
ANNE DENEYS-TUNNEY AND YVES CHARLES ZARKA (EDS.), *ROUSSEAU BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE: PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE, AND POLITICS*, DE GRUYTER, BERLIN, 2016.

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Rousseau Between Nature and Culture: the title of the collection of essays straightaway evokes our most essential understanding of Rousseau's oeuvre, the antithetical relation of nature and civilization. The collection approaches this relation on three different levels, reflected by three parts: the first, *Technology: Between Nature and Anti-Nature*, poses the very question of the natural man versus the modern man depicting the human being as the subject in its physical and moral existence in Rousseau's work. The second part, *Politics and Ethics: Beyond Nature/Culture Polarity*, develops this further, but instead of the individual it turns to the political in man, as the product of the subject emerging at intersections of nature and culture. As a synthesis, the third part, *The Philosophical Novel: Culture as Nature's Supplement*, reconciles opposing entities (nature-culture; individual-society) and indicates possible ways that Rousseau proposed to step out of the binary, mutually exclusive oppositions.

In order to present the originality of this volume and the novelty it brings to existing scholarship, it is important to be familiar with certain fundamental concepts in Rousseau's philosophy. Therefore, these will be reviewed here along with the findings and ideas presented in the essays. The compilation itself builds

upon well-known notions to many readers: the very aporia between nature and culture is embodied by the famous *Second Discourse* or the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, written in 1754. Widely read and taught even today, the emblematic text of the Enlightenment opened new ways of questioning the political, anthropological and ethical horizons of modernity, and continues to do so. Modern anthropology and philosophy (e.g., Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, Starobinski), simply put, would not be the same without the elemental questions raised by Rousseau: what is natural in man, if anything, and how could we preserve it? Could men, living in a corrupted society, return to the ideal (natural) state of humanity, if it ever existed? But most importantly: what is the artificial, what constitutes culture in our societies? Rousseau's importance is twofold: being inherently part of the Enlightenment, his inquiry into the natural – feeling, law and moral – of man, made him simultaneously the counterpart of the mainstream Enlightenment philosophy.

However, as this compilation ingeniously underscores, the full extent of the *philosophe's* questions and possible answers is not limited to this particular text. The oeuvre of the Genevan thinker is a web of ideas, where the reader can find multiple

aspects of the relationship between nature and culture, meticulously interwoven with distinct levels of the social and individual man. The critical approach adopted in these studies assumes that this duality (nature/culture) dominates all of Rousseau's work – from the autobiographical writings through the political and pedagogical essays to the novels – and thus, makes it possible to comprehend the *philosophe's*, oftentimes paradoxical, system as a whole. Reading and analyzing the *Second Discourse* detached from its immediate intertext, which remains a common practice among scholars even today, at best leads to a fragmentary understanding of Rousseau's impact on contemporary thought, or to misinterpretation at worst.

Following the different facets of man's social state where this fundamental complementarity is disseminated, the studies are grouped into three main parts. The logic of the arrangement of the articles follows that of Rousseau's reasoning: before we can arrive at the abstract, and playfully transcendental query about politics, the thinker returns to the question of the pre-social and the pre-moral in man. That is because man, before sealing the "social contract," i. e. creating an ever-changing community with the Other, had already been subject to two primal qualities that predetermined the fabric of society. These two attributes, which constitute man before the creation of society, are *love of oneself* (*amour de soi*) and *pity*. Consequently, when Rousseau turns to an idea of a pre-moral man, he takes on one of the central concepts of his contemporaries: the savage man, who, metamorphosed through the lenses of modern European morals is presented as the noble savage (*le bon sauvage*), is an antipode of the modern social man (e.g., as he appears in various works of Voltaire and Diderot). Nevertheless, for Rousseau, the fully pre-civilizational does not exist, given that culture is not contradictory to nature, but rather its continuation – whether this is a positive or negative evolution is an entirely different question for him. Hence the need for the characteristics mentioned above that are at once inherently human

and natural. It is important to emphasize that, in opposition to Descartes, but also to Locke, Rousseau does not assume the existence of innate ideas nor the dominance of sensations in the development of society (Knee, pp. 30–31). It is rather the natural feeling of being that leads to new sociability: "We did not begin by reasoning but by feeling" (*Essay on the Origin of Languages*, Chapter 2, 1781).

This transition is best illustrated in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages* where the *philosophe* hypothesizes the emergence of the first human communities. It probably seems self-evident to us now but associating the advent of society with the evolution of language – which is no longer a cultural artifact or a tool, but the foundation of any civilization – was yet a novel idea in the 18th century. Rousseau's anthropological approach thus presumes that human associations and communication were, at least in part, not born from primal or instinctive needs, as those would essentially scatter the population on the face of Earth, but from feelings bringing them together. These feelings, as mentioned earlier, are love of oneself and pity: they require a short explanation to demonstrate how these natural feelings – natural as in they are perfectly present in animals as well – in the end, provide a passage to culture. Love of oneself or *amour de soi*, which is not to be confused with its corrupted form, self-love or *amour-propre*, is an essential attribute in Rousseauist thought. It is the inner feeling of existence, an instinct of self-preservation without which no species could survive: a life-instinct in other words, but also the voice of nature that attaches the Self to the Other. Because if one wants to persist in existence, this means that this other being must feel so as well. For that reason, the other pillar of the natural man is pity: an inner feeling that the Other must also have the same sense of pain, hunger, and fear as I do. As a consequence, the Self as an individual entity becomes capable of identifying with the Other, and thus the first bond between beings is created based on the pure love of oneself, which is ultimately the love of the other. It is essential

to emphasize – as does the very first article written by Pierre Guenancia – that this feeling of pity is not merely compassion. The latter would not convey group identity, which, in the end, is prerequisite to the formation of any society: “If the cogito consisted in distinguishing the self from what not-self, pity consists in identifying the self from what is not self” (Guenancia, p. 24).

Nonetheless, these feelings of love of oneself and pity do not remain untouched, and it seems that our societies are irreversibly based on a false contract, marked by the act of enclosure. Founded on violence and force, rather than consent, modern society quickly degrades passions and morals, and Man succumbs to what Rousseau names self-love (*amour-propre*) and becomes the slave of the Other’s gaze. Self-love gives way to inequality and individual identity, however perverted, as it presents itself as a spectacle to others: luxury, selfish gain, and love for power; all nourish this newly acquired excess of artificial needs, propelled by the desire of being seen. Being in nature is thus supplemented by being seen or seeming: “Looking is a splitting faculty that divides being and seeming and thus leads the way to the great stage of the civilized world and, in so doing, introduces the leaven of corruption” (Lojkin, p. 52). Subsequently, the deformation of love of oneself to self-love establishes a continually deteriorating political, anthropological and ethical stance which in fact is anti-nature and anti-republican for Rousseau.

The first part of the book, consisting of five articles, undertakes the interpretation of these principal notions in relation to the transition of man from nature to culture and technology, or rather man’s alienation from nature for the benefit of self-love. The second part, *Politics and Ethics: Beyond Nature/Culture Polarity*, takes a step further and examines the political and moral ramifications of the Rousseauist thought. Here, his work – in particular, the *Social Contract* – is read along with Machiavelli, Hobbes or Carl Schmitt, and thus becomes painstakingly timeless and contemporary to us. The articles unfold central ideas of the *philosophe*,

such as the general will, sovereignty and the social contract itself, and one cannot help but see our era, particularly the worrisome processes currently vitiating, corrupting and consuming our democracies, mirrored in these argumentations. The image of the Sovereign followed through the ages, reappears with Rousseau, but under a different cloak. As the figure who suspends or limits some or all democratic institutions during a crisis by delegating power to the executive branch – in order to safeguard and reinstate those once the menace is dissipated – is a familiar picture to the 21st century citizen who very recently experienced the state of emergency in Western democracies after the terror attacks. Rousseau’s political thinking not only foresaw the possibility of imbalance in power but coded the Sovereign, becoming the Dictator with Carl Schmitt into the normal functioning of modern societies. Can we, in fact, tell democracy from dictatorship today? As these studies point out, Rousseau’s notions of contract and general will – both the product of the love of oneself and pity – could help us understand our sovereignty in our modern republics.

The third part of the collection, *The Philosophical Novel: Culture as Nature’s Supplement*, offers a reading of various texts from the vantage point of the educator. The essays, primarily relying on the tenets found in *Emile ou l’éducation*, accentuate the possible reassimilation of the natural into culture. Education, just as gardening for *Julie*, does not prepare the child to enter society as an ideal „Citizen,” but to be a free subject in a society that has been fundamentally corrupted (L’Aminot, p. 183). In the end, Rousseau does not advocate for returning to a fictitious ideal state but proposes acknowledging nature’s presence and recognizing culture in its supplementarity to Nature. The term supplement, rich in significance, theorized by Derrida (*Of Grammatology; Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*) is construed in relation to various texts, which comes into play with and modulates our understanding of the *philosophe*’s definition of Nature.

Analyzing the critical notions mentioned above (love of oneself, self-love, pity, general will, supplement, etc.) is undoubtedly the best way to approach Rousseau's philosophy; nevertheless, this collection undertakes this task by juxtaposing the Rousseauist concepts with our current vision of nature. That is a crucial contribution to existing scholarship because it posits traceability of an impending ecological threat, such as the exploitation, abandonment, and destruction of nature, which goes hand in hand with the establishment of an artificial, corrupted society. Rousseau thus offers a new way of thinking when it comes to our unilateral relation with the environment and its resources whose finality becomes increasingly palpable in our era. His theories do not solely apply to the abstract substratum

determining the structuration of our societies (e.g., inequality and the organization of modern democracies), but they can raise more tangible issues: could our current environmental catastrophe be caused by the same, voluntary detachment from Nature that created our modern societies? Is there a way to reverse this process or find a remedy to it and if so, can we discover it in the current state of affairs or do we need to reevaluate our subjectivity – corrupted by self-love – in relation to the Other on the social, moral and political level in order to prevent the devastation of Nature?

This collection of essays sheds light on the value of Rousseauist thought in the 21st century: facing new political and ecological challenges, our expanded civilization could once again turn to the illustrious figure of the 18th century for enlightenment.