no rules that restrict the actions of individuals participating in festivals¹². He is prepared, it seems, to let anarchy reign.

Even though freedom is a component of the festivals, they still qualify as rituals because they are controlled events¹³. Placing the stake in the ground and summoning

¹¹ Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember, p.57.

¹² Kenneth Schmitz defines a "communal ritual" as "a series of human actions, repeated in accordance with a recognized rule, which aims directly at the good of a community and/or individual considered precisely with regard to the totality, and hence with the problem of the limit" ("Ritual Elements in Community", p.168). Rousseau's festivals can fit this definition in that the exercise of freedom could be expressed as a rule that declares free activity permissible and the ritual itself serves the interests of the community.

¹³ The control exercised over the events at Clarens is more than obvious. One of the major themes of the novel is how Baron Wolmar oversees all aspects of life at the estate and anticipates how individuals will react and behave under his

people to harvest grapes are actions calculated to bring people together in a certain place at a certain time. Moreover, the placing of the stake in the ground authorizes the exercise of liberty that defines the festival. Although there are no inherent guarantees that the festival will not degenerate into complete chaos, without the sign that initiates the festival, there would be little means of distinguishing it from a riot or other melee. The exercise of freedom is made part of the festivities without necessarily entailing that it is not a ritual with a definite form and function.

The celebrations Rousseau describes include further restrictions on individual freedom. Although individuals are able to feel free during the celebration, they are not entirely in command of their activities. As an organized event, the celebration is designed to elicit the proper emotions from its participants. If those in charge of such activities did not take measures to ensure that participants felt what was necessary for social cohesion, then the results would be haphazard or even dangerous¹⁴. Hence Rousseau's

influence. See Kavanagh Writing the Truth for an analysis of Wolmar's character.

¹⁴ James Scott describes how festivals, such as "carnivals of reversal" where members of social classes swap roles, may not function merely as "safety valves" that preserve the status quo in the long run. In this context, the freedom exercised during carnival can be disruptive and be responsible for revolt. See

position is closer to Connerton's analysis than it initially appears. The freedom of expression indicative of the celebration is part of a well-defined organized event. The trick, however, is that rituals inspire feelings of freedom without revealing that the form of individual expression and action has been determined in advance. This stipulation is consistent with the distinction Rousseau draws between theatre and ritual. Individuals in rituals can be made to have certain beliefs and emotions regarding fictional states as long as these fictions remain hidden. The power of rituals rests in the concealing of controls that may hinder or hamper the genuine expression of emotions.

We find a good example of the concealment of control in Starobinski's own discussion of the festivals at Clarens. Baron Wolmar, the master of Clarens, lets his servants join in the celebrations. In turn, the servants feel that they are equals of their masters. However, at no point does actual equality exist. As Starobinski writes:

In fact, the supposed equality is quite illusory. It appears with the holiday rapture and will disappear with it as well...In ordinary times Clarens enjoys neither the natural equality of ancient times nor the civil equality described in the Social Contract.¹⁵

In constructing the illusion of equality, "much ingenuity is

Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, pp.178-182.

expended to win the consent and even the affection of servants for their masters"¹⁶. Wolmar's intention is to make his servants "more docile instruments"¹⁷. The ritualized celebrations that Wolmar designs make the feeling of freedom and the recognition of equality part of a project of control. But for the control to be successful, the servants participating in the celebration need to believe that what they perceive is genuine. Such beliefs prevent the servants from resenting the power of their masters and can even create bonds of emotional attachment. I return to the theme of concealed control in later discussions because it emerges as a central aspect of Rousseau's overall political project. Hidden controls make cooperation possible by channelling individuals toward communal ends without the use of conspicuous measures that may breed resentment and discontent.

The ritual nature of a festival can be made even more explicit if the event is given a publicized purpose. The festival at Clarens, for example, is described as a celebration of the harvest. In such cases, the signs chosen to mark the commencement of events are not as accidental as they may seem. They must have some relevance to the purpose assigned to the festival. Giving the gathering a purpose,

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

however, does not detract from the fact that it is an occasion that allows individuals to interact in ways that remind them of their shared identity. Thus the standing of the event as a ritual is distinct from its role as a way of creating or renewing emotional bonds. Individuals can be gathered together for a defined purpose, such as celebrating the harvest, and the true purpose of this gathering, that it fosters social cohesion, may remain hidden from them. Indeed, given Rousseau's criticism of theatre, if the hidden function of this sort of ritual was revealed it would lose its power. Any hint that the revealed purpose of the celebration is not its intended purpose would make the participants and observers feel as if they were engaging in or viewing a theatrical performance. The festival would appear to its participants to be an exercise in make-believe and would be dismissed as a temporary distraction or a charade intended to fool them.

The requirement that the hidden function of the festival not be revealed may seem too strong. If the function of the festival was not of a questionable nature and was something that the participants would find agreeable, then there might be no need for concealment. If people liked the idea of coming together to foster social cohesion at a harvest festival, this function could be announced. While this may be a feasible practice, Rousseau might be suspicious of its effectiveness, since it could invite the feigning of emotions.

In other words, people being conscious of the emphasis placed on certain emotions might pretend to have them or exaggerate the degree to which they held them, so as not to feel out of place or to avoid looking as if they did not belong. In terms of the comparison with theatre, participants in the festival may behave in a manner similar to a theatre-goer who pretends to enjoy a play, because it is a popular and critically acclaimed piece. The audience member believes that certain responses are anticipated and failure to offer such responses could be met with hostility, derision, or suspicion. Likewise, an individual participating in events at a festival may feel the desire to display the correct emotional responses so as to avoid the criticisms of others. From Rousseau's perspective, the need to have socializing emotions remain honest and untainted by pretence requires that safeguards be in place to prevent such acts of deception. The function of ritual is concealed to ensure genuine reactions.

So far I have concentrated on a form of ritual that instills a sense of communal identity in its participants. Festivals aid the development of socialized pity by providing individuals with feelings of care and concern for their fellow citizens. I have yet to explain how these feelings maintain their intensity once the festival has come to an end. In order to be of political use, the emotions generated by the festival have to be sustained when individuals return to the ordinary

world of everyday social interaction. Otherwise, the festival would display the same flaws as theatre. However, before I deal directly with this matter, I will introduce some other varieties of ritual that Rousseau describes. These rituals are capable of creating emotions similar to those created by festivals, but they do not promote social unity in the same way. The imaginative identification responsible for socialized pity is still present, but since the objects of attachment in these rituals differ in nature, the manifestations of this identification are not the same.

As is evident from the discussion of Baron Wolmar's activities, Rousseau is not opposed to putting ritual to use as an instrument for the preservation of power in hierarchal social systems. In a similar vein, Rousseau observes how ritual can be used to inspire emotional attachments to governments and political leaders. He speculates on how political elites can use ceremonial rituals. In The Government of Poland, Rousseau describes how they improve the status of the ruling nobility. He writes that the nobles should engage in organized activities with the masses since

it is a good thing for the people to be thrown with them frequently on occasions set aside for pleasure, to learn to recognize them and to share their amusements with them. Provided only that distinctions of rank are maintained and that the people never actually mingle with the rulers, this is the way to tie the former to the latter with bonds of affection, and to combine attachment to them with respect. (Government of Poland, pp.15-16)

The attachments reinforced by this contact are to particular individuals who occupy positions of authority and political significance¹⁸. Citizens are made to imagine that these important persons are not devoid of essential human qualities. Their leaders are not specimens of the tyrannical individuals who forfeit human feeling and virtue for access to power. The citizens can be assured that their leaders are worthy of respect and affection. As well, the rulers acquire some idea as to the nature of the life experienced by the masses. The abuse of power may be eradicated if rulers have an increased appreciation of the lives of their subjects. Unlike the tyrants who only see suffering in theatrical contexts, the leaders who engage in the activities Rousseau envisions will have a first-hand knowledge of the difficulties faced by ordinary human beings.

In the context of political rituals, as in the description of public festivals, Rousseau envisions the use of devices that inspire imaginative identification.

Far more than people believe, men's hearts follow their eyes and respond to ceremonial majesty; it surrounds authority with an aura of order and discipline that inspires confidence, and that draws a line between authority and those notions of capriciousness and

¹⁸ It is important to remember that imagination is restricted to operating with ideas of particulars. In the discussion of public festivals, the imagination creates attachment to other individual citizens and in the context of political ceremony, the imagination is called on to generate feelings for particular individuals who possess power.

improvisation that keep company with the idea of arbitrary power. (Government of Poland, p.16).

The main difference between this variety of ceremony and the one outlined previously is that the exercise of liberty is not made a central feature of governmental ritual. The confidence arising from political ceremonies is due entirely to the absence of capricious behavior. In this case, Rousseau accepts outright the claim that a ritual can be a highly structured activity. As long as the proper symbolic devices are available, the imagination can be aroused by ritual.

A similar appeal to constancy is evident in the description Rousseau provides of the powers of effective legislators. The law-giver who seeks to found a political community must be able to present himself as a voice for divine forces. He cloaks his actions in ritual so that he can "convince by divine authority those who cannot be moved by human prudence" (Social Contract, pp.69-70). By appearing to be in league with the gods, the law-giver insinuates that he possesses the moral stability that warrants trust. Law-givers utilize rituals so that their powers appear to be an extension of divine or majestic forces. They, like other leaders, must avail themselves of structured, ritual performances so that their claims are not doubted. They look to ritual as a way of persuading so that citizens will be made to act accordingly.

Governmental rituals are also a good example of

rituals that support cohesion by enhancing group identity. These rituals, to be effective, should involve activities that are unique to the society in which they are practised. The national character of the rituals demonstrates to citizens that they are not like people from other countries. By distinguishing themselves from others, members of a society discover what they share with their fellow citizens. If the rituals prove to be a source of pride or enjoyment, then the citizens will treasure them and seek to preserve them in the face of challenges from other nations. Rousseau observes this struggle against outside forces in the measures taken by Moses to bring his people together. Rousseau writes:

Determined that his people should never be absorbed by other peoples, Moses devised for them customs and practices that could not be blended into those of other nations and weighted them down with rites and peculiar ceremonies. He put countless prohibitions on them, all calculated to keep them constantly on their toes, and to make them, with respect to the rest of mankind, outsiders forever. (Government of Poland, p.6)

Rousseau makes these comments in the context of recommendations for ways of protecting Poland from its enemies. National differences, as demonstrated in ritual activities, are to ensure that nations remain distinct. This insistence on the maintenance of pronounced differences, however, raises problems concerning tolerance. If people, within or outside a nation, appear to be different, the question arises as to whether or not they should be treated as

enemies. If we wish to sustain difference without engendering or magnifying hostility, then some measures must be in place for ensuring that difference can be tolerated. This theme will be the preoccupation of a later chapter. For the time being, the important point is that we realize that Rousseau finds substantial merit in rituals that evoke feelings of a shared communal identity.

Rousseau envisions a third variety of ritual activity that combines features of both public festivals and governmental ceremonies. He describes public dances intended for young people of marrying age. These events allow for self-expression through dancing, but the events themselves are under the direct control of an individual possessing considerable political authority. Rousseau advocates the staging of these dances to combat the difficulties associated with allowing young people to interact with members of the opposite sex. He writes:

As for me, far from blaming such simple entertainments, I wish they were publicly authorized and that all private disorder were anticipated by converting them into solemn and periodic balls, open without distinction to all the marriageable young. (Letter to d'Alembert, p.129)

The magistrate who presides over the affair is to ensure that the occasion does not disintegrate into debauchery. His repertoire of weapons in this battle includes the presence of communal elders who watch over the event from a place of honour. The young dancers must pay attention to these senior

members of the community and make a ceremonial show of respect. Rousseau describes in detail the form of these rites.

I wish that in the hall there be formed a comfortable and honorable section reserved for the old people of both sexes who, having already given citizens to the country, would now see their grandchildren prepare themselves to become citizens. I wish that no one enter or leave without saluting this box, and that all the young couples come before beginning and after having finished their dance make a deep bow there in order to accustom them early to respect old age. (Letter to d'Alembert, p.129)

The participants in this ritual, in a sense, operate as signs. The young people, by making a ceremonial show of respect to the older people, depart from the regular course of everyday activity. Regimented politeness appears different from common courtesy and indicates a change in circumstances. Likewise, the physical space reserved for senior individuals invests them with an elevated significance. They could not demand such rehearsed displays of respect outside of the ballroom and outside of the ceremonial occasion. Both parties, by altering their appearance and behavior¹⁹, inform each other that they are engaged in activities that are not part of ordinary social interaction.

The symbolic functions performed by the people at the dance may inspire emotions comparable to those arising from

¹⁹ There are other means for altering appearance more typically associated with public dances. One could point to the nature of costumes and decorations that are generally found at formal ceremonial assemblies.

the open-air festival. Rousseau speculates about the feelings generated by the coming together of young and old.

I do not doubt that this pleasant meeting of the two extremes of human life will give to this gathering a certain touching aspect and that sometimes in this box tears will be seen being shed, tears of joy and memory, capable perhaps of eliciting them from a sensitive spectator. (Letter to d'Alembert, p.130)

The sharing of emotion is due to a recognition of communal bonds. The old see the young as future citizens and the young are exposed to the individuals responsible for the community they are to inherit. But in some ways, the ritual surrounding the dance serves a more explicit socializing function than merely provoking displays of emotions. In being made to present themselves to the elders, the young are forced to interact in the open. They avoid corruption by avoiding private experiences of pleasure. As Rousseau puts it, "vice is a friend of shadows and never have innocence and mystery lived long together" (Letter to d'Alembert, p.129)²⁰. The young are made to accept the standards of the community by participating in ceremonies that hinder their pursuit of illicit pleasures. Aspiring libertines, through the ceremony surrounding the dance, are made to realize that their actions will be condemned. Individuals tempted to ignore communal standards are reminded of the judgments they must face by the collective

²⁰ This emphasis on the public nature of pleasure is another reason for excluding theatre from the well-ordered republic.

gaze of their elders. The actual, physical location of the individuals to whom respect is paid is a visible sign of the judgment to which wrong-doers will be subjected. No one can enter or leave without being made aware of the fact that they are open to public inspection. If properly executed, the ritual will excite the imagination. The young people will feel this gaze, and the desire to engage in deviant behavior will be extinguished. Shame and the fear of negative criticism will undermine the desire for unhealthy or immoral amusements.

Employing a ritual to inspire shame introduces into the emotional landscape feelings that are not obviously extensions of natural pity. Feeling embarrassed is not the same as feeling care or concern. The socialization brought about by ritual seems, therefore, to create new, uniquely social, emotions. If such emotions are available and have considerable impact on social interaction, then it does not seem necessary, as I have claimed, to base human sociability on feelings of concern. However, in the Emile, Rousseau observes that pity can be expanded to include feelings for "moral suffering". Rousseau's basic examples of moral suffering are non-physical afflictions, such as "languor and sadness" that trouble "sensitive souls" (Emile, p.227). In this context, Rousseau introduces categories of experience that resist being classified with the ailments that inspire natural pity. A similar change in experience is present with

emotions such as feelings of shame and guilt. Socialized pity enables me to feel shame or embarrassment precisely because I can imagine myself in the place of others when they form negative judgments. I can anticipate that someone will frown on my lascivious behaviour if I am open to imagining the emotional situation of others. I would lack this openness if I were immune to the socializing power of pity. Natural man is invulnerable to the forces of shame, in part, because he does not imagine himself in the situation of others. To consider judgments others make regarding his actions is beyond him, because he has not made the imaginative leap that expands his emotional horizons. In essence, Rousseau argues that I cannot care about what others feel about me until I care about what others feel. Only when I have an active concern for the emotional states of others can I be concerned about how they perceive me. This concern is not merely inspired by my desire that individuals have feelings for me that serve my purposes. It is not a case of seeking to create feelings in others that are for my benefit. If my interest in the feelings of others was so blatantly instrumental, then I would not be concerned primarily with their judgments. Rather, my aim would be to ensure that they adopt whatever stance toward me that was necessary for the success of my plans. To have a genuine concern for the way other people feel about me is to seek their approval and not just their compliance.

The ritual of the public dance raises even greater problems. In making negative judgments a positive factor in the socializing process, Rousseau avails himself of the very same corrupt practices that he is attempting to exorcise from the virtuous individual. In the Emile, Rousseau warns that in training the young to feel the proper emotions,

it is important to mix the least possible personal interest with these emotions - above all, no vanity, no emulation, no glory, none of those sentiments that force us to compare ourselves with others, for these comparisons are never made without some hatred against those who dispute with us for preference, even if only preference in our own esteem. (Emile, p.226).

Rousseau's insistence that amour-propre be prevented from having a say in our emotional life is apparently abandoned when he makes it an instrument for controlling the behavior and development of young citizens. They are judged according to how they compare with others. Not only are they subjected to constant scrutiny at public dances, they are also called on to engage in competitions for praise. Rousseau includes, in his description, the rules for something resembling a beauty contest.

I wish every year, at the last ball, the young girl, who during the preceding one has comported herself most decently, most modestly, and has most pleased everyone in the judgment of the members of the box, be honored with a crown from the hand of the Lord Commissioner and with the title of Queen of the Ball. (Letter to d'Alembert, p.130).

Rousseau evokes the standard of judging women that he discusses in the Emile. Women, he notes, are "enslaved by

public opinion" (Emile, p.377) and must learn that their "honor is not only in their conduct but in their reputation" (Emile, p.364). However, even if we excuse Rousseau's remarks as a description of the practices of his times, it is still necessary to explain how he can make amour-propre part of his project of moral rehabilitation. Women may have been judged in this way, but the question is should they be so judged. If it is correct to interpret his remarks in the Letter to d'Alembert as suggesting an improved way of doing things, then the reliance on amour-propre is puzzling.

Problems multiply when it is noted that Rousseau denounces the very activities that are central to the rituals he envisions. Rousseau's depiction of the emergence of amour-propre in the Second Discourse seems to draw a irrevocable connection between amour-propre and the kind of public displays of talent that are essential for the success of celebration and ceremony. Rousseau sees communal gatherings as the root of social schisms.

People grew accustomed to assembling in front of the huts or around a large tree; song and dance, true children of leisure, became the amusement or rather the occupation of idle and assembled men and women. Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself; and public esteem had a value. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most adroit, or the most eloquent became the most highly considered; and that was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice. (Second Discourse, p.149)

Rousseau provides, in this passage, a litany of the

comparisons that are indicative of amour-propre. Disruptions of social life result from the desire to appear better than everyone else. The desire to be valued more than others leads us to depreciate others²¹. But if inequality and vice are inescapable by-products of "idle amusements", such as song and dance, it does not seem appropriate to propose rituals that employ these amusements as forms of moral guidance. However, these difficulties, as well as those pertaining to the use of negative judgements, are avoided if close attention is paid to the transformations achieved through the proper use of ritual.

The judgments that feed amour-propre are part of commonplace experience, but ritual leaves aside the commonplace. There is considerable difference between engaging in song and dance as a way of passing the time, and song and dance as part of an organized event. In assemblies of idlers, no attention is paid to the formal purposes and activities that direct rituals. As well, there is no use of signs that inform participants that circumstances have changed. It is not unreasonable to conclude that, in the context of a ritual, the transformation of the environment will alter the way

²¹ Rousseau leaves much unsaid in his discussion of how amour-propre makes itself felt so easily during such apparently innocent group activities. For a discussion of some of the possible psychological and epistemological developments that cause this change see Skillen's "Rousseau and the Fall of Social Man", Charvet's "Rousseau and the Ideal of Community" and Cherry's "How Difference Makes a Difference".

participants judge each other. This is not to say that judgments will not be made at all. It is, instead, to suggest that opinions will take a new form and serve a different function.

In support of my contention, consider the example of the public festival. If participants in the festival are prompted to make comparisons regarding personal attributes, these judgments will not be expressed in conventional terms. As dancers joined in celebration, the participants' identities have been altered²². Personal attributes are judged not merely as qualities possessed by individuals but qualities used to serve the purpose of the festival. If I, as a participant, see someone who dances better than I do, I do not necessarily feel inadequate. I may, in fact, feel elated because I believe that this individual's superior talent is contributing to the overall success of the celebration. My involvement in the festival and interest in its purpose motivates me to feel pleasure if the general quality of the gathering is improved by the excellence of its participants. If the emotions that are generated in the context of the ritual carry over into ordinary social interaction, the negative judgments indicative of amour-propre might be

²² Schmitz notes that a "ritual is an integrating identity-making 'procedure'". ("Ritual Elements in Community" p.168)

replaced by an interest in the talents and successes of one's fellow-citizens. Encouraging festivals that inspire positive judgments allows for a new model of judgment that counteracts amour-propre. Opinion, as a socializing force, is more than a servant of vanity.

The absence of vanity in the judgments formed by participants in the festival is contingent on the character of those participants. It is hard to imagine that similar experiences of pleasure will be available to individuals who lack some prior sense of attachment to their fellow participants. It is for this reason that Rousseau suggests that these festivals work best in communities with a well-developed network of social attachments. He claims that in virtuous republics there should be numerous festivals.

It is in republics that they were born, it is in their bosom that they are seen to flourish with a truly festive air. To what peoples is it more fitting to assemble often and form among themselves sweet bonds of pleasure and joy than to those who have so many reasons to like one another and remain forever united? (Letter to d'Alembert, p.125)

The promotion of communal festivals is recommended if the community can make proper use of such interaction. The negative judgments of amour-propre are not a considerable obstacle to the enjoyment of the festival, precisely because the individuals participating in it are not prone to being negative. The festival reinforces the virtue of the citizens by reminding individuals of their common nature.

My presentation of Rousseau may appear to treat envy too lightly. It is slightly utopian to suppose that even the most virtuous of individuals will not be jealous of their fellow citizens. Coupled with the fact that the fervour inherent in some forms of ritual celebration may generate violent passions that intensify already existing resentments, it seems that rituals may actually breed the emotions that Rousseau thinks they are capable of eliminating. To draw this conclusion, however, is to ignore the simplicity of Rousseau's claim. The emotions inspired by celebrations are primarily induced by a recognition of the temporary expulsion of suffering from the lives of its participants. To engage in activities that are intended to promote one's own aggrandizement at the expense of the condition of others is, in essence, to bring unhappiness into the celebration. With the erosion of the happiness of others comes the disintegration of the environment that makes one's own happiness possible. In terms employed previously, just as natural man suffers when others suffer in his presence, so will members of a community feel distress when their fellow citizens are made unhappy. Pity prevents individuals from escaping misery when exposed to the misery of others. Therefore, to wilfully harm others in a context where the emphasis is placed on communal joy is tantamount to wilfully harming oneself, which is something that not even the most

hardened of egoists wishes to do.

Well-formed communities may possess considerable immunity from the corruption spread by envy, but Rousseau's festivals can also nurture civic attachment in less virtuous communities. The judgments associated with amour-propre are not an unavoidable hindrance to these festivals, because even if vanity inspires envious judgments, the actions motivated by envy can still enrich public gatherings²³. For example, if I observe that someone else sings better than I do, I may try to improve my own ability so that I can attract the attention that is focused on my rival. In so doing, I increase the quality of the festival by adding another beautiful voice to the proceedings. Without intending to, I contribute to the joyous atmosphere that inspires communal spirit²⁴. There are, without a doubt, numerous ways in which this competition can go awry. Rather than pursue self-improvement, one could resort

²³ Bruce James Smith, in Politics and Remembrance, argues that comparison does not always lead to envy. He notes that, in the civic republican tradition, there is respect for greatness. As he puts it, "Great individuals are the jewels of a healthy republic" (p.256). Such a claim, as Smith realizes, is compatible with Rousseau's position.

²⁴ This is, I think, the logic that underlies the "Queen of the Ball" contest. In vying for the title, young women try to be more virtuous than others. The end result is a net increase in the number of virtuous women. But the problem with judging virtue is, as Rousseau notes, that appearances can be deceptive (Emile, p.369) and someone can appear to be virtuous without actually being so. It is more difficult to imagine someone appearing to sing or dance well, especially in the context of a live, public performance.

to sabotage or other devious ways of undermining the efforts of others. If chicanery becomes the rule of the day, then amour-propre is, once again, victorious and the community has proven that it was not prepared for this kind of celebratory ritual. Further attempts to stave-off the corruption present in this society would involve the introduction of pursuits more suited to the debased nature of its members²⁵.

Making the character of the rituals available to the community contingent on the moral character of its citizens underscores Rousseau's insistence that socializing forces must be moulded to suit the existing nature of the individuals being socialized. The Social Contract commences with a statement of purpose that, in part, acknowledges that such enquiry involves "taking men as they are" (Social Contract, p.46). Any study of politics must start with an investigation into the nature of the individuals in question²⁶. Rousseau's contention that geography, climate, and time substantially

²⁵ Rousseau, strangely enough, considers that the theatre is an amusement that can be left for such societies. It is something that "divert the wicked, and deter them from occupying the idleness with still more dangerous affairs". ("Preface to Narcisse", p.551).

²⁶ I think Keith Tester goes too far when he asserts that Rousseau's use of the expression "taking men as they are" is intended in an "ontological sense". (Civil Society, p.64). Stressing that Rousseau is preoccupied, in this context, with "essential being" prevents a clear understanding of the practical significance of his proposals.

influence human nature²⁷ implies that political solutions are to be determined by an understanding of how communities differ. There is no universal solution for political and social ills.

In terms of Rousseau's overall project, determining which rituals are suited to a community is one of the tasks to be assumed by the law-giver or legislator who seeks to direct the development of the community. However, Rousseau thinks that the understanding required to guide this development is extremely rare. Only unique individuals possess the necessary insight to be law-givers. In the Social Contract, he comments at length on the unusual mix of qualities that a law-giver should have.

The discovery of the best rules of society suited to nations would require a superior intelligence, who saw all of men's passions yet experienced none; who had no relationship at all to our nature yet knew it thoroughly; whose happiness was independent of us, yet was willing to attend to ours; finally one who, preparing for himself a future glory with the passage of time, could work in one century and enjoy the reward in another. Gods would be needed to give laws to men. (Social Contract, pp.67-68)

In the context of the Social Contract, the god-like qualities of the law-giver are appropriate because he seems to function as a 'deus ex machina' invented to eliminate difficulties endemic to contract theory. He appears on the scene as a way of ensuring that the transition from the state of nature to

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Social Contract, pp.75-76.

organized society is not threatened by the absence of an existing political authority. As a way of approaching the problems of political reality, the acceptability of Rousseau's project may be weakened by his reliance on the timely arrival of such an unbelievable character as the law-giver. A project that calls for the active input of individuals with god-like qualities seems doomed to fail.

A dissatisfaction with Rousseau's picture of communal development also emerges from his insistence that the law-giver creates a political order out of non-political disorder. For some, the idea of a start to politics is out of place in the real world of political action²⁸. Human beings are social beings and with any form of social existence comes a degree of political organization and structure. As well, it would seem odd to suggest that Rousseau's project could be adopted unaltered to suit modern circumstances, because, quite simply, we do not live in a non-political situation. But these observations do not eliminate the value of guidance obtained from individuals who approach political problems from a non-political standpoint. In other words, if individuals, who are not immersed in the everyday operations of a community, seek to fashion a political solution to social ills, they may be more effective than those bound to existing systems. It is in

²⁸ For a discussion of this matter see Margaret Canovan "Arendt, Rousseau and Human Plurality in Politics".

this context that a modified version of Rousseau's law-giver has much to contribute. Leaving aside the claim that the law-giver is god-like, we can still stress that viable political change, on a grand scale, benefits from the contribution of individuals removed from the political process. Individuals who understand the community from a disinterested, dispassionate perspective may help us avoid difficulties inherent in established practices. Rousseau, in a sense, anticipates the role assumed by policy advisors and social critics in the modern context. The law-giver is, in essence, a social visionary capable of focusing on the needs of a community. In terms of deciding what forms of celebration or ceremony are suited to a community, the law-giver assesses situations so that the proper practices can be introduced²⁹. The law-giver understands the particular problems faced by a community and fashions solutions suited to those problems.

Rousseau's position encounters resistance in other areas. Even if the idea of the law-giver can be made tenable, there is room to be sceptical about a political system that makes ritual central to the preservation of a community. Ritual appears archaic and is said to belong more to religion

²⁹ In this regard, it is important to note that the "outside" role assumed by the law-giver places him outside of the domain of these rituals. His role in devising solutions makes them transparent to him. This is in part why it is valuable to have someone who will not be part of the community after his task is complete.

than politics. Kenneth Schmitz notes:

Ritual may seem to have little relation to modern forms of community and to the foundations of communication. It is easily dismissed as having only decorative or historical import; or it is thought to be limited to religious matters alone.³⁰

Rousseau found a similar poverty in the attitudes of his time. He notes that people have failed to understand the ancient use of ritual as a socializing force, when they dismiss it as "idle and superstitious" (Government of Poland, p.8). He makes, in support of this comment, a fairly intriguing case for seeing ritual as essential for the thriving of a community. I have explored some of its positive effects in my analysis of his examples of rituals. The question that remains is whether or not ritual as Rousseau describes it has the power to sustain emotions once individuals are no longer directly participating in a ritual.

³⁰
p.163.

Kenneth Schmitz, "Ritual Elements in Community",

2. Memory and the Regulation of Passion.

In an extended footnote near the end of the Letter to d'Alembert, Rousseau provides an initial clue as to how rituals sustain emotions. He tells of a festive gathering of soldiers and civilians that he witnessed during his youth. He comments on how the memory of the celebration has never left him.

I remember having been struck in my childhood by a rather simple entertainment, the impression of which has nevertheless stayed with me in spite of time and variety of experience. (Letter to d'Alembert, p.135)

The important aspect of the celebration for Rousseau is its culmination in expressions of communal feeling. Rousseau recalls how his father summarized the significance of the event in terms of patriotic attachment and how his father's words are associated, for him, with intense emotions. Thus the key to the emotional hold ritual has on individuals after the cessation of the event seems to lie in the power of memory³¹. If the impressions made by the ritual are capable of persisting for considerable lengths of time or can be recalled at later dates, then the socially useful emotions generated by rituals can be revived when required. Social cohesion would, therefore, be aided by memories that reinforce communal

³¹ Memory has a more general connection with Rousseau's position in that he makes the intensity of pity felt for another's ills a function of how memorable and persistent those ills are. See Emile, p.226.

feeling³².

Merely pointing to the utility of memory does not, in itself, accomplish much. Memory is imperfect. As Rousseau notes in the Confessions, he cannot vouch for the accuracy of everything he has written because memories can be mistaken³³. Rousseau thinks that such problems may be avoided by relying on the testimony of feelings. He writes that he cannot be wrong about his "genuine feelings" (Confessions, p.262). In making this assertion, Rousseau ascribes Cartesian certainty to his recollection of emotions³⁴. However, individual recollection of feelings, despite what Rousseau says, can be tainted. What, at the time, gave rise to feelings of communal togetherness could be remembered, when years pass, as a night of drunkenness. To make sense of the role memory plays in reviving emotions, there must be some means to prevent memories from being lost or coloured.

A more compelling answer to problems of memory than the one found in the Confessions is presented in the Reveries of the Solitary Walker. In the process of describing his love

³² This is what Smith has in mind when he refers to "the compelling bonds of recollection" Politics and Remembrance, (p.264).

³³ Confessions, pp.261-262.

³⁴ For a concise summary of Rousseau's use of feelings to evoke and communicate self-certainty, see Warnock's Memory, pp.118-119.

for botanical excursions, Rousseau reveals how the specimens of plants he has collected serve as physical reminders of the places he has visited and the emotions he has felt.

All my botanical walks, the varied impressions made by the places where I have seen memorable things, the ideas they have aroused in me, all this has left me with impressions which are revived by the sight of the plants I have collected in those places. (Reveries, p.120).

The appeal botany has for Rousseau rests in the "chain of accessory ideas" (Reveries, p.120) that commences with contemplation of his herbarium. Being in the presence of his souvenirs "brings together and recalls" to the imagination visions of distant times and places. His memory is activated by certain objects that are intimately connected with profound experiences of emotion. In terms I have employed previously, the plant samples serve as signs that stimulate Rousseau's imagination and allow him to relive the past. Transposing Rousseau's analysis of the charm of botany into a straightforward political context reveals that signs have a power that extends beyond their role in rituals. Socially useful emotions can be sustained by ensuring that the signs that stimulate the imagination in ritual contexts are also present in non-ritual contexts. In other words, just as plants remind Rousseau of the circumstances in which he first encounter them, signs remind people of their original contact with them in ritual. In both cases, objects function as means to exciting the imagination so that emotions can be

experienced anew³⁵.

Although Rousseau does not speak directly of the analogy between his botanical pursuits and his political proposals, he does offer examples of political arrangements that seem to presuppose a model of memory similar to the one operating in the Reveries. In The Government of Poland, Rousseau in citing, with approval, the measures employed in Sparta by Lycurgus, concludes:

He fixed upon them a yoke of iron, the like of which no other people has ever borne; but he tied them to that yoke, made them so to speak, one with it, by filling up every moment of their lives. He saw to it that the image of the fatherland was constantly before their eyes... (Government of Poland, p.7)

The Spartans are made to remember political allegiances and duties through reminders that are analogous to Rousseau's plant samples. Certain objects carry with them associations of the past that have emotional implications for individuals who encounter them. Politically speaking, the successful governance of the populace requires the strategic implementation of images that direct the imagination. Signs speak to the eyes and can be employed outside of ritual contexts to invoke imaginative responses. However, as Rousseau

³⁵ For more on these powers of recollection, see Starobinski's Jean-Jacques Rousseau where he writes "The collected flower is not merely an instance of a type, but a sign, by means of which a feeling is wrested from oblivion and relived with all its original vivacity" (p.238) and Alain Corbin's The Foul and the Fragrant, where he discusses Rousseau's notion of a "memorative sign" (p.83).

makes explicit in his discussion of the Roman legislator, Numa, these signs only have power outside of ritual if they are connected with ritual³⁶. He writes that the virtue of Numa's leadership was found in his use of ritual to make Rome appear sacred to its citizens³⁷. The aspects of Rome that are made sacrosanct by ritual remind individuals of the respect due the city. In making effective use of ceremonial and celebratory ritual, intelligent legislators create a supply of images that support social cohesion³⁸.

The examples of the effective use of signs that Rousseau favours in The Government of Poland call for rather drastic and heavy-handed measures. Lycurgus imposes a "yoke of iron" on the Spartans. This kind of extensive control may make Rousseau's project appear reprehensible. Employing methods that enchain citizens seems incompatible with modern political aspirations. As Judith Shklar rightly remarks, "the Spartan

³⁶ It may be possible to contend that the emotional power of signs is independent of ritual, but, in terms of Rousseau's project, this raises the question of exactly where the emotions associated with these signs come from. In other words, where do particular signs get their meaning if it does not come from prior experience of some significant event, such as a ritual?

³⁷ The Government of Poland, p.7.

³⁸ Rousseau finds in the characters of Lycurgus, Numa and Moses, examples of legislators who "sought ties that would bind the citizens to the fatherland and to one another" in religious ceremonies, in public games and public spectacles. (Government of Poland, p.8). Their example is contrasted explicitly with the drawbacks of relying on the theatre, and other flawed institutions as the means to commanding respect.

rigor of Rousseau's polity is certainly not what most urban Americans want"³⁹. However, Rousseau does not impose the same restraints on all communities. The measures used in controlling the Spartans were required because Lycurgus "undertook to legislate for a people already debased by servitude and by the vices the latter brings in its train" (Government of Poland, pp.6-7). Once again, it is a case of designing practices to suit the character of a group of people. The condition of the Spartans invited the use of methods that exploited their prior exposure to tyrannical practices.

A gentler use of signs is evident in Rousseau's account of his personal reactions to the sight of injured and crippled soldiers. He recounts how his walks past the veteran's hospital inspired feelings of respect for these men. He writes:

I have always felt an interest in this noble establishment. I can never look without emotion and veneration at the groups of good old men who can say like those of Sparta:

We have been in former days
Young and valiant and brave. (Reveries, p.149).

Rousseau is moved by his encounters with veterans, because he understands what they have sacrificed. But it is more than coincidental, given his fond memory of the military celebration experienced in his youth, that Rousseau feels

³⁹

Judith Shklar, The Faces of Injustice, p.122.

certain emotions in their presence. They remind him of the joys he felt when he joined in the communal dance. This rekindling of emotion is even more apparent in Rousseau's delight at being welcomed by old soldiers.

One of my favorite walks was around the Military Academy, and I used to have the pleasure of meeting here and there some of the old pensioners who still retained the old military courtesy and saluted me as I went by. This salute, which my heart returned to them a hundred-fold, delighted me and added to the pleasure I felt in seeing them. (Reveries, p.149)

The symbolic act of saluting gives Rousseau, at least temporarily, the feeling of being involved in the community from which he believes he is normally excluded. The signs associated with the military replenish his attachment to the community. He is, for the time being, like the Spartans, whose public spectacles,

by keeping them reminded of their forefathers' deeds and hardships and virtues and triumphs, stirred their hearts, set them on fire with the spirit of emulation and tied them tightly to the fatherland... (Government of Poland, p.8)

Rousseau's appreciation of Spartan patriotism reflects his desire to be included in the community. He, at a later date, resents the perceived discontinuation of the soldier's greeting because it is, in a sense, a vivid indication of his estrangement from others⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Rousseau believes that the soldiers cease to welcome him because they have been influenced by those conspiring against him.

Despite the purely personal dimension of Rousseau's reaction, his response to the sight of the soldiers illustrates how symbols associated with the particular experiences of emotions are available without having to impose "a yoke of iron" on people. We can be reminded of important events and social occasions without being constantly forced to focus on images of the nation or community. The signs that revive feelings may be inconspicuous aspects of our ordinary social interaction, and not necessarily components in a grand scheme designed to elicit our constant attention. The signs that trigger Rousseau's emotions are integrated into the existing social milieu. There is no mention of the soldier's hospital being deliberately created, by a law-giver, to foster socially useful emotion. It is not essential, therefore, to always create new signs that stimulate imaginative identification with the community. Rather, it is important to ensure that existing signs continue to be visible and activate memories and emotions. The fact that the soldiers and their activities are already connected with a rich history of rituals suffices to make them a source of potent images. If we live in an environment with established rituals and signs that work to cultivate and sustain proper social feeling, then little artifice on behalf of leaders and legislators may be required.

It is appropriate to conclude that Rousseau allows for

a wide spectrum of ritual practices and that the amount of rigor or control called for is a function of how much is needed. Answering these questions comes down to the settling of empirical details beyond the scope of Rousseau's project. However, Rousseau's description of how communal sentiments are cultivated and sustained through the use of rituals and signs is threatened by several inconsistencies. Previously, I outlined how the imagination is activated by the presentation of new and unfamiliar objects or images. It is this change in circumstances that awakens the imagination and which explains the practical effectiveness inherent in the use of signs. In my explication of how signs continue to work outside of rituals, I have introduced the notion that they serve as reminders that create associations of the sign with prior experiences. This claim encounters difficulties. First, the power of the sign was initially attributed to novelty. If a sign becomes commonplace, then it has the potential of appearing mundane or trite. In this regard, if the sign sustains emotions by being constantly or frequently before the eyes of citizens, then it loses the very power it had as a way of exciting imagination. There is a problem of ensuring that a sign or image does not become obsolete too quickly. The political challenge is to find a means for exercising judicious control over a sign so that it is not exhausted prematurely. Keeping images of the community before the eyes

of the citizens entails juggling signs so that the images do not become tiresome.

Means of maintaining the power of signs may not be impossible to envision, but the problems related to novelty point to an even greater conceptual difficulty. My characterization of the imagination distinguished it from a form of consciousness directed by mechanical association. However, if signs lead to the automatic recollection of previous experiences, then it seems we are dealing with a variety of mechanical association. The mundane appearance a sign acquires, because of frequent contact, is a function of its becoming part of established associations. It seems as if the emphasis I have put on imagination is unwarranted, since the outcome of my analysis is a return to ways of thinking that imply the negation of the freedom essential to the imagination. Rousseau's framework leaves us with the uncomfortable result of using the imagination to put a stop to imagination. This troubling conclusion is further magnified by Rousseau's insistence, in the Emile, that habitual associations are to be avoided if one seeks to inspire emotions.

In everything habit kills imagination. Only new objects awaken it. In those one sees everyday, it is no longer imagination which acts, but memory...for only by the fire of imagination are the passions to be kindled. (Emile)

p.135)⁴¹.

Habitual ways of thinking, it seems, are the enemy of emotion, not its protector. Rousseau apparently denounces the very solution to the problem of sustaining emotions that emerges from his comments on how memory preserves feelings.

Untangling Rousseau's confusing remarks on memory and habit may not be as daunting a task as it first appears. In some ways, he is stating the problem of maintaining novelty in the face of repetition. A balance must be achieved between the contact with an object that excites the imagination and the overexposure to an object that deadens the imagination. Habit is to be avoided in circumstances where it threatens imagination. Experience must be infused with novelty if feelings are to remain powerful and alive. However, discovering a balance between old and new is fraught with practical difficulties. It might require a calculus that determined how many times an idea must come to mind in order to qualify as habitual. Relying on such strange, and difficult, computations weakens Rousseau's position.

A defense of Rousseau is possible if we take into account the textual evidence that indicates that Rousseau's fear of habit is overstated. The initial tension between habit and imagination is lessened by Rousseau's own observation that

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See also Emile, p.231.

the automatic association of ideas is the mode of thinking with which most people are comfortable. In the Emile, he indicates that the chains of thought identified with philosophical and scientific practices emphasize abstract reasoning and general ideas. He is quick to point out that his discussion of thinking concerns the methods employed by the ordinary person.

There is another entirely different chain by which each particular object attracts another and always shows the one that follows. This order, which fosters by means of constant curiosity the attention that they all demand, is the one most men follow... (Emile, p.172).

In this regard, Rousseau finds a place for both imagination and habit within a model of automatic association. Habitual association creates curiosity by creating expectations. These expectations take the form of imagining what will be next in a sequence of experiences. Individuals anticipate the ideas associated with certain objects or images and are curious to see if their expectations are fulfilled. Individuals imagine what is to come on the basis of what they have previously experienced and prior experience fuels the imagination. However, even if habit in this context does not deaden the operations of the imagination, there is nothing in Rousseau's remarks to indicate that the mechanical association of ideas does not extinguish emotions. Habit may not be the death of imagination, but it has yet to be shown to be hospitable to emotion.

Joining emotion to habit does not seem that insurmountable. The emotional attachments that Rousseau pinpoints as the source of social bonds are sustained by frequency of contact. Emotion is thus served by the habit of seeing and being with each other. As well, an understanding of how habit supports emotions is available if we realize that Rousseau's overall position is dedicated to the replication of natural processes through human artifice. Habits become a way of ordering the emotions so that human behavior approximates what is natural. In this respect, the efforts of legislators and educators are intended to reproduce the order inherent in nature that has been lost with the development of social relationships. In the Emile, Rousseau links education with the rediscovery of the human place in the natural scheme. He declares, quite passionately, that, as a human being, you should stay "in the place nature assigns to you in the chain of being" (Emile, p.83). The ideal that shapes his political proposals is one of a system of control that would "have an inflexibility that no human force could ever conquer" (Emile, p.85). If achieved, "all of the advantages of the natural state would be united with those of the civil state..." (Emile, p.85). Nature, as a deterministic system governed by inescapable laws, provides the ideal towards which social forces should strive.

On a psychological and cognitive level, the

approximation of natural forces is achieved through control of thinking and feeling. The emotions rekindled by certain objects and images are automatic responses to aspects of the social environment. As customary ways of thinking, they have an unavoidable hold on emotional dispositions. Such inflexibility entails that fixed emotional responses reproduce the serenity of passions found in natural man. By controlling the nature, and number, of emotions experienced by individuals, the disruptions created by unruly passions are prevented. As Rousseau notes, "natural passions are very limited" (Emile, p.212). The goal in education and socialization is to ensure that unnatural passions are limited as well. The natural condition of human beings is to be approximated by the manipulation of passions so that human beings are able to experience the emotional stability enjoyed in the state of nature.

Imagination aids the process, because if imagination is properly directed, it will only allow for a fixed number of emotions to be experienced. Imagination is the source of social passions and an instrument that controls the passions. Any explicit attempt to eliminate the imagination is, in Rousseau's mind, foolhardy and counter-productive. As he exclaims, in reference to the education of a young man, "Do not stifle his imagination ; guide it lest it engender monsters" (Emile, p.325). Control, not obliteration, is the

answer. The reign sought over emotions returns us to Rousseau's claim that "Sentiment must enchain imagination" (Emile, p.219). Sentiment enchains imagination by ensuring that the emotions inspired by objects and images are inescapable. Imagination inspires passions that control its power⁴². Socialization is to prevent the imagination from being completely free and fanciful. When Rousseau speaks of the language of signs as captivating the imagination, he means, quite seriously, that the imagination is taken captive.

Rousseau accepts the conclusion that the freedom of the imagination is ultimately the source of its own enslavement. Habitual ways of feeling are maintained by directing the imagination. Habit does not destroy all emotion. It merely eliminates certain emotional options. The practical result of the captivity of the imagination is the placement of restrictions on the emotions of citizens. People are made to feel what their social environment tells them to feel. Such a conclusion is not out of place in Rousseau's work, given that, as I have already described, the social value of ritual is contingent on the control of the environment to facilitate proper emotional responses. In the context of communal festivals, I showed how individuals in charge must take

⁴² A similar dynamic to the one I outline here is visible in Uday Singh Mehta's work on Locke. See his The Anxiety of Freedom.

measures that direct the operations of the imagination. A similar kind of control is evident in the subsequent use of signs to replenish emotions.

The union of control and imagination is, however, not altogether happy. Imagination, because it is born out of cognitive disruptions, is not so easily quieted as we may think. What complicates matters is that the number of influences that work upon the individual are so great that they cannot be brought entirely under human control. As is evident in Rousseau's account of romantic attraction, a new and intriguing object can quickly arouse the imagination. To put an end to such possible disturbances requires unrealistic predictive abilities on behalf of those who educate and shape communities. Rather than opt for the fanciful conclusion that the imagination can always be restrained, it is better to show how we can deal with the gaps left behind. Perfect control may be the ideal, but it is only ideal because it wishes away all other difficulties. The difficulties associated with imperfect control deserve respect. In subsequent chapters, I speculate on how the gaps can be filled so that certain apparently repugnant aspects of Rousseau's project can be addressed.

IV. Politics and Reflection.

1. Control, Truth and the Perils of Philosophy.

Rousseau's perspective on the imagination provides a means for making individuals care for their communities. Social unity is to be sustained by emotion. As Rousseau declares, "Society is not created by the crowd, and bodies come together in vain when hearts reject each other" (Dialogues, p.100). Moreover, the emotions that hold society together are not fleeting or momentary. They last because rituals and signs foster social attachments that persist even without the direct interaction between citizens that may seem vital for a sense of communal attachment. As previously noted, social cooperation is hindered by the fact that no individual citizen can know every other citizen. One may feel less inclined to do things to benefit individuals that one will never encounter. As well, people may be less inclined to live up to their communally imposed responsibilities when there is less chance of their non-compliance being detected. When they are left alone, individuals may forget or neglect the effects their actions have on those who are absent. Under the conditions Rousseau establishes, the individual by experiencing emotions generated by celebratory and ceremonial rituals and by being reminded of these emotions is more compelled to behave according to the expectations of the community.

Individuals prone to causing disruptions, such as free-riders, may be made hospitable to communal life if they are made to recognize the value of emotional attachments and the importance of reducing the unhappiness of others. Pity, which starts as a feeling limited to suffering one directly perceives, is transformed by imagination to include feelings for suffering that one does not directly perceive. As well, the innate desire to avoid suffering becomes the desire to avoid contributing to imagined suffering. The virtuous citizen, therefore, assumes a disposition to suffering that resembles that of natural man. However, the citizen, unlike his natural counterpart, cannot take flight to escape the suffering of others. An awareness of suffering follows the citizen, because imagination can make the absent appear present. In the end, the control and regulation of the imagination entails the control and regulation of the citizens of a community. Such insistence on the need for control and regulation, nevertheless, raises questions concerning the appropriateness of the measures employed.

If individuals are united through appeals to feelings and passions, then there may seem to be no room in political and social situations for actions motivated by dispassionate reflective processes. Intellectual activities that may temper emotional reactions would not be pursued or condoned because they would seem to undo the attachments that are the basis of

social cooperation. Rousseau's general hostility to intellectual pursuits adds to the concern generated by his appeal to sentiment as a socializing force. In this chapter, I analyze Rousseau's comments on philosophical reflection to demonstrate why he has little confidence in it as a means for improving the human condition. However, a place is made available in Rousseau's position for the construction of models of reflection that support communal existence. My aim is to show that Rousseau tolerates ways of thinking that enable the individual to critically examine his position in social relationships, but the scope of such reflection is determined by the requirement that social cohesion be preserved. The function of reflection, therefore, is not to support individualistic decision-making, but to enable individuals to operate competently within their social arena.

The reason why we may think it desirable that human beings reflect on significant matters is that it allows them to discover the truth about things. Less broadly stated, and cast in political terms, the value of reflection rests in its power to uncover the reality of social affairs. For those seeking to reform society the unveiling of political truths is a prerequisite for large scale change. People can be emancipated from undesirable political arrangements if they are shown how their situation involves exploitation or other forms of servitude and manipulation. Introduced in this

fashion, it is evident why Rousseau may be troubled by questions concerning reflection. If my description of his views on ritual is correct, then certain varieties of reflection have the potential to undermine the effectiveness of the ceremonial and celebratory practices he endorses. If individuals can see through these events by reflecting on them, they may not be so inclined to believe what they are seeing. Reflection can make rituals appear to be theatrical events rather than genuine displays of communal togetherness.

The power of reflection is even more upsetting for Rousseau when we remember that the rituals he presents utilize deception. By not informing citizens of the genuine function of rituals, those responsible for their implementation could be accused of trickery. If citizens are able to reflect on their situation, they may see through such deception. The power of reflection as a liberating force is an extension of its basic operations. Reflection involves the making of judgments and the forming of ideas that are not determined by the nature of sense experience. It includes activities such as abstraction, generalization, and speculation. With the discovery of reflection, thought is no longer restricted to what is perceived. Imagination qualifies as reflection because it involves the transcendence of ordinary experience by envisioning objects that are not physically present. In an analogous fashion, the abstract thinking utilized in

philosophy is reflective. It employs speculation and contemplation to arrive at claims that are not necessarily validated by experience. Reflection of either sort is hostile to deception, because reflective activities aid in the search for things not supplied by direct experience. They can expose deception by uncovering what is beneath surface appearances. The value of deception for Rousseau's position can, therefore, be seen as contributing to his devaluation of reflection.

Rousseau's distrust of certain forms of reflection and his acceptance of deception as a tool in the service of social cooperation raises another vital concern. The surreptitious control of citizens that Rousseau advocates seems misplaced in the work of a philosopher who has taken "vitam impendere vero" (to devote one's life to truth) as his personal motto¹. Making communal togetherness a product of deception is difficult to reconcile with a professed dedication to truth. Rousseau is well aware of a tension between his writing and his self-assigned mission. However, he focuses more on the fact that he has invented stories in his past, rather than on the fact that he champions the use of deceit as the way to solve political and educational problems. Nevertheless, the defense of his life that Rousseau puts forward in the Reveries of the Solitary Walker may provide reasons for permitting

¹ Reveries, translator's footnote 2, p.63.

political deception. In this respect, deception may be excused by demonstrating that citizens can be kept from knowing certain truths without it being considered an injustice.

At first, it seems impossible to extract a defense of deceitfulness from Rousseau's writings. He explicitly rejects the idea that lying can be used to benefit the person spreading the lie or, for that matter, anyone else. He writes that, "To lie to one's own advantage is an imposture, to lie to the advantage of others is a fraud..." (Reveries, p.69). In this light, the deception central to Rousseau's work seems to qualify as fraud, rather than imposture. The individuals who apparently benefit from the deception are the community as a whole and not the specific individuals, such as the law-giver and the tutor, who propagate fictions. The rewards that the law-giver and the tutor receive are not so much from their particular acts of deception as they are from the appreciation received from those they have helped². However, regardless of who benefits, it still seems that Rousseau's deceptive practices qualify as lies, because the "deception is intended" (Reveries, p.69) and serves the interest of a designated recipient.

² See Emile, p.325, where the tutor reveals to his pupil what he has done for him. The pupil's response is an immediate show of gratitude. See also Social Contract, pp.67-68, where it is said that the law-giver prepares "for himself a future glory".

Another avenue is available within Rousseau's remarks on lying that mitigates the harm created by deception. He writes, prior to his condemnation of lying, that it is necessary to distinguish "between cases where the truth is absolutely required of us and those where it can be left unspoken and concealed without falsehood" (Reveries, p.68). The distinction is between actively lying and passively concealing the truth. I lie if I tell you something that is not the case, but I do not lie if I fail to tell you something that is the case. Not disclosing a truth is not the same as fabricating something and claiming that it is a truth. In terms of the deception central to Rousseau's project, it may not be a form of injustice if it can be shown that omission in this area is not the same as uttering a falsehood. This suggestion is at first glance ludicrous. There seems to be no area of human life that requires more disclosure than politics. The conditions that govern our lives are so important that truth is "absolutely required" in these matters. But on a different level it is viable to argue that the truth regarding our political situation is not as crucial as it seems.

Rousseau holds that the "things a man needs to know, and whose knowledge is necessary to his happiness are not perhaps very numerous...". (Reveries, p.66). He quickly adds that what human beings do need to know cannot be wilfully

withheld from them. We can conclude that what must be revealed is what is necessary for human happiness. This stipulation, as it stands, is not very useful because, as Rousseau notes, it yields "no sure practical guidance" (Reveries, p.67). Knowledge that promotes happiness might change according to the character of the individuals in question. However, given the specific social and political practices I have already outlined, is it necessary for citizens engaged in these practices to know the truth about them? In other words, is happiness promoted by exposing the hidden aspects of political life? Put this way, it is not hard to support a negative answer. Built into my analysis of the ritual dimensions of politics is explicit acknowledgement of the dangers of revealing the truth about them. With transparency comes the loss of the charm these sorts of spectacles and activities hold. They become theatrical, and the emotions they engender can be dismissed as trivial. With such demystification comes the potential for the disruption of social cohesion and the reintroduction of social strife³. In straightforward terms, it is reasonable to suggest that the breakdown of important

³ F. G. Bailey, in the Prevalence of Deceit, makes a case for seeing deception as an integral part of social order. However, Bailey assumes that deception can be effective even if it is feigned. In other words, he focuses on how social agents pretend to be ignorant of certain facts, although these facts are available to all parties involved. Such a view, from Rousseau's perspective, amounts to the claim that theatricality can be part of political life; a claim Rousseau would deny.

social bonds is detrimental to human happiness. In relation to Rousseau's method for calculating when truth should be revealed, a case can be made for hidden controls as consistent with justice. They can be justifiably concealed for the sake of individuals they affect.

To accept my defense of Rousseau without reservation would be foolish. In some political systems the discovery of the truth is necessary for the well-being of the citizens. Political corruption and the exploitation of certain individuals and classes of individuals make it necessary to expose lies and explode myths. Ironically, it is exactly this kind of truth-telling that is apparent in much of Rousseau's philosophical criticism. He questions standard beliefs and practices with the intent of liberating people from misery. For example, his claim that philosophers do human nature a disservice by attributing incorrect motives to it is an attempt to undo the political damage spread by the idea that hostility and aggressive self-interest are natural⁴. These ideas buttress tyrannical practices through dubious claims regarding human behavior. As well, Rousseau's own description of the injustices of certain forms of deception shows that he only tolerates it in circumstances where it benefits the community as a whole. In this respect, his condemnation of

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Second Discourse, pp.129-130.

imposture and fraud corresponds with his negative characterization of unnatural egoism and factionalism. Imposture could be a means through which a self-interested individual attempts to exploit others. Likewise, a factional interest within a community could achieve ascendancy by means of fraud. Neither of these forms of deception is practised for the betterment of a larger community. The deception consistent with Rousseau's position is only acceptable when it is not connected to limited or self-serving motives.

Rousseau's campaign against philosophical reflection, however, is not inspired solely by his defense of deception. Such reflective thinking is a source of more serious social and moral problems that have little to do with its ability to uncover deceit. His primary objection is focused on the tendency philosophers have to claim knowledge about matters that are unknowable. While theorizing of this sort may seem harmless to us, for Rousseau it is the source of substantial evils, all of which spring from the follies of vanity. As an introduction to Rousseau's worries, consider the Emile where the character of the Savoyard Vicar expresses dissatisfaction with the fact that philosophy is not bound by experience. Speculative metaphysics is dismissed as responsible for numerous irresolvable disputes. He observes that philosophical problems are invariably shrouded in confusion. Rousseau writes:

Impenetrable mysteries surround us on all sides; they are above the region accessible to the senses. We believe we possess intelligence for piercing these mysteries, but all we have is imagination. Through this imaginary world each blazes a trail he believes to be good. None can know whether his leads to the goal. (Emile, p.268).

Every philosopher seeks a truth that cannot be known and believes that the answer he has concocted is the only truth. Given that not every theory can be correct, some must be disqualified. However, since there is no way of discerning the truth of speculative claims, each philosopher clings to his own position denying that it could be false.

Philosophical reflection would seem relatively safe, on Rousseau's account, if it were not for the corrupting influence that he thinks it has on philosophers and those who pay attention to them. Rousseau accuses philosophers of sacrificing an interest in the truth to amour-propre. He remarks:

Each knows well that his system is no better founded than the others. But he maintains it because it is his. There is not a single one of them who, if he came to know the true and false, would not prefer the lie he has found to the truth discovered by another. Where is the philosopher who would not gladly deceive mankind for his own glory? Where is the one who in the secrecy of his heart sets himself any other goal than that of distinguishing himself? (Emile, pp.268-269).

The philosopher, so perceived, is guilty on two counts. First, he defends his views so tenaciously that concern for the truth is ignored. Second, his admiration of his own intellectual powers and his appreciation for the accolades he receives for

his work blind him to any inadequacies in his thought. He will never surrender his theory because he loves himself and what he has accomplished more than truth itself. He is capable of imposture for the sake of amour-propre. He would willingly deceive to ensure that he benefits from the theory he has constructed. He invites others to admire his impractical, and often dangerous⁵, speculation so that he can benefit.

Rousseau may have a distorted view of the philosophical temperament and the excesses in his depiction may be dismissed as idiosyncratic⁶. He may also underestimate the power of philosophy by restricting meaningful truth to empirically verifiable claims. But, even so, his remarks on the nature of philosophy provide some illustration of why he thinks philosophical reflection is detrimental to human happiness. It increases the potential for self-interested behaviour. Rousseau explicitly links the philosopher's way of thinking to social corruption when he claims that philosophy weakens important communal bonds. He writes that the

⁵ These dangers are obvious, for Rousseau, in sceptical and atheistic philosophy. See, in particular, *Emile*, p.315, where Rousseau draws a correlation between atheism and unnatural egoism. He sees the "inner language of the unbeliever" as one in which everything is "related to me alone".

⁶ He was, after all, almost constantly engaged in feuds with the Philosophes, in particular Voltaire. His tangles with these fellows may have poisoned his view of philosophy. For Rousseau's opinion of Voltaire and other thinkers of his time, see the *Dialogues*, esp. p.219.

philosopher's "vanity grows in exact proportion to his indifference to the rest of the universe" ("Preface to Narcisse", p.549). The result is that,

Family and fatherland are, for him, words void of meaning. He is neither parent, nor citizen, nor man; he is a philosopher. ("Preface to Narcisse", p.549).

The philosopher's preoccupation with abstract theoretical questions prevents him from having a genuine understanding of the human condition. He fails to appreciate the importance of emotional attachments and concentrates his attention on his own esoteric theorizing. All the while, his amour-propre expands. He becomes only interested in how things relate to his philosophical system and the praise he garners from it⁷.

The vanity that motivates the philosopher is not an isolated occurrence. Rousseau finds evidence throughout the society of his times of individuals engaged in reflective activities becoming uncooperative citizens. The inflamed amour-propre of scientists, writers and artists makes them competitive. They, like other unconstrained egoists, seek personal benefit over communal harmony. Hence Rousseau argues that if we take these individuals to be model citizens, we commit a grave error. We hold up the wrong behaviour to be admired and emulated. On this account, Rousseau connects his

⁷ Rousseau writes in the Dialogues that the "proud despotism of modern philosophy has carried the egoism of amour-propre to its furthest extreme" (p.179).

condemnation of reflection to his rejection of political theories that make aggressive, unnatural self-interest the source of community. Rousseau comments on this tendency in the following manner:

Our writers like to regard absolutely everything as "the political masterpiece of the century": the sciences, the arts, luxury, commerce, laws- and all other bonds which, in tightening the social knot with the force of personal interest, make men mutually dependent, give them reciprocal needs and common interests, and require that all pursue the happiness of others in order to be able to pursue their own. ("Preface to Narcisse", p.549)

The drawbacks to this approach are an increased potential for social strife. Rousseau questions whether the apparent benefits of the explanatory weight placed on self-interest compensate for reducing social relations to motives that are hostile to society. In words that echo his criticism of Hobbes, Rousseau asks:

Is it really such a wonderful thing to have made it impossible for men to live together with mutual bigotry, mutual competition, mutual deceit, mutual treason and mutual destruction? ("Preface to Narcisse", p.549).

The more productive gesture is to praise motives that are consistent with the attachments necessary for the maintenance of social cooperation. Intellectuals seem ill-suited for this task, because they cannot appreciate the significance of important relationships, such as those between citizens and between family members. Reflective activities alienate intellectuals from other human beings and vanity prevents them from repenting and restoring the bonds that they denigrate and

weaken.

If we leave aside Rousseau's almost obsessive fascination with the dynamics of vanity, another reading of his comments on reflection emerges. The philosopher, because his thinking is not bound in ways similar to that of the properly socialized citizen, is capable of seeing through the controls exercised within political systems. He takes things such as "fatherland" and "family" to be "words devoid of meaning", because his reflective capacities allow him to take a different stance regarding these practices. He is not committed to ordinary practice. It is this insight that I identified as the philosopher's liberating vision. Rousseau's awareness of the philosopher as spokesman for alternative political possibilities may also make him wary of their disruptive influence in a community. In the end, however, Rousseau's interest in neutralizing forces that undo social bonds overshadows ways in which his position allows for revolutionary powers to be brought into play. Too much reflection, it seems, damages the republic.

The defects of reflection are not limited in kind to those Rousseau identifies with intellectuals. Reflective activities come into conflict with more basic, rudimentary forms of thinking that are taken as essential for human well-being and survival. He sees the development of the arts and sciences as detrimental to the moral character and physical

health of human beings. He explores these themes in detail in the First Discourse and further defends his position in the "Preface to Narcisse", where he declares:

The taste for the arts, letters and philosophy eviscerates both body and soul. Study makes men delicate, weakening their constitution. And once the body loses its strength, the vigor of the soul is maintained only with difficulty. Study exhausts our system, drains our spirit, destroys our vigor and unnerves our courage - and this alone suffices to prove that we are not made for study. ("Preface to Narcisse", p.548).

Physically weak and morally degenerate citizens are the prize offered by a culture that emphasizes reflective activities. The losses that accompany the arts and sciences prevent modern individuals from living up to Rousseau's Spartan ideal. Spartans are better than Rousseau's contemporaries, because "instead of being glued to books", Spartans began their education "by being taught how to steal their dinner" (Emile, p.119). In other words, education is to be fundamentally practical. A scientific or philosophical education is worthless, because "(s)cience is not made for men in general. In pursuing scientific inquiry, he forever loses his way" ("Preface to Narcisse", p.550). In its place, people should be taught what "puts food on the table"; what helps keep them strong and alive.

Rousseau's condemnation of his contemporaries is not merely a result of an intense admiration of the Spartans. He also appeals to his views on human psychology. The problem

with education in abstract arts is that it is contrary to human nature. He writes that,

man is born to act and to think, and not to reflect. Reflection can only make him unhappy, without making him either wiser or better. It makes him regret the good that is past, yet precludes enjoyment of the present. It proffers a happy future only to seduce his imagination and torment his desires; and it proffers an unhappy future so that he may suffer it in advance. ("Preface to Narcisse", p.550).

Here Rousseau touches on issues that I have already investigated. He points to the power of imagination as a source of unhappiness. By expanding our horizons, it increases our desires and the potential for disappointment. But more importantly, Rousseau asserts that human beings are not suited for intellectual, reflective activities. Although these capacities are innate, human beings would be better off without them. They should act without engaging in a high degree of speculation or contemplation. Human mental activities are to be limited to what is required for action. Human beings are "born to act and to think" in the sense that they should rely on common sense judgments, such as those I described previously, that recreate the conditions of instinct. Anything more than this amount of thinking is both unnecessary and counter-productive.

The significance Rousseau's critique of reflection has for his political project is that he seeks to limit human beings to a life resembling that of natural man. We cannot

live isolated in the woods, as natural man did, but we can approximate the life of a "free being whose heart is at peace and whose body is healthy" (Second Discourse, p.127) by avoiding enervating and corrupting intellectual activities. For Rousseau, "the simple, uniform, and solitary way of life, prescribed to us by nature" (Second Discourse, p.110) is destroyed by the discovery of reflection. He concludes that "the state of reflection is a state contrary to nature and the man who meditates is a depraved animal" (Second Discourse, p.110). The defect of reflective thinking is that it undermines instinct. Instinct, as I have noted, supplies non-reflective practical knowledge. In this regard, it is possible to see Rousseau's claim that there are only a limited number of truths that a person needs to know as an invocation of his other claim that when conditions are right instinct can provide all that is necessary. Rousseau's devotion to practical knowledge appears, therefore, to be another statement of his desire for the replication of instinct in non-natural circumstances.

In its political dimensions, Rousseau's fear of reflection makes him appear to be the philosophical equivalent of the individual who invented the practices of the people living on "the banks of the Orinoco". In describing the practices of the natives of that region, Rousseau concludes:

It would be horrible to be obliged to praise as a

beneficent being the one who first suggested to the inhabitant of the banks of the Orinoco the use of those pieces of wood which he binds on the temples of his children, and which assure them at least part of their imbecility and original happiness. (Second Discourse, p.115).

Rousseau may propose a more subtle, less obtrusive means of achieving his goal, but the result is the same. He does not bind the skull, but he does bind the minds of the citizens who inhabit his proposed communities. The aim of socialization processes is the imposition of limits on thinking that approximate those that Rousseau takes to be natural to human beings. The recommendation is for political and social arrangements that reproduce natural "imbecility" and "original happiness".

Substantial evidence of Rousseau's praise of the natural happiness of human beings is found in the First Discourse. Rousseau describes how nature itself "conspires" to keep human beings in this state of ignorance. Nature, when left alone, works to conceal unnecessary truths from human beings. Rousseau poetically envisions nature to be a divine female presence and describes her actions as beneficial to human existence. He writes:

The heavy veil with which she covered all her operations seemed to warn us adequately that she did not destine us for vain studies. Is there even one of her lessons from which we have we have known to profit, or which we have neglected with impunity? Peoples, know once and for all that nature wanted to keep you from being harmed by knowledge just as a mother wrests a dangerous weapon from her child's hand; that all the secrets she hides from you

are so many evils from which she protects you...
(First Discourse, p.47).

Rousseau's remarks demonstrate that he thinks that human beings should only know those things that nature makes readily available. Even more interesting, however, is his use of words that attribute deception to nature. Nature "covers" and "hides" certain truths for the benefit of human beings. It is exactly this kind of deception that Rousseau advocates in political life. The system he develops continues nature's work by legitimately concealing those things that can be of harm. Given that Rousseau does not think we should demand that nature reveal everything, a similar conclusion is available in regard to political matters. Political knowledge is, in this respect, a "dangerous weapon" and we should avoid the reflective activities that place it in the hands of those who are not suited for it.

The realization that deception is not only the work of human beings prompts another revision of Rousseau's position. If his anthropomorphic description of nature is treated as metaphorical, then it is possible to conclude that nature deceives, without intending to be deceptive. The implication of this conclusion from my reading of Rousseau's political project is that the presence of deceptive forces does not have to be attributed to the intentions of any particular individual. Political and social systems conceal certain

truths about themselves without it being the case that anyone is directly responsible for this deceit. One benefit to be derived from this claim is that the law-giver can be assigned a more peripheral role in Rousseau's project. The law-giver designs and revises political institutions and practices, but he may not anticipate all of the effects of his plan. The fact that certain elements of his plan remain hidden from the citizens he aids is not necessarily what he intended. In this regard, the need for the law-giver to be "god-like" is further diminished. His knowledge of good political institutions and practices does not necessarily include complete awareness of their effects.

Limitations in the powers of the law-giver entail that political institutions and practices have a life of their own. Their deceptive aspects are not necessarily designed. They can be produced independently of the will of any agent. So understood, Rousseau's recommendations for social and political improvement cease to appear exceedingly utopian. Rousseau prescribes certain approaches to political problems, but his position allows for the possibility that the forces that direct political life operate independently of human intention. The control sought over political life is lessened because certain dimensions of political systems cannot be controlled. Much of it is external to our will and cannot be completely anticipated.

However, the claim that deception can be an unavoidable and non-intentional component of political systems creates its own problems. It seems, on such a view, that individuals' control over their lives is further diminished. They become part of systems that they cannot fully understand. Rousseau, in allowing for deception to go unchallenged, is vulnerable to a reiteration of the accusation that his views are fundamentally illiberal. He envisions political systems in which the potential of individuals to develop into rational, intelligent citizens is denied. The individual is, without his knowledge or consent, forced to be an imbecile who only knows what is required for basic survival. The citizen is viewed as a child incapable of correctly using the knowledge that reflection provides. He lives in a society that he cannot comprehend fully and which he cannot shape for his own purposes.

Rousseau does, at times, speak as if individual concerns are incidental. He does not help his case by presenting an overly simplified method for determining whether a political system is truly advantageous. He suggests that the best way of testing whether a state is working properly is to look at how its population grows⁸. He writes:

⁸ If we take Rousseau seriously on this point, then it is no wonder that he thinks that all societies necessarily deteriorate. Coupled with his other claim that small states are invariably the best, the paradoxical conclusion is that as a state

What is the end of the political association? It is the preservation and prosperity of its members. And what is the surest sign that they are preserved and prospering? It is their number and their population. Therefore, do not seek this much disputed sign elsewhere. All other things being equal, the government under which - without external aid, without naturalization, without colonies - the citizens populate and multiply is infallibly the best. One under which a people grows smaller and dwindles away is the worst. (Social Contract, p.96)

Although Rousseau predicates his remarks on the claim that the welfare of individuals is the most important factor, he proceeds to reduce the concerns of individuals to a preoccupation with reproduction. As long as citizens feel comfortable enough to have children and, if their offspring are capable of surviving, then the system is working. While the presence of material resources that support life may contribute to the way we judge the success of a government, they are not "infallibly the best" signs⁹. What Rousseau neglects is that the worth of a political system is also judged on how the individuals fare in terms of the quality of life available. Having the material resources for reproducing and sustaining life is essential, but making this the sole concern of politics is to be satisfied with what Glaucon, in Plato's Republic, calls a "city of pigs"¹⁰. Human life is

thrives and grows, it becomes a larger, and hence, weakened state.

⁹ Current problems related to population growth reveal that growth is not always a sign of prosperity and stability.

¹⁰ Plato Republic Book II 372d.

more complex than Rousseau's measure of good government allows. People must not only multiply, they must enjoy access to various goods that have little to do with survival.

The fact that Rousseau overlooks the role governments play in sustaining cultural and intellectual pursuits is not unexpected. His reduction of individual concerns to a basic interest in survival is a symptom of his preoccupation with what is essentially practical. For Rousseau, human existence should be governed by necessity, and even though it is possible to feel free, it is still essential to become accustomed to living within limits. Thus the young Emile is educated so that he knows what is possible.

Necessity weighs heavy on him too often for him still to balk at it. He bears its yoke from his birth. Now he is accustomed to it. He is always ready for anything.
(Emile, p.161).

Emile is prepared for all situations, because he has limited desires and needs. Emile would be at home in a "city of pigs", because he is immune from the lure of luxury. Luxury creates problems because it requires having more than one needs or having things that one does not need. The unnatural desires stimulated by exposure to luxury undermine our ability to adjust to changes in fortune. To be distracted by luxury is to lose sight of what is required for self-preservation. Pursuing the unnecessary makes us forget what is necessary.

In Emile's case, the struggle against luxury is

evident in everything from the way his room is decorated to his choice of clothes¹¹. Rousseau even holds that certain careers can be considered luxurious. Emile cannot be trained merely to be the member of an idle class of "gentlemen". He must have a trade that serves him in all circumstances. So he is trained to be a carpenter because it is a practical occupation that is required in all societies¹². Rousseau summarizes the tutor's dedication to what is practical in the following terms.

Let my student be destined for the sword, the church, the bar. I do not care. Prior to the calling of his parents is nature's call to human life. Living is the job I want to teach. On leaving my hands, he will, I admit, be neither magistrate nor soldier nor priest. He will, in the first place, be a man. (Emile, pp-41-42)

The impetus for the restrictions Rousseau places on Emile's occupation and on what goods a culture provides is his dissatisfaction with how unnecessary activities and goods undermine our ability to survive. Human well-being suffers because of pursuits that we mistakenly think improve our situation.

Rousseau's devotion to austere ways of life is evident in his romanticized visions of European peasants and Spartan

¹¹ See Emile, p. 93 and p. 127 respectively.

¹² Emile, pp.199-202.

citizens¹³. It is visible, as well, in the limits he seeks to implement in regard to ways of thinking. The philosophical, reflective way of life is doomed on both fronts. As an occupation, it is unnecessary for well-being. As a general intellectual disposition, it destroys the basic, natural restrictions that govern human thought. Rousseau's "city of pigs" is a city of people who live without the luxuries of material and intellectual goods that he sees as in vogue in the modern world. The limitations of Rousseau's program, not surprisingly, encounter resistance from our modern sensibilities. However, in the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter Five, I argue that although Rousseau in no way retreats from his stand regarding opulence, he does provide a means of escaping some of the limits he imposes on reflection. His program may not allow for philosophy to become the paradigm of thought, but he does enable us to be reflective in regard to political and emotional matters. Political reflection is enabling, because it allows citizens to contribute something of substance to political deliberation. Emotional reflection is equally, if not more, essential in that it allows for forms of communication that support social relationships. Each of these varieties of reflection comes with its own set of limitations, but they do permit a more

¹³ See Shklar's Men and Citizens for a discussion of these two ideals.

enhanced form of intellectual life than Rousseau's general comments on reflection seem to allow.

2. Reflection, Travel and Political Wisdom.

If Rousseau's diatribe against the perversity of reflection is taken seriously, there is little need for political institutions beyond those that shape the will of the citizen. The process of socialization would require nothing more than methods for ensuring that by the time an individual is prepared to take his place in society, his will has been properly controlled. Although Rousseau's texts indicate that he would accept political systems that exacted such obedience, he also permits individuals to assume a more contemplative stance regarding their political situation. The reason why he retreats from his more strident demands regarding the necessity of control may be attributed to an awareness of the impracticality of achieving such control. Control over the will of an individual does not entail that the behaviour of an individual can be determined completely in advance. Specifically, Rousseau must provide citizens with ways of coping with novel and unpredictable developments. In a move similar to the one presented in his discussion of learned instinct, Rousseau allows experience to shape individuals so they can fit their environment. Given his desire to prepare individuals for all contingencies, Rousseau must allow for spontaneous problem solving and decision-making. Otherwise,

citizens would be left defenceless if their situation altered. Even if an authority, such as Emile's tutor, can mould the will of another, he cannot guarantee that he has anticipated all the variables that an individual can encounter. Political reflection is required as a way of supplementing the socialization process.

As evidence of Rousseau's insistence that a variety of reflection must come into play in human socialization, consider his willingness to subject pupils to lessons concerning political matters. Emile, because he must enter society as an active citizen, must understand the nature of political life. The tutor chides Emile for assuming that these lessons are unnecessary and points to the practical importance they have. He remarks:

In aspiring to the status of husband and father, have you meditated enough upon its duties? When you become the head of a family, you are going to become a member of the state and do you know what it is to be a member of the state? Do you know what government, laws and fatherland are? Do you know what the price is of your being permitted to live and for whom you ought to die? You believe you have learned everything and you still know nothing. Before taking a place in civil society, learn to know it and to know what rank in it suits you. (Emile, p.448)

In undertaking a political education, Emile is given an understanding of the basic requirements of social and political responsibility. His introduction to these matters is a truncated version of Rousseau's own Social Contract. The questions that such a study answers require the pupil to adopt

a reflective stance toward his political situation and how it shapes his life.

Rousseau appears inconsistent, because Emile is apparently being made to philosophize about political matters. Emile reflects in order to achieve a mastery of politics. The charge of inconsistency does not hold, because Rousseau distinguishes Emile's lessons from the "science of political right" (Emile, p.458). In fact, Rousseau denies that there can be such a thing as a "science of political right". He asserts that this science is "yet to be born, and it is to be presumed that it will never be born" (Emile, p.458). By "science of political right", I take Rousseau to mean the abstract formulation of the general principles of government as they apply to each and every situation. Such an exercise would be philosophical, but Rousseau denies that this science is possible. The axiomatic statement of political principles ignores the importance of particular and localized developments within political communities. Thus the aspiration to understand politics abstractly yields a "great and useless science" (Emile, p.458).

Rousseau does, however, believe that some features of the failed science of political right must filter into a proper approach to politics. Unlike Montesquieu, who Rousseau sees as concentrating only on the "positive right of established governments" (Emile, p.458), a teacher of true

political understanding combines the search for principles with a study of existing practices. He writes that "whoever wants to make healthy judgments about existing governments is obliged to unite the two. It is necessary to know what ought to be in order to judge soundly about what is" (Emile, p.458). Rousseau envisions a form of reflection that brings together the abstract speculation and prescriptions of the theorist with the wisdom derived from experience¹⁴. By claiming that the formulation of principles must be bound by the discoveries of experience, Rousseau seeks a compromise that prevents the rampant, speculative thinking he takes to be the downfall of pure philosophy. His interest is in maintaining a fundamentally practical orientation to political life. The citizen is allowed to reflect, but his reflection must not stray from practical issues.

The practicality of Rousseau's position extends to his suggestions on how the lessons of politics can be taught to individuals that have been educated to be practical. Emile

¹⁴ Rousseau writes "One must construct a standard to which measurements one makes can be related. Our principles of political right are the standard. Our measurements are the political laws of each country" (Emile, p.458). The implication of this formula seems to be that the practices of nations supply models that can be judged only by a consideration of certain abstract principles. Principles in themselves cannot yield such models, but these models cannot be understood without principles that allow for some comparison. We have, in this approach, reflection combined with experience to yield judgments concerning political realities.

might shun political education, because it may appear irrelevant to his more mundane concerns. Rousseau says this indifference can be counteracted by appealing to the pupil's practical nature. The tutor must structure his lessons to answer two basic questions regarding politics, namely "What importance does it have for me? and What can I do about it?" (Emile, p.458). By respecting these concerns, the tutor attracts his student's attention without having to condone the study of philosophy. The pupil is intrigued and wishes to discover certain things about his political situation so that he can benefit. His knowledge is expanded through reflective pursuits that avoid the traps of philosophical abstraction.

My reading of Rousseau may be open to the accusation that the emphasis on practical matters in political education conceals egoistic motives. Emile's interest in politics, if truly inspired by questions of how it benefits him personally, entails that his concern is self-interested. He apparently has no interest in how political developments affect others or the community in general. Emile is comparable to the maximal egoist who only enters into social and political associations on the basis of instrumental calculations. However, this criticism of Rousseau may be overstated in that Emile has been educated to be self-interested without being egoistic. He listens to amour-de-soi, but he does not feel the pull of amour-propre. His education is designed to make him a natural

man capable of living within society. In remarking on Emile's "savage nature", Rousseau notes:

Emile is not a savage to be relegated to the desert. He is a savage made to inhabit cities. He has to know how to find necessities in them, to take advantage of their inhabitants and to live, if not like them, at least with them. (Emile, p.205).

Although this description minimizes the amount of attachment that Emile feels toward other citizens, it does not make him a vain and competitive egoist. It is important to remember that he is not inclined to avoid duties and obligations, because he has been conditioned so as to feel the proper sentiments when exposed to the suffering of others. He remains a good citizen, although his character is considerably different¹⁵.

The vehicle that is proposed to capitalize on Emile's nascent interest in political life is travel. Travel provides the aspiring citizen with experiences of numerous and varied political and social practices. The experience of these differences provides the citizen with material for contemplation. He can put his observations to use in order make his own judgments regarding political matters. In outlining the form travel should take if it is to be

¹⁵ The difference in his character from that of other idealized citizens, such as those presented in the Social Contract, can be attributed to the fact that Emile is being fashioned to fit into existing society, instead of having a society fashioned for him.

educational, Rousseau follows guidelines he has already established. First, he distances actual travel from reading about travel. Reading books about other countries and peoples cannot be a substitute for actual, first-hand experience. The consumption of travelogues is described in terms that resemble Rousseau's condemnation of abstract, reflective activities. The reader of these books is presented with a plethora of contradictory accounts. Rousseau writes in a tone reminiscent of his frustration with the competing views of philosophers that

I have spent my life reading accounts of travel, and I have never found two which have given me the same idea of the same people. In comparing the little that I could observe myself with what I have read, I have ended by dropping the travellers and regretting the time I have spent reading them. I am quite convinced that in matters of observation of every kind one must not read, one must see. (Emile, p.451).

Relying on the accounts of other travellers puts one in the undesirable position of accepting a report that is shaped by the prejudices of another. In this regard, both the travel writer and the philosopher are in position to manipulate and exploit the ignorance of others by making claims that readers are not in a position to verify immediately¹⁶. The travel

¹⁶ We can, of course, confirm or disaffirm the traveller's claims by inspecting foreign places ourselves, which we cannot do with abstract metaphysical speculation. But until, or unless, we have travelled, we are unable to check the traveller's claims, which is analogous to what happens in regard to philosophical theories.

writer, however, may also be guilty of the crime of deliberately misleading the public, whereas the philosopher appears to act out of ignorance. But both persist in guiding individuals instead of letting them utilize their own common sense. If we add to this situation that some individuals may be likely to spread untruths for the sake of their own aggrandizement, we reencounter the imposture that Rousseau attributes to the philosopher. It is difficult enough, Rousseau says, to trust sincere and genuine accounts recorded by honest writers, but, he asks, "What is the situation when one has, in addition, to discern the truth through their lies and bad faith!" (Emile, p.451). It seems that what is added is the vice of the philosopher. It is the asserting of things that others are not in a position to verify in order to enhance one's reputation.

First-hand experience is a necessary but not sufficient condition of proper travel. The instructive quality of travel is as well a product of properly conducted observation. Here we once again see the shortcomings of the philosophical reflective method. Rousseau asserts that the knowledge "one extracts from travel is related to the aim that causes travel to be undertaken" (Emile, p.454). Using travel to supply material for philosophical reflection makes travel into a vehicle for one's prejudices. Hence when the aim of travel is "a system of philosophy, the traveller never sees

anything but what he wants to see" (Emile, p.454)¹⁷.

Rejecting the idea that travel can be undertaken in the name of a philosophical system does not entail, however, that travel should not be systematic. Travel must have a specific purpose, otherwise it ceases to be practical. As Rousseau puts it:

Travel - taken as part of education - ought to have its rules. To travel for the sake of travelling is to wander, to be a vagabond. To travel to inform oneself is still too vague an aim. Instruction which has no determined goal is nothing. (Emile, p.455).

Steps must, therefore, be taken to give Emile a "palpable interest" in travelling. As I have already noted, this interest is confined to his personal concern for his own well-being. He travels to gain insights that he can apply in his political life. Without this purpose, he will wander aimlessly and not learn what travel has to offer.

Emile, to achieve his goals, must travel in a fashion that ensures that he is not exposed to the wrong sights. Inappropriately conducted travel, where one is exposed to dull and uninformative sights or where one only engages in morally

¹⁷ It is difficult to think of an example of how travel would aid the construction of a philosophical system. After all, philosophy's speculative bent makes it overly occupied with abstract, non-empirical claims. How travel would supplement such theorizing is not clear. In this context, Rousseau may have in mind philosophical systems that concern human nature or certain areas of natural science, such as geology and metallurgy, that require some form of empirical verification. Nevertheless, for my purposes, his rejection of "philosophical travel" is a further example of his distrust of certain forms of reflection.

corrupting activities, is worse than not travelling. Emile does not frequent museums or salons¹⁸, because these do not provide information useful for understanding his own political situation. Museums, and for that matter, libraries, galleries and historical monuments, do not interest Emile, because these places present images of the past¹⁹. They do not reveal enough about current practices so that Emile can make judgments regarding his times²⁰. Salons, and other frivolous entertainments, offer only lessons in vice and idleness that Emile has been trained to abhor²¹. He would find nothing of practical merit in joining such circles, at home or abroad. He is bored by anything that does not directly relate to the task at hand. For similar reasons, Emile does not spend much time in large cities. For Rousseau, cities, because they all seem the same, do not offer much diversity in terms of practices and institutions. Having been exposed to Parisian life

18 Emile, p.467.

19 Emile, pp.467-468.

20 Rousseau underestimates the value of historical understanding. For more on history, see Emile, pp.110-112. We can, of course, attribute Rousseau's distrust of history to his unwillingness to trust the prejudices of others. History, on this view, does not give us truth, rather it gives us images that others want us to believe.

21 Emile, p.467.

already, Emile has no need of Rome or London²². He confines his search to the countryside where it is more likely that native practices are preserved.

The purposes that inspire travel specify what locations one must visit. As well, proper travel requires stipulations concerning the amount of travel undertaken. Too much or too little travel reduces its value. Rousseau claims that "Just as the least cultured peoples are generally the wisest, so those who travel least are the ones who travel best" (Emile, p.452). Curiously enough, the "least cultured peoples" are exactly those individuals who Rousseau sees as withstanding the onslaught of reflection endemic to modern societies. They lack culture, because they lack artistic and intellectual pretence. However, they still display a form of wisdom; wisdom that is respected by Rousseau for its practical nature. In relation to travel, the need is for the amount of travel that engenders similar wisdom. Too much travel subverts wisdom by making travel mundane. The world-weary traveller ceases to observe, because he thinks he has "seen it all". Too little or no travel, quite obviously, prevents one from having a wide enough appreciation of different ways of life. Rousseau's project requires the maintenance of a tenuous

22 See Emile, p.468. For more analysis of Rousseau's views on the nature of cities, refer to Ellison's "Rousseau and the Modern City".

balance between travel that inspires boredom and travel that sustains ignorance.

The claim that overexposure makes travel tedious and uninformative returns us to a theme we have encountered already. In analyzing the power of signs, I noted that familiarity was required for them to have effect, but too much familiarity weakened their hold. A similar dynamic emerges in the context of travel. Too much travel undoes the fascination travel should inspire and too little prevents travel from having the appropriate effect. Both the question of the power of signs and the question of travel point to the regimentation of novelty that is essential for Rousseau's overall project. In this respect, it returns us to the issue of the imagination. Travel, pictured in this context, is describable as a means to excite the imagination. By travelling, individuals encounter practices that they can use to transfigure their own circumstances. In applying its lessons to their own situations, they are able to envision alternative practices and modes of government by imagining how these practices would change the way they do things²³. Even though travel is introduced as a supplement to experience, its power

²³ In this respect, we discover the point in Rousseau's discussion where the dissemination of new ideas aids political vision. When individuals who have been properly socialized can reflect on the nature of their community, then it is reasonable to allow new ideas to become the basis for political innovation.

is felt through the imagination. In turn the need to regulate the amount of travel is also understood as an expression of the need to regulate the imagination. Wrongly conducted travel can lead to an excess or dearth of imagination. An excess of imagination inspires the fanciful revisionism that disrupts social cohesion by offering radical and impractical alternatives that undermine existing social relationships and attachments. A dearth of imagination mars social existence by preventing individuals from developing a reflective understanding of their situation. However, if travel is undertaken in compliance with Rousseau's dictates, it serves political stability by adding the correct amount of imaginative reflection to the individual's otherwise limited thinking processes. So understood, travel fosters the capacity for reflective judgments that citizens must be able to make, without alienating them from their social circumstances in the way that unguided reflection does.

The experience travel provides is not restricted to what arises from the first-hand experience of foreign places and practices. Travel is useful as a means of cultivating enriching relationships with people from other lands. After returning home, friendships with foreigners can be sustained through written correspondence. There is considerable merit in these exchanges, because they give the citizen access to an outsider's opinion of one's own country. Unlike travelogues,

which provide knowledge of foreign places, letters received from foreigners provide knowledge of one's own place. They aid reflection by supplying a new and different viewpoint on familiar circumstances. Rousseau describes the virtues of correspondence in the following terms,

Not only is it sometimes useful and always agreeable to carry on correspondence with distant countries, but it is also an excellent precaution against the empire of national prejudices which attack us throughout life and sooner or later get some hold on us. Nothing is more likely to deprive such prejudices of their hold than disinterested interchange with sensible people whom one esteems. Since they do not have our prejudices and combat them with their own, they give us the means to pit one set of prejudices unceasingly against the other and thus to guarantee ourselves from them all. (Emile, p.471).

The insights of "sensible men" from foreign lands provide a fresh perspective that invites us to revise our attitudes. In this way, travel is supplemented so that once we return home we do not immediately forget what we have learned²⁴.

The insights communicated through correspondence are similar in genesis to the insights essential to the law-giver's vision. The "sensible man" who writes letters regarding the affairs of other nations assumes a stance analogous to that taken by the law-giver. Both require a detached outside perspective and freedom from self-interested

²⁴ Here we reencounter the significance of memory in political contexts. The letters received from foreign correspondents operate in a way analogous to the signs I discussed in Chapter 3. They remind of us important events and observations when we are no longer exposed to them and, thus, sustaining their power.

prejudices²⁵. The implication is that sincere letter writers from other countries can be taken to be good models of the kind of visionaries capable of directing political reform. These individuals occupy a privileged position from which they can persuade others who may be too immersed in political realities to achieve proper understanding²⁶. Such "sensible men" have a distance from political life that aids communities rather than hindering them.

Rousseau holds that exposure to foreign practices and customs may provide political wisdom. Individuals who travel and correspond with people from other geographical areas may have a greater reflective understanding of their own political situation. However, the scope of this increased understanding has limitations. Citizens must remain committed to their communities, even if they can imagine ways these communities should change. Rousseau avoids advocating a complete, generalized study of politics. Too much reflection on important social matters leads, in Rousseau's mind, to the

²⁵ It is for similar reasons that Rousseau praises the ancients for allowing foreigners to design their constitutions. See Social Contract, p. 68.

²⁶ In this regard, Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France can be read as an outsider's attempt to offer insight into a situation that citizens may have been too immersed in to understand. The fact that the Reflections take the form of personal correspondence adds to its standing as an example of what Rousseau has in mind.

deterioration of the communal fabric²⁷. In this regard, Rousseau appears to leave the more troublesome aspects of his position untouched. The socializing emotions that are central to communal cohesion are apparently not open to question. Guided primarily by feelings and passions, citizens may be prone to engaging in destructive activities. They will not be in a position to stand back and determine the appropriateness of their behaviour.

A negative reading of Rousseau's views on emotion finds further support in his insistence on the social control of emotions. The use of mechanisms for instilling certain emotional dispositions in citizens is seen to be contrary to the principles of just politics. Chapman encapsulates this claim in the following way:

Intense social spirit- namely patriotism - based on deliberate conditioning of man, may so weaken his capacity for rational insight that he is deprived not only of conscience and social interest but also of moral freedom.²⁸

The deliberate manufacturing of "intense social spirit" leads, on Chapman's interpretation, to political extremism. People cease to have the proper avenues for determining correct actions. Rampant emotions presuppose excessive control and

²⁷ "One often compromises in regard to one's duties by dint of reflecting on them and ends up replacing real things with abstract talk." (Emile, p.408.).

²⁸ John Chapman, Rousseau- Totalitarian or Liberal?, p. 56.

make available a compliant citizenry. Chapman's criticism, however, does not hold if the restraints that Rousseau seeks to impose on the individual's will and imagination are by nature imperfect. There is quite definitely reason to suppose that the total control of the imagination is not possible. The freedom that defines imagination may be suppressed but it can never be annihilated. One may try to enchain imagination, but the control exercised is only as good as the devices employed.

Rousseau is aware of the potential for mechanisms of social control to lose hold over individuals. In The Social Contract, he bemoans the fact that at the instant of its creation, the well-ordered republic has already begun to decay. He writes, "The body politic, like the human body, begins to die at the moment of its birth, and carries within itself the causes of its destruction" (Social Contract, p.98). Political arrangements are victims of entropy. They fall apart because the forces used in the service of political control can become uncontrollable. This tendency is more than visible in Rousseau's analysis of how magistrates usurp sovereign authority²⁹ and it is present in the observation that imagination is an instrument of freedom as much as it is a vehicle for control. Relying on the imagination to foster social harmony leaves open the possibility that its power to

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Social Contract, p.98.

provide alternative visions may undermine social cohesion. Imagination may be taken captive, but like an enslaved man, it can reclaim its freedom.

In light of the limits to Rousseau's program, it is necessary to find ways of enabling individuals so they can reflect on the nature of their emotions. If political control of the source of passions is imperfect, individuals must be given the resources for appraising their emotions. Political life is aided by capacities that allow for some revision or reevaluation of feelings and the actions following from them. Without such resources, individuals will be unable to cope with the gaps left by social design. However, for social cooperation to remain viable, reflection must be directed in a fashion that is consistent with group interests. In other words, it is not only essential that citizens can reflect, but that they reflect in a manner that is not overtly or directly hostile to the community. Education must help shape the way individuals think about their emotions and actions so that the result is not a haphazard assemblage of decisions that only serve individual interest. Social control may never be total and complete but its limits do not entail that it is necessary to surrender all efforts to influence individual reflection. In the next chapter I explore the means that Rousseau provides that enable individuals to understand their emotions. Being able to judge the appropriateness of emotions is necessary for

citizens if they are to control their behavior. Emotional reflection is, in this regard, a precondition for citizenship. It allows individuals to adjust their emotional reactions so that they are suited to communal existence.

V. Emotions and the Excesses of Community.

1. Patriotism, Narcissism, and Difference.

The degree to which we gauge the acceptability of Rousseau's vision depends on how convincing we find his analysis of human emotions. If he characterizes emotions in such a way that they appear to be immune from the powers of reflection, then the citizens of his proposed community may seem to be nothing more than zealots mindlessly devoted to whatever feelings they happen to possess. But the requirement that emotions be brought under some form of control is useless unless it can be shown how individuals can learn to temper their emotions. In this respect, we can argue that in order for citizens to meaningfully reflect on the nature of their emotions, they must be instructed through the use of appropriate models. Such models stimulate the imagination and show individuals how to think about their emotions. In this chapter, I examine Rousseau's presentation of models of emotional reflection to demonstrate their place in his overall project as well as to establish how they contribute to the education of citizens.

I start with a consideration of Rousseau's Confessions. Examples that spur emotional reflection abound in the Confessions. It is a work that provides access to sophisticated and sensitive contemplation of human emotions.

Rousseau thinks that he is the perfect individual to write such a work, because feeling is his milieu. He declares that he felt before he thought¹. The book is a presentation of his life in terms of his emotional experiences. Its lessons are, in a sense, analogous to those of travel. The aim of both is to provide individuals with alternative viewpoints. However, unlike the reflections engendered by travel, which focus strictly on social and political practices, Rousseau's personal writings concentrate on emotional possibilities.

Rousseau's gift for emotional analysis is more than apparent in his remembrance of how, when employed as a servant, he accused another of a crime he committed. The crime itself was a minor one. Rousseau stole a ribbon from his employer. He intended it to be a present for a young woman, Marion, who worked in the kitchen of the estate. However, when the ribbon was discovered in his possession, he claimed that it was a gift from her. Because of this action, he is haunted by considerable feelings of guilt.

This cruel memory troubles me at times and so disturbs me that in my sleepless hours I see this poor girl coming to reproach me for my crime, as if I committed it yesterday. (Confessions, p.88)

Rousseau's memory of the incident is a source of discomfort. He remembers the events that transpired and is forced to contemplate the damage he has caused. Moreover, he is troubled

¹ Confessions, p.19.

even though he does not know the exact, long-term consequences of his action. He surmises that Marion would have difficulty finding employment elsewhere, but he has no proof that she has suffered extensively because of what he did. In this regard, Rousseau's feelings are sustained by his imagination. He accuses himself of causing great suffering, because he imagines how his behaviour has hurt others. Rousseau cannot escape his feelings because his imagination works in such a fashion that it forces him to consider the wrongs for which he could be held responsible.

Rousseau in committing his crime is guilty of an indiscretion similar to the one committed by the self-serving stag hunter. He takes the path of least resistance and does so to avoid personal discomfort. Rousseau does not stop to ponder how his accusation will effect the other party. His intent, however, was not to harm someone else. He writes, "Never was deliberate wickedness further from intention than at that cruel moment" (Confessions, p.88). Rousseau is, therefore, not governed by amour-propre. He does not hope to look better at the expense of another.

I saw nothing but the horror of being found out, of being publicly proclaimed, to my face, as a thief, a liar and a slanderer. Utter confusion robbed me of all other feeling. If I had been allowed a moment to come to my senses, I most certainly would have admitted everything. (Confessions, p.88)

Rousseau's misdeeds are produced by the pressure of the

moment. He says his crime "amounted to no more than weakness" (Confessions, p.89). If he had been more mature or had greater strength of character, he would not have committed a crime or blamed another for his actions. He would have had the resolve to behave virtuously.

Guilt, for Rousseau, is part of a learning experience. He notes that he has "derived some benefit from the terrible impression" of the incident (Confessions, p.89). It has ensured that he will not undertake any action "that might prove criminal in its results" (Confessions, p.89). By offering it as part of his memoir, Rousseau not only alleviates his conscience through confession, but also instructs. He shows that it is important not to act callously. Following immediate impulses can lead to unnecessary negative consequences. Certain actions must be avoided if we can anticipate how they will harm others. Rousseau, if he had engaged in even the most superficial reflection, should have known that he could hurt Marion. His example, therefore, makes a direct appeal to pity. As well, it shows that such neglect may result in powerful feelings of personal anguish. Hence he makes an implicit appeal to amour-de-soi. The interest in one's own well-being is not necessarily served by what appears to be the best at the moment.

In political terms the value of Rousseau's analysis is in showing that having a feeling is not all that is needed to

justify an action. Rousseau cannot defend his action, because it was motivated by an improper impulse. Similarly, patriotic citizens cannot act only on impulse because the results of their actions may be regrettable. By following immediate impulses, rash patriots cannot be certain that they are not creating suffering for others. Given that patriotic feeling, as an expression of concern for others, is an extension of pity, patriots should be wary of the potential that their actions have to contribute to suffering. If socialized in the proper fashion, patriots should be willing to consider the ramifications of their actions. They will be prompted to temper their actions with some degree of reflection. However, this reflection does not destroy all patriotic attachments. Individuals can still feel strongly about their community. What reflection changes is the relationship between these feelings and individual actions. If an action increases the potential for the suffering of others, then it is not compatible with the emotion that inspired it. By reflecting before acting on emotion, individuals can be truer to basic emotions.

A complementary stance toward emotional reflection is observable in the Emile. In an attempt to protect his pupil from the negative effects of violent anger, the tutor persuades him that uncontrollable rage is an illness. Rousseau's main objective is to demonstrate that knowledge of

abstract terminology is not necessary for moral education. A young pupil is not ready to understand the complicated language normally associated with morality, but since he will be exposed to situations that invite moral judgment, some instruction is required. Hence it is feasible to introduce these lessons in terms of more rudimentary notions, such as illness. However, in addition to Rousseau's proposed intentions, his example indicates that emotional matters are open to social appraisal. The tutor is, in effect, informing his pupil that violent displays of emotion are deviations from normal patterns and can be the subject of negative assessment. At a later date, Emile applies what he has learned by informing a woman he sees consumed by anger that she is terribly ill and that he pities her². In this respect, he has understood the standard used by his tutor and applied it in similar circumstances to inform someone else that there is something wrong with their behavior. Emile adopts a reflective stance regarding the emotions of others. He is in a position to discern when certain kinds of emotions are considered to be departures from socially acceptable norms. Emotional reflection is not merely confined to anticipating the consequences of one's own feelings and actions. It also operates in situations where we have qualms about the feelings

² Emile, pp.96-97.

of others.

Observing that judgments can be made about the emotions of others brings us back to the socializing function of opinion. Assessing the feelings of others is equivalent to formulating opinions. Such appraisal is, as well, an extension of the interest that individuals have in each other's well-being. If an individual can identify with the condition of others, that individual will not hide from judgment. The individual will be interested in how emotions and actions are perceived and respond accordingly. When others are open to our concerns, we are in a position to exploit this concern to influence their actions. We are able to bring forces such as shame and remorse into play as part of the regulation of conduct. Judgment is not in this context the spokesman for amour-propre. It is a means for communicating and understanding how we feel about the consequences of our emotions and actions. In decisions that have political ramifications, the need is for the exchange of opinions on emotions so that agreement can be reached regarding what is appropriate. Zealous patriots may accept the analysis of their emotions as offered by their fellow citizens, because it is concern for others that is the foundation of communal sentiments. The communal exchange of opinions regarding emotions, therefore, constitutes a further barrier against the possible excesses of patriotism.

My conclusions presuppose that the harm done by non-reflective actions is to individuals for whom we may have some basic concern. However, the intolerance associated with extreme patriotism may be founded on the disavowal of emotional attachment. For example, the energetic, communally minded neo-Nazi persecutes and tortures those individuals that fail to be included in his or her vision of community. Such an individual may be made to reflect so as to avoid personal harm or inflicting injury on other members of the group. However, there is no compulsion to respect those taken to be outsiders. Moreover, if one's fellow citizens have been so directed that they accept animosity toward outsiders as an emotion beyond reproach, then social appraisal and opinion are not formidable obstacles. One can imagine members of a community who operate with a homogenous perspective regarding their emotions, which includes disdain for foreigners. There is no diversity of opinion standing in their way. On these grounds, Rousseau encounters a reformulation of the accusation that his project is susceptible to totalitarian abuses. His models of emotional reflection fail to address circumstances where reflection lacks substantial bite.

In response it is necessary to explore means for making citizens cognizant of underlying similarities between members of their community and those individuals they may classify as not worthy of respect. Rousseau offers a glimpse

of such means in his description of how Emile is socialized. Emile is not to identify only with a certain class or category of people. He is to treat everyone the same. The pupil learns that "Man is the same in all stations" (Emile, p.225). Emile "sees the same passions, the same sentiments in the hodcarrier and the illustrious man" (Emile, p.225). This insight gives rise to a generalized concern for the condition of the human race. As a tutor, you are to "teach your pupil to love all men" (Emile, p.226). In conveying this message, the teacher draws on feelings of pity that are universal. If these feelings are absent it is due to a defect in the perceiver, as in the case of the tyrant, the misanthrope, and the philosopher, and not in the individual being perceived. The capacity to feel pity, if operating properly, entails that the individual should be subject to its pull when viewing or imagining another human being suffering.

Appealing to the universal quality of pity as a solution to problems generated by political extremism fits with the general tone of Rousseau's work. His use of imagination as an instrument for expanding pity implies that its scope can be widened indefinitely. As long as one can imagine himself in another's place, one can feel pity for that individual. The respect that Emile has for his species is a result of such exercises. However, in predicating socialized pity on imaginative projection, Rousseau is open to the

criticism that his position is narcissistic. He makes pity the product of seeing similarities between oneself and another. One pities another to the extent that the other is capable of the same kinds of experiences. On such a view, the amount of pity felt is dependent on the degree of similarity perceived. The problem suggested by this conclusion is that one may pity only those individuals that one takes to be most like oneself. Each individual becomes the sole determiner of when pity is a reasonable response and, in this sense, a form of narcissism may dominate social life.

Michael Brint discovers narcissism in Rousseau's philosophy. Brint, however, chooses to frame the problem in terms of the general will. For Brint, the identification of an individual with the community is predicated on seeing others as subscribing to his or her will. The conditions of generality and neutrality that make possible the expression of the general will also allow the individual to see others as performing actions that the individual has willed. An individual imagines that others behave as they do, because of their shared resemblance with that individual. Brint concludes:

Rousseau constructs a vision of political community that is like a circle of mirrors in which each citizen sees only an image of himself in the eyes of all others...³

³Michael Brint Tragedy and Denial, p.58.

A narcissistic political environment such as Brint describes may erode sources of tolerance and compassion. Narcissistic individuals may band together solely because of a strong sense of personal similarity. They would only care about those individuals that met their stringent identity requirements or, in Brint's terms, embodied their will. To prevent this outcome a means must be found for ensuring that a wider sense of similarity dominates. In other words, individuals should be taught that people can be alike without it being necessary that they are identical. There must be some capacity for respecting differences between people.

Misgivings about Rousseau's position are not confined to concerns about its narcissistic implications. For some, Rousseau predicates communal attachments on the complete obliteration of personal differences. On this view, the limits imposed on feeling are not produced by fascination with how others mirror one's nature, but arise from the systematic elimination of existing differences. Rousseau's community on this account is not formed by recognition of similarity, but by the deliberate creation of similarity through the denial of difference. This theme is apparent in Iris Marion Young's elaboration of what Foucault called the "Rousseauist dream". For Young, the Rousseauist makes political and communal existence a function of the dissolution of differences between individuals. She claims:

Whether expressed as shared subjectivity or common consciousness, on the one hand, or as relations of mutuality and reciprocity, the ideal of community denies, devalues or represses the ontological difference of subjects, and seeks to dissolve social inexhaustibility into the comfort of a self-enclosed whole.⁴

In Young's mind, the Rousseauist ignores difference in both his model of political deliberation and in his model of socializing activities. Whether understood as the open exchange of ideas between citizens who perceive each other to be equals or as the expression of emotions inspired by the realization of a shared nature, Rousseau's ideal of community is said to make no room for the undeniable differences that can exist between human beings⁵. He espouses a totalitarianism of identity in which every one must be forced to appear similar.

Rousseau invites criticism not only because of his requirement that a sense of shared identity is an essential feature of communal life. We find disavowal of difference in his strong notion of citizenship. He limits the scope of social attachment to those individuals that make up a

⁴ Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, p.230.

⁵ It is strange to think that Rousseau disavows difference, because, as I have shown previously, he bases the activation of imagination on the initial recognition of differences between people. However, even with this prior recognition of difference, it is still possible to maintain that differences can be made to vanish if it suits political stability.

community. He exclaims:

Every particular society, when it is narrow and unified, is estranged from all-encompassing society. Every patriot is harsh to foreigners. They are only men. They are nothing in his eyes. (Emile, p.39)

On these grounds, Rousseau does seem to endorse a picture of community that resists diversity. Social attachments exist only between members of the same community. It is their identifying with each other as part of the same social unit that makes them care for each other. By stressing that the communities that support proper feelings of citizenship are "narrow and unified", Rousseau weighs similarity more heavily than difference in describing the ideal community. Being part of a community entails an estrangement from a world of others who remain foreign. Unity makes the community an enclave of individuals completely detached from anyone who is viewed or defined as dissimilar.

Rousseau's characterization of citizenship is at odds with his own views on the universal quality of pity. Emile's respect for his species seems to run counter to Rousseau's strategies for instilling patriotic sentiments. A general respect for one's species is difficult to reconcile with the claim that for a citizen foreigners are "nothing in his eyes". This tension is comparable to the one generated by Rousseau's remarks on factions and nations. In that context it was shown that Rousseau had difficulty providing a clear indication of

why a larger group, such as a nation, should take precedence over a smaller group, such as a faction. In the present discussion, Rousseau reverses the order and seems to favour a smaller group over a larger one. The community to which one belongs emerges as more important than the species as a whole. In some ways, this shift is not that significant. As I have already claimed, where Rousseau wishes to draw boundaries for attachment is irrelevant, given that boundaries are malleable. Imagination can be employed so that attachments are widened or narrowed. We can excuse Rousseau's remarks on the inherent limits of patriotism as a failure to understand the full implications of his view of the imagination.

Rousseau does nevertheless recognize that his praise of narrow attachments may lead to the claim that his position is harsh and exclusionary. He defends himself by an appeal to the practical importance of limited attachment. The virtue of citizenship is that it takes actual relationships to be more important than possible relationships. He notes that the real issue is that one "be good to the people with whom one lives" (Emile, p.39). The measure of the value of attachments is how they affect people that are part of one's life. Stressing that our responsibility is to care for all human beings equally is meaningless if we have little prospect of interacting with or making meaningful contact with people outside of our community. In this respect, the claims of patriotism are not

built on the rejection of the possibility of widening concern. Rather, they are a rejection of the tendency to devalue primary attachments in favour of abstract ones. Caring for all human beings has no practical significance if we remain within narrow social confines.

Rousseau perceives a dubious universalism behind the claim that emotional attachments must be all-inclusive. He remarks that we should be suspicious of "those cosmopolitans who go to great length in their books to discover duties they do not deign to fulfil around them" (Emile, p.39). Such individuals are seen as only criticising the limits of patriotism so that they can escape the responsibility of citizenship. Once again, the chief culprit is the philosopher who loves foreigners so "to be spared having to love his neighbors" (Emile, p.39). The philosopher claims that we have to embrace people from different lands with different ways of life to be true to our compassionate nature. But what he really intends, in Rousseau's mind, is to avoid his more immediate and pressing responsibilities. The rejection of citizenship, Rousseau warns, can be a ruse that serves self-interest by making it appear as if the duty of human beings is to honour something external to the boundaries of community.

Suspicion regarding universalism does not in itself constitute a defense of citizenship. More must be done to show that patriotic citizens will not assume that being part of a

narrow and unified community justifies the exclusion of those individuals that differ. However, people can differ in so many ways that it seems foolish to praise difference unconditionally as an important part of political life. Some effort must be made to explicate the concept. In attempting such explication, I contend that Rousseau's position is compatible with a weak notion of difference. On this account, differences are not ontologically constituted, but arise from individual experiences. Such a view has nothing to say about metaphysical questions. Rather, it focuses on how differences are produced by the influences that work on a person. Two people can be said to be different, in a non-trivial sense⁶, if their experiences give them differing perspectives, histories and attitudes. The physical differences between individuals also matter little on this account. One is not different solely because of one's gender or colour. Instead, difference emerges in part from how these factors shape one's experience. Making difference contingent on experience suits the approach Rousseau takes, because it can leave in place his claim that the capacity to suffer is universal, without suggesting that everyone suffers in the same way.

⁶ A trivial definition of difference would hold that an individual is different just by being an individual. By being separate from others, one is automatically different. But this notion has little to offer when it comes to exploring the substantive, personal differences between people.

Environmental and social forces can condition or influence a person in such a fashion that his or her experiences of suffering are unique. But uniqueness does not entail that one has somehow been transformed into something so different that he or she cannot be grouped together with others. We still remain human and are vulnerable to the same things to which human beings are vulnerable, even if we can point to the differences in our experiences.

A weak notion of difference does not efface basic similarities. Likewise, the recognition of shared identity that is so vital to Rousseau's project does not entail the complete subjugation of difference. In fact, respecting difference without erasing similarity entails that being exposed to differences expands our understanding of similarity. By learning about how others differ and comparing their experiences with ours, we acquire a greater sense of what it means to be human. We discover that there are things that we previously did not know about the way human beings can experience the world. In political terms, this expanded awareness is useful in combatting intolerance. In particular, when our understanding of how individuals can suffer increases, we realize that certain emotions and actions may be unjustified. If our emotional attachments are predicated on the recognition of similarity, then seeing that different experiences still qualify as suffering should temper our

enthusiasm for exclusionary associations. We may be patriotically attached to our communities, without being unduly chauvinistic⁷.

The incorporation of a respect for difference into political judgments requires that these differences be made apparent. The ability to communicate one's experiences, especially one's feelings, is essential for the discovery of differences. Rousseau to this end offers numerous ways in which we can conceive of communication. These models show how individuals are able to relate their experiences to receptive audiences. In what follows, I describe these forms of communication to demonstrate the contribution they make to the initiation and maintenance of social cooperation. The starting point of this analysis is Rousseau's remarks concerning the acquisition of language.

⁷ Rousseau, at this point, finds an ally in Richard Rorty. Rorty writes of his own view that human solidarity is properly conceived of "as the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation -the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of us" Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, p.192.

2. Communication, Language and Literature.

Natural man did not speak, but he was not silent. He did not have a language in the ordinary sense, but he still communicated orally. He expressed himself through what Rousseau calls the "cry of nature". This "language" is said to be "the most universal", "the most energetic" and the only one required in the state of nature (Second Discourse, p.122). Its universal scope, its energetic quality and its natural sufficiency are all attributable to its being "elicited only by a kind of instinct in pressing emergencies" or "to beg for relief in violent ills" (Second Discourse, p.122). The cry of nature is defined as an immediate and automatic reaction to great physical distress. Instinct and individual tolerance determine when it is heard. Natural man, whose strength and capacity to endure suffering far exceeds our own, would only cry when overwhelmed by his pain. His cry would be rarely heard, but it would be an unmistakable expression of suffering

We have left the state of nature and lost much of our supposed physical stamina, but we have not lost the capacity to cry. In the Emile, Rousseau offers a detailed account of the natural language of children. It is a language of cries.

Since the first condition of man is want and weakness, his first voices are complaint and tears. The child feels his needs and cannot satisfy them. He implores another's

help by screams. If he is hungry or thirsty, he cries, if he is too cold or hot, he cries, if he needs to move and is kept at rest, he cries; if he wants to sleep and is stirred, he cries. (Emile, p.65).

Absent from this description is the noble strength of natural man. Children cry, not because they are consumed by intense pain, but because they feel privations and do not have their needs and desires immediately satisfied. Moreover, given that all of their discomfort arises from similar feelings of dissatisfaction, their reactions are uniform. The infants' inability to perceive clearly gradations in discomfort is a result of the crude and underdeveloped nature of their faculties. Rousseau writes that, for the infant, given "the imperfection of his organs, he does not distinguish their diverse impressions; all ills form for him only one sensation of pain" (Emile, p.65). Rousseau concludes that the infant "only has one language because he has, so to speak, only one kind of discomfort" (Emile, p.65). The infant does not need a complicated language, because what he needs to communicate is not complicated. For him, all experiences of discomfort appear the same and elicit the same response. Natural man, likewise, lacks sophisticated powers of expression, because he has little to communicate. He only cries, when his suffering exceeds his tolerance. Both the infant and natural man share the same deficiency. No matter how they differ, both are trapped by the limitations of natural language.

The limitations of natural language would not be problematic if human beings did not live in communities. Natural man needs no other language, because he is self-sufficient. But when the state of nature is overturned, there is a need for new forms of expression. Human beings require a means for communicating more than their feelings of physical pain. In part, they must expand their linguistic capacities because society makes it "necessary to persuade assembled men" (Second Discourse, p.122). More complicated modes of expression are required for the discourse that takes place in communities. There must be ways of communicating so that it is possible for communities to reach agreement on political matters. Language, so to speak, sustains communities by sustaining communication⁸. In this context we encounter themes related to matters of communal deliberation. Non-natural language is a vehicle for the expression of personal opinions in group situations. It allows each individual to speak to others in terms that encapsulate and relate individual perspectives for the sake of mutual understanding. Such interaction would be unimaginable if everyone were restricted to crying. There would be no diversity of expression that would correspond to the diversity of

⁸ For an analysis of the centrality of communication for community, see Glenn Tinder's Community: Reflections on a Tragic Ideal.

experience.

The communication indicative of political interaction is a topic we have encountered elsewhere. In the previous chapter, I described how citizens must be given a variety of experiences in order to form political judgments. I pointed in the process to the lessons taught by travel. Travel, therefore, can be seen as a way of expanding one's vocabulary so that one is in a position to persuade. Exposure to new places and people has repercussions on the way one speaks and about what one speaks. As well, travel can create an appreciation of difference by offering access to new perspectives. In this respect, given that forms of expression within a community are not necessarily homogenous, it is possible to say that the edifying experiences that Rousseau links with travel are also available within one's community. The potential for divergent viewpoints within a community to find expression in different ways of speaking invites the conclusion that the knowledge of differences is attainable without leaving one's own community. Difference is not found only at a distance. It is visible wherever people have something different to say or say something in a different way⁹.

⁹ Travel to foreign lands may still be required on Rousseau's account because communities may not offer enough examples of divergent political and social practices to provide political wisdom. Nevertheless, communities may offer enough

The exchange of opinions associated with communal deliberation is only a portion of communal life. To limit language to this function is to ignore other vital forms of expression. There must be some acknowledgment of the language that suits intimate, interpersonal contact. Language is not only a vehicle for persuasion, through which different opinions are expressed, it is also required for the exchange of feelings that are central to social relationships. An understanding of this function of language is derivable from how Rousseau conceives of the transformation of the language of infants. In their original state, children rely entirely on the aid of others. Their cry is necessary for their continued existence. It allows them to attract the attention of those who can help them. But in order for human beings to be more than children, they need a language that is suited for the personal interaction that defines social existence¹⁰. Hence Emile is educated so that language takes the place of crying. As soon as he is capable of speech, he talks instead of

divergent viewpoints to give people a sense of difference within their own social situation.

¹⁰ In a cynical mood, one could say that Rousseau's ideal community actually requires people to remain children. This is what seems to be the general implication of his tirade against more extensive forms of reflection.

cries¹¹. Emile comes to communicate his feelings of privation and need through words that others understand. He is able to engage in discussions about his feelings and understand the claims of others. He, in a manner similar to that of natural man, is made capable of social existence through language¹².

Although language replaces crying, basic emotions remain the impetus for communal existence. Just as socialized pity is predicated on the natural capacity to experience pity, so the emotive function of language is an extension of natural expressions of suffering. Rousseau contends that the infant's cries initiate the social relations that will be so important during his life. He remarks:

From these tears that we might think so little worthy of attention is born man's first relation to all that surrounds him; here is formed the first link in that long chain of which the social order is formed. (Emile, p.65)

Emotional reactions to suffering are the source of community. The realization of shared vulnerability brings people together. The care shown for the infant is the paradigm of the concern that initiates communal relationships. Non-natural

¹¹ Emile does not, however, surrender the ability to cry completely, because he will still cry "when the pain is too intense for speech to express it" (Emile, p.77). In this respect, he learns that the only timeless cry is the "cry of nature". Crying possesses a power of expression not found in other languages.

¹² It is not accidental that Emile's ceasing to cry occurs around the time that he is deemed capable of having moral relationships. It is part of the maturation process. See Emile, p.78.

languages preserve these basic bonds. We speak and listen so that we can understand each other, but we need to be understood, because we need each other.

Emile's initiation into the language of emotions brings with it an appreciation of different forms of suffering. He feels for others even though he is not always exposed directly to the sources of their pain and even though they suffer in ways different from him. Not only, therefore, does he acquire an openness to difference, he also becomes capable of understanding non-physical forms of suffering. He is attuned to what Rousseau refers to as "moral suffering", which afflicts the mind more than the body¹³. This development is necessary for ensuring that pity is felt in circumstances involving non-physical evils. In particular, it is required for dealing with the kinds of harms that can only be experienced in society. For instance, a feeling of betrayal is something that is only possible once social relationships develop. Such forms of suffering are not purely physical. Therefore, in teaching Emile to understand different varieties of suffering, he is also taught to appreciate a new category of pain. The recognition of moral suffering is made possible by the basic discovery that suffering is not uniform.

13 "There exist later and less general impressions which are more appropriate to sensitive souls. These are the ones resulting from moral suffering, from inner pains, affliction, languor and sadness" (Emile, p.227).

The success of Emile's initiation into the world of moral suffering is more than apparent in his reaction to the tale of his future in-law's woes and how they have been able to overcome them. We learn prior to Emile's meeting with Sophie's family that their troubles stem from their ill-advised marriage. Sophie's father tells his daughter that,

Your mother had position. I was rich. These were the only considerations which led our parents to unite us. I lost my wealth. She lost her name and was forgotten by her family. (Emile, p.400)

Sophie's father also tells Emile this story of "the misfortunes of his life" and how these have been offset by "the constancy of his wife, the consolations they have found in their union" and "the sweet and peaceful life they lead in their retreat" (Emile, p.414). Emile's response to this bittersweet story is an open and sincere display of emotion. He is "moved and filled with tenderness", and "with one hand he grips the husband's hand and with the other he takes the wife's hand and leans toward it rapturously, sprinkling it with tears" (Emile, p.414). Emile sheds tears, not because he is childlike and lacks other means of expression, but because he is so overwhelmed by emotion that he cannot speak. Unlike the child, he does not cry only because he experiences personal discomfort. He weeps because he understands the discomforts felt by others.

The pain felt by Sophie's parents is a result of

social ostracism. The relative isolation in which Emile has been raised prevents him from having been personally exposed to this kind of social prejudice. His reaction to the suffering of Sophie's parents is not brought about by his remembering past experiences that approximate what they have felt. As well, he only knows of their pain from what they tell him. He does not perceive the causes of their misfortune directly. Therefore, his response is not merely the automatic, mechanical reaction indicative of natural pity. What enables Emile to respond to the predicament of Sophie's family is his imagination. The story he is told is "agreeable and touching" (Emile, p.414) and it works in such a way that it allows Emile to imagine himself in circumstances different from what he has felt before. The depth of his reaction is not solely a matter of perceived similarities between himself and others. It, rather, emerges from the ability of the storyteller, in this case Sophie's father, to create a realistic and moving picture of events unlike those Emile has encountered.

The example of Sophie's parents introduces the possibility of using the art of fictional story-telling as a means for eliciting certain emotional responses. The power of a particular story may come from the fact that someone experienced the ills described, but this in itself does not preclude similar emotions being generated by stories of things

that have not happened¹⁴. The important factor is that the individual being told the story is in a position to take what he is told as believable. He imagines something that he believes has taken place and responds accordingly. On these grounds, it is clear that theatre would fail the test because, as noted earlier, Rousseau believes it does not permit the suspension of disbelief. The artificialness of the theatre is, in his assessment, incapable of fooling anyone into having more than a momentary lapse of doubt. The emotions caused by theatrical presentations are fleeting at best. However, if other forms of story-telling avoided the pitfalls of theatre, then there would be at least a *prima facie* reason for believing them to be appropriate vehicles for generating emotional responses.

Presenting individuals with fictionalized tales intended to bring forth emotions would have a definite value in Rousseau's project. If the exposure to new and varied emotional experiences is a prerequisite for having an informed citizenry that respects the differences between individuals, then having access to such things as novels and fables would make the task easier. Fiction would enable those interested in promulgating a respect for difference to make use of an

¹⁴ In this respect, we could say that in our reading of the *Emile* any emotional responses we may feel are produced by Rousseau's own artful story-telling. He makes a fiction believable to his readers.

existing body of written material, rather than hoping that individuals will happen to encounter people who can tell convincing stories about their personal experiences. In other words, rather than wait for Emile to meet Sophie's father, apparently by accident¹⁵, he could learn of such experiences by reading a book. As well, by not depending on accidental encounters, it would be possible to increase the number of stories that an individual could hear. Rather than travel to collect tales, an individual could stay in one¹ place and learn more in less time. Fiction, and, for that matter other forms of writing such as autobiography and biography, permit a form of imaginary travel that allows one to learn what travel teaches while remaining stationary. The practical advantages of reading seem to make it a worthwhile substitute or supplement to travel.

My line of argument would encounter immediate resistance from Rousseau. We have already seen how wary he is of books written about travel. They, he believes, make the reader a prisoner of someone else's prejudices. Moreover, Rousseau has a general dislike for books. He declares in the Emile, "I hate books. They only teach one to talk about what

¹⁵ Rousseau implies that Emile's encounter with Sophie's family is not accidental. See Emile, p.416.

one does not know" (Emile, p.184)¹⁶. Using a book to instruct about differences would be a way of teaching people to discuss things about which they have no direct knowledge. As well, Rousseau's own experiences with literature show a distrust of its powers. In The Confessions, he recalls how his father and he passed the time by reading the novels that once belonged to his mother. Rousseau believes that his early reading gave him "a singular insight" into human passions and emotions. But being so young, he was incapable of having a true and complete understanding of what he learned. He was unable to reflect on the novels he read so as to draw any conclusions regarding the appropriateness of what they depicted. He lacked the mental capacities required to compare what he read with the way the world was. In this respect, novels, writes Rousseau, gave "me the strangest and romantic notions about human life, which neither experience nor reflection has ever succeed in curing me of" (Confessions, p.20). Without reflective distance, Rousseau becomes a victim of novels. His entire development is conditioned by his premature exposure to fiction.

In terms of his educational philosophy, Rousseau argues against the haphazard approach taken to his own development. He advocates that correctly educated young people are not to be exposed to fiction at an early age. Emile, for

¹⁶
on Rousseau.

The irony of making such a claim in a book is lost

instance, will not be allowed to read the fables commonly used to direct moral development. The defects inherent in this ordinary practice relate, in part¹⁷, to the inability that children have to derive the proper lessons from what they read. He notes of La Fontaine's fables that they are inappropriate for children, because there is "not a single one who understands them" (Emile, p.113). Understanding fables requires introducing the pupil to abstract ideas that "he cannot grasp" (Emile, p.113). The implication of Rousseau's criticism is that without the capacity to understand the content of the fable, the student cannot reflect on the lesson to be learned. Any conclusion reached will be confused and the whole enterprise becomes counter-productive.

Rousseau does not, however, believe that no one can read fables. In reference to his own appreciation of La Fontaine, he remarks:

Let us come to terms, Monsieur de La Fontaine. I promise, for my part, to read you discriminately, to like you, to instruct myself in your fables, for I hope not to be deceived about their object. (Emile, p.116).

Rousseau gains insight from fables because he can think about them without being confused. He understands fables because he is a mature reader and has the knowledge necessary to reflect

¹⁷ Fables are also criticised for endorsing the wrong actions as well as holding up virtuous characters for apparent ridicule. They, thus, have something in common with theatre. See Emile, pp.112-116.

on the content of what he reads. His life experience provides a background that is unavailable to a young person. Even though Rousseau has a "strange and romantic" view of the world, he is not devoid of the sensibilities required for reflective reading. He achieves the critical distance that his pupil is yet to discover.

Rousseau's wariness of the effects fables have on children raises an even more pressing concern. Students are not only misled by the sophisticated concepts at work in fables. They are also deceived into thinking of themselves as characters in the stories they read or hear. In terms of my interpretation of Rousseau, it would seem as if this result is consistent with his main objective. Individuals by seeing themselves as someone or something else benefit by expanding their experience and understanding of others. If fables functioned as intended, individuals would gain access to new perspectives through some sort of imaginative projection. By seeing themselves as different, they would grow in their emotional capacities. Rousseau, however, circumvents this possible conclusion by intimating that fiction does not necessarily work toward such an end. The example used to further this point comes once again from his analysis of La Fontaine. Rousseau relates an anecdote about how one child, upon hearing the fable of "the lean wolf and the fat dog", identified with the captive dog rather than the free wolf. He

remarks:

I shall never forget having seen a little girl weeping bitterly, upset by this fable which was supposedly preaching docility to her. It was difficult to get to the cause of her tears. Finally we found out. The poor child was irritated by being chained. She felt her neck rubbed raw. She was crying at not being a wolf. (Emile, p.116)

This example not only supports Rousseau's contention that the moral lessons of fables can be misunderstood. It also shows how individuals can be moved by stories to the point of feeling the same physical and mental irritation ascribed to fictional characters. Such reactions are obvious evidence of the imaginative identification essential for socialized pity, but Rousseau offers no praise of the fable's success at causing this feeling. The question raised by the example concerns what is missing from the experience of reading the fable that apparently disqualifies it as the appropriate vehicle for inspiring pity.

Rousseau does not address my question explicitly. An answer, however, can be extracted from the fact that the identification with a character in the fable is so great that the little girl forgets her own identity. She cannot learn a lesson from what she hears, because she is unable to compare what she is experiencing as the character with what she experienced previously. She cannot discern the difference in experience primarily because, while she listens, she loses contact with other experiences with which to make a

comparison. It is as if she has just come into existence as the character. A similar loss of identity is apparent in Rousseau's account of how when he was younger, he would read historical biographies and imagine himself to be whomever he was reading about. He exclaims,

I became indeed that character whose life I was reading; the recital of his constancy or his daring deeds so carrying me away that my eyes sparkled and my voice rang. (Confessions, pp.20-21)

In forgetting himself in this fashion, Rousseau is not learning. His ability to become someone else during the time that he is reading provides no lasting insight. He does not, as does the theatre-goer, dismiss what he experiences. He is so caught in the flux of changing experiences that he never has the opportunity to achieve an understanding of the meaning of these experiences. The absence of reflection that was apparent in his reading of novels carries over into his reading of history. In both cases, he is incapable of making judgments.

The mistake the young Rousseau makes is to forget who he is while reading. The mature Rousseau, who reads La Fontaine with critical acumen, does not make this mistake. In showing how his reaction to literature changes, he demonstrates that literature can have a useful role in education. Individuals who read for the sake of understanding difference must be in a position to make judgments about what

they read. But with the emphasis on the need for reflective judgments, we clearly see why Rousseau has misgivings about fiction. In order to have value in fostering a knowledge of the emotional situation of others, the reading of fiction must involve critical reflection on what is being read. With the development of reflective intellect also comes the ability to place what is happening at a distance. The reader is always in danger of becoming a philosopher. The other difficulty presented by fiction is, however, a product of not being reflective in the right way. The novel makes the reader believe that what is the case in a book is true of the real world. It invites such a full immersion into what it describes that the reader ceases to distinguish the novel from what is real. The novel inspires the kind of response on behalf of the reader that Rousseau thinks theatre cannot generate. The reader loses himself in what he reads in a way that the theatre audience cannot¹⁸. There is, therefore, a curious twist to Rousseau's views on fiction. In one instant he criticizes fictional presentations, as in the case of theatre,

¹⁸ Rousseau's view on novels, in contrast with theatre, may be attributed to a difference in setting. Theatre stages events, whereas novels describe events in language that is not different from ordinary discourse. In other words, a novel is not distinguished by its mode of representation from non-fiction writing. It is this similarity that allows autobiography and fiction to be confused. Theatre, on the other hand, requires an artificial environment (i.e. a separate, specially designated stage).

for not allowing an individual to believe what he sees and in another he denounces fictional works for being too believable. In drawing the lines in this way, Rousseau is pointing to the need for a balance between two extremes. Just as novelty must be regulated so that imagination is not overly excited or stifled, fiction must stand somewhere between being too artificial and too seductive. Fiction has a place in the lives of citizens when it achieves this balance.

Oddly enough, it would seem that full immersion indicative of the experience of reading novels is what Rousseau should seek because it is similar to the situation created by ritual. In a correctly functioning ritual, the individual does not question the source of the emotions being felt and the same appears true with novels. However, Rousseau may remain suspicious of novels because they are like the theatre in that they are fundamentally private experiences. When I read or listen to a story, I am not necessarily engaged in an activity where my emotions are open to public scrutiny. But when an individual engages in a ceremonial or celebratory ritual, the actions performed and the feelings experienced become part of a public spectacle. Others can observe individual behaviour and emotional reactions and determine the appropriateness of what is being done and felt. A similar kind of judgment can be brought to bear on responses to novels, but only if individuals communicate their feelings and reactions

to others. The redemption of literature in Rousseau's project would seem to call for this kind of public sharing of experiences in order that what is learned can be measured and judged.

But even if I can make Rousseau's approach to literature feasible, I face another obstacle. For Rousseau, there is reason not only to distrust written words, but all words. Story-telling as a means of communication is apparently not to be preferred to the use of non-linguistic signs. Spoken and written language are seen as defective when compared with other ways in which human beings could communicate. In reference to political communication, I have previously described how visual signs, rather than arguments, are taken to be the most effective way to convince someone. Likewise, in intimate relationships, gestures and facial expressions are preferred over the spoken word. Rousseau seems willing to surrender the centrality of speech, even though he seems to make it an essential aspect of community.

Evidence for Rousseau's preference for non-verbal communication is presented in the Dialogues. Rousseau commences the work with a description of a paradigm of interpersonal communication. In describing a world occupied by beings much better than those found on our planet, he notes that the general demeanour and physical appearance of these improved beings will convey their improved moral qualities.

Beings who are so uniquely constituted must necessarily express themselves in other ways than ordinary men. It is impossible that with souls so differently modified, they should not carry over into the expression of their feelings and ideas the stamp of those modifications. (Dialogues, p.12)

These changes in character and expression serve as a "sign by which initiates recognize one another" (Dialogues, p.12). In other words, individuals who have achieved such standing are able to communicate with others through recognizable indicators of their goodness. Such beings do not speak to be understood. If goodness, as Rousseau envisions it, were actually achieved, the result would be an end to verbal exchanges. A knowing silence would be the norm of communication in Rousseau's ideal world.

A similar view is put forward in La Nouvelle Heloise. Rousseau describes how the intimacy achieved by the principal characters enables them to communicate without speech. As one character puts it, "there is nothing, even in the bottoms of hearts, which we wish to hide from each other" (La Nouvelle Heloise, p.345). They are able to let others know their true and deepest feelings without uttering a word. Starobinski interprets this praise of immediacy in communication as showing that Rousseau longs for interaction where "sensitive souls" are able to "communicate more reliably and more rapidly" with "tremblings, signs and glances exchanged in

silence" than with "any other means"¹⁹. Silence, on this reading, transcends speech as a the mode of communication suited to virtuous, honest human beings.

These examples reveal that if we could communicate directly what we felt and have others understand us without running the risk of being misunderstood, then we have a foolproof means for making sure that no one will be fooled by others. Fraud and imposture are impossible in Rousseau's "enchanted world", because the signs used "cannot be counterfeit" (Dialogues, p.12). In a perfect world, trust can be given without fear. The same trust is inspired by Emile. Rousseau notes that he "is worse at disguising his feelings than any man in the world" (Emile, p.415). Those who interact with him are assured that he is not going to betray them. To expand on an old notion, silence is golden in a world where people are golden. When people are not tarnished, it is possible to suggest that their appearances will speak for themselves.

In invoking apparently unrealistic examples of emotional transparency, Rousseau also gives us an interesting way of outlining the requirements for forms of verbal communication that have social utility. Individuals' emotions

¹⁹ Starobinski, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, (p.225). Starobinski also links his discussion of La Nouvelle Heloise with the passage I have previously cited from the Dialogues. Silence, he thinks, is the cherished ideal in both cases.

may not be as obvious as Rousseau thinks they should be, but in any situation calling for reliable social interaction, the need persists for some way of conveying that one is trustworthy. People must be assured that the claims that others make are sincere and not merely strategic moves that serve self-interest. Social cooperation is aided by this sort of honesty. People may be more willing to make the sacrifices cooperation demands if they know that others are not going to exploit their trust for personal gain. Language may allow for counterfeit claims, in ways that other signs might not, but language is not without potential as a means for inspiring trust.

If we must resort to verbal communication in the less than perfect world to foster cooperation, then on Rousseau's grounds such language must be clear, precise and unambiguous. People need to be able to be understood and to understand others so that they will not be victims of deception²⁰. Such language is the kind that the tutor gives the young Emile. A young person should be taught to "speak plainly and clearly, to articulate well, to pronounce exactly and without affectation..." (Emile, p.149). The requirements for proper

20 It is, of course, ironic that trust becomes so important in a political system maintained by deceit. However, we can say that knowing what others feel is something that human beings need to know for the sake of their happiness, and, thus, in terms of Rousseau's remarks on truthfulness, deception is out of place here.

speech, in part, ensure that the pupil does not become accustomed to speaking with rhetorical flourishes that could disguise or hide what he means. Language should not be a weapon used in the service of imposture. The needs of the community stipulate that citizens should be able to communicate clearly their true opinions and not attempt to subvert the common good through verbal trickery. Language must ensure that honesty and sincerity govern political and personal discussions.

Even if honest self-expression becomes the order of the day in verbal exchanges, more is required for social cooperation to be viable on a grand scale. Direct assurances from those we interact with do not guarantee that everyone is committed to social cooperation. It is here that we find another task for written communication. Literature, as we have seen, exposes citizens to different emotional possibilities. In so doing, it provides alternative models of human behaviour. Individuals can appropriate lifestyles and attitudes that are depicted in novels, biographies and other studies of human conduct. The creative portrayal of alternatives within written texts allows individuals to adopt different orientations and perspectives. If reading effectively exposes people to different experiences, it can also provide different models of action.

Although Rousseau requires that we be careful in how

we project ourselves into another's situation, he is not opposed to having mature readers engage in some degree of imaginative identification for the sake of acquiring knowledge of different ways of life. When Emile reaches the proper age and books cannot be hidden from him any longer, he is given a copy of Robinson Crusoe. This book is selected for the obvious reason that it depicts a life of self-sufficient existence that approximates Rousseau's ideal of the natural life. Emile is allowed to "think he is Robinson Crusoe himself" (Emile, p.185), because it reinforces the tutor's general emphasis on self-reliance. However, in a more expansive sense, what Rousseau is admitting is that we can use the images supplied by books as supplements to the lessons we have already learned. When Emile is pretending to be Robinson Crusoe, he is in fact imagining the possibility of living a certain way. The practical result is that he is able to envision himself behaving in a way appropriate to his circumstances²¹. He can model himself after what he reads.

The reflective individual can still appreciate fiction,

21 A similar engagement with literature is visible in Sophie's reading of Fenelon's Telemachus. However, in this context, Rousseau worries that women may not be able to read as critically as men. The potential women have for exercising judgment is limited, so that if their imaginations are carried away by fiction, little can save them. See Emile, p.403.

without having to worry about forgetting himself²². In a political context, the further implication of the possibilities opened up by books is that they assume a socializing role. If the correct portrayals of human existence, whatever we deem them to be, are available in books, then we have greater means for influencing people. If we wish to have individuals accept what is required for social cooperation, we benefit if our books supply convincing images of the cooperative citizen. We do not, however, have to predicate the success of literature on the full immersion that Rousseau cites as hazardous. All that is necessary is that people reflect on the materials provided and decide whether certain models are worthwhile.

There are, of course, reasons to doubt that books, even ones written under ideal circumstances, will put an end to social problems. The effectiveness of books may be limited by Rousseau's own requirements for clear, unambiguous

²² At this point, it may seem as if I have overstated the case involving Emile. His reading of Robinson Crusoe seems to be predicated on the kind of forgetting of oneself that Rousseau links with the reading of fables and histories. Emile, when reading about Crusoe, is said to be made "dizzy" to the point of believing that he is "Robinson himself" (Emile, p.185). But Emile's reading is also to involve judgments formed when he is prompted "to examine his hero's conduct" and "to investigate whether he omitted anything" (Emile, p.185). These judgments are quite obviously acts of critical reflection concerning the status of the character Emile emulates and, thus require a distance lacking in the kinds of reading that Rousseau distrusts.

expression to be the model of proper language. Part of the strength books have to convince and influence lies in the use of metaphor and other devices that exploit or promote ambiguity. The value literature has in displaying difference is also predicated on the allowance for ambiguity. Difference can be made visible by showing that things are not always as clearly and precisely defined as we might think. In this respect, rhetorical flourishes and imprecise forms of expression have a role overlooked by Rousseau's model of language. However, although books may not always work as we wish they would, their limits only remind us that there are no guarantees in political contexts. The failure of books to convince on all occasions in itself does not imply that they cannot be a meaningful way of improving social circumstances.

Finding a political function for books entails that the influence given to writers increases. Rousseau, given his disdain for the intelligentsia of his times, would have difficulties with this development. However, he does not refrain from providing his own image of the proper writer. In describing his idealized human beings, he notes that they "would write few books" (Dialogues, p.12), but they would feel inspired to write when they had something vital to communicate to a broad audience.

A felicitous discovery to publicize, a beautiful and great truth to share, a general and pernicious error to combat, or some matter of public utility to establish:

these are the only motives that can bring them to the pen. (Dialogues, p.12)

Unlike philosophers and other intellectuals, these individuals only write when it is required and do not go "leaping into the literary fray" to "scribble endlessly on paper, an urge which is said to be part of the profession of the Author" (Dialogues, p.12). They write for the public good, not for individual benefit. In so doing, they aid social cooperation, rather than hinder it for their own self-aggrandizement and personal gain.

The requirement that writers only write when inspired by a sincere interest in the public good may diminish the power of books by limiting the number of books written. We may be left with few individuals who are capable of putting aside self-interest in order to communicate a "felicitous discovery" or "combat a pernicious error". However, it is this role in Rousseau's project, that is already filled by the law-giver or social visionary who is sufficiently detached from public events. The outsider who sees a new way of doing things or envisions a reorganization of political life becomes the model of the writer. Our hopes may be dashed by the apparent absence of perceptive outsiders in our world. But ironically, the best example Rousseau provides of the social visionary is himself. He is the outsider, living in self-imposed isolation, who understands the flaws and faults of existing social

organization and provides a new vision of social cooperation. He is the outsider who writes books to combat prejudices and to serve the public good. The explication of Rousseau's vision of social cooperation has, therefore, shown that his project requires his own presence. This result may be a reflection of his own vanity. Rousseau may be guilty of overemphasizing his own importance. On the other hand, his role in his project may also be an indication of the completeness of his vision. He understood that someone who occupied a position similar to his own regarding society was the best judge of its failures and how they could be corrected.

Regardless of any suspicions we may harbour about Rousseau's centrality to his own project, the outcome of his discussions of emotions, language and literature is clear. If citizens are to be part of a community, then they need ways of envisioning and communicating emotional possibilities. The ties that are fostered through communal activities, such as celebrations and ceremonies, find support in forms of education that increase the willingness individuals have to identify with and respect the situation of others. These aspects of citizenship are achieved through imaginative exercises and practices that highlight the bonds of community without obliterating differences between individuals. But even if we glimpse a feasible model of citizenship in Rousseau's wide and detailed writings, his critics may not be silenced.

The vision I have explored seems to be constructed without adequate consideration of questions of autonomy. Even though citizens are given the ability to reflect on their political and social situations, these devices in themselves are products of political and social design. Citizens may appear to us to be trapped in communities that are formed and regulated independently of individual contributions. Such a conclusion is alarming when it is remembered how often Rousseau's name is associated with the cause of freedom. The aim of the next chapter is to suggest that freedom is not as important to Rousseau as it may seem and that his model of citizenship can be completed without making personal autonomy take precedence over communal harmony.

VI. Social Order and Autonomy.

1. Community, Moral Freedom and Deliberation.

In the Emile, Rousseau makes a claim that serves as the basis for a distinction between what I call the politics of interest and the politics of feeling. He notes that "If our common needs unite us by interest, our common miseries unite us by affection" (Emile, p.221). A politics of feeling, on my understanding, centers on the emotional dimension of communal existence, whereas a politics of interest focuses on how societies function to protect and serve individual concerns. My preoccupation has been with outlining the conditions that make a politics of feeling feasible. The emphasis placed on the role of ritual as well as on forms of interaction and discourse that intensify communal sentiments are intended to show what sorts of influences must be in place to inspire the feelings that bond people together. However, even if the models and examples Rousseau employs are acceptable, difficulties remain. A politics of feeling, by making social attachments a product of emotional reactions, may leave individuals at the mercy of the social institutions and relations that influence and determine the form these reactions take. Individuals lose control of their actions, because they do not choose which emotions to have. On this account, the freedom valued by so many is reduced in

importance.

By suggesting that the preservation of individual autonomy is not the aim of political association, the politics of feeling is in conflict with cherished ideals¹. Individual autonomy appears to be sacrificed for the sake of social stability. Such implications of a politics of feeling may prompt us to emphasize Rousseau's apparent endorsement of a politics of interest. The present chapter is intended to demonstrate that Rousseau's work cannot be read as an unqualified endorsement of a politics of interest. In particular, Rousseau's concerns regarding the recalcitrant aspects of freedom show that more must be at work in political life than an interest in individual benefit. The result of my analysis is the controversial conclusion that freedom, understood as the ability to control one's life, is not Rousseau's main preoccupation. Although his position is introduced as a defense of individual freedom in the face of social constraints, the arguments he presents make room only for a weaker form of freedom. In this respect, his position falls short of being an unequivocal acceptance of a politics of interest.

¹ John Chapman is quick to note when Rousseau departs from the standards of established varieties of liberalism. He writes, "Rousseau's attempt deliberately to create patriotic feeling and to subject men to the surveillance of their fellows is the point on which he diverges from modern liberal democratic theory". (Rousseau-Totalitarian or Liberal ?, p.86).

A politics of interest makes individual interests central to social life. On such an account, political associations and social organizations are said to exist to satisfy the interests of individuals by allowing them to act in such a way as to fulfil their own personal needs and wants. I have already dealt with matters related to this approach. Its paradigm is found in Hobbes' social contract. As Joseph Raz notes, the tradition identified with Hobbes and, to a similar extent, Locke "regards the consent given as an expression of rational enlightened self-interest. Its approach is instrumental. One consents to the establishment of a political authority because of the benefits one will derive from its existence"². Unity, on such a view, is produced by the recognition of the gains arising from joint ventures. Emotional attachments are seen as superfluous or unnecessary for social order.

Raz does not think that Rousseau's version of the social contract shares the assumptions made by Hobbes and Locke³. David Gauthier, on the other hand, thinks that Rousseau, in The Social Contract, presents a blueprint for a system that sustains a politics of interest. He argues that Rousseau's critical analysis of social institutions in the

² Joseph Raz, The Morality of Freedom, p.80.

³ Ibid., p.80.

Second Discourse clears the way for this project. Gauthier writes:

Suppose that we agree with Rousseau, as indeed I believe that we should, that the individual is right to see the institutions and practices that make up any society as chains whose legitimacy he may appropriately question. Now there is an answer, which we may identify with liberal individualism: the institutions and practices of society legitimately bind individuals insofar as they make possible the greater and fuller the realization of those individuals' reflectively-held concerns.⁴

On this interpretation, Rousseau appears to endorse the instrumental view of the state. Political association is a vehicle for the satisfaction of individual needs. Gauthier does, however, protect Rousseau from problems generated by impulsive self-interested activity by making the needs of individuals into "reflectively-held concerns". Individuals would not automatically take the easiest and quickest route to satisfaction, because they would be capable of reflecting on the nature of their concerns⁵. But even if this is a reasonable stipulation, there is still little room for the claim that political associations are sustained primarily by emotional attachments.

Gauthier thinks that on a personal level Rousseau has

⁴ David Gauthier, "Le Promeneur Solitaire: Rousseau and the Emergence of the Post Social Self", p.55.

⁵ There is, of course, the potential for reflectively held concerns to become expressions of disruptive self-interested motivations. Thinking about one's needs and desires reflectively does not yield automatically a socially desirable result.

misgivings about the system he designed. Rousseau, he says, could not live with the constraints imposed by accepting the duties and obligations associated with organized society of any sort⁶. I agree with Gauthier that Rousseau has reservations regarding the politics of interest, but I do not think that we have to turn to his autobiographical writings to confirm these suspicions. Rousseau includes within his discussion of a politics of interest reasons for doubting that it can sustain social order. Although Rousseau acknowledges that interests can bring people together with the hope of creating associations, he does not think that interests alone can maintain order. The social contract, understood as a mutually-binding agreement made between free agents, is undermined by the very calculations that prompt its enactment⁷. If a social order inspired by an interest in personal welfare is to survive, forces must be brought to bear on self-interest so that social stability is maintained.

Rousseau is adamant that public mores, customs and opinions must exercise control over individuals if the state

⁶ Ibid., pp.55-56.

⁷ In terms of Rousseau's understanding of historical developments, the social contract emerges as a solution to problems created by the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. As Asher Horowitz remarks, "The problem that Rousseau faces in The Social Contract is the legitimate integration and stabilization of a society of atomized acquisitive agents within the relations of a market society." (Rousseau, Nature and History, p.203).

is to survive⁸. For Rousseau, these forces have more power over individuals than political, civil or criminal laws⁹. They, in fact, constitute a fourth type of law, "the most important of all; which is not engraved on marble or bronze, but in the hearts of citizens..." (Social Contract, p.77). In other words, they are laws that are emotional in nature¹⁰. Their effectiveness is found in how well they commandeer the inner life of the individual. A similar claim is found in The Discourse on Political Economy, when Rousseau discusses the power of patriotic sentiments. He argues that the "most absolute authority is that which penetrates to the inner part of a man and is exerted no less on his will than on his actions." (Discourse on Political Economy, p.119). In both cases, control is exercised over motivations and deviation in feeling and action is reduced by conditioning of the emotions and the will. Individuals governed in such a fashion act the way they do because they cannot do other than what their

⁸ Social Contract, p.77

⁹ Political laws are the fundamental laws that determine the constitutional form of the state. Civil laws govern the relations between individual members of the community as well as their interaction with the community as a whole. Criminal laws are sanctions that enforce obedience to existing political and civil laws. (Social Contract, pp.76-77).

¹⁰ If we take Rousseau's use of law, in this context, seriously, then we have further support for my contention in Chapter Three that his political system seeks law-like control and regimentation of emotions.

feelings dictate. They are enchained by their sentiments.

The emotional power of mores, custom and opinion is evident in ceremonial and celebratory rituals. Indeed, an imperfect correspondence exists between the defining characteristics of the examples of ritual Rousseau presents and these three forces. Mores and opinion are at work in his public festivals and dances. Mores, as an unwritten code of conduct and behaviour, curb disruptive impulses. The young people at the dance are vivid examples of individuals made to accept public standards of conduct through the pressure exerted by other members of their community. Judgments concerning the qualities of others in festivals and public games make opinion a socializing force. We seek esteem and appreciate the esteem others give us. Rituals influence opinions in such a way as to make this search for esteem a positive factor in social life. Customs, understood in a narrow sense as institutionalized forms of conduct, prevail more in governmental rituals where rigid and defined practices are central to the celebration. However, in a general sense, custom is evident in all communal rituals, since a ritual practice is conducted according to a set of organizational principles. As well, the feelings engendered by ritual practices as products of habitual ways of thinking, become, in essence, "emotional customs". They are institutionalized forms of feeling.

Referring to feelings as "institutions" may seem strange. An institution is normally thought of as something other than a mental state of a particular human being. It is an existing social convention or practice that is external to the mind of any given individual. However, as Carol Blum is correct to note, Rousseau's idea of an institution is not a typical one. She writes, in the context of the law-maker's attempt to "institute" a people, that,

'Institutions' were not the same thing as laws, nor were they the ingrained habits and traditions that evolved within a given society; rather they were a third value system imposed upon the people: a set of idiosyncratic usages enunciated by a great legislator and somehow incorporated into the mentality of the citizenry.¹¹

Emotions can be institutions, from Rousseau's perspective, because they are "somehow incorporated into the mentality of the citizenry". They are products of the control exercised over the imagination and will of the citizen. They are institutions of thought and feeling. However, although Blum understands Rousseau's idea of how institutions become part of the psychological make-up of citizens, she overstates the emphasis on the artifice of the legislator in this context. To be fair, it is true that Rousseau observes that a people "suited for legislation" should have "neither customs nor superstitions that are deeply entrenched" (Social Contract,

¹¹
p.114.

Carol Blum, Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue,

p.74). But his concern, in this context, is with ensuring that the law-giver's reforms are not blocked by immovable prejudices. This requirement in itself does not prevent the law-giver from using existing institutions if they are conducive to his purposes. After all, what other function does his investigation of the people, prior to implementing reforms, serve if not to discover their habits and customs? Thus creating "idiosyncratic usages" may be the order of the day when starting from scratch, but in a case where some social fabric already exists, habits and traditions can also be made part of the institutions that govern citizens. These influences can be in place when the legislator attempts to transform people to create a cohesive community. An institution is not merely a product of the legislator and existing customs can qualify as institutions.

The culmination of Rousseau's exploration of the emotional customs required for the existence of a well-ordered republic is his notion of a civil religion. He claims that it is possible to maintain a variety of religion that provides its citizens with "sentiments of sociability without which it is impossible to be a good citizen or a faithful subject" (Social Contract, p.130). Civil religion, however, does not make the state an object of religious worship. By keeping law distinct from theological concerns, civil religion avoids the tradition of religious warfare Rousseau thinks is the legacy

of paganism. Since paganism "did not distinguish between its Gods and its laws", it followed that "there was no way to convert a people except to subjugate it, nor any missionaries other than conquerors" (Social Contract, p.125). Civil religion can tolerate divergent spiritual beliefs as long as they are "in no way contrary to the duties of the citizen" (Social Contract, p.131). Christianity, on these grounds, is in conflict with civil religion in that it presents a set of duties that compete with those of the citizen. Christian religion is preoccupied with "heavenly matters" (Social Contract, p.125) and it distracts citizens from their civil responsibilities. Civil religion, although acknowledging that there exists a "powerful, intelligent, beneficent, foresighted, and providential divinity" (Social Contract, p.131), remains concerned with events and actions in the present world.

Rousseau hesitates to say more about the specific practices of civil religion. The particular details of the religion are to be established by the sovereign assembly as it sees fit¹². However, he does note that the central dogmas should stress "the happiness of the just; the punishment of the wicked; the sanctity of the social contract and the laws" (Social Contract, p.131). So understood, civil religion

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Social Contract, p.130

enhances social order by making the conditions of social order the object of worship. In other words, the main tenets of civil religion coincide with the requirements for justice and political stability. Rousseau furthers this parallel by making those individuals who reject civil religion enemies of the community. Civil religion may tolerate unorthodoxy in theological contexts, but it cannot accept citizens who deny the validity of the central dogmas.

Without being able to obligate anyone to believe them, the sovereign can banish from the State anyone who does not believe them. The sovereign can banish him not for being impious, but for being unsociable...
(SocialContract, pp.130-131).

In this regard, Rousseau reiterates his earlier observation that someone who does not accept the terms of the social contract declares himself to be a rebel and a traitor¹³. Failure to uphold the contract or civil religion is met with equal hostility and can result in exile or execution.

The severity of the treatment for the non-believers and non-cooperators supports the accusation that Rousseau's position is illiberal. But there is no reason to suppose that non-compliance has to be answered harshly. Civil religion can have value and can aid the development of social sentiments without being a vehicle for oppressive and coercive reprisals. For example, something as innocuous as a pledge of allegiance

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Social Contract, p.65.

can be an important aspect in celebrating the community, without implying that people who refuse to recite it are political heretics. Moreover, if we couple the notion of civil religion with my previous analysis of the power of ritual, then it can be concluded that a correctly functioning civil religion, by utilizing rituals, can exercise control over citizens without relying on conspicuous uses of force. A ritual inspires emotions without having to coerce. Indeed, it makes sense to discuss ritual in the context of civil religion, because there must be something that makes it a religion. Without ritual aspects, a civil religion would be a peculiar religion. The implication of Rousseau's position seems to be that civil religion is intended as a way of celebrating and sanctifying the community to create and renew emotional attachments. These are aims that are consistent with his views on the function of ritual in general.

Emphasizing emotional attachments in the context of The Social Contract implies that political order, which is introduced as an instrument of self-interest, cannot remain a vehicle for personal gain. Civil religion, in conjunction with the influence of mores, customs and opinions, overcomes egoist motivations by generating emotional commitment to the community. However, in making this claim, I may be falling into the same trap that John Chapman thinks snares Rousseau. For Chapman, Rousseau's proposals for intensifying social

sentiment are symptoms of pessimism. He thinks that the calculated cultivation of strong social sentiments is advocated by Rousseau because the ideal community is a difficult achievement. The continual slide of existing political associations toward materialism and egoism erodes the chances of achieving political stability through rational means¹⁴. On this interpretation, a politics of feeling is not Rousseau's first choice as a political solution; it is rather his last resort.

Chapman offers a reading of Rousseau in which the primary socializing force is the nurturing of moral freedom. This kind of freedom is distinct from the freedom sought by egoists. Egoists value freedom to achieve personal satisfaction. Moral autonomy, on the other hand, is defined as the ability to live according to self-imposed rules. Without such rules, one fails to achieve self-control and remains a victim of capricious appetites and desires. Autonomous moral agents, on this interpretation, employ reason to come to the understanding that a community governed by an impartial, impersonal system of laws is just and deserves obedience¹⁵. In this regard, a genuine politics of interest calls for an

¹⁴ Evidence of Rousseau's pessimism is found in The Social Contract Book IV Chapter 1, where he speaks of the just state existing only in "illusory and ineffectual form" because of the triumph of base interests (pp.108-109).

¹⁵ Chapman, p.37.

interest in moral development and freedom as opposed to a self-serving interest in personal gain and satisfaction.

Chapman's account makes sense of Rousseau's belief that society supplies the conditions necessary for individuals to fully actualize their moral potential. Rousseau's emphasis on "perfectibility" as the defining characteristic of human beings can be understood as a call for moral development¹⁶. Humans, unlike other animals, are able to improve themselves. Improvement is particularly evident in contexts where physical impulses are denied for the sake of a greater good. Society makes this overcoming of appetite possible. Specifically, society provides the interaction required to awaken capacities¹⁷ that make the determination of moral laws possible. Hence Rousseau notes that among the things acquired through the creation of the

civil state could be added moral freedom, which alone makes man truly the master of himself. For the impulse of appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself is freedom. (Social Contract, p.56).

The freedom Rousseau exalts in this passage is consistent with his definition of virtue in the Emile. The virtuous man is

he who knows how to conquer his affections; for then he follows his reason and his conscience; he does his duty;

¹⁶ Second Discourse, p.114.

¹⁷ I outline this process in my discussion of the awakening of imagination. Similar process seem to be at work in the development of moral reasoning.

he keeps himself in order and nothing can make him deviate from it. (Emile, pp.444-445)

Moral autonomy and virtue are conceived to be forms of self-mastery. Individuals are truly free and virtuous when they can overcome appetites and passions and determine courses of action through deliberation¹⁸. Virtue requires that natural indolence is replaced by the active pursuit of self-restraint that diminishes or eliminates the tendency to act on immediate impulse.

I agree with Chapman that self-control is an important dimension of Rousseau's political vision. Individuals must be given some way of controlling impulses that disrupt social life. However, I think this mastery for Rousseau comes more from the emotions that govern our lives than from an insight into the requirements of morality. In other words, despite indications to the contrary, Rousseau does not think a community can be sustained solely by cultivating an interest in moral autonomy. Chapman's interpretation does not conclusively establish that Rousseau's prime concern is with the conditions necessary for moral autonomy. I make this claim, because the ascendancy of reason and freedom that is

¹⁸ Rousseau, in his emphasis on autonomy being an extension of self-control, anticipates Frankfurt's oft noted distinction between first and second order desires. Free-will, for both Rousseau and Frankfurt, requires the ability to deliberate about one's desires and decide if they are the desires one wants to have. See Frankfurt's "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of the Person"

the focus of Chapman's reading is not achieved without introducing a tension between what morality demands and what the community orders.

Self-mastery is initially defined as the process of giving laws to oneself. The only authority that would be recognized under strict adherence to this definition would be one's own authority. Autonomy, so conceived, is only compatible with a variety of political anarchy. Morally free individuals cannot accept the authority of the state and must remain self-legislating agents. As Robert Paul Wolff argues:

The defining mark of the state is authority, the right to rule. The primary obligation of man is autonomy, the refusal to be ruled. It would seem, then, that there can be no resolution of the conflict between autonomy and the putative authority of the state. Insofar as a man fulfills his obligation to make himself the author of his decisions, he will resist the state's claim to have authority over him.¹⁹

Applying Wolff's remarks to what has been said about Rousseau's view of freedom generates the paradoxical conclusion that the moral autonomy created by social order is incompatible with that order. To be true to one's moral autonomy, one must not live by the rules and dictates of others. But the very existence of social order demands compliance with laws that are not necessarily made by oneself. A genuinely free agent must reject the claims of the community to have authority over his actions if he is to be master of

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Robert Paul Wolff, In Defense of Anarchism, p.18.

his actions²⁰.

Rousseau's position, it seems, is best served by advocating a return to the state of nature. Self-mastery requires the isolation and solitude that defines the condition of natural man. However, pursuing complete independence entails abandoning the social interaction that makes moral freedom possible and is, therefore, not a meaningful option. An individual who attempts to be autonomous by being completely rid of all of society essentially rejects morality and seeks to become an animal²¹. The individual wishes to return to a world where acting on immediate impulses and desires is an appropriate form of conduct. The possibility of people honestly willing to sacrifice the access to virtue that communal existence provides is so remote in Rousseau's assessment that he thinks everyone will gladly "bless the happy moment" when they ceased to be a "stupid limited animal" and became an "intelligent being and a man" (Social Contract, p.56).

The solution Rousseau seems to propose to the collision between self-mastery and authority starts by

²⁰ Rousseau is well aware of this tension. In the Social Contract, he writes, "But it is asked how a man can be free and forced to conform to the will of others?" (p.110).

²¹ Rousseau, as I note, avoids this reversion in his own pursuit of solitude, because he does not abandon his concern with human beings.

advocating the complete alienation of natural right. By entering a community, the individual renounces the natural right to do as one pleases and gains the communally constituted right to be a member of the newly formed sovereign body that directs the state. The act of joining the contract entails that the parties agree to equal treatment. In so doing, whatever subsequent political decisions are reached and whatever laws are enacted apply to each individual in the same way²². By highlighting equality and impartiality as terms of the contract, Rousseau gives laws the quality of being personal acts of will. Each citizen can understand the law as if it is a personal expression of self-determination, because the law does not designate any particular individual²³. Generality and neutrality are intended to guarantee that political obligations are consistent with personal autonomy. With the creation of the social contract, individuals become, as citizens, subjects of a general will that replaces

²² Social Contract, p.53.

²³ Rousseau concludes that "any function that relates to an individual object does not belong to the legislative power." (Social Contract, p.66). If the legislator did designate particular persons and objects it would compromise the capacity of individuals to express the law in first-person form. Particularities, in this context, function as indexicals that make neutrality difficult to maintain. For a similar discussion see P. Neal, "In the Shadow of the General Will", pp.397-398.

individual wills²⁴. They do not sacrifice self-mastery, because they do not subject themselves to the will of others.

Rousseau speaks of the general will in such a manner to suggest that understanding it is essential for an appreciation of legitimate social order. But he does the general will a disservice by saying so little about it. I cannot hope to untangle all of the controversy surrounding the formulation and expression of the general will. However, two rather obvious points can help clarify matters. First, the general will never errs. Rousseau states explicitly that "the general will is always right and always tends toward the public utility" (Social Contract, p.61). In this regard, the general will takes on an objective status. It is "always constant, unalterable and pure" (Social Contract, p.109). It cannot be automatically equated with decisions reached by a group, since such decisions can be mistaken. The potential for error leads to the second point. The general will might not be ascertainable at all times. With particular emphasis on the distortion of public deliberation in corrupt social environments, Rousseau notes that "it does not follow that the people's deliberations always have the same rectitude" (Social

²⁴ Rousseau's emphasis on generality and neutrality is seen by some as eliminating difficulties in determining the general will because it limits the kind of matters that can be decided upon to abstract, constitutional questions. See Kain, "Rousseau, the General Will, and Individual Liberty", p.318 and Braybrooke, "A Public Goods Approach to the Theory of the General Will"

Contract, p.61). There is, therefore, room for a distinction between the genuine general will and what may pass for the general will. The correct course of action, as dictated by the general will, may exist, but may not be available to those who seek to implement it.

Rousseau believes that the community can make mistakes, but he does not attribute these errors to human cognitive deficiencies. The culprit is, as always for Rousseau, amour-propre. Amour-propre has no place in deliberations concerning public utility. It leads individuals to value personal gain and to resort to deception and manipulation to achieve their ends. If amour-propre dominates public deliberations, the result is not the general will, but what Rousseau calls "the will of all". The will of all "considers private interest and is only a sum of private wills" (Social Contract, p.61). When the will of all prevails, the reconciliation of self-determination and social order is undermined and the original contract is threatened²⁵. Being governed by private will is equal to being commanded by another individual. When the will of all prevails, political existence becomes a form of servitude and enslavement.

Rousseau goes as far, in drawing the distinction between the general will and the will of all, to offer a

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Social Contract, p.59.

calculus to aid in the pursuit of the general will. In considering the sum of private wills that makes up the will of all, he suggests that we "take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel each other out, and the remaining sum of differences is the general will" (Social Contract, p.61). The point concealed behind this rather elliptical formulation seems to be that properly conducted deliberation eliminates conspicuous attempts to shape the general will to suit personal interests. What is left is genuine and sincere difference of opinion concerning the good of the community. Further deliberation somehow distills the relevant and salient differences that remain into a clear, impartial statement of what should be done. Once citizens cease to be distracted by amour-propre, they are in a position to ascertain the general will. The objective good of the general will is made apparent.

By concentrating on the distractions created by amour-propre, Rousseau appears to underestimate other obstacles that prevent the discovery of the general will. People may seek the general will, but even if they are not deceived, it may not come to them in its proper form. A complaint along these lines is raised by Wolff. Although Wolff does not doubt the validity

of using voting as a means for determining group preference²⁶, he does object to Rousseau's faith in the power of the people to determine the general will. Wolff is perplexed by what he takes to be Rousseau's unquestioning acceptance of majority rule. He interprets the proposed calculus to be a statement of a principle of majority rule put to work in the context of a direct democracy. Wolff concludes that the weakness in Rousseau's argument is

the apparently groundless assumption that the majority are always right in their opinion concerning the general good...What can possibly have led Rousseau to such an implausible conclusion? Experience would seem rather to suggest that truth lies with the minority in most disputes...²⁷

Rousseau does indeed postulate that decisions regarding the general will can be determined by consulting the majority²⁸. However, I would like to suggest that his understanding of how the majority expresses itself differs considerably from the model Wolff thinks he employs.

An alternative understanding of the general will would describe its formulation as arising from a deliberative

²⁶ For a discussion of the supposed incomprehensibility of Rousseau's claims regarding the general will see Riker's Liberalism against Populism.

²⁷ Wolff, pp.54-55.

²⁸ He thinks that a majority approaching unanimity is required in deciding important matters, but that a simple majority is sufficient in situations where a decision is needed immediately and consensus cannot be further cultivated. (Social Contract, p.111).

process, as opposed to a computational one, through which the community discovers how it is to be governed. The ballots cast in this process are not the kind that can be counted in a conventional fashion²⁹. Rather, they are discursive contributions forwarded in pursuit of a correct course of action. Rousseau's idealized citizens, who decide "the affairs of State under an oak tree" (Social Contract, p.108) are not staging referendums to find out what the majority wants. They are, instead, engaged in an active and sincere search for the truth regarding their situation as a community. A statement of the general will, under these circumstances, is not realized by aggregating individual opinions. The general will is obtained by focusing the group's attention on the communal good and eliciting individual input so that the correct decision can be reached. In this regard, the major claim underlying Rousseau's response to Wolff is that voting is reliable on epistemological grounds.

Rousseau has what may appear to be an exaggerated confidence in the ability of an uncorrupted public to overcome cognitive limitations. He believes that the expression of genuine differences of opinion can compensate for deficiencies

²⁹ Rousseau states, at one point, that the precision associated with geometry does not hold when one is considering moral questions (Social Contract, p.80). An analogous disclaimer concerning the accuracy of mathematical metaphors could accompany his remarks on computing the general will.

in knowledge. In the Dialogues, he makes his epistemological claim explicit by suggesting that an honest and capable judge can determine guilt or innocence merely by listening to the testimony and cross-examination of prosecution and defense witnesses. Rousseau writes that,

the deposition of the witnesses, however many there may be carries weight only after their confrontation. From this action and reaction, and from the conflict of these opposing interests, the light of the truth must naturally emerge before the eyes of the judge; at least this is the best means he has in his power. (Dialogues, pp.56-57)

Truth is found through this regulated process of disputation. The judge reaches the correct verdict because the participants, by expressing dissenting and differing views, remove obstacles to knowledge. In reference to the general will, the members of a political state have a similar task. However, they are also in the unenviable position of being witnesses and judges. They provide the testimony as well as judge it³⁰.

Rousseau insists that in a well-functioning state, as in a properly conducted trial, that the correct decision "requires only good sense to be perceived" (Social Contract, p.108). Such "good sense" is activated by distracting individuals away from individual concerns and directing them

³⁰ Radcliffe supports the analogy I draw, although not with explicit reference to the Dialogues, when he writes that "Just as jurors have no personal stake in the result of a trial, citizens qua citizens have no personal interest in the outcome of voting games." ("The General Will and Social Choice Theory", p.43).

toward communal questions. When they devote the proper attention to these questions and discuss them thoroughly and disinterestedly, the correct answers will appear. When the proper social conditions exist, the right decision will be obvious. Tabulating affirmative responses or listening to the majority, on such occasions, is seen as a relatively simple way of affirming the truth. The majority is not assumed to possess some special voice; it is rather seen as the representative voice. If the proper conditions hold, consulting a single individual would yield the same result. The majority can still err if deliberation is hindered by amour-propre, but this does not count against the possibility that an objectively correct decision could have been available.

There may be reason to doubt that the communal endeavour to realize objective solutions to its problems will ever succeed. Rousseau's model of deliberation may be fanciful in that public assemblies may be the source of more difficulties than they resolve. Individuals who are unable to discern the communal good when alone may only multiply confusion when together. Human ignorance does not vanish in groups. If this is the case, then even the minorities that Wolff thinks have history on their side will be caught in a muddle. To deny Rousseau's epistemological claim is to deny that communal, dialogical interaction on any scale is an

improvement on solitary, monological reflection.

Many have tried to champion the communal approach to political decision-making. The most noticeable contributions are found in the work of Jurgen Habermas³¹. Through a critique of contemporary democratic practices, Habermas seeks to revitalize a model of communal deliberation that concentrates more on the formulation of consensus via discussion than on the tabulation of votes. He associates the failings of modern democracy with the emphasis placed on creating the appearance of consensus at the expense of rational public deliberation. Hence he notes of public authority in current democratic systems that

it operates less as a public opinion giving a rational foundation to the exercise of political and social authority, the more it is generated for the purpose of an abstract vote that amounts to no more than an act of acclamation within a public sphere temporarily manufactured for show or manipulation.³²

If Habermas succeeds in restoring the lost sense of public authority, the result would be a political situation similar to the one found in the Social Contract. Individuals will gather together to engage in deliberations intended to better the condition of the society as a whole. Democratic action

³¹ See Cohen's "Discourse Ethics and Civil Society" Goodin's Motivating Political Morality and Moon's "Constrained Discourse and Public Life" as other examples of approaches to this issue.

³² Jurgen Habermas The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, p.222.

would begin with discussions centred on the public good. However, to draw a strong connection between Rousseau's project and Habermas' ideal is not without its difficulties. As I demonstrate in the next section, Rousseau's model of public assemblies allows for a degree of manipulation that could be seen as hindering the kind of interaction Habermas values. The political function of communal deliberation for Rousseau is not limited to generating agreement through discussion. It also involves measures that ensure a compliant populace.

Leaving Habermas aside, the important point to be derived from the discussion of communal deliberation is that participation in communal decision-making is apparently taken by Rousseau to determine whether or not a state legitimately preserves individual moral autonomy. Laws are illegitimate if they are not approved by the people. "Any law that the people in person has not ratified is null; it is not a law" (Social Contract, p.102). Given the presumption that the social contract defines individuals as equal, it would seem as if Rousseau is constructing a model of democracy in which equal contribution to the formation of laws is a prerequisite of justice. In other words, if individuals, who are party to the contract, are prevented from having a say in the process of ratifying laws, then political legitimacy is compromised. The implication is that only equality of access to legislative

procedure preserves personal autonomy. If other conditions prevail, then any individual that is excluded from the process or whose contribution is diminished has not only surrendered natural freedom, but has also given up the freedom supplied by civic association. Thus Rousseau criticizes the people of England for foolishly believing that representative government is conducive to liberty. The English people, he says, are free only when they cast votes to elect members of Parliament. It is the only decision the people make. The rest of the time they are slaves³³.

In presenting an interpretation of Rousseau as a committed proponent of a form of direct democracy, there is a tendency to overlook his retreat from some of his more grandiose claims regarding the collective powers of the people. Richard Fralin provides a vital and detailed survey of ways in which Rousseau allows representational government to assume a prominent role in political life³⁴. Rousseau's apparent willingness to permit some forms of representation may be a sign that he, in a manner similar to Wolff, doubted that the bulk of humanity was capable of reaching correct decisions. But Rousseau's hesitancy could be attributed to conceptual concerns that undermine any attempt to join

33 Social Contract, p.102.

34 Fralin, Rousseau and Representation

autonomy and community. These concerns make it difficult to see him as overly committed to moral autonomy as the main preoccupation of political life. He seems willing to admit that autonomy suffers in social settings. In what follows, I consider some of the wider implications of this claim to demonstrate that the emphasis Rousseau places on autonomy has more to do with social control than with individual freedom.

2. The Ritual of Autonomy.

As evidence of Rousseau's misgivings about the reconciliation of community and autonomy consider his willingness not only to concede, but to prove, that reductions of individual freedom occur when the population of a state increases³⁵. He claims that if the population of a state grows ten fold, then the amount of individual freedom decreases proportionately. This change results from the fact that although "the condition of the subjects does not change, and each is equally under the whole dominion of the laws", the individual citizen's contribution which is "reduced to one hundred-thousandth, has ten times less influence on their drafting" (Social Contract, p.79). The conclusion Rousseau reaches is that although

the subject always remains one, the ratio of the sovereign to the subject increases in proportion to the number of citizens. From which it follows that the larger the state grows, the less freedom

³⁵ My discussion, so far, seems to ignore possible distinctions between different forms of social existence. I use terms such as "state", "community" and "society" interchangeably, without indicating that they are not necessarily identical. However, given Rousseau's apparent willingness to have only one sovereign, governing a given political community, and that this sovereign is composed of the citizens of that community, it seems as if he will not tolerate subdivisions within the community. In other words, distinguishing between the community and the state is not something Rousseau is prone to do. At best, he takes the myriad of terms available to describe political associations to be ways of referring to the various forms of action that can be undertaken by the same unified body. See Social Contract Book 1, Chapter 6 as an illustration of this tendency.

there is. (Social Contract, pp.79-80).

We must, of course, heed Rousseau's warning that the language of geometry is an imperfect vehicle for explaining such matters³⁶. However, his proof of the reduction of freedom stands even if we discount his method of expression. The point is that if individuals are joined together to reach decisions, then the more people that are present, the less input each individual will have in the result. Less input is, under the conditions Rousseau establishes, equivalent to less freedom.

It follows from Rousseau's proof that being a member of any state implies that individual freedom is less than complete. No matter what population a state has, it is possible to designate a lower population size that allows for more individual freedom. The only state in which perfect autonomy remains is one composed of a single citizen. Thus Rousseau presents an argument, similar to the one forwarded by Wolff, that undermines his supposed defense of the state as conducive to individual liberty. Rousseau may intend his proof to establish that a small state is a better form of association or that the need for government intervention in people's lives increases when population grows. However, it has the added feature of showing that by being members of associations, individuals sacrifice the personal autonomy such

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Social Contract, p.80.

associations are supposedly intended to preserve. Laws can never be true acts of self-determination, because they are always enacted in concert with others and others contribute to their content. Even if I agree with others and my input to decisions resembles what others have said, I am not completely free. The very fact that others have a say in what I do implies that my contribution is limited. I am less free, because I have less than complete control in the process of deciding the laws I must follow.

Rousseau makes the possibility of finding personal autonomy in a community even less likely by endorsing a model of a public assembly that incorporates severe limitations on individual input. He explores forms of assembly used by the Romans to accommodate large populations. In the process, he describes acts of gerrymandering that limited the input of certain segments of the population. He cites Servius' division of the people into various camps, called "centuries", which resulted in a situation where

the class that was the least numerous in men was most numerous in centuries, and the entire last class counted only as one subdivision even though alone it contained more than half the inhabitants of Rome (Social Contract, p.115).

Given that political power was a function of having more centuries, Servius, in effect, gave more control to the elite that made up the "first class". Rousseau, in laying out this example, does not frown on Servius' manipulation of the

assembly process. Although he admits that Rome, as is typical of all states, did degenerate³⁷, its problems are not attributed to the kinds of measures Servius employed. What emerges from this example is further evidence of Rousseau's acknowledgement of the inherent limits on individual contribution to collective decisions. But the example does more than reiterate his basic point in that it also demonstrates that restrictions on individual input can be increased by design. People can be left with minimal say in the political process without it being an indictment of the system.

The Roman example may be excused as a flawed attempt to squeeze a political ideal into conditions that do not suit it. Rousseau's motivation is, after all, to use historical examples to support his claim that his system can be adapted to fit less than optimal circumstances. However, if Rousseau accepts the compromise of equality as an undesirable, but unavoidable, consequence of large population size, why is he less charitable when contemplating the practices of the English? Historical developments may have left the English people with no choice but to establish a system of legislation that did not require assemblies of the sovereign people. Further support for the English system may be wrested from

Rousseau's own acknowledgement that, at times, the sovereign does not have to deliberate in order for the general will to prevail. He notes that, although the sovereign people cannot promise "simply to obey" the commands of others,

this is not to say that the commands of leaders cannot pass for expressions of the general will, as long as the sovereign, being free to oppose them, does not do so. In such a case, one ought to presume the consent of the people from universal silence. (Social Contract, p.59)

With the proviso that universal silence can be taken for approval, it is not hard to reconstruct representational government so that the people are seen as tacitly accepting the decisions reached by their elected representatives. The initial act of appointing representatives sanctions their decisions as legitimate. All that is required in such a system is the added assumption that the sovereign reserves the right to recall elected officials who cease to express and follow the general will. On these grounds, parliament can assume the exercise of sovereignty by proxy without usurping sovereignty³⁸.

Permitting tacit consent to stand in the place of deliberation undertaken by a sovereign assembly shows that participation need not be maintained. The correct course of

³⁸ Reading Rousseau in this fashion makes his position closer to that of Locke. See Locke's Second Treatise on Government, Chapter XIV for a discussion of the power of prerogative, as employed by the executive power, when the legislature is not in a position to deliberate. See also Radcliffe's "The General Will and Social Choice Theory" for a Lockean rendering of the general will.

action can be arrived at through other means. The general will, as the objectively correct course of action, exists regardless of how it is discovered. Given that the general will is not always available to the community, it follows that consulting the community is not the only way of finding it. In permitting the general will to be intuited by leaders or law-makers, Rousseau allows the community to surrender its role as the only arbitrator of the general will. His epistemological claim that the general will prevails wherever there is "good sense" is compatible with decision-making processes that exclude certain segments of the population³⁹. The general will can, without difficulty, be divorced from Rousseau's model of participation. If, however, participation is dispensable, why does Rousseau insist that it must be present in a proper functioning polity? Why champion the rather odd assemblies employed by the Romans, if participation is not required for legitimacy?

The answer is, quite simply, that systems which preserve some semblance of individual contribution to political decisions make the population more manageable. The point concerns the logic of political psychology. Given that

³⁹ A peculiar implication of Rousseau's disputational model seems to be that it excludes the solitary law-maker that can decide what is best for the community. However, Rousseau's insistence that this individual is "god-like" gives him the power to consider all sides of an issue without having these perspectives presented by disputing parties.

individuals may approach collective existence with a propensity to think of themselves first, something must be done to remove this tendency. By convincing individuals that they have a stake in the law, it is possible to foster greater respect for the law. In particular, if individuals believe that only the law can supply them with genuine autonomy, then the interest they have in obeying the law increases. But these measures of cultivating compliance are not enough. Individuals may think that the law cannot serve their interest in freedom if they are excluded from the process of determining the law. It is difficult to claim that law preserves freedom if those subjected to the law are not free to determine its content. The function of communal deliberation, therefore, is to make individuals feel as if they are contributing to the content of the laws they follow. Political participation is essential for generating a sense of individual empowerment. However, as Rousseau makes clear, these feelings can still arise and be sustained in situations where access to decision-making is limited or not equal. As long as deficiencies in the system are concealed, the practical result can be the same. In this regard, the function of participation is not to preserve autonomy, but to create a sense, within individual citizens, that they are the authors of the law, even though this is not necessarily the case.

The function of Rousseau's legislative assemblies is

to propagate a fiction about communal life. In particular, it is a fiction appropriate for individuals who disavow the importance of social attachments. Once again, Rousseau fashions institutions and practices that suit the nature of the people in question. Individuals motivated by an interest in individual liberty are made to accept certain institutional arrangements because they unwittingly believe that these arrangements work to preserve their autonomy⁴⁰. If a legislative assembly of citizens works in this way by hiding its real political function, it is possible to conclude that it is another form of ritual that creates social cohesion. In particular, the legislative assembly displays ritualistic features of a ceremonial kind. By joining together to approve of the laws that govern them, citizens bless the general will. They issue ceremonial approval that sanctifies the rules that govern the community. But as in Rousseau's other examples, much of the ritual remains hidden. The citizens do not realize that their role in the process is primarily ceremonial. They must, if the ritual is to work, believe that their individual

40 Ironically, Emile observes that the pursuit of freedom is actually the major source of enslavement. He notes that "The more I examine the work of men in their institutions, the more I see that they make themselves slaves by dint of wanting to be independent and that they use up their freedom in vain efforts to ensure it" (Emile, p.471).

contributions are significant⁴¹. However, given that individual contributions are not guaranteed to have any influence, their role remains ceremonial.

We can imagine Rousseau's example of peasants gathering to exercise their right to sovereignty in such a way as to show that certain aspects of the process, such as its setting and rules for conducting discussion, parallel other forms of ritual. By gathering under a tree at designated times, the participants are removed from ordinary circumstances⁴². They enter into a forum that is similar in structure to ceremonial gatherings we have examined. The location of the meeting functions as a sign that informs them that a particular kind of exchange is going to take place. As well, their discussion is not a casual conversation. It is a goal-directed, regimented exchange. Rules exist that describe what kind of utterances are allowed. In fact, we can see Rousseau's formula for calculating the general will as a rule that ensures that only certain kinds of discussions take place. The political assembly is a ritual in which the exchange of viewpoints is

⁴¹ This need for opaqueness might explain why Emile's introduction to the social contract excludes detailed discussion of civil religion and the Roman assemblies. Emile, as a future citizen, cannot be instructed about the hidden functions of these institutions, otherwise they will lose their control over him.

⁴² A tree may not be merely an accidental location, given that trees, for Rousseau, have been given significance in the past by ancient law-givers. See Emile, p. 321 where he refers to the "old oak of Marme" as an object of symbolic importance.

conducted according to an established pattern. Citizens are, so to speak, committed to a certain mode of discussion by customs and traditions that govern their deliberative interaction.

A difficulty seems to emerge from taking public assemblies to be rituals. Unlike a catechism or a pledge of allegiance, which is conducted according to script, the exchanges that take place in a political assembly are not restricted to what has already been spoken on previous occasions. As long as individuals are concerned with the public good, they are permitted to say what they think. Taken in this light, Rousseau's restrictions are, in fact, quite weak and seem to admit of greater divergence than rituals allow. However, to accept this conclusion is to overlook the fact that there is a place for individual expression in ritual practices⁴³. Political assemblies resemble in some important ways the public festivals that make liberty part of a ritual. Saying what you feel constitutes a form of free expression. In this light, we can see the conditions of neutrality and generality that Rousseau imposes on public deliberation as analogous to the conditions that allow for the discovery of

⁴³ Catherine Bell suggests that introducing spontaneity into a ritual does not disqualify it as a ritual. It can, instead, show that the ritual is now answering a need that it could not in its previous form. Change, thus, preserves ritual. I think a similar point could be made regarding Rousseau's political gestures toward spontaneity. See Bell Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice, p.124.

shared identity through public festivals. In other words, if political assemblies presuppose that everyone is apparently treated the same, then we have a situation that resembles the one brought about by public festivals in that the underlying similarity of individuals is made explicit. The outcome of both processes is to bring citizens together by removing differences that may keep them apart⁴⁴. However, as was evident in my earlier discussion, the presence of free expression does not make the ritual into a 'free for all'. The design of the ritual practice brings with it certain kinds of restrictions that govern what is acceptable. Thus we can repeat the observation that certain kinds of utterances are out of place in communal deliberations because they are inappropriate.

With an understanding of the ritual function of public assemblies in mind, Rousseau's appeal to Roman practices in The Social Contract seems more than reasonable. It connects his discussion of political participation with his use of Roman examples of ritual practices. The ritualistic flavour of the Roman assemblies is commented on by Rousseau explicitly when he describes how Servius cloaked the motivation for the

⁴⁴ Starobinski notes that "The communal feast is reminiscent of the general will of the Social Contract... The festival expresses in the 'existential' realm of emotion, what the Social Contract formulates in the theoretical realm of law". (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, p.96).

changes he brought about. Servius, rather than admit that his innovations served existing elites, made the structure of the assembly resemble that of the military. People were led to accept his actions because of the importance they placed on military matters. As Rousseau observes:

In order that people would have less understanding of the consequences of this last division, Servius pretended to give it a military appearance. (Social Contract, p.115).

The military appearances of the assemblies have nothing to do with warfare. Rather, they are put in place to convince individuals that a questionable form of political organization is legitimate. In transforming the appearance of the assemblies, Servius avails himself of rituals that the people accept because of their predilection for organizations that display the hierarchies inherent in the military. He creates a political ritual that bestows an apparent legitimacy on political decisions by appropriating the ritual features of other organizations. The citizens of Rome tolerate an unequal distribution of decision-making power and accept the decisions of the assemblies even though these practices implicitly contradict the professed equality that the assemblies are intended to preserve.

Linking deception to the ritual of public assembly shows, once more, the centrality of imagination to Rousseau's conception of political activity. Certain situations, objects and images have power over individuals by speaking to their

imaginations. Imaginative identification with central features of political life inspires attachments to particular institutions and arrangements. The awakening of imagination, in these contexts, makes political control possible. Individuals think that assemblies serve their interest in freedom, because the arrangement and presentation of institutions of public deliberation captivate their imaginations. They are compliant, because they are made to imagine that they are free.

We find a complementary perspective on the imaginative and symbolic dimension of political assemblies in Bruce James Smith's work on the civic republican tradition. Smith discusses the primacy of perceived equality to political decision-making processes. He writes:

Political equality in its most primitive form probably meant simply the right to be seen and heard. This right is adequately symbolized in the staff of council which passed from one to another that each might speak.⁴⁵

It is not difficult to see symbolic objects, such as the "staff of council", as items that would be at home in the assemblies Rousseau imagines. As a sign that regulates discussion, it is consistent with other ways of regimenting and organizing communal deliberation. Moreover, symbols that direct discussion can create a sense of equality. Everyone recognizes the apparent equality of others by accepting the

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Bruce James Smith, Politics and Remembrance, p.257.

conditions that make it possible to be seen and to speak.

The emphasis on the right to be seen and heard, introduces another important feature of legislative assemblies. In this regard, Smith highlights a basic requirement of democratic practice. Democracy can be adequately characterized as a way of giving individual members of a community a voice. Voice can be defined as the vehicle for personal expression in group situations. It is what allows the individual to exert influence on the direction a group is taking. As Hirschman notes in his study of voice in political and market environments, it is central to systems that are concerned with "interest articulation"⁴⁶. In other words, voice is what individuals require if their interests are to be protected, because it is what enables them to make their interests known. The articulation of interests can also fuel political exchanges in communities where there is a more pronounced interest in the public good. This form of discussion is apparent in Barber's notion of "democratic talk"⁴⁷. Such form of talk enables individuals to influence the direction a community takes. However, Rousseau departs from these models in that he thinks that the important feature of voice is not that it leads to the definite incorporation of

⁴⁶ Albert Hirschman, Exit, Voice and Loyalty, p.30.

⁴⁷ Barber, Strong Democracy, pp.197-198.

individual viewpoints in to established practices, but that it makes individuals feel as if they have contributed. His claim is, therefore, not very strong. Personal expression is valued if it leads to certain beliefs; no corresponding changes in the world have to take place in order for voice to fulfil its function. The importance of political participation is to be seen and heard, but being seen and heard is not the same as serving one's interests or being the autonomous source of the laws one must follow.

The psychological significance of participating, of being seen and heard, better explains Rousseau's disdain for systems of representative government than does the claim that he is defending moral autonomy. The failure of representative systems is that they do not allow individuals the feeling of empowerment that is a result of direct participation. In terms of rituals, the English Parliamentary elections, for example, are lacking because they are an infrequent and alienating form of ritual. Citizens have little chance to feel in control of their political destiny in such a system because their obvious lack of input does not involve them sufficiently in the decision-making process. Individuals, who only have a say occasionally and in an impersonal manner, do not have the opportunity to feel as if their autonomy is being preserved. The defects of representative government as a ritual, however, in no way eliminate the potential it has a way of discovering

the general will. Citizens living under such a system do not have to despair over the collective good going unrecognized⁴⁸, but they can worry over the fact that they feel little or no connection to the decisions reached. Participation, from Rousseau's perspective, is essential for engendering the correct attitudes required for citizenship and without the proper ritual settings, individual contribution fails to be robust enough to generate commitment to the laws governing a community. To put it differently, the wrong rituals allow for the selfish pull of egoism to strain the community. Participation, therefore, counteracts self-interest, but it does not do so by maintaining a strong form of personal autonomy that some claim Rousseau defends.

Uncovering the ritual function of Rousseau's notion of participation is not a radical discovery. F.M Barnard analyzes Rousseau's rules for public deliberation and points out that these rules may appear to be "mere rituals", but that it in no way entails that they are "empty of meaning". Barnard remarks that:

A ritual, and at times only a ritual, can recover what was once real and vibrant, and of the greatest significance. By preventing memory from becoming faded and jaded, it can help people share a remembrance as though it were a common abode. Above all, a ritual can act as a warning against vapid complacency, against

⁴⁸ It is easy to draw analogies between a Parliament and a court of law. In fact, Rousseau's disputational model seems to fit nicely with standard models of parliamentary debate.

indifference and the blunting of perceptions.⁴⁹

There is much in what Barnard says that resembles points I have already explored. In particular, he accepts the claim that ritual is a means for exposing the shared identity of its participants and for ensuring that individuals have the proper disposition toward their communities. However, Barnard lists other aspects of Rousseau's procedural rules that I take to involve more positive contributions to political decisions than ritual assemblies allow.

Legitimacy, on Barnard's interpretation, requires input that protects the citizens from unscrupulous exercises of power. Input, in this context, does more than make individuals feel a part of their community. It also allows them to determine the nature of their political life.

So conceived, a ritual surely is not something peripheral to politics. Though it is expressive chiefly of a certain performative style, it enshrines also, in and through its procedural decorum, something that is of real substance in politics, its ethic of mediation; for it defines how things are done.⁵⁰

My complaint with this formulation is that the defining of "how things are done" is not necessarily, on Rousseau's model, a product of citizen's contributions. Servius' revision of political procedures, for example, does not appear to have

⁴⁹ Barnard, Self-Direction and Political Legitimacy: Rousseau and Herder, p.72

⁵⁰ Ibid. (Author's emphasis).

been a subject of collective deliberation. Barnard also thinks that procedural rules observed in such assemblies "make all the difference between tyranny and freedom, between honesty and fraud and between the demise and the survival of a polity"⁵¹. But as I have pointed out, Rousseau's position is consistent with a concealed tyranny. Servius used rituals to disguise the fact that an elite controlled Rome. Deception is evident here as well as in the very form of ritual Rousseau advocates. Ritual deceives citizens into thinking that they are autonomous and that communal existence does not compromise their freedom. The survival of the polity is connected with citizens not discovering that their autonomy is not being served by the community.

Margaret Canovan is perhaps more sensitive to the limits of Rousseau's rituals than Barnard. She notes, with obvious dismay, that the "startling implication of Rousseau's theory is that in a free republic assemblies have a purely ritual function"⁵². However, Canovan uses this realization to deny that Rousseau's assemblies have any value. She bases her position on the mistaken assumption that the general will, prior to its discovery, requires complete unanimity in a community. She thereby fails to take into account how the

51 Ibid.

52 Canovan, "Arendt, Rousseau and Human Plurality in Politics", p.292.

search for the general will inspires a recognition of similarity and that unity does not have to be made explicit prior to deliberation. Indeed, the act of deliberation creates unity by removing differences that hinder the recognition of underlying similarities. Making this claim is not equivalent to holding that "In a perfect republic the assembled citizens would be mere clones, all speaking with one voice"⁵³. It is not surprising that Canovan, therefore, overlooks the sense of empowerment that assemblies make possible. Assemblies that function appropriately do have political value and it is not the case that, in Rousseau's system, "real politics in the sense of public action and discussion is redundant"⁵⁴. Exercising one's political voice inspires feelings that cannot be created by any other means. Ritual assemblies can perform a crucial and non-redundant political function.

The political function of public assemblies I have described may leave little room for a theory of moral agency that makes self-legislation essential for autonomy. On Rousseau's account of social life, freedom of this sort appears spurious. It is plausible to suggest, therefore, that Rousseau must have something else in mind when it comes to defining the freedom supplied by social existence. Rather than

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

stress self-mastery as the essential feature of autonomy, it could be noted that freedom, as a social achievement, is actually a matter of gaining access to the preconditions of rational behaviour. In other words, I am free if I am capable of understanding my actions and deliberating on my desires before acting. As an active member of a political society, I can acquire an awareness of which goods and ends are valuable and can reflect on the proper way to achieve these ends. I am free in the sense that I am a rational agent, regardless of whether or not I achieve a strong form of personal autonomy. What social existence provides is an environment in which this aspect of human nature can be nurtured and sustained. This interpretation finds support in the list of achievements Rousseau provides regarding the changes brought about through proper socialization. He writes:

Although in this state he deprives himself of several advantages given to him by nature, he gains such great ones, his faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas broadened, his feelings ennobled, and his whole soul elevated... (Social Contract, p.56)

Freedom, in these circumstances, depends on the individual being more than a creature of appetite. A free agent is capable of deliberation and seeks to follow the correct course of action, even if it is prescribed by others. Thus individuals can be "forced to be free" in the sense that they can be coerced into doing what is right, regardless of whether

or not it is what they wish to do. By being made to do what reason requires, an agent's actions are brought into line with what the individual would desire to do when correctly responding to reason. Society ensures that the individual remains a rational agent.

Stressing that freedom is more a product of being situated in the proper social environment, and less a result of having the opportunity to decide all of one's actions, may undo some of the difficulties Rousseau's account faces. Problems persist, however, in that the ennobling of human beings brought about by socialization is possible without access to legislative processes. In other words, the influences that permit human beings to rise above their initial primitive condition can be present in societies where individuals are not part of the sovereign body. My faculties can be enlivened and exercised without insisting that I contribute to political decisions. In order for the development of rationality to be directly connected to political processes, it would be necessary to show that something about these activities is responsible for the emergence of rationality. But Rousseau discusses the value of the changes people undergo in terms of their belonging to a society and not merely because they contribute to sovereign decision-making. There is, therefore, no compelling reason to bind the conditions of freedom to a particular model of

political organization. We are no closer to understanding why Rousseau connects individual freedom to communal exercises of sovereignty.

Moreover, even if Rousseau draws a strong connection between individual rationality and access to sovereignty, there is little reason to follow him on this point. The essential claim he makes is that the act of entering political society dramatically alters the human condition. By recognizing the equality of others and by giving oneself to the sovereign, the individual understands the need to behave according to the laws that govern society. However, this realization in itself does not entail that the individual must be included or consulted whenever sovereignty is exercised. An agent is not rendered irrational if society acts without every individual's input. The general will is still ascertainable, regardless of individual contribution. Therefore, even if access to rational purposes is the hallmark of political existence, it remains available in societies that depart from Rousseau's model of political deliberation.

A more serious objection to interpretations that emphasize the realization of rationality provided by socialization is that Rousseau is not as comfortable with all of the developments that accompany the emergence of reason. Before praising the ennobling of human beings, he observes how some individuals may reason incorrectly about the nature of

political association. He remarks on how an individual may "view what he owes the common cause as a free contribution, the loss of which will harm others less than its payments burden him" (Social Contract, p.55). In other words, the environment that makes the social contract possible is also the same one that allows for the kind of free-riding practised by maximal egoists. Individuals may reason in such a manner that they threaten the circumstances that make such exercises of reason possible. The self-defeating use of reason in the name of individual interest may be an example of "the abuses of this new condition" which harms "man" and will "often degrade him beneath the condition he left" (Social Contract, p.56). By pursuing self-interest, and by abusing the newly acquired powers of reason society provides, individuals place themselves in a situation less desirable than the state of nature. They, in essence, turn the creation of political society into an opportunity for individual gain, and undermine the conditions that make justice possible. With the emergence of the rationality linked with the development of society comes the disruptive influences that Rousseau sees as responsible for social strife.

Regardless of whether or not we can see Rousseau as having second-thoughts about the value of reason in society, I have yet to provide an adequate defense of my own position. My interpretation may seem to overlook the importance of the

general will to Rousseau's thought. In particular, I may be accused of failing to realize how the general will preserves individual autonomy by providing commands and prohibitions that differ significantly from the kinds of laws imposed on slaves. By not designating particular individuals or situations, the general will does not entail that one individual is forced to follow the will of another. The conditions of neutrality that I mentioned previously ensure that individuals can understand the general will as an expression of their own individual will. Nevertheless, irrespective of how the general will is ascertained, its power over individuals arises from the belief that it is compatible with individual freedom. Individuals act as the general will dictates because they take it to be a statement of their will. Appealing to the general will convinces individuals that obeying the law is equivalent to self-mastery. The crucial aspect of the general will, therefore, is the control it has over individual psychology. Individuals behave in a certain fashion because of beliefs they have regarding their relationship with the law. If, as the example of Servius shows, these sorts of beliefs can be generated in political environments where concealed inequalities exist, the results remain the same. Individuals behave accordingly because they believe that their actions contribute to their autonomy. The significance of the general will is not that it seeks to

preserve individual freedom, but that it is expressed in a form that makes individuals accept it as preserving freedom. Rousseau's emphasis on the role belief plays in generating compliance allows for the conclusion that the feeling of freedom is an adequate substitute for freedom. As long as the political environment is such that individuals are convinced that they are free, the necessary result has been achieved. The general will supports cooperation by sustaining feelings of individual autonomy.

My reading of the Social Contract as opposed to the others I have outlined, has the advantage of making the discussion of freedom parallel arguments made elsewhere. In particular, by demonstrating the ritual nature of Rousseau's legislative assemblies, it is possible to compare them to the other rituals he describes. As for Rousseau's intentions on this subject, it is difficult to claim that he had such conclusions in mind when he attempted to reconcile personal autonomy and social existence. He may have thought that his model of political participation succeeded where others failed, but it does seem as if his arguments carried him in a different direction. In this respect, his efforts to show how his approach could be implemented result in forms of political association that do little to salvage the freedom he claims to have valued.

My position finds further support in arguments put

forward by William Bluhm. Bluhm is puzzled, as I am, by how a system in which individuals are controlled by socially determined decisions are able to preserve autonomy. For Bluhm, the problem centres on the metaphysical standing of free will in Rousseau's philosophy. Bluhm holds that Rousseau would not base his entire position on a metaphysical claim that could not be publicly confirmed. To do so would leave him vulnerable to attack by materialists and sceptics who would not accept such unconfirmed claims⁵⁵. Indeed, as I have demonstrated, Rousseau insists in his criticism of philosophical reflection that its weaknesses stem from the fact that it claims to access what is unknowable. He does not accept the word of philosophers who claim to establish truths beyond the limits of human experience and understanding. According to Bluhm, Rousseau's own definition of free will is subject to similar doubt because free will is only accessible to the individual as a personal experience or sentiment. In other words, my freedom is not directly perceived by others. My actions appear to observers to be the mechanical operations of my body. Likewise, if I attribute freedom to you, it is on the basis of your testimony or my willingness to believe that you experience the same sensation of freedom that I do. Given that free will is not objectively apparent, Bluhm suggests that

⁵⁵ William T. Bluhm "Freedom in The Social Contract: Rousseau's 'Legitimate Chains'", pp.364-368.

Rousseau finally decides that the important measure of human well-being is perfectibility. The progress people make toward perfecting talents, abilities and virtues can be ascertained without resorting to claims about free agency. Movement toward perfectibility is publicly accessible in ways that free will is not and thus serves as a better foundation for judging the success of a political community.

For Bluhm, one of the devices available for creating an environment geared toward perfectibility is the appeal to freedom. Much of what Bluhm says turns on how the citizens described in the Social Contract accept their "chains" as legitimate. They live with the social restraint of their actions because they believe it is consistent with the realization of their personal autonomy. However, the concealed function of the appeal to freedom is to prevent individuals from revolting against the kind of controls necessary for nurturing perfectibility. The cultivation of virtues requires systematic deception that makes citizens compliant. Bluhm concludes that "Freedom in society is a legitimating myth - morally meaningless, but psychologically useful to the sagacious legislator of egalitarian perfectibility"⁵⁶. The value of such a myth arises from the fact that

Rousseau has arranged it so that his egalitarian system of the general will provides each man with the subjective

experience of freedom (a natural need) in his equal participation in the formation of that will, and in his equal subjection to self-made laws⁵⁷ .

Individuals agree to obey laws because they believe that laws maintain freedom, but the real political value of this acceptance lies in how it leads to individual improvement.

Bluhm, however, does not go far enough in making his case. He fails to realize that the system does not have to be egalitarian. Just as the power of freedom is found in its mythical quality, the value of equality is found in the appearance of equality. Servius, for example, conceals unequal divisions of power without disrupting communal harmony. Moreover, Bluhm overstates the role of perfectibility in Rousseau's philosophy. As I have previously argued, the attributes that make improvement possible are also responsible for the decline of the species. Notions of perfectibility are closely connected to the cultivation of the arts and sciences, which are attacked outright by Rousseau. Rousseau believes that human beings possess the ability to improve themselves, but he is aware of the ways in which such improvement may go wrong. Nevertheless, Bluhm's analysis succeeds in raising a point similar to my own. More is going on in the Social Contract than Rousseau admits. Bluhm realizes that the freedom claimed to be created or preserved by social order is

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Bluhm, pp. 376-377.

peculiar. The general will is not necessarily compatible with the exercise of individual choice and is not the kind of freedom that Rousseau values in his personal life. If civil freedom appears to be a suspect concept, Bluhm argues that its function may be different than that normally believed. He thinks that tensions generated by Rousseau's intentions suggest a different reading of the Social Contract. The appeal to freedom in the course of the work shifts from a statement of the need to uphold individual liberty to a claim that the value of freedom rests in the power it has over citizens.

Rousseau complicates any analysis of the Social Contract by not supplying a thorough examination of the concept of freedom. He notes at one point that "the philosophic meaning of the word 'freedom' is not my subject here" (Social Contract, p. 56). Fortunately, Rousseau is not completely rid of the subject of freedom, and discussions of it can be found in his other works. These works support the conclusion that Rousseau's main interest is with a weaker concept of autonomy than that normally associated with the Social Contract. For Rousseau, to be free is to be free from feelings of coercion. In the Reveries, he defends his position and his own actions by stating,

I have never believed that man's freedom consists in doing what he wants, but rather in never doing what he does not want to do, and this is the freedom I have always sought after and often achieved, the freedom by virtue of which I have been most scandalized by my

contemporaries. (Reveries, p.104).

In this assessment, freedom is defined as the absence of pressures that force an individual to do something that he or she does not want to do. Rousseau's remarks in the Reveries are compatible with a view of freedom put forward in the Emile. Rousseau writes that "my freedom" consists in "my being able to will only what is suitable to me or what I deem to be such, without anything external to me determining me" (Emile, p.280). This formulation may be read as repeating the strong claim that freedom involves imposing laws on oneself. However, in the light of the Reveries, it can just as easily be read as the simple claim that freedom requires that I do not feel as if my actions are being compelled by external forces. Freedom is not determined to exist by pointing to a particular state of affairs or objective criteria. Rather, freedom is deemed to be a matter of individual disposition⁵⁸. Hence I am free if I do not feel as if my actions are forced upon me. In this regard, any emphasis that Rousseau may have appeared to place on a strong sense of self-determination is misleading. His advocating that one is free only if one lives by one's own determinations actually means that individuals only feel free if they see themselves as the source of their actions. In

⁵⁸ This point is also consistent with Bluhm's claim that knowledge of freedom arises from awareness of a subjective state.

other words, Rousseau's concept of freedom reiterates my basic point, namely that the importance of freedom is to be found in its psychological effects. The value of freedom rests not in the capacity to exercise autonomy, but to feel as if one is autonomous.

The need for feeling in command of one's actions sheds new light on the contrast Rousseau presents between impulsive and free behaviour. The problem with letting appetites and impulses rule your life is that, under such conditions, your actions will always feel as if you never decide how to act. In other words, if your behavior is entirely impulsive, you will feel as if it is beyond your control. A creature of appetite is a creature that fails to ever feel as if it is commanding its life. In relation to a notion of perfectibility, the implication is that reliance on appetites is tantamount to a failure to conceive of your life as something that is your own and which you can change and direct as you see fit. Although Rousseau denies, in the end, that the conditions that make total self-mastery possible can exist in social circumstances, he still holds that having the feeling of being in control is essential for human happiness and well-being. Absence of a feeling of empowerment is not only a political defect. It is also equivalent to feeling as if one's life belongs to someone or something else.

Further evidence to support my interpretation is found

in the Emile when Rousseau observes that feeling as if someone else is controlling one's actions is a source of frustration. He counsels against trying to master a pupil through direct confrontation. Such acts lead to rebellion, because "it is always irksome to do another's will" (Emile, p.90). As a clever tutor, you should, therefore, never let your pupil "imagine that you might pretend to have any authority over him" (Emile, p.91). The need for an individual to feel free prevents an authority from using conspicuous means to compel actions. Rousseau believes that education can only be successful if teachers can disguise authority and make it look as if the pupil's actions are directed by physical laws and not human artifice. Only in this way can the pupil come to accept the inherent limits on self-determination. Individuals may not feel as if they are being coerced if their actions appear to be controlled by the "harsh yoke of nature" (Emile, p.91).

It is important, however, to distinguish the "yoke of nature" from the "yoke of appetite" and the "yoke of another's will". When my freedom is thwarted by physical laws, I can still feel in control of my actions. I would have succeeded if the world had behaved differently. There is no absence of a feeling of self-control in this situation. But such feelings are missing if one is guided entirely by impulses that seem foreign to the will. Nature may impede us from acting as we

please but this is not the same as being impeded because of a lack of self-control. Likewise, being controlled by nature is not the same as being controlled by someone else in the sense that one does not necessarily perceive a will operating behind nature. Nature controls, but it does not command in the same way that others do when they seek control of our actions. The necessity associated with nature differs from the restrictions associated with slavery.

Rousseau does not limit his discussion of the "irksome" nature of coercion to examples where one individual attempts to command another. In the Reveries, he describes how something as innocuous as giving aid to a street urchin can inspire the feeling that one's actions are being controlled. Giving money to a child on one occasion creates the expectation in the recipient that similar gifts will be offered at subsequent encounters. If one is sensitive to these expectations, as Rousseau claims to be, then a compulsion to continue giving is created. The result as Rousseau describes it is that

I often found my good deeds a burden because of the chain of duties they dragged behind them; then pleasure vanished and it became intolerably irksome to me to keep giving the same assistance which had first delighted me. (Reveries, p.94)

In this context, Rousseau offers himself as an example of how social relations can create feelings of misery by making actions seem compulsory. We may not all feel, as acutely as

Rousseau does, the pains of obligation, but it is not difficult to imagine similar scenarios in which we feel as if we are losing control of our actions. It is this effect of social life that Rousseau thinks typifies the experiences of most citizens.

All our practices are only subjection, impediment and constraint. Civil man is born, lives and dies in slavery. At birth he is sewed in swaddling clothes; at his death is nailed in a coffin. So long as keeps his human shape, he is enchained by our institutions. (Emile, pp.42-43).

Rousseau's message seems to be that there is an irrevocable connection between being part of a social order and feeling the burden of "social chains". By implication, if political reform is to be successful, the best path is one that eliminates, as much as possible, feelings of control and coercion. In terms of my rendering of Rousseau, the obvious route is to conceal social control so that it becomes imperceptible and individuals continue to believe that they are free.

The considerations I have presented may seem to falter in the light of Rousseau's own professed dedication to liberty. The passionate statement of purpose that begins the Social Contract exerts such lasting influence that it is impossible to read the body of the text independent of an analysis of his broad and forceful claims. I must, therefore, show how Rousseau's words mesh with my overall interpretation. However, problems arise from the very ambiguity of Rousseau's

claims. Roger Masters provides a helpful beginning to the process of analysis when he translates Rousseau's famous opening statement of the Social Contract as "Man was/is born free and everywhere he is in chains"⁵⁹. He decides upon such an awkward formulation because Rousseau's words are ambiguous. He can be taken as using the present or past tense⁶⁰. Masters thinks that Rousseau exploits this ambiguity to make two distinct claims. With the past tense, he sees Rousseau as referring to natural man's freedom from political controls. Masters writes that "'Man was born free'... that is, there were no civil societies, no laws, no obligations binding the first men"⁶¹. On a basic level, Masters' interpretation is perfectly correct. By definition, natural man is free of social restrictions and political obligations, because he lives without social relations and political institutions. He is not bound by society and laws because they do not exist. This freedom is lost when political society is created. Hence human beings become enchained and sacrifice their freedom. On

⁵⁹ Social Contract, p.46.

⁶⁰ Masters writes that the "ambiguity arises because the verb 'est ne' is the past tense of 'naitre' (to be born), whereas 'est' (is) 'ne' (born) is an equally possible translation." (Ibid., p.36). Even if it is not clear that Masters' choice of words is the best, his approach has heuristic value in that it nicely lays out the options available for classifying different aspects of human freedom.

⁶¹ Roger Masters, "Introduction", On the Social Contract, p.10.

another level, things are more complicated. Although natural man is free of social and political restraints, he is not completely free. Rousseau indicates that human beings in the state of nature do not exercise free-will. Natural man is, as I have already noted, governed by non-reflective instinct. Natural man, therefore, was not born free in the sense that he was not free from the fetters of instinct⁶².

Pointing to the control instinct has over natural man alters the meaning of Rousseau's initial claim. What can be added to Masters' interpretation is the idea that natural man was "everywhere in chains". Although Rousseau does not explicitly make this notion part of his basic position in the Social Contract, it can be extracted from his discussion of the state of nature. In other words, the chains that bind human beings are not produced solely by the introduction of socially imposed constraints. Nature itself controls the way human beings can act. However, these constraints in themselves do not invalidate the claim that natural man was born free.

⁶² In the Second Discourse, Rousseau seems to suggest that choice accompanies the basic "animal functions" as part of natural man's condition. He writes that "To perceive and feel will be his first state, which he will have in common with all animals. To will and not will, to desire and fear will be the first operations of his soul, until new circumstances cause new developments in it" (p.115). Despite the inclusion of willing in this list of "operations", natural man wills without the aid of foresight, memory or imagination. His acts of will are non-reflective, and, thus, are not free in any strong sense. Instinct determines his choices without allowing him to analyze his situation or his options.

Not only was natural man free of social and political restrictions, he was, more importantly, free of all feelings of restriction. Natural man never felt coerced. Even though his actions were directed by instinct, he remained oblivious to this control. Natural man could not see his actions as determined, because he lacked the cognitive power required for this insight. In this light, natural man was born free in the sense that he lived as if he was always the author of his own actions.

The other claim Masters sees Rousseau as making involves the present situation of human beings. Human beings are born free, on this reading, because they have the innate ability to make decisions. In terms of their place in society, individuals can accept or reject the demands of others. As Masters puts it, "Man is born free" means that "every human being is born with a natural freedom to chose whether or not to obey others"⁶³. For Rousseau, the existence of organized society is "always simply a case of free and voluntary association" (Emile, p.459). Being bound by social conventions and controls is not a natural condition. Nature cannot tell human beings what to do in such circumstances, because social relations are not natural occurrences. However, when read in this context, the claim that "Man is born free

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Masters, p.10.

and everywhere he is in chains" sounds strikingly odd. If human beings are free to grant their obedience, would they place themselves in chains? If they are truly free, it would seem more likely that they would choose to live without chains.

Masters glosses over these difficulties by assuming that the chains Rousseau describes can be rendered legitimate by consent. If individuals are allowed to decide the form their chains should take, these chains become legitimately binding. A social contract is a means for justifying the communal restraint of individuals, because it entails that chains of social obligation have been freely accepted. The strangeness of Rousseau's claim, however, does not vanish by asserting that chains can be rendered legitimate. The unhappy citizen, who perceives all social responsibilities as painful burdens, is not the sort of person that would be satisfied if he were told that he can choose his own chains. A citizen who experiences society as coercive would see any obligations as a source of personal hardship. Such individuals, when they could avoid unpleasant or irksome duties, would most likely do so. In this respect, the notion of natural freedom reintroduces into the discussion problems I have associated with individuals who feel no compulsion to aid others or respect agreements. If individuals always retained the freedom to decide on the nature of their obligations, chances are that

no such chains would exist. The citizen would flee social obligations in a way analogous to Rousseau's own attempt to avoid encountering the street urchin or the stag hunter's willingness to abandon the group cause. Chains, being uncomfortable hindrances to action, would be shed as soon as possible by naturally free individuals.

There seems to be little reason to suppose that the freedom Masters attributes to human beings is compatible with the existence of social restraints. Rousseau has, as I have shown, undermined the claim that a strong form of personal autonomy can be reconciled with social authority. Social existence is a source of chains that cannot be avoided. The individual surrenders his ability to decide for himself in social circumstances because he is governed by decisions wholly or partly determined by others. However, in a weak sense, the notion that social man is born free can be preserved through a move similar to the one that made sense of the claim that natural man was born free. Freedom can be achieved in social environments where individuals are free from direct coercion. This sense of freedom can be described as something human beings are born with, because it is made possible by the nature of human psychology. Human beings are capable of feeling as if they are the authors of their own actions, as long as there are no countervailing forces that make them feel as if they are being controlled. It is this

tendency to which Rousseau refers when he writes in the Emile that "Freedom is found in no form of government; it is in the heart of the free man. He takes it with him everywhere" (Emile, p.473). On this account, if a human being is left to his own devices, his innate sense of individual autonomy will carry him forward. He will live life believing that he is in control of it.

The sense of individual autonomy can be cultivated and sustained in social environments if the control exercised over individuals is concealed. Once again, the condition of natural man provides a suitable model for envisioning the condition of the citizen. Just as instinct remains hidden for natural man, the forces of socialization remain hidden by becoming part of the way the individual conceives of his actions. This result is made possible by controlling acts at their source, namely by controlling an individual's imagination and his will. When Rousseau urges in the Emile, that the tutor must hide his exercises of power over his pupil, he offers a way in which "the will itself is made captive" (Emile, p.120). This obedience is exacted through deception. The pupil does not resist his chains, because "(t)here is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom" (Emile, p.120). Emile is controlled through devices similar to those that control the patriotic citizen. In both cases, "man is everywhere in chains", because, in a properly functioning

social system⁶⁴, actions are determined through the control of will, but the individual is free as long as he or she is made to imagine that these actions originate within the self⁶⁵.

The Second Discourse presents a worrisome indictment of the kind of reading of Rousseau that I have just offered. If it is correct to see him as accepting concealed control and inequalities as positive features of political associations, then he advocates the form of social agreement he denounces in the Second Discourse. As noted previously, that version of the contract arose due to the interest the rich and privileged had in defending themselves from those at whose expense they had acquired wealth and power. They conceal their motives, however, and present the contract as a mutually beneficial

64 It is important to remember that the control sought over the will and the imagination is something available only when ideal conditions prevail. As noted in Chapter 3, the imagination can be taken captive, but there is no guarantee that it will stay captive.

65 Amelie Rorty provides an analysis of power relations, in "Imagination and Power", that is remarkably similar to Rousseau's position. She suggests that "to control someone is to control his imagination" (p.331). She holds that imagination is the "faculty that envisages possibilities, that works them out in detail, that formulates them in such ways as to make them viable and available options" (p.340). For Rorty, and, as I believe, for Rousseau, by controlling the imagination, it is possible to control the way an individual conceives of his options. The more limited an individual's imagination is, the more limited is his awareness of what opportunities are available to him. It is exactly this kind of control that Rousseau seeks when he provides a means for restricting the workings of the imagination.

arrangement that will establish a just and secure political order. A situation resembling Hobbes' "war of all against all", in which property and social position are constantly threatened by acts of brute force, is replaced by the emergence of political sovereignty. In the process, the rhetoric inspiring the contract hides the sources of inequality. The language of justice makes possible the entrenchment of injustice. The wealthy manipulator has "easily invented specious reasons" to persuade others and "lead them to his goal" (Second Discourse, p.159). The fraudulent misrepresentation of the circumstances surrounding the enactment of the contract violates Rousseau's own dedication to truth and justice. By his own definition, Rousseau cannot condone such outright dishonesty because it is imposture that serves the interest of an elite, rather than the society as a whole. If the version of the contract presented in the Social Contract lapses into similar fraud, then Rousseau fails to respect the requirements that he has established.

The curious aspect of Rousseau's condemnation of illegitimate means of persuasion is that the language employed in such charades does not differ from the kind that would be used in creating a just society. In order for the masses to be deceived, they must be told that the results brought about will serve their interests. The wealthy manipulator calls on others to

institute regulations of justice and peace to which all are obliged to conform, which make an exception of no one and which compensate in some way for the caprices of fortune by equally subjecting the powerful and the weak to mutual duties. (Second Discourse, p.159).

In the end, after being seduced by these words, everyone runs "to meet their chains thinking they have secured their freedom..." (Second Discourse, p.159). In this account, however, there is little that would be out of place in the statement of the general problem in the Social Contract. The intended function of the contract is presented as follows:

Find a form of association that defends and protects the person and goods of each associate with all the common force, and by means of each one uniting with all nevertheless obeys himself and remains as free as before. (Social Contract, p. 53)

The inspiration for the social contract remains the same in both contexts. Individuals wish to be protected, but do not want to surrender their freedom. They seek a form of association that will grant security without entailing a complete sacrifice of personal autonomy. But if the illegitimate contract and the just contract have similar inspirations and are expressed in similar terms, what accounts for the substantial differences between them? Why does Rousseau condemn one and hold that the other provides a solution to political and social ills?

An initial answer seems to rest in Rousseau's analysis of the preconditions of justice. In both the Second Discourse and the Social Contract, he describes existing social

relationships. In the former, he envisions individuals as bound together in corrupting relationships that engender vanity and mutual distrust. In the latter, he allows himself to consider individuals that are in a more pristine environment. They have not been so corrupted that laws cannot reform them. These are the kinds of beings that a law-giver is able to influence and Rousseau believes that they are most likely to be found when a particular society has just been formed. He remarks:

Most peoples, like men, are docile in their youth. They become incorrigible as they grow older. Once customs are established and prejudices have taken root, it is a dangerous and foolhardy undertaking to want to reform them. (Social Contract, p.70)

The citizens of a just social order are to be open to reform and change. This stipulation shows that the situation outlined in the Second Discourse is beyond repair. It is a society rife with conflict and prejudice. The contract enacted under such corrupt circumstances could not initiate reform. Rather, it merely cements existing inequalities. If a society is to be swayed in the direction of justice, the change must happen before it is too set in the course it is taking.

To think that the stage of social development at which reform takes place is crucial for distinguishing just from unjust associations is to indulge a conceit of which Rousseau is exceedingly wary. He, as I have discussed previously, notes that one cannot suppose people to have the virtues that just

legislation instills prior to the enactment of the contract and the establishment of political order. Otherwise, the contract and subsequent legislation are superfluous. People would be the way we want them to be without the need for political reform. Therefore, if the only difference between just and unjust political orders is the nature of the people when reform is undertaken, then in practical terms Rousseau's vision is appallingly unhelpful. We cannot hope for justice to emerge unless we are living in one of those rare moments of great upheaval when a society can start anew. Justice is a goal for those people who have lost their customs and prejudices. We have to wait until the "horror of the past is equivalent to amnesia" (Social Contract, p.71). But if political hope is inextricably linked to mass amnesia, justice is placed out of reach.

At this point, Rousseau's project seems undone by pessimism. If a just social order is possible, it is only when a utopian flight from history is available. However, the verdict is premature. What is being overlooked is the change Rousseau makes regarding the framing of the social contract. In the Second Discourse, the people agree to the illegitimate political arrangement because they are persuaded by a form of speech. They are seduced by powerful language that promises justice but delivers injustice. In the Social Contract, however, it is noted that people will probably not listen to

the earnest language of the law-giver. They will be so distracted by personal interests and concerns that the meaning of what he says will be lost. Just as those individuals described in the Second Discourse only agree to temper their pursuit of personal goals when they hear it is in their self-interest, so will the law-giver's audience only listen for appeals to self-interest. The law-giver instead must resort to the use of visual signs and symbols that "can win over without violence and persuade without convincing" (Social Contract, p.69). Such symbolic devices, I have claimed, are central to Rousseau's project. In this context, they work without being supplemented by speech. Language, as an instrument for voicing personal perspectives, must be quiet if people are not prepared to hear what justice demands. The reform of society requires demonstrations of justice that are not contaminated by expressions of self-interested concerns. Therefore, what is wrong with the contract of the Second Discourse is the assumption that a just system can be brought about through direct verbal persuasion. While it is necessary for human beings to use speech in non-natural environments, the reliance on persuasive speech is dangerous when imposture can threaten the birth of a just republic. Justice requires a disposition to new possibilities incompatible with the rhetoric of persuasion. Justice presupposes the envisioning of new arrangements inspired by the presentation of signs and symbols

that capture people's attention. In other words, instituting justice requires imagination.

The difference between the contracts Rousseau considers is not, on my reading, produced by the presence of deceit. Rousseau acknowledges that the law-giver's recourse to symbolic displays is itself a ruse, but it is a carefully constructed one. "False tricks can form a fleeting bond; wisdom alone can make it durable" (Social Contract, p.70). Likewise, the legitimate social contract can conceal inequalities, but only as long as these exist for the betterment of the society as a whole. Denying that verbal persuasion can work means that actions undertaken for political reform should focus on the entire group and not on particular concerns that attract the attention of individuals. Resorting to signs and symbols does not, however, entail that Rousseau abandons all hope for language within the just society. Practical circumstances require the use of language for persuasion and communicating diverging viewpoints. The deficiencies of language are less conspicuous in communal discussions than in the enactment of the social contract, because other measures that influence individual behavior are in place in post-contract situations. The presence of socializing forces that temper self-interest ensures that citizens are more cooperative than they may be prior to the implementation of the contract. Language is reliable once

people become comfortable with thinking in terms of group interests.

The need for group interests to usurp the place formally held by individual interests points in the direction of an improved understanding of the idea of the general will. Rousseau fashions a contract that creates a very special organization, namely a society that acts in a cohesive fashion by following a path directed toward shared objectives. By following this will, the society does only what is good for it as a whole and ceases to be guided by personal or factional interests. Individuals, as well, prosper by having their genuine needs and interests expressed and protected by the community. Hence the group takes on a more pronounced role in determining individual well-being. But there is nothing in this view to show that Rousseau would not allow individuals to be deceived about their condition. The chains that bind individuals together do not become illegitimate merely because individuals do not understand that there are severe limits placed on their actions. Illegitimacy is not a product of reducing individual freedom. Rather, it is a product of persuading individuals that they should work for the benefit of someone or something other than their society. The contract in the Second Discourse, by only appealing to self-interest, undermines the commitments necessary for social cohesion. By listening to self-interest, individuals fail to understand the

underlying basis of justice. They do not see the general will, because they do not see themselves as part of a cohesive group.

Rousseau's insistence that appeals to self-interest should recede as quickly as possible from the public stage finds a suitable counterpart in my own argument. As is evident from the structure of my work, the problems that initiated my analysis of Rousseau have received less mention as the work proceeded. I began by asserting that the question that must be answered pertained to the overcoming of self-interested motives that generated difficulties related to such things as the free-rider problem. But the discussion of how social cooperation is feasible in the face of these difficulties has not returned to the details I first introduced. This apparent oversight is actually demanded by the logic of Rousseau's position. From Rousseau's perspective the success of political reform depends on abandoning the language of self-interest as soon as possible. We may appeal to it as a way of arousing initial interest in the potential for community, but if it continues to exert influence it does more harm than good. Likewise, in the search for improved approaches to the philosophical study of community, it makes sense to employ a different vocabulary. By moving away from the traditional formulation of central problems, the envisioning of new solutions is made easier. In other words, by adopting

Rousseau's language, we can imagine possibilities that are concealed by adherence to more standard approaches. Therefore, certain formulations of problems may inspire us to think about issues, but forgetting them enables us to transform our outlook. Given as well that problems related to social cooperation are still relevant, the need for new ways of seeing is even more pronounced.

Rousseau's vision itself entails a different way of seeing the relationship between individual and community than the one presupposed by positions that concentrate on the power of self-interested motives. In his view, the needs of the community assume a standing that is incompatible with the pursuit of self-interest. The primacy of the community is not misplaced in Rousseau's position, even though he has profound appreciation of individualism⁶⁶. His emphasis on the importance of community is consistent with his claim that the implementation of a just political order must start with a transformation of the individual. In this respect, the whole of my work can be read as an exploration of the developments required for such change to come about. We have seen how the asocial condition of Rousseau's natural man is altered to

⁶⁶ This appreciation is more than evident in Rousseau's own life. His willingness to pursue unpopular choices, both philosophically and personally, entail a desire to be an independent, unique individual. But there remains in his thinking an interest in putting aside destructive individualism for the betterment of the human condition.

create a social individual deeply concerned about the condition of his particular community and fellow citizens. The activation of imagination and the socializing emotions that it brings with it allow for feelings necessary for community. These emotions are sustained by rituals that make visible the similarities between citizens. As well, with the emergence of such bonds comes the ability to employ language to further 'tighten the social knot' as well as providing means for understanding differences between individuals. Finally, the appeal to individual liberty as a social creation ensures that recalcitrant individuals are not as keen to disturb the social order. In all of these developments the emphasis is on the power of imagination. Imagination enables individuals to see the world in different ways and to see themselves in different situations. But imagination is not set free completely, for its social utility rests in how it is to be directed. Without restraint, imagination is the source of disruptive and dangerous passions. It must, therefore, assume a position similar to that of the citizens of Rousseau's idealized community. It must live in chains.

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