

# OCCASIONAL PAPERS

ERIC-VOEGELIN-ARCHIV  
LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS-UNIVERSITÄT  
MÜNCHEN

— XIII —

Gregor Sebba

Jean-Jacques Rousseau:  
Autobiography and Political Thought



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Gregor Sebba

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Autobiography and Political Thought

hrsg. von Peter J. Opitz

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

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## VORWORT

Alle der bisher im Rahmen der *Occasional Papers* veröffentlichten Beiträge stammen entweder von Voegelin selbst oder befassen sich mehr oder minder direkt mit seinem Werk. Verglichen damit fällt die vorliegende kleine Schrift von Gregor Sebba aus dem Rahmen. Weder bezieht sie sich auf die Person Voegelins noch befaßt sie sich mit dessen Werk, in dem übrigens Jean-Jacques Rousseau nur eine sehr marginale Rolle spielt.

Der Bezug liegt auf einer anderen Ebene. Gregor Sebba war einer der wenigen Freunde Voegelins und zugleich einer der sensibelsten Interpreten seines Werkes. Seine über die Jahre erschienenen Essays zur Philosophie Voegelins, von denen einige in der posthum veröffentlichten Kollektion seiner Schriften enthalten sind<sup>1</sup>, gehören auch heute noch zum besten, was über Voegelin geschrieben wurde. Was sie aus der Fülle der Arbeiten über Voegelin heraushebt, sind sowohl die feinfühligste Interpretation wie auch die eigenständige und undogmatische Auseinandersetzung mit Voegelin.

Es läßt sich nicht mehr genau feststellen, wann die beiden Männer sich erstmals trafen. Es muß irgendwann in den 30er Jahren in Wien gewesen sein, wo beide jenem „Geistkreis“ angehörten, von dem Voegelin in seinen *Autobiographischen Reflexionen*<sup>2</sup> berichtet. Ihr in den „Hoover Institution Archives“ enthaltener Briefwechsel beginnt mit einem undatierten Brief von Sebba, in dem er Voegelin darüber informiert, er sei gestern nach Rotterdam geflogen und werde von dort am Ende der Woche nach London gehen, um sich am 2. September einzuschiffen. Vermutlich handelte es sich um das Jahr 1938,

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<sup>1</sup> The Collected Essays of Gregor Sebba. Truth, History and Imagination, ed. by Helen Sebba, Anibal Bueno, and Hendrikus Boers, Louisiana State University Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographische Reflexionen*, hrsg., eingeleitet und mit einer Bibliographie von Peter J. Opitz, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994, S. 22 ff.

in dem auch Voegelin Österreich verlassen hatte, und vermutlich war Sebba über Zürich nach Rotterdam geflogen und beabsichtigte nun, von England aus in die USA zu gelangen. Die Freundschaft der beiden Männer, die irgendwann in Wien begonnen hatte, setzte sich während der Emigration fort. Auch Sebba hatte es in den Süden der USA verschlagen, wo er Ende 1946 eine Stelle als „Associate Professor of Economics“ erhalten hatte. Allerdings hing sein Herz nicht an diesem Fach – sobald sich eine passende Gelegenheit bot, wollte er es wieder verlassen und in die Politikwissenschaft überwechseln. Schon bald begann er neben einem Lehrbuch über Statistik über Goethe und die deutsche Literatur zu schreiben.

Die Korrespondenz jener Jahre weist zwar immer wieder Lücken auf, spiegelt jedoch deutlich die sich vertiefende Freundschaft der beiden Männer. Am 25. November 1956 berichtete Sebba Voegelin über ein Buchprojekt mit „literarisch-psychologischen Studien“. Er will das Buch „The Creative Moment“ nennen und es soll neben dem umgearbeiteten Goethe-Aufsatz auch Studien über Eliot, Descartes, John St. Mill und Kubin und eine Rousseau-Studie enthalten, „die neue Wege geht“. Es ist halb fertig, und Sebba will es bis zum Herbst des nächsten Jahres druckreif haben. Doch diese Planung ist nicht einzuhalten. Neben seinen Arbeiten an dem Statistik-Lehrbuch übernimmt Sebba bald auch die Beiträge über Mallebranche und Descartes für die *Cabeen Bibliography of French Literature*. Die Arbeiten an einer großen Descartes-Bibliographie werden ihn nun die ganzen nächsten Jahre beschäftigen.<sup>3</sup> Doch auch seine Studien über Rousseau gehen weiter. Im Januar 1958 hatte er in *John Hopkins* Vorträge über „Rousseaus *Volonté générale* und über sein moralisches Problem“ gehalten und bald danach die Arbeiten an dem Roussau-Kapitel aufgenommen.

Im Frühjahr 1958 hatte Voegelin die *Louisiana State University* in Baton Rouge verlassen. Einem Ruf nach München folgend, war er nach Deutschland zurückgekehrt, um an der

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<sup>3</sup> 1964 erscheint *Bibliographia Cartesiana: A Critical Guide to the Descartes Literature, 1800 to 1860, The Hague, 1964.*

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in München ein Institut für Politische Wissenschaft aufzubauen.<sup>4</sup> In jener Zeit war an der LMU gerade eine Professur für Amerikanistik frei geworden. Für sie schlug Voegelin Mitte Oktober 1958 in einem Brief an das Bayerische Kultusministerium Gregor Sebba vor, der von der Aussicht einer eventuellen Rückkehr nach Europa überaus angetan war. Doch das Projekt zerschlug sich und Sebba blieb weiterhin in Georgia. 1959 erhielt er eine Professur sowie die Leitung am gerade gegründeten „Graduate Institute of Liberal Arts“ der *Emory University* und arbeitete nun vor allem über französische Philosophie und deutsche Literatur. Weiterhin in Arbeit ist aber auch, wie er Voegelin berichtet, sein Buch über „Human Creativity“. In einem Brief vom 25. Februar 1963 ist erneut von einem „grossen Rousseau-Vortrag“ die Rede, den er gerade an der *University of Oregon* gehalten habe und „der als Kapitel hineinkommt – die autobiographischen Werke wieder einmal gründlich untersucht, mit überraschenden Resultaten.“

Schon im Wintersemester 1960/61 hatte Voegelin Sebba eingeladen, ihn während einer Gastprofessur in den USA zu vertreten. Im Frühjahr 1963 folgte eine weitere Einladung – dieses Mal mit Erfolg. Sebba nahm an, und die nächsten Briefe der beiden befassen sich nun vor allem mit den Modalitäten der Reisefinanzierung. Doch im Oktober 1963 bricht die in den „Hoover Institution Archives“ erhaltene Korrespondenz zwischen Voegelin und Sebba ab. In Wirklichkeit ging sie natürlich weiter.... Irgendwann im Herbst 1964 kam Sebba mit seiner Frau Helen und seinen beiden Söhnen in München an, um Voegelin im Wintersemester zu vertreten. Im Rahmen seiner Veranstaltungen hielt er auch eine eindrucksvolle Vorlesung über Jean-Jacques Rousseau, die er zu einem Buch auszubauen beabsichtigte. Ich habe ihn später wiederholt an diese Absicht erinnert, zuletzt in Atlanta während der gemeinsamen Arbeit an der Voegelin-Festschrift *The Philosophy of Order*. Er hatte den Plan zwar noch nicht aufgegeben, behaupt-

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Maier / Peter J. Opitz, Eric Voegelin – Wanderer zwischen den Kontinenten, Occasional Papers, XIV, hrsg. von Peter J. Opitz und Dietmar Herz, München: Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, 2000.

tete jedoch, das alte Manuskript nicht mehr zu finden. Vielleicht war das nur ein Vorwand, vielleicht waren ihm die Arbeiten an dem noch immer nicht fertigen Buch über „Human Creativity“ wichtiger. Es wurde übrigens nie fertig. Ein Vorlesungszyklus zu dem Thema, den Sebba Anfang der 80er Jahre an der *Emory University* hielt, wurde posthum unter dem Titel *Creativity: Lectures by Gregor Sebba* veröffentlicht.<sup>5</sup>

Im April 1985 starb Gregor Sebba, nur wenige Wochen nach dem Tode Voegelins, zu dessen „Memorial Service“ an der *Stanford University* am 4. Februar 1985 er noch nach Stanford gereist war, um seinem alten Freund die letzte Ehre zu erweisen. Einige Monate später erhielt ich von Helen Sebba ein kleines Päckchen. Es enthielt neben einer Reihe von Briefen und Manuskripten auch das verschollen geglaubte Kapitel über Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Es wäre schade, wäre es verschollen geblieben. Denn trotz der Jahrzehnte, die seit seiner Abfassung verstrichen sind – und trotz der umfangreichen Literatur, die seitdem über den Philosophen aus Genf erschienen ist – hat der Text nichts von seiner Frische und Originalität verloren. Wie wichtig gerade die Beschäftigung mit Rousseau für Gregor Sebba gewesen war, bezeugen einige Sätze aus einer späten „Autobiographical Note“:

„I cannot divorce the phenomenon of human creativity from its setting in history and society. Conversely, the study of the creative act in Rousseau, to give another example, has led me to a quite different evaluation of the *Contrat Social* and the *Émile*, and a study of the *volonté générale*, done twenty-five years ago became the key to an understanding of the complexities of this man’s intellectual constitution.“<sup>6</sup>

*Peter J. Opitz*

*Wolfratshausen, den 2. Dezember 1999*

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<sup>5</sup> Gregor Sebba, *Creativity: Lectures by Gregor Sebba*, ed. by Helen Sebba and Hendricus Boers, Atlanta, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Macksey, „Foreword“ zu *The Collected Works of Gregor Sebba*, S. XVIII f.

**GREGOR SEBBA**  
**JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU:**  
**AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Biography does not easily mix with critical analysis. Philosophical exegesis is concerned with 'argument', not with biographical circumstance or psychological motivation. Only two major instances in Western thought provide an exception: the cases of Socrates and Rousseau. Their thought and life forms a whole, though in very different ways. The life, trial, and death of Socrates as told by Plato - - regardless of historical facticity - - necessarily completes the Socratic-Platonic doctrine by carrying it from thought into existence, as that doctrine demands. The doctrine of the soul searching for Truth calls for a *paideia*, for growth towards ultimate commitment, as a *condition* of knowledge; the life and death of Socrates adds to the doctrine the sanction of radical existential commitment. Socrates founded the ethics of the new *way of philosophizing* by radically enacting the Myth of the Philosopher's journey from confusion "here" towards Truth "beyond". He thus established, existentially, the autonomy of the Thinker, against any and all heteronomous claims upon his loyalty.

Rousseau's life was anything but a Philosopher's life in the Socratic sense, and for good reasons: the Myth of the Philosopher was dying. The existential commitment to philosophize had become an intellectual one. The belief in an objective order of Truth "beyond" was breaking down; the philosopher therefore no longer had a certified place in a given order of things. Inasmuch as the philosopher is the exemplary man, the man who knows where other men simply exist, the displacement of the philosopher reflected the incipient aliena-

tion of Western man and society, the beginning of that loss of faith in any type of transcendent order which Nietzsche was to call the death of God. Thought ceased to be linked to existential commitment; it became committed to itself only, operating under its own autonomous rules towards its own autonomous goals. Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Hume exemplify this new intellectual commitment. Rousseau does not belong in their company. His problem was that of alienated man in a desacralized, dehumanized universe who must not only think but live solely out of the resources he finds in himself. This makes Rousseau, not a philosopher in the old or the new sense, but “the prototype of the prophet-thinker.”<sup>7</sup> At the age of almost forty, Jean-Jacques had casually “walked in through the open window into a world with which he had nothing in common;” for the next twelve years - - 1750 to 1762 - - he acted within and upon this world, injecting into it what can be called his public philosophy. Then, “in the full madness of his career of virtue,” he walked out of this world again, into the misery of aloneness and final total solitude, devoting the desperate last sixteen years of his life to a vast autobiographical enterprise which had no precedent and, as he rightly predicted, was to have no imitator.<sup>8</sup> It yielded a vast body of letters, several illuminating sketches, and above all the great posthumous trilogy of the *Confessions*, *Dialogues*, and *Rêveries*. This part of his work may be called his private philosophy. It is inseparable from his public philosophy. Yet the link between the two is anything but obvious. To find it one must search for what Nietzsche called *den Grundwillen der Erkenntnis*<sup>9</sup>, the basic cognitional will which informs Rousseau’s thought in all its paradoxes and contradictions, just as it informs his seemingly disjointed paradoxical, and contradictory life. The first part of

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<sup>7</sup> Quotations from the perceptive essay “Intuition and Deduction: J.-J. Rousseau”, in: Times Literary Supplement 52, 1953, p. 701-703.

<sup>8</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book I, Œuvres (Édition de la Pléiade), I, p. 5

<sup>9</sup> *Genealogie der Moral*, Vorwort, Art. 1.

this life, according to him (and again regardless of biographical facticity) was that of the dweller in Dreamland.<sup>10</sup> Thus (true or invented) Jean-Jacques is uncommitted, detached, indolent, natural, happy: the prototype of the pre-societal man of pure feeling of the first *Discours*. If this was paradise, the Fall was at hand. In a stray moment - - *instant d'égarement* - -<sup>11</sup> he walks through the open window into the great world, proclaiming it false, corrupt and corrupting. An outsider, a misfit, he soon recognizes that he is in the wrong place. The Copernican turn in his political thought occurs at this point: he reverses the position of outsider and society. For it is precisely the outsider, the misfit, in whom true humanity resides, who therefore is the fountainhead of social regeneration and the prophetic messenger of salvation. Alienated, rebellious, untouched by conventional morality, uncompromisingly willing to be himself *as he is* (if he were what he “ought to be” he would not be himself), the outsider is the free man, the only one who through a radical act of will can create the true new society.<sup>12</sup> Whatever goodness there is to be in this society can only come from within that man: there is no more Socratic growth of the soul towards the True and the Good because the True and the Good are no longer “elsewhere.” There is only man in the Here and Now.

All of Rousseau’s “public” thought strives for world-immanence conceived as man-immanence, as human autonomy within a sovereign society of men. His political philosophy is grounded in a philosophical anthropology, doctrine of the

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<sup>10</sup> See the Rousseau chapter in Jacques Maritain, *Trois Réformateurs*, 2nd edition, Paris, Plon, 1925, p. 130 ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Confessions*, Book VIII. *Œuvres* I, p. 351. The same view in the second letter to Malesherbes (January 12, 1762, *Œuvres* I, p. 1136): “Voilà comment lorsque j’y pensois le moins je devins auteur presque malgré moi,” repeated also in the *Dialogues* and the *Rêveries*.

<sup>12</sup> Civilized man, being corrupted by society, cannot enter the new society except by a complete re-orientation of the self. This total break makes him an outsider in the old, a citizen in the new society.

new man who is alienated but autonomous, autonomous because alienated. And because Rousseau conceives of that new self - - his own - - in opposition to and in eventual harmony with society, his anthropology is political from the root up: to him, political philosophy and philosophical anthropology are one. The method of his anthropology is not speculation but observation: observing himself as the paradigm of the new man, and observing the others as specimens of old corruption. This observation becomes the task of his last autobiographical period.

At the very beginning of it, around 1762, he collects notes for a self-portrait. Among the first of these is the statement of his quest: "I conceive of a new service to men: offering them a true portrait of one of them, that they may learn to know themselves."<sup>13</sup> The revolutionary burden of this seemingly commonplace statement is revealed when we consider this other statement from the *Confessions*: "I am not made like any of those I have seen."<sup>14</sup> Yet others may learn to know themselves by studying the portrait of the man who is *not* as they are!<sup>15</sup> They may indeed, for Jean-Jacques in his uniqueness is simply the new man beyond the old good and evil. "I know my great faults and am vividly aware of my vices," he writes to Malesherbes: "Nonetheless I shall die... very certain that of all the men I have known, none was better than I."<sup>16</sup> The supreme values of the past are dead; Rousseau fills the spot they had occupied by the highest value that seems left: man's autonomous, freely willed assertion of himself as he is, alienated and miserable, free and good, transforming his condition by accepting it.

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<sup>13</sup> „Mon Portrait“, Œuvres I, p. 1120, fr. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Book I, Œuvres I, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> "If I am not better, at least I am different." *Confessions*, Book I, Œuvres I, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> First letter, January 4, 1762. Œuvres I, p. 1133.

## I

This is the connection between Rousseau's thought and life at the end of his public period and the beginning of his last autobiographical quest. The underlying doctrine of man is a doctrine of Will. In the new autonomy no other faculty will serve, since no other faculty can create man-made order. Feeling cannot do it because it is the mode of existence of pre-societal natural man. Reason cannot serve either; there is no longer any universal order for Rousseau to ascertain and to reveal to man. Reason can and must *guide* man towards the new order, but it cannot *create* it. The creation is the work of man's own act of Will.

It is the purpose of a recent book by the German historian Otto Vossler<sup>17</sup> to view the entire body of Rousseau's political thought pure immanentist voluntarism centered in a doctrine of freedom, of Will creating order and morality. Vossler sees in Rousseau's system the greatest turning point in political thought since the Christianization of Europe. A new fact had been emerging: the rise of the state towards full autonomy and unrestricted sovereignty. Yet in Vossler's view, political philosophy remained incapable of making the collateral step towards full immanence. Reason and natural law had taken the place of Revelation and divine order, but this still left the sources of law and morality outside the state. In fact, the Enlightenment undercut state sovereignty from below as well as making it dependent upon an order above: now the individual became quasi-sovereign within the state, isolated and protected from it by inviolable rights. The Declaration of Human and Civic Rights of 1789 completes in practice what political theo-

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<sup>17</sup> Otto Vossler, *Rousseaus Freiheitslehre*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1963, 394 p.

ry had begun in theory: the moral and political emasculation of the new state.

As a consequence, political philosophy and political practice were driven into the insoluble dualisms and conflicts between individual and state, ethics and politics, might and right, freedom and compulsion, legality and morality. Only a “heretic of reason” could break the deadlock, and Rousseau was the man. At one stroke he laid the basis of a political philosophy of pure immanence, a philosophy of harmony which makes the old dualism meaningless. Man creates his own order through a continuing act of free Will, of autonomous self-determination, which establishes the reign of morality in a political society where individual and state are identical: “man himself *is* the state.”<sup>18</sup> It follows that the state, as continuing moral action, is the *Sittengebot*, the moral command or imperative itself. There being nothing above the moral imperative, the state is unrestrictedly sovereign. The sovereignty can never be evil; the totalitarian state is not sovereign - - in fact, it is not even state: only if the state is identical with the moral command, is it *state*.<sup>19</sup> Such is the main thesis which Vossler pursues with flamboyant, polemical aggressiveness through a long, detailed, often repetitious analysis of all of Rousseau’s political writings, including the minor ones. But the analysis is competent and often illuminating; the single-minded construction of Rousseau’s thought as an idealistic, voluntaristic immanentism leads straight to the core of the problem: the ambiguity and contradictoriness of his system.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.18; also p. 157: Man and state cannot be casually related because “man himself is state, and the state is within man himself..., [being] his own willing and acting.”

<sup>19</sup> See p 247. It follows that though the state can anything it wills, it cannot -- being the moral imperative itself -- will the wrong (p. 285). Rousseau teaches otherwise. Only within itself is the state a general, i.e., good society. In its relation to other states it is a particular society; therefore it not only can but must do wrong since it can only act out of “amour propre,” selfishness, which is corrupt.

Vossler admits that Rousseau was not a systematic thinker. But he tries to show that if the doctrine of the General Will is recognized as voluntaristic immanentism, the most important “contradictions” disappear. What remains is ascribed to three major factors: (1) Rousseau did not completely achieve his immanentist goal; (2) his system does not lead from theory to institutional practice; (3) since he is a rank amateur in political matters, his practical proposals are mostly naive, sometimes silly. Nonetheless Rousseau found the key to the new problem in a radically immanentist voluntaristic philosophy of identity.

The Will in this voluntarism is will-in-action. It frees man not through the society it creates but through the mode of willing: freely, autonomously, with no ulterior purpose. This Will has no goal other than itself. It is identical with the common good which, too, “has [only] itself as its object” (265). In another aspect, the General Will is the categorical imperative of the Golden Rule (118 f).

Because of the man-state identity, state will is individual will; and “the individual Will is the General Will of Mankind” (192), since it expresses “The purpose of the race” (*den Gattungszweck*). This Will is not determined by anything substantive, nor does it will anything substantive. It merely wills that all acts of will shall rise out of man's own essence and purpose, out of his uncommitted and uncommittable conscience (245). It determines the “how”, not the “what” of willing. General Will and common good are identical, self-reflexive, and substantively empty. The state (the General Will) can do anything it wills, but it cannot will anything other than itself being substantively empty, it is politically empty. Vossler, in the madness of *his* pursuit of civic virtue, calls this consequence the identity of politics and ethics. Where all act in accordance with the categorical moral imperative, there can be

no struggle, no conflict of interests. For “General Will” is merely the “principle of harmony or identity of interests.” Vossler must therefore declare that Rousseau’s doctrines of Particular Will and of the Will of All have no place in the system because they assume the existence of conflict, of evil, within the reign of the good.

Rousseau teaches differently. Only within itself is the state “general”. With regard to other states it is “particular”, hence it only has a particular will, therefore it not only can but must do wrong. For Vossler this is another theoretical lapse: Rousseau did not see that *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, cosmopolitanism and nationalism, presuppose each other to the point where “their separation means the end of both” (334). Rousseau’s man is not the abstract, absolute being of eighteenth century rationalism; he is concrete, historical (304); his moral act of liberation rises out of a concrete situation, from personal experience (113, 197). In stopping at the national level Rousseau makes the revolutionary acknowledgment that individual and state have a right to their individual values, the right to “be themselves.” But this view is incompatible with the interpretation of the General Will as a pure, substantively empty act of self-determination. The will to preserve concrete “values“ is directed towards a “what”, hence it cannot be the General Will. Again, if (as Vossler claims) the individual Will is the General Will of mankind, why does this General Will not produce the *universal* rule of the *Sittengebot* in the only new society - - mankind itself - - which cannot be particular because there is nothing outside it? Vossler seems to suggest that such an extension is unnecessary: the categorical imperative creates harmony and identity of interests between the states, as well as within the state. If so, why does it not establish *identity* of states and mankind, the same way as it establishes identity of citizens and state?

The contradiction is in Rousseau; Vossler cannot interpret it away. It reappears in Vossler's interpretation of the social pact as neither a historical pact nor a theoretical construction to guarantee the reign of law but simply as a statement of *Menschwerdung*, humanization, "through the state as the moral Will that makes us masters of ourselves, human beings" (243). Rousseau, though, beclouds this simple issue by the "ghastly" demand for "aliénation totale", for total renunciation of the individual with all his goods and rights as the condition of the pact may scare the wits out of the unsuspecting reader and citizen, particularly when followed by the equally ominous assertion that this surrender will produce total equality (226). Stage thunder! The solid citizen (*der ehrbare Bürger*) may breathe again: the scaring operation has already happened without his even being aware of it, the state is already there, the monstrous alienation is merely the good man's own decision to play the game according to rule, "to act simply out of honesty and decency" (230) - - "an utterly familiar, harmless everyday affair" (227). Rousseau's other terrifying statement: "La volonté générale est toujours droite" is equally harmless, being "trivially right"; it really says no more than that "the idea or maxim of morality is always moral" (245). The free acceptance of this maxim is "the highest concrete moral deed in which [individual and state] are one" (303), a deed as high as it is inexpensive. What is its goal? Rousseau answers: liberty and equality. For Vossler this is merely the General Will once more; expressed in ordinary language, "the general interest is that everyone should act rightly" (268), where "rightly" means "in the common interest." No wonder that the philosophy of identity sounds suspiciously like Double-Think: Might is Right, Coercion is Freedom, Politics is Ethics, Ethics is Politics, Autonomy is Submission - - *vice* becomes *versa*. Nonetheless the logic is inexorable. When the pure moral Will wills only itself, it transforms the dualisms into identity. Only if that Will wills something substantive, something outside

itself, do the dualisms reappear. But then the state is no longer state, the work of humanization is undone. All this follows from the interpretation of Will in Rousseau as categorical, i.e., wholly autonomous, self-reflecting, and therefore substantively empty. But what is Rousseau's own view of Will?

In an astounding note for his Self-Portrait of around 1762 he says: I am an observer, not a moralist; a botanist who describes the plant, leaving it to the physician to regulate its use.<sup>20</sup> This refers of course to his proposed picture of himself. But it goes beyond this: in Rousseau, autobiographical observation is the method of philosophical anthropology. As a radical immanentist he finds Will to be the only human faculty that can regenerate and redeem man. As an observer he knows that this Will is weak. Man is by nature a drifter. Willing does not come easily to him. He needs something to carry him beyond his natural indolence to willed freedom: the impetus of a concrete situation impinging upon him, a surge of Feeling sweeping him along, Reason to assure him of right guidance. Thus the sovereign, autonomous state is most easily established when civic liberation goes hand in hand with national liberation from a foreign yoke, a foreign will. From the struggle for national independence emerges the General Will of a new nation. But this General Will is general only within the nation. What prevents it from becoming universal is again the weakness of man's will. Selfish "amour propre" rises only with difficulty to "amour de soi," to a love of the self in a society whose common interest is close enough to its own to make identification possible. Alienated man's will lacks the power of divine Will, redemption therefore remains partial. Attaining the General Will requires gradual orientation of the individual wills towards the common goal which they as yet only indistinctly perceive. This process of orientation may

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<sup>20</sup> Œuvres I, p. 1120, fr. 3.

fail. There is therefore a systematic need for doctrines of Particular Will and the Will of All. With this analysis of the conditions under which the General Will is identified and formed, Rousseau takes the systematic step from theory to practice.

The two doctrines acknowledge the existence of conflicts of interest even within the domain of the General Will. Because man's will is weak, it comes to rest at different levels. The internal will of a particular society, too, is general, good, legitimate.<sup>21</sup> For Rousseau democracy is not a reign of morality that makes conflicts of interest vanish in moral harmony and theoretical identity. It is a process of reconciling and resolving these interests. Even this factual reconciliation is possible only within a limited-size society.

The relation between self and society is never an easy one. Even where the General Will rules, man's weakness of will always tends to make him drift down towards natural yielding to impulses, to the immediate attraction of selfish interest. To rise above selfishness to humanization in true society is not a mere matter of agreeing to the rules of the game; becoming honest and decent requires a total regeneration of the self. The new man is born in pain. He must will to be himself in all his weakness and ugliness, he must cease to conform to easy conventional heteronomous morality, he must reject the comforts and benefits of corrupt society - - and be rejected by it. Had the prophet-thinker stopped with the *Émile* and the *Contrat Social*, he would have left a message of revolutionary courage and optimism, however somber its undertones. But Jean-Jacques pushed on to explore the depths of that alienated self which is to create its own world by its own act of will;

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<sup>21</sup> He wants of course particular societies, e.g., political parties abolished; but being the good botanist he is, he adds at once that if this is impossible, they should be multiplied and prevented from becoming unequal in power. *Contrat Social* II, ch. 3.

what he found was an abyss. The awareness of man's weakness of will gives Rousseau's political thought its profundity and tragic tinge. Without it, his public philosophy becomes a tranquilizer pill.

## II

Another recent Rousseau book, by an English author, J.H. Broome, tries to trace the unity of Rousseau's thought not only through his political but through all his major works, including the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and the autobiographical trilogy.<sup>22</sup> "The surest way to kill Rousseau is to study him only in the parts" (210): only from *all* the parts does the unity of Rousseau's thought emerge. But this unity is not a consistent philosophy of harmony, marred only by theoretical lapses and practical dilettantism; contradiction, paradox, absurdity are its constitutive element, as they must be in a doctrine of alienated man. Seen as a whole, Rousseau's thought is for Broome an attempt to understand man and society in a desacralized universe which poses the old problems but no longer permits the old solutions. The resulting anthropology and political theory can be best explained in the terms of secularized theology. Its main theme, according to Broome, is man's fall and redemption within a purely human, non-transcendent world. This at any rate is the heart of it, this where he rises to almost painful originality out of an effort to combine and reconcile the great opposing currents of his century deeply influencing and affecting him.

Rousseau's fundamental problem is the problem of evil where there is no divine order and command, original sin, eternal damnation, redeeming grace. Man is originally inno-

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<sup>22</sup> Broome, J.H., *Rousseau: A Study of His Thought*, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963, viii, 231 p. This introduction to Rousseau's writings, the best we now have in English, gives careful outlines of the argument in each work, with critical discussions: Good index, meager bibliography.

cent, this is Rousseau's unshakable belief; man is fallen, this is the unshakable fact. No God has cast him into his misery, no violation of an eternal law has ejected him from paradise: how can he in his innocence be responsible for his fall? Rousseau's "devastatingly simple" solution consists "in socializing sin, and transferring... the burden of guilt from men as individuals to men collectively in society" (17).

In the first *Discours* Rousseau shows natural man in his innocence before the fall. The second *Discours* presents the secularized version of the Fall and its consequences. Since natural man is innocent and good, and since society does not yet exist, the Fall is in effect an innocent drift out of nature into the social state; it comes through "*chance*, operating on natural man" - - unpredictably but irreversibly. In his first social state, man is gradually corrupted by society; "contradiction and paradox are the characteristic forms of evil in [first unauthentic] society" (32). Redemption is of course not a movement "back to nature" but one leading forward to authentic society in which man can again be true to his *own* nature. The social pact which authenticates, redeems society, is the "formal gesture of commitment" without which humanization cannot be completed; neither a real nor a hypothetical event, it is "the threshold of a 'state of grace'," for "beyond the Contract is the Citizen, or the New Man" (63). But just as unauthentic society necessarily produced the Despot, so Regeneration needs a Lawgiver, the man of destiny whose appearance is a matter of chance or, in a different version, of Providence. The Lawgiver is needed because men, even when morally transformed, may lack the intelligence and insight "to see the good which they will in theory" (66).

In the New Jerusalem of the *Contrat Social*, the substitute paradise where "the business of salvation" takes place, dissent is "demonstrably superfluous"; nonetheless, "political redemp-

tion is impossible without a respect for minority opinion” (67 f.) because even under the rule of the General Will an individual or a minority can be in *error* about this Will. But if a state of error must be respected, a state of *sin* is intolerable. Rousseau calls for the death penalty only in the case of the offender who goes on the civic faith he has solemnly accepted, because his blasphemy “destroys the belief in Original Innocence” (70). Civic religion is essential in the New Jerusalem. It renews religion which, too, has fallen into contradiction and absurdity and must be regenerated by being secularized and socialized. Rousseau looks beyond civil religion to the religious problem of the individual. There is “obvious continuity of principle between the artificial and provisional paradise of the *Contrat Social* and the ultimate religious paradise of the *Vicaire*” (121) in the *Émile*: both consist of the “willing integration in a system where all is ordered for the best, with an exquisite consciousness of individuality [and] freedom from ‘contradiction’” (121). But Christian revelation has become rationally unbelievable; Redemption requires the development of *all* of man’s faculties *in the Here and Now*; the “unspoken implication” is that henceforth every man must be his own Christ” (124).

Rousseau would not be Rousseau if he could not “move out of the fall-and-redemption scheme” (70) when the stubborn facts of political reality demand it. His public philosophy (the term is Broome’s) is eminently reasonable in its origins, practical in its aims, and revolutionary in its effects because the crucial elements in the system are acts of will. If Rousseau’s New Jerusalem looks harsh to the English liberal (however soft it may look to the German one who views it with idealistic eyes), it is because Rousseau’s nature concept is harsh: Nature’s operations are completely ruthless, from the standpoint of ordinary human sensibility” (73). So is the new state, in some of its aspects: for man can only be free *within*

restraints beyond his control, be they natural or social, as Broome shows in a fine chapter on *Émile*, that “artificially-produced natural man for an artificially-produced natural society” (104).

“For Rousseau, all philosophical problems are personal problems... and the consequences... are rather paradoxical” (12). For Broome, this is what forces Rousseau to go beyond his public philosophy into his autobiographical period. The public philosophy has presented the thought; what is now needed is the “break-through from thought to reality” (151). What needs proof is not only the basic humanity and innocence of man, but the factual *existence* of at least one exemplary regenerated man. The system cannot be justified unless its originator, Rousseau himself, is justified and proven to be essentially good; for he is the Lawgiver and Redeemer (a secularized Christ-figure). The Word alone does not suffice: “Rousseau’s Word must be Flesh, and seen to dwell among the scoffers and the persecutors” (151). The *Confessions* attempt the “justification of the system and the outsider who created it” (150). In the *Dialogues*, Rousseau applies the terms of the public philosophy to himself: “his is the single conscience in which the indestructible General Will provisionally resides” (164) until enlightenment or general revolution will complete the creation of the new society. The infernal plot, on the other hand, is precisely the Will of All blocking the true General Will and ostracizing the new man.

The court drama of the *Dialogues* ends with forensic victory and existential defeat. Rousseau finds himself rejected by men and forsaken by God. The famous postscript to the *Dialogues* marks the collapse of his attempted justification.<sup>23</sup> The

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<sup>23</sup> In order to save the manuscript of the *Dialogues* from being destroyed by his enemies, he addresses it to Providence and tries to lay it on the altar of *Nôtre-Dame de Paris*. But a grille he had not noticed before bars his access to the altar. He flees in panic, convinced that his true image is now

*Rêveries* open with a statement of final resignation. Now he is utterly alone; he accepts his rejection by society. He must explain and justify to himself his rejection by society and his resignation to the fact; he must break the last ties to society and make the final adjustment to his new situation of “living death.” He resigns himself to the inscrutable Will of God, but the logic of his withdrawal from society soon forces him to cut even the last tie of conscious religious obligation. But society still has a hold on him through the senses. Having tried to solve the problem of social isolation by mentally reverting to the innocence of the child or the primitive, he turns from “negative contracting out of society” to an effort to loose the sense of personal identity, “to contract into nature” through the “exploitation of sensory experience in a process of self-hypnotism.” But memory threatens to bring him back from this “Golden Age” to the times of his Fall. Here the *Rêveries* break off, interrupted by death.

There is a statement in this sensitive, often profound reading of the *Rêveries* that goes to the heart of Rousseau’s final position: “We can say that his mental world is becoming almost void of any social or moral content” (177). Nothing could be truer. But how does this systematic emptying of the mind, anticipating Samuel Beckett, fit into the framework of Rousseau’s philosophical thought? That Rousseau tries to draw the consequences from his social and political failure is evident; but the question is: how, in the terms of his own philosophy, is such failure *possible*?

Broome misses this question, and his analysis of the autobiographical writings, however suggestive, remains inconclusive. His difficulties stem from the ambiguity of his initial statement that for Rousseau all philosophical problems are

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lost forever. When he returns to calm thinking, he places the manuscript in private hands. “Histoire de cet écrit.” Œuvres I, p. 977 ff.

personal ones. At times he takes this to mean that Rousseau's thought is a rationalization of his psychological problem as an outsider and social misfit; elsewhere, he suggests far more, namely a *philosophically* relevant connection between the thought and its originator. This connection he tries to establish by claiming that Rousseau identifies himself with the Lawgiver; this is what, in this view, makes a "breakthrough from thought to reality" a philosophical necessity for Rousseau; but while Rousseau in the *Dialogues* still identifies the "infernal plot" as the corrupt Will of All, he must now (in the *Rêveries*) recognize it as the General Will; his opposition to this Will would then be proof that his supposed "amour de soi" was a delusion covering up his surrender to "amour propre" - - expecting "a special and personal miracle" (171). But this interpretation is untenable. The texts do not support it; and the doctrine does not support it either. Rousseau is *not* "in fact... in the situation of a Lawgiver, and right by definition." His Lawgiver is the man of destiny who *establishes* the Law, successfully: this is what *makes* him a Lawgiver. None of the Lawgivers he cites as examples originated a doctrine of the General Will; all of them established General-Will societies. The link, if there is one, must be sought between doctrine and originator, not between General Will and Lawgiver.

In the Socratic case, there is no link whatever between doctrine and originator. The doctrine impersonally and generally declares that only the soul committed to the Good and the True can truly know. The life and death of Socrates is merely the exemplary factual enactment of the doctrine; that Socrates is the originator of the doctrine (if indeed he originated it) is immaterial. Rousseau's doctrine is a doctrine of Will, and Will is not a cognitive faculty. Will is directed towards action. The link between cognition and Will is therefore indirect: cognition depends on the state of man's Will. The *Dialogues* suggest that only innocent man, here: the natural man, can

*discover* the true doctrine. Man in the state of corruption by society can not: selfish “amour propre” dominates his Will and this prevents him from discovering the doctrine. But corrupted man *can* rise to an act of Will which, lifting him out of “amour propre,” establishes the reign of “amour de soi” in the General Will, and thereby renders him capable of unbiased knowing. What his new Will enables him to know, though, is not Rousseau’s doctrine; the new man knows the authenticity of his new state, which is something entirely different. Jean-Jacques is in the position of the innocent man who *discovers* the doctrine, brings it into corrupted society, and - - *not* being the Lawgiver - - fails to regenerate the selfish wills of men.

Corrupted men are incapable of *accepting* the message, but nothing prevents them from understanding it. They understand that it is a call for the destruction of their own society which, in their own biased eyes, is authentic and good. This society allows them the free pursuit of what they hold to be their true interests, and gives them the sanction of established morality conforming to divine command. The man who attacks the material foundations of this society and rejects its morality is a criminal and a blasphemer. He need not be refuted, but he must be destroyed.<sup>24</sup> The position of Jean-Jacques is exactly analogous to that of the Anarchist and Nihilist intellectual in a European monarchy at the end of the nineteenth century, of the Communist in present-day America. To make the parallel complete, he was initially greeted with enthusiasm.

It was Rousseau who first noticed the error. Rousseau’s withdrawal from society begins while he is at the height of his popularity. Step by step he converts himself from the elegant man of letters, as La Tour pictures him, into the rugged soli-

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<sup>24</sup> “In the storm that has overwhelmed me, my books have served as a pretext; the attack was against myself. They bothered very little about the author, but they wanted to destroy Jean-Jacques.” Confessions, Book IX; Œuvres I, p. 406.

tary who only “wants to be himself.” Once more he becomes the outsider, with a difference; he is no longer detached, indolent, natural. He was good, now he is virtuous; he rejects society as Truth rejects Falsehood. This claim to be better than the other men of his time *must* be made because the conflict is not one of institutions or ideas but of morality. The justification of the doctrine calls for proof of the existence of autonomous morality within a still heteronomous society, which, because of its heteronomous commitment, cannot accept the justification unless it wills its own destruction. Rousseau, “the man born without a skin”, as Hume called him, may have been mad when he exaggerated persecution (which was real enough) into a universal “infernal plot” against himself; but if this notion had its paranoiac aspects, it also fitted his system with precision. If Jean-Jacques *was* a criminal, then society was right in calling his doctrine an immoral, criminal attack upon true society. Where Jean-Jacques erred, on the grounds of his own doctrine, was in assuming that the fully autonomous man *could* justify himself before the jury of his corrupted contemporaries. They would by necessity have to interpret his justificatory self-revelation as an admission of his criminality. Over a century later George Saintsbury still called Rousseau “the self-confessed criminal.”<sup>25</sup>

Rousseau writing his *Confessions*, did not doubt that justification before his contemporaries was possible. In 1770-71 his private readings from the manuscript were answered with a call for the police to stop him. Now he understood. Work on the *Confessions* was abandoned; in 1772 he begins the *Dialogues*, and it is to posterity that he now addresses himself. This has unsuspected philosophical implications. What does “justification of the self before posterity” mean? New questions about the autonomous self in a desacralized universe

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<sup>25</sup> See his article “Rousseau” in the Encyclopedia Britannica, 9<sup>th</sup> edition (reprinted in several subsequent editions).

arise, questions for which there had been no room in the public philosophy. For the first time, death of the self must be envisaged. The immanentist must now ask: can the self endure in *this* world beyond its physical lifespan, and if so, how? Beneath this question lurks the fear of existential extinction: if after death nothing remains of the self, in this world, then it will have made no difference whether this self ever existed or not.

“Immortality of the self” is no answer to *these* questions, not for an immanentist, not for a thinker who defines self in relation to others. As an immanentist, Rousseau cannot jump out of the Here and Now into a Beyond, even if he subjectively believes in “his” immortality - - as he does. For the “something” which he feels (or postulates) to be immortal is certainly not the socially defined self of his anthropology. Nor can the idea of the survival of the cause in its effects serve, the notion of the self surviving in the changes it brought about, the “immortal works” surviving their author. For Rousseau does not define the self as an efficient cause, nor does he mistake his works for his self.

Jean-Jacques does not weigh these alternatives. In the near-madness of his fear he does not speculate; instinctively and unerringly he identifies the problem in his own personal terms: the “infernal plot” is about to destroy his unique individual self by destroying its true image for all time to come: existential murder by defamation. This is what the *Dialogues* are about. To prevent this crime, two things must be done. First, the endangered self must be justified; it must be shown to be good, and it must be shown as it is: neither blackened by slander nor whitewashed by a coat of false morality. The image to be preserved must be the image of Jean-Jacques in his individual uniqueness and in his goodness. Secondly, this image must be saved from destruction and handed over to posterity, since

the dimension in which the self immanently endures beyond death is *memory*. This is Jean-Jacques's answer to the new question. Memory is the social dimension in which the social self dwells, once death has taken it out of social participation. If the memory of the true Jean-Jacques is extinguished, it will be as if he had never existed. What begins as an attempt to authenticate the doctrine by justifying the originator, ends as an attempt to save the unique self from destruction.

The *Dialogues* close with "Rousseau" convincing the Frenchman (who represents the true conscience of society) that "Jean-Jacques" is good and innocent. But then comes the post-script. It proves in an unexpected way that this forensic victory is empty: Jean-Jacques has already passed beyond the thesis he has vindicated. In the incident of Nôtre-Dame de Paris he plunges into paranoia in the literal sense of the word: he is out of his mind. In this state the physical survival of the manuscript becomes the symbolic expression of the philosophical problem. And symbolically he finds himself deprived of survival, barred from salvation. In his panic he momentarily abandons all hope for the preservation of his individual self in posterity's memory. Then he recovers himself and returns to sanity: he realizes that there are other, more practical, ways of preserving the record. But this very turn from "mad" symbolism to "sane" practically marks the death of his quest for social duration. He *can* save his image, but it no longer matters. For in his "madness" he has experienced irrevocable, total isolation. Nothing in his public philosophy suggested even the possibility of it. The public philosophy began with the incident on the road to Vincennes where he saw the vision of the social self creating the good social world; it ends with the incident of Nôtre-Dame which shows this vision to be partial. The immanent self is not *essentially* social; it *can* be thrown into a state of utter social isolation, of "living death."

Now the question must be asked that should have been asked at the beginning, not the end, of the immanentist venture:<sup>26</sup>

“But I, detached from them and from everything, what am I?  
This is what I still have to find out.”

Montaigne’s question *Que sais-je?* has found its radical counterpart in this *Que suis-je moi-même?* To find the answer, Rousseau must once again turn to self-observation; his self, emptied from all that links it to other selves, must listen to its own murmurings. For God is dead, and there is nobody to tell him any more.

### III

There is, after all, unity and sense in this extraordinary philosophical quest which begins with man optimistically creating his own ordered world and ends with the emptied self listening to itself, as Krapp will listen to his tape. But this is an eighteenth-century self; it still believes in God because Feeling - - which is all that is left - - needs Him.<sup>27</sup> Rousseau is the premature immanentist who sets out on the new road and stops short on his way. For the ultimate consequences of this immanentism we must turn to Nietzsche.

Nietzsche had no use for Jean-Jacques. He saw in him the epitome of the man of resentment in all his miserableness, a low-class type driven by self-contempt and burning vanity to attack the ruling classes.<sup>28</sup> But, speaking of himself, Nietzsche

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<sup>26</sup> *Rêveries, Première Promenade; Œuvres I*, p. 995.

<sup>27</sup> This does not constitute a “variety of Deism,” a belief in a created order in which man “occupies an appropriate and intermediate position in the scheme of things,” as Broome says (p. 15).

<sup>28</sup> “Aus dem Nachlaß der Achtzigerjahre”, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. by Karl Schlechta, III, p. 524.

also found the humane word for Jean-Jacques with his contradictions, delusions and lies:

“What do *you* know about this, what *could* you know of this - - how much self-preservative cunning, how much judgment and higher care there is in such self-deception, - - and how much falsehood I still *need* to be able to afford again and again the luxury of *my* truthfulness?”<sup>29</sup>

Nietzsche himself would never have applied this word to Rousseau. By “truthfulness” he meant the courage to think to the radical end, and Jean-Jacques had stopped at Christian doctrine. Nietzsche rejects this doctrine that God created man “happy, idle, innocent, immortal” - - Rousseau’s very language - - that man’s life here is a false, fallen, sinful “penal existence,” that suffering, struggle, labor, death are unnatural, that against such unnaturalness man “needs a remedy - - and *has* it.”<sup>30</sup> But this is Rousseau’s doctrine too, if we substitute “man *is by nature* innocent, idle, immortal, happy” for “*God created him so,*” if we put “unauthentic society” in the place of “life here” and let the General Will be the Redeemer. Rebellious, virtuous, resentful, miserable, Jean-Jacques was a “low man” in spite of his “great accents and attitudes.” The “higher man” of the century was Voltaire, not he.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless Rousseau’s philosophical intentions coincide with Nietzsche’s. Right after the note on Voltaire and Rousseau, just referred to, comes a sketch of what is evidently Nietzsche’s Rousseau program:

“That men be given back the *courage* to [acknowledge] their natural drives - -“

“That their *self-disparagement* be curbed (*not* that of men as

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<sup>29</sup> Menschliches und Allzumenschliches, Vorrede, art. 1. Ibid., I, p. 438

<sup>30</sup> “Aus dem Nachlass”, Werke III, p. 658.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 531.

individuals but that of man *as nature...*) - -“

“That the *contradictions* be taken out of things, once it is understood that we ourselves put them there - -“

Rousseau would have agreed. But intentions are not enough. In his last two points Nietzsche pushes on to the doctrine, and the destructive thrust goes to the heart of Rousseau's public philosophy:

“That the *idiosyncrasy of society* (*die Gesellschaftsidiosynkrasie*) be taken out of [man's] existence altogether (guilt, punishment, justice, honesty, freedom, love, etc.) - -“

“Progress towards *naturalness*: all political questions... are *questions of power* - -‘what *can* one do,’ and only then: what should one do.”

This disposes of the socially defined self and of the morality of the General Will. In a purely immanentist philosophy, the problem of evil can be posed neither in terms of guilt and punishment nor in terms of innocence and punishment. An immanentist doctrine of Will cannot yield a political doctrine of justice, freedom, honesty, of “love of self” as a social cement. It certainly cannot yield a “political” philosophy which puts morality in the theoretical place of power.

The heart of the opposition between Nietzsche and Rousseau lies in their different conceptions of immanence and Will. Rousseau is an immanentist for the same reason that Nietzsche is an immanentist: the answer to man's questions about himself can only be found in the Here and Now because, in Nietzsche's terms, God is dead. But this Here and Now is brutal, ugly, unjust, hence unacceptable to Rousseau. Yet man cannot get out of it. He must submit to it where he cannot change it, meaning nature as environment. What he can change is the *human* world, and only he can do so; the immanentist premise allows no heteronomous agency. And so Jean-Jacques builds,

out of the materials he finds in ugly, cruel reality, his political substitute paradise with its substitute religion. To this, out of the goodness that is in him, he adds a substitute Theodicee (in Kolakowski's sense) which allows Feeling to leap out of the unbearable Here and Now into an unprovable beyond and after - - a subjective leap which leaves man where he is, though feeling better. Nietzsche bars this last desperate glance beyond. Immanence is windowless. Had Jean-Jacques had more fortitude and less Christianity, he would have agreed. But he would still have seen within immanence what appears to be a door leading out of the Here and Now, not into a beyond but certainly into an after which is limitless and perhaps as inscrutable as God: never-ending change. For Nietzsche, immanence is doorless. History is a movement within, a walk along the wall, eternal in duration and finite in compass, along a circuit that closed upon itself. This doctrine of the Eternal Return of the Same is a doctrine of No Exit. Neither is there change, unless the roll of the wheel about its axle constitutes change. There is no way out of ugly, hurtful existence. There is no escape in history either, no promise of unique newness in the future.

With this confrontation with existence *as it is*, Nietzsche's anthropology draws the radical conclusion from which Rousseau's anthropology escapes. "Low man," *der niedrige Mensch, r e s e n t s* the immanent world which is his only one, seeking utopian escape through the belief that by becoming good himself, the Here and How will become good. The "higher man" has no such illusions; he is higher precisely because he has no illusions; this is what makes him truthful. Seeing things as they are, knowing that they *cannot* be otherwise, he cannot resent the state of things because resentment presupposes the possibility and desirability of it being different.

Acceptance is therefore merely another word for knowledge. “The highest man” (*der höchste Mensch*) rises above acceptance to joyful affirmation of what is *as it is*, to identification with being, to *willing things as they are*, so unequivocally and radically that he wills them to be so not only here and now but ever and ever again. This act of willing is ultimate humanization.

In Rousseau’s anthropology, Will is a faculty of man, wholly within him, weak, and corruptible. It is capable of being strengthened; when corrupted it can be regenerated. But man’s factual weakness imposes narrow limits on such strengthening, and the regeneration does not go very far. At best, regenerated Will makes man good, it humanizes him as far as he can at all be humanized, it makes him natural again on a higher level. But this higher level is not universal. The regenerated Will produces an island of virtue and happiness, a humane society in an unregenerated world. Even if this world of man were to consist entirely of such little paradises, its ugly, brutal injustice would still persist in the relations of these islands to each other: Hell is other paradises.

For Nietzsche, Will is not a human “faculty.” He does not conceive Will psychologically; on the contrary, psychology is for him the “morphology and theory of evolution of the Will to Power.”<sup>32</sup> The Will to Power is in all that lives; it is “the fundamental characteristic of all the real,”<sup>33</sup> it is universal. In man’s awareness, this fundamental trait of reality rises into the light of consciousness and into a new dimension. Will becomes command, and command is “order” in both senses. Man’s Will as the Will to Power does not create man’s world, as Rousseau’s redeemed General Will does. It dominates. The

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<sup>32</sup> *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, art. 23, Werke II, p. 587. See Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Frankfurt a.M., 1950, p. 215-220.

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

“highest man” wills domination. And domination has no upper limit.

“The Will to Power has its ground not in a feeling of deficiency, it is rather in itself the ground of overabundant life.”<sup>34</sup> The order it wills is the order of life itself, the order of existence as it is. This Will to Power is wholly immanent, and therefore it is destructive to all heteronomous morality. Rousseau’s immanentist moral imperative is “Be thyself!” We have seen what an abyss that word covers up: Jean-Jacques’s last question, *que suis-je moi-même?* took the cover away. His morality is autonomous and immanent, but it is not universal. At first it seemed to be generally human, i.e., social, though it never attains humanity as the universal social category; in the end it shrank to the specifically individual, with indications that even this was not enough, that the isolated self might have to “contract back into nature.” The pursuit of the moral imperative leads out of the natural state of man into the social world, then back to the individual and finally into the individual’s dissolving into an awareness which is, simply, nature conscious of itself. This existential return is the end of the autonomous morality. Where the social world vanishes, the ideas of individual commitment and moral command cease to have meaning.

Rousseau’s public philosophy is not even remotely aware of this weakness in its premises. In its assertive optimism it proclaims the regeneration of man through his regenerated Will. But the product of the redeeming act of Will shows its limitations. The New Man of Rousseau is the Citizen, not the “highest man,” the *Übermensch*. The Citizen is man within the *Cité*, the limited good community; he has grown from individual selfhood to communal selfhood. Even as a political concept, Rousseau’s citizen-state with its autonomy and autarchy

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

was already obsolescent when he invented it. In Nietzsche's terms, the Will to Power had already begun to transform the state. The *Übermensch* is the man who "is man out of the reality determined by the Will to Power, and for this reality."<sup>35</sup> He is also the political man *per se*, the political natural man for whom "all political questions are questions of power," who makes full use of the "idiosyncrasy of society" - - the ideas of guilt, punishment, honesty, freedom, love - - because they are part of the reality of things as they are; but he recognizes these ideas as idiosyncrasies, dear to the deluded but false. If Rousseau's *Citoyen* is the old Adam transformed into a new Adam who has established the reign of true morality - - not on earth but at home - - having driven immanence as far as it will practically go, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* wills immanent reality, its pain and bliss, forever. His will is the articulated will of reality itself. It strives for mastery of nature, domination of the human world, conquest of all that makes the self weak, trustful, fearful and obedient. Nietzsche's favorite term is "distance," and distance is for him vertical, not horizontal as in Rousseau.

With all the difference in their thought, their lives came to an end in perfect keeping with their thought. Rousseau falls from the warmth of human communion into cold isolation, pursuing the elusive, receding, contracting self; the end comes slowly as the cold and the rigor of death creeps into mind and body. Observer to the last, he records the process with precision:<sup>36</sup>

"I feel already my imagination freeze, all my faculties weaken. I am prepared to see my *Rêveries* grow older from day to day until the boredom of writing robs me of the courage to go on; and so my book, if I do continue it, must naturally end when I approach the end of my life."

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>36</sup> Draft for the opening paragraph of the *Rêveries*, one of the jottings on the back of the playing cards he used for this purpose. *Œuvres I*, p. 1165.

Rousseau seeks and finds last sublime bliss on a tiny, lonely island in a calm lake: return to the womb of nature. Nietzsche seeks bliss among the crags of the Alps. His mind soars above them like Zarathustra's eagle, in gleaming solitudes no mind had reached before. A cognitive will of almost superhuman intensity takes him up to the limit of the humanly bearable and, for a brief moment, beyond it to ultimate understanding beyond sanity and madness: then the swift plunge into the dark. In this last moment, Nietzsche writes to Jacob Burkhardt: "My dear Professor, in the end I would much rather be professor in Basel than God; but I did not dare carry my private egotism to the point of abstaining, for his sake, from creating the world."<sup>37</sup> God is dead, the incarnate Will to Power fills and expands the self until it can no longer distinguish immanent existence, God, and itself. In his last joke the radical voluntaristic immanentist has become everything and everybody including God. Consequent to the last!

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<sup>37</sup> Letter dated January 6, 1889 (posted January 5, 1889). Werke III, p. 1351.

## IV

Compared to Nietzsche, Rousseau is a low-order immanentist. He has neither Nietzsche's radicalism, nor his utter lack of self-pity. His "amour de soi," often inextricably mixed with "amour propre," saves him from driving immanentist thinking to its hyperbolic consequences; but then it leads him into equally disastrous ventures. Nietzsche in his radical commitment to thought could never have mistaken himself for an existential condition of salvation. Consequent and rigorous as always, he defines "the highest man" functionally, instead of identifying him as an individual:<sup>38</sup>

"ORDER OF RANK: He who *determines* the values and guides the will of millennia by guiding the highest characters is *the highest man*."

The originator of the doctrine of the Will to Power has no special standing in it, be it metaphysical, existential, or symbolical. He has to be a "highest man" because (as in the Socratic-Platonic and the Jean-Jacques doctrine before) true cognition is the privilege of the highest man. There is no more to it. But then, Nietzsche began with a radical concept of immanent reality, and Rousseau began with the notion of the socially defined self.

If all of Rousseau's works are read as the complete documentation of one unitary philosophical enterprise, his political philosophy is recognized to be a transitional stage, proclaimed with finality, never repudiated, yet abandoned in the end. It is part of an ongoing philosophical search for an understanding of the new modern self. What is singular about it is its unity: unity of purpose and human unity. Rousseau's life, parts of the same quest, are both deliberately fashioned from the time that the great idea seizes him to the time when his powers fail.

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<sup>38</sup> "Aus dem Nachlass", Werke III, p. 425.

None of his writings can be dismissed as delusions or ravings of a psychopath, for his mental alienation is not purely psychopathic; it is also, and above all, the precise expression in life of the situation created by the modern self's alienation from all transcendent order. Self-observation is Rousseau's method of inquiry into philosophical anthropology; his self develops the problems of enforced autonomy as radically as does his thought, always a step ahead of his thought. His "madness" therefore represents an inevitable, rigorously consequent step forward into a new type of living experience which his thought will have then to explore. In this "mad" phase Rousseau places his self - - whatever the psychological mechanisms may be - - into the very situation that raises the next and last problem. In his "public years" he had done the same thing. His deliberate, considered, gradual withdrawal from society had placed him in a social and psychological position which made the subsequent flight into paranoiac delusion possible and inevitable. This position revealed in the form of living experience the irremediable weakness of his philosophy, at the very time he was formulating this philosophy with utmost outward assurance.

One could say that his life *before* the public period does not show this pattern of conscious decisions propelling him forward from problem to problem, in systematic sequence. But even this first phase, accompanied almost from the beginning by hoarding up recollections, by introspection and by as yet groping thought, shows in retrospect the same directedness. Nonetheless it was necessary for him to bring this first phase into the unity of pattern, once he had become aware of the need for the autobiographical quest. This he did in his autobiographical writings. He skillfully used every usable fact, he manipulated or omitted what did not fit the pattern; this invention of a philosophically relevant life amounted to the creation of a myth; but in this as in all true cases, myth is simply a sto-

ry which is truer than truth. The story as Rousseau tells us, not the account of the biographer who factually corrects him, is what the student of his thought must accept. For this is not only the story of Jean-Jacques; it is the story of the voyage of the modern self from autonomous natural innocence through social hell and social paradise to ultimate, empty isolation. Jean-Jacques is after all as radical as Nietzsche, in his own peculiar way. Nor is he any less modern, despite the eighteenth-century furniture that still stands around forlornly in the enigmatic emptiness of his last philosophizing. Nietzsche, not Rousseau, is the immanentist philosopher of Will; Rousseau, not Nietzsche, is the philosopher of the modern self, the thinker who no longer knows the answer to the question: Why am I here? And who therefore must ask: What am I? - - and Will is no answer to *that* question. Rousseau spans in one life-time the distance from eighteenth-century rational optimism to twentieth-century existential despair.

How can the itinerary of one human being span such distance, considering that it is not only thought that must traverse it (thought travels fast) but that a historical transformation of human awareness over generations is here pressed into one man's life? Speaking of himself in the third person, Jean-Jacques in his dreamlike clairvoyance answers:<sup>39</sup>

“One must admit that the destiny of this man has rather striking peculiarities; his life is cut into two parts that seem to belong to two different individuals; and the period that separates them, namely the time when he published books, marks the death of the one, and the birth of the other.”

This is the key to the understanding of the single philosophical enterprise in both of its inseparable aspects: Rousseau's itinerary of thought and Jean-Jacques's itinerary through life.

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<sup>39</sup> Premier Dialogue. Œuvres I, p. 676.

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