

Lectures | **Reading**
de | ***La Nouvelle***
La Nouvelle | ***Héloïse***
Héloïse | **Today**

publié sous
la direction de

edited
by

Ourida Mostefai

Pensée libre, n^o 4

Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau
North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Ottawa 1993

**CANADIAN CATALOGUING IN
PUBLICATION DATA**

**DONNÉES DE CATALOGAGE
AVANT LA PUBLICATION (CANADA)**

Main entry undert title:

Vedette principale au titre:

Lectures de la Nouvelle Héloïse =
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today

Lectures de la Nouvelle Héloïse =
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today

(Pensée libre ; no. 4)
Text in French and English.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

(Pensée libre ; no. 4)
Texte en français et en anglais.
Comprend des références
bibliographiques.
ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

1. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778.
Nouvelle Héloïse. I. Mostefai, Ourida
II. North American Association for the
Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. III.
Title: Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse
today. IV. Series.

1. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778.
Nouvelle Héloïse. I. Mostefai, Ourida
II. Association nord-américaine des
études Jean-Jacques Rousseau. III. Titre:
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today. IV.
Collection.

PQ2039.L43 1993
848'.509 C94-900020-5E

PQ2039.L43 1993
848'.509 C94-900020-5F

Ouvrage publié grâce au concours de l'Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau, grâce à une subvention des Services Culturels français de Boston, et grâce à l'aide de la Faculté des Arts et des Sciences de Boston College.

The publication of this volume was made possible by the cooperation of the North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, by a grant from the French Cultural Services in Boston and by the support of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Boston College.

© Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau / North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1993.

ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

Collection « Pensée libre » dirigée par Guy Lafrance.
Revision de textes, typographie et mise-en-page par Daniel Woolford.

Pensée libre series editor: Guy Lafrance.
Text editing, typesetting and layout by Daniel Woolford.

Imprimé au Canada
Printed in Canada

**ROUSSEAU'S ECONOMIC THEORY:
DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNITY
RECONSIDERED**

Rousseau's conception of political rights and responsibilities cannot be understood without an examination of his framework for the reproduction of human life, a task he consigned to the province of the household. The autarkic household, inspired by the models of the French feudal manorhouse and of Genevan artisanal familial mores, is the realm in which men master the necessities of life through the management of economic affairs. The reconstruction of the feudal household, which Rousseau sketched in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, was intended as an antidote to the contemporary bourgeois transformation of family life into a more private and closed structure, designed to insulate its members from the struggle taking place among opponents in the market place. Rousseau's model also served to recall the French nobility to its traditional responsibility. As public/civic education is impossible in a monarchy, it becomes the responsibility of the nobility to organize the production of material life in a manner consistent with the moral principles that inform all other social and political interactions. Thus, the reform of monarchies is directed at reviving and redirecting the structural source of their power and of their special virtue: the aristocratic household. This structure self-consciously assumes responsibility for the nurturing process through which man's sentiments are socialized and he acquires the moral development appropriate for a new politics.

It is only in the light of mistaken characterizations of the aristocracy as a decadent and defeated class that Rousseau's advocacy of the aristocratic household appears anachronistic.¹ Such views, which portrayed the triumph of the bourgeoisie in almost all aspects of social, economic, and even political life in the eighteenth century, have been successfully disputed by steady challenges. The documented survival

1. Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Régime* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

of the *ancien régime* into the nineteenth century demonstrates the endurance and adaptability of the aristocracy and confirms its vital participation in the widespread reformulation of public life.² The modern efforts by both liberal and leftist theorists to locate the foundation of rights in property, respectively either emphasizing the "natural" status of property, and therefore its position as the basis of all other rights, or stressing the stringent limitations on property and its purely social and political basis, are confounded by Rousseau's "reactionary" preference for an autarkic, aristocratic reordering of material needs in which property, although held in "private," is exploited for the more or less commodious welfare of a small community of unequal participants.³

Rousseau, who analyzed the particular ills of the French *ancien régime* and formulated plans for delaying its eventual overthrow, specifically designated the aristocracy as the most suitable agent of positive social and moral reform. Rousseau made no claim for the universality of his plan, nor should it be taken, as by one commentator, as an alternative to the political reform of a state's constitution: it is not an alternative to the political reform but rather a precondition for any future wise government.⁴

The Aristocratic Household as Revolutionary Class

Focusing on the family as the prototypical social institution and explaining political associations on the basis of sentiments provided Rousseau and his audience with a new understanding of politics. This becomes particularly apparent in recent conceptions of the public sphere as including the "social." The concern with establishing stable affections, with nurturing and well-being as social concerns, leads Rousseau

-
2. G. Chaussinand-Nogaret, *La Noblesse au XVIII^e Siècle, De la Féodalité aux Lumières* (Paris: Hachette, Éditions Complexe, 1976), pp. 39-65, 119-160, 181-201. B. Behrens. "Nobles, Privileges and Taxes at the end of the Ancient Regime," *Economic History Review* (1962). Daniel Roche, "Recherches sur la Noblesse Parisienne au milieu du XVIII^e Siècle: La Noblesse du Marais," in *Actes du 86^e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes*, 1962. Jacques Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution: Doctrine and Action 1789-1804*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
 3. See Yoav Peled, "Rousseau's Inhibited Radicalism: An Analysis of His Political Thought in Light of His Economic Ideas," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 74, December 1980, No. 4, pp. 1034-1045.
 4. J. Shklar, *Men and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

to address the problem posed by the changing economic arena. Although English and French economists find it necessary to include the economic sphere within the boundaries of public opinion yet outside the jurisdiction of the state, Rousseau instead wants it to remain within the domestic purview and under the aegis of political adjudication.

Procuring the necessities of life, a function relegated in antiquity to the household, has become embroiled in a set of impersonal and adversarial relations. Rousseau favors a more communal model based on the mutual recognition of needs among small domestic groups, which will form the economic basis of the state. Thus, the political economy developed in opposition to both French and English models of market expansion seeks to limit the scope of impersonal transaction by maximizing bonds among immediate familiars.

Rousseau's critique of society is not simply an attack on the system of hierarchy and privilege of the aristocracy or on the preoccupation with the expansion of a bourgeois market economy. It is an attack on the social and political inequalities that harm all aspects of human life. His conviction that economic inequalities contribute as fundamentally to social injustice as do hierarchies of rank leads him to expose the aristocracy's "base" preoccupation with wealth.⁵ In spite of his fascination with the aristocracy, and with the alliance he sometimes contemplates between the nobility and the artisanal class of his youth, Rousseau is clear on the problems of hereditary privilege. Although united in their contempt of the bourgeois, the two orders do not have all interests in common. As rich and poor they compete for the precious resources needed to satisfy their most basic needs:

The waste of goods which serve to nourish men is sufficient to render luxury odious to humanity. . . . We need sauces in our kitchens; this is why the sick lack bouillon. We need liqueurs on our tables; that is why the farmer drinks only water. We need powder for our wigs; this is why so many poor people have no bread.⁶

Rousseau has been characterized as a pessimist who views modernity and the prospects of "industrialized urban civilization" with a jaundiced eye.⁷ The despoliation of nature and the debasement

5. Pl. II, pp. 84-86, 75.

6. Pl. III, p. 79n.

7. Masters, (1968), pp. 421-37; B. de Jouvenel, "Rousseau, the Pessimistic Evolutionary," *Yale French Studies*, No. 28, Fall-Winter 1961-62, pp. 83-96; J. Shklar, *Men and Citizens*; Serge Mallet, *Essays on the New Working Class*, eds. D. Howard and D. Savage (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), p. 120.

of human life that Rousseau witnessed in the course of long walks through the French countryside convinced him that “ransacking the earth’s entrails” would only condemn man to be “buried alive.” Rousseau’s “pessimism” about certain aspects of urban life does allow his vigorous advocacy of a mostly rural existence for modern man. Contrasting “the emaciated faces of the unfortunate who languish in the foul vapors of mines” with those of “loving shepherds and robust laborers,” Rousseau adumbrates the advantages of restoring a connection with the natural world of “green pastures and flowers, of azure skies.” Rousseau asserts, several years before the physiocrats, the importance of agriculture as both a source of material wealth and a key to social equilibrium. Contemporary political economy has vindicated Rousseau’s resistance to the English model of modernization predicated on a rapid “take-off” into industrial growth. France’s more gradual approach to modernization would prove a far more reliable prototype for other nations.⁸

Rousseau’s defense of rural life also gives voice to his predictions of the demise of English political liberty. Although his pronouncements have been ascribed to “reactionary economics,”⁹ it is not for lack of sympathy with the quasi-republicanism of the English people¹⁰ that Rousseau believes them destined to fail but rather from a belief in the inevitable downfall of a people who forsake the land for life in the cities.

8. For a corrective view of French economic development: Rudolph Braun, “The Impact of Cottage Industry on Agricultural Population,” in David Landes, *The Rise of Capitalism*, (New York: Macmillan, 1966) pp. 53-64. Franklin F. Mendels, “Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrialization Process,” *Journal of Economic History*, XXXII, March 1972, pp. 241-261. Franklin F. Mendels, “La Composition du Ménage Paysan en France au XIX Siecle: Une Analyse Economique du Mode de Production Domestique,” *Annales*, E.S.C., no.4, Juillet-Août 1978. Franklin F. Mendels, “Industry and Marriages in Flanders before the Industrial Revolution,” *Population and Economics* (ed. Paul Déprez) (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1968) pp. 81-93. Patrick O’Brien and Caglar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1978). This excellent work points out that reallocation of labor “from agriculture to industry and services is efficient only if its marginal productivity is higher outside primary production” and that there is “no easy assumption that a relatively large agricultural section is abnormal or demonstrably ‘suboptimal’” (p. 18). Richard Roehl, “French Industrialization: A Reconsideration,” *Explorations in Economic History* 13 (1976), pp. 233-281. This is a very useful review essay on the debate and its ramifications.
9. Alexandre Chabert, “Rousseau Economist,” *Revue d’Histoire économique et Sociale*, 1964, pp. 345-356.
10. Pl. II, pp. 524, 654.

As Rousseau gains greater understanding of the habits and mores engendered by market relations and becomes more familiar with social and political practices in England, he is persuaded, in spite of praise lavished on the English parliamentary system by Montesquieu, Voltaire and the *Philosophes*, that a people willing to uproot themselves, to sever bonds of kinship formed in pre-industrial society in order to gain greater access to luxuries, will wish to conquer others. Their downfall must follow. Having learned the lesson of Roman decadence, Rousseau applies it to the contemporary avatar of this particular type of republicanism:

It is, for example, very easy to predict that in twenty years, England in all its glory, will be ruined, and moreover will have lost what remains of its liberty. Everyone asserts that agriculture still flourishes in that Isle, and I wager that it is perishing. London grows daily; therefore the kingdom is depopulated. The English wish to conquer; therefore they will become slaves.¹¹

Were Rousseau's predictions overstated? His warnings about the consequences of dissolving rural familial and economic ties were mostly correct, anticipating some major problems of urban industrial life that more enthusiastic proponents of modernization blissfully overlooked. The consequences of inappropriate and ill-conceived industrialization efforts are being reconceptualized. The range of problems is comprehensive, from the degradation of the physical environment to the one hundred million women "missing" from the populations in South Asia, West Asia, China and North Africa.¹²

The political economy developed by Rousseau in opposition to changes in the modes of production of France and England involves him in a specific project to reform mores through the private sphere. His solution is meant to address the specific problem of the French *ancien régime*. Rousseau announces his plan for domestic reform in the second preface to the *Nouvelle Héloïse*: "If there is any reform to be attempted in dealing with public morality, it is through domestic mores

11. Pl. III, p. 573.

12. The dislocations and sometimes deadly consequences of significant aspects of the industrialization and "modernization" process are the subject of contemporary reportage. See: Peter Passell, "Rebel Economists Add Ecological Cost to price of Progress," *New York Times*, November 27, 1990; Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Third World: Back to the Farm," *New York Times*, July 28, 1985; Amartya Sen, "More Than 100 Million Are Missing," *New York Times Review of Books*, December 20, 1990, pp. 61-66.

that it must begin."¹³ It is in this context that Rousseau clarifies the possibility of attaining equality among unequals — while maintaining the wide disparities in economic conditions between members of the same community.

The Moral Ordering of Brute Functions

Given the egalitarian import of Rousseau's conception of rights, his preference for an autarkic feudal household as the economic and political basis of harmonious social existence is incomprehensible unless it is understood not only in terms of the violent revolution taking place in the mode of production in England, but also in terms of the debate on reform taking place in Geneva. This political debate opposed powerful international banking interests, openly identified with the French court and with modernity, to the mostly artisanal citizen body. The latter, more rustic in manner and traditionalist in their daily practices, sought territorial independence as well as greater internal political freedom vis-à-vis their governors. In a century noted for frequent popular uprisings throughout Europe, the fierce contestations of the Genevan citizens, as well as of the *natif* and *habitant* populations, is justly famous.¹⁴

Rousseau's depiction of the private sphere as the appropriate base for organizing the nation's material life starkly contradicted contemporary proposals for modernizing production. Targeting the realm of agricultural production, the largest and most significant productive sector, the physiocrats advocated abolishing the small holding in favor of a form of agrarian capitalism that imitated the English method of agricultural exploitation.¹⁵ Rousseau's defense of a feudal model for organizing the cultivation of resources reflected his political rejection

13. Pl. I, p. 24.

14. Michel Launay, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Écrivain Politique* (Cannes; C.E.L.: Grenoble: A.C.E.R., 1971), pp. 34-66; 82-100.

15. Many excellent economic histories, among the best: Ernest Labrousse & Fernand Braudel (eds.), *Histoire Economique et Sociale de la France, Vol. 2, 1660-1789* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1970), pp. 88-155. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy: Economic Revolution and Social Order in France in the 18th Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976). Henri Sée, *La Vie Économique et Les Classes Sociales en France au 18^e Siècle* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1924); discussion of Turgot on pp. 138-150. Henri Sée, *L'Évolution Commerciale et Industrielle de la France Sous L'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Marcel Giard, 1925). Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). Marc Bloch, "La Lutte Pour

of impersonal market relations, which he understood as commodifying and homogenizing all human relations, in favor of face-to-face relations. His critique of political economy, considered a preface to the *Social Contract*,¹⁶ itself part of a larger work to be entitled *Institutions Politiques*, emphasized a theory of administration, or of government, which avoided both market relations and the production of more wealth.¹⁷

The study of economics, which, for Rousseau, concerned the regulatory functions of government, deals primarily with the administration of affairs among individuals who hold disproportionate amounts of property and who are therefore unequal in this regard. Rousseau understood the study of public economy in terms of three principal functions, which he summarizes as the administration of laws, the maintenance of civil liberty, and the subsidy of the state's needs.¹⁸

Legitimate government's first and foremost function is to distinguish the private will above all one's own, from the general will, and to follow the latter in all matters. The objectives of the second function of government are to be accomplished by protecting the individual members of the state, inculcating them with love for their homeland and, when appropriate, instructing them through a public education system inspired by the models of antiquity.

It was only in his discussion of the third function of public economy that Rousseau disclosed his understanding of, and recommendations for, a particular economic system. It was here that he stated his preference for a mostly agrarian basis for material life and his hostility to the expansion of commerce and industry. Rousseau reaffirmed and obstinately maintained this preference in *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* (1765) and in *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne* (1772), altering little in his vision of an agriculturally based economy.

l'Individualisme Agraire," in *Mélanges Historiques* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963) vol. 2, pp. 594-96. Georges Weulersse, *Le Mouvement physiocratique en France*, 2 tomes, (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1910).

16. Pl. III, p. LXXIV.

17. Pl. III, pp. 262-263. Especially strident in the *Discourse on Political Economy*: "The right of property is the most sacred right of citizenship, and even more important, in some respects, than liberty itself." This is true for several reasons, the last being that "property is the . . . real guarantor of the undertakings of citizens: for if property were not answerable for personal actions, nothing would be easier than to evade duties and laugh at the laws."

18. Pl. III, p. LXXVIII.

The Discourse on Political Economy (1755) succinctly clarified Rousseau's position: he understood his task as that of a moralist, not of an economist. He sought to attenuate, if not eliminate, the destructive impact of abundance and luxury on citizens in order to enhance their ability to value and seek to achieve political freedom. Men's desires for sensual gratification were to be restrained in order not to overwhelm their judgments; if that process could be legislated and administratively maintained, "from what errors would reason be preserved, and what vices would be choked even before birth, if one knows how to compel the brute functions to support that moral order which they so often disturb."¹⁹

Rousseau was, therefore, preoccupied with reducing both government spending and its resources, advocating, as had Bodin, the establishment of a public domain from which the state could derive most of its expenses. This is why Rousseau would join the liberal theorists, who were mostly concerned with strengthening private property, in recommending a limited accumulation of the resources of the state. In this manner, Rousseau would unite conservative and liberal positions to support his own. To that end Rousseau proposed a system of progressive taxation to redistribute the costs of governance to the richer members of society and thus ensure his primary objective — the protection of social and political justice among citizens.²⁰

The Problem of Development in France

Anglo-American historians and economists seeking to understand modern French economic development have characterized it as stagnant in its incapacity for structural change. Cameron notes that the French rate of growth for all relevant variables was "substantially below that of other Western industrial nations."²¹ In attempting to elucidate the sources and factors of this stagnation, historians have compared France to England, the latter having the dubious distinction of having paved

19. Pl. I, p. 409.

20. Pl. III, p. 270.

21. Rondo Cameron, "Economic Growth and Stagnation in France, 1815-1914," in B.E. Supple (ed.), *The Experience of Economic Growth* (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 329. Cameron changes his evaluation of French economic growth from "retardation" to "slow growth" in "L'Économie française: passé, présent, avenir," *Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* (Paris: A. Colin), Sept-Oct. 1970, pp. 1424-27.

its way to modernization via the industrial "take-off" phenomenon.²² Kemp wrote that although French "growth was taking place, it fell short of what was required to bring the economy into line with the best results elsewhere." French torpor was, therefore, clearly understood as both relative and structural, for Kemp gloomily predicted that even the modicum of growth that could be detected "was not accompanied by the preparation of conditions for structural change."²³ Recent work by Braun, Berkner, Mendels, O'Brien and Keyder, and Roehl, however, suggests that the panorama is more ambiguous and that France's development followed a different route. Industrialization existed earlier and in different forms than those manifested by the English model, and this resulted in a less drastic and dislocative process.

Agrarian capitalism, which had great success in England, was advocated by the physiocrats in France but never adopted as a working model. "Preindustrial industry," industrial production that occurs in a nonurban setting, was, however, of considerable significance for both France and Switzerland. Understanding this phenomenon clarifies Rousseau's "reactionary" economics: his reluctance to endorse agrarian capitalism and "modern" industrialization.

Studies of "retardive factors" in French economic development had located the problem of economic stagnation in the nineteenth century: 1815-1914. This meant that industrialization was purported to have taken place a century later in France than in England, without duplicating Rostow's much admired take-off model. Marczewski was unable to identify a take off per se in France but asserted that an upturn could clearly be detected in the middle of the eighteenth century. Roehl indicates that this assertion is well-founded. He has shown that the middle of the eighteenth century, far from being the origin of retardive factors, was instead the origin of modern French economic develop-

22. W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), Chs. 2-4, and W.W. Rostow (ed.), *The Economics of Take-Off Into Sustained Growth* (London: Macmillan, 1963). In this volume J. Marczewski clarifies this discussion in "The Take-Off Hypothesis and the French Experience": "There was no true take-off in France at all: the growth of the French economy was very gradual and its origin lies far in the past." He believes that if there was a take-off it was in 1750; France was a leader and Britain a follower (pp. 129, 131-32).

23. Tom Kemp, *Economic Forces in French History* (London: Dobson, 1971), believes that backwardness can be defined and analyzed in structural terms, France's "stagnation" deriving from its failure to imitate Britain's technology and factory system. See p. 257.

ment. He suggests that this was a time of unique and intense activity in the agrarian and industrial sectors.

Significantly, the modern debate echoes the debates in 18th century French philosophic circles. In question was the physiocratic contention that economic phenomena represent a distinct order of facts and knowledge and obey laws that derive from that order. Although the work of Petty in England and of Boisguilbert in France a century earlier had underscored the need to elaborate an economic law, it was not until Quesnay and the physiocrats "codified" an economic order that a case would be made to establish economics as a science. The debate acknowledged the primacy of the agrarian sector, which the Physiocrats valorized, but leveled bitter criticism at agrarian capitalism. Rousseau and his disciple Mably were the earliest critics of a doctrine which legislated economic inequality in the name of progress. Rousseau's most salient objection focused on the separation of the economic sphere from the judicature of the legislative authority, while Mably, more egalitarian, focused on the injustices inherent in the system.

French economic growth should be considered in light of the phenomenon Mendels calls "proto-industrialization," and describes as "part and parcel of the process of industrialization or, rather, as the first phase which preceded and prepared modern industrialization proper."²⁴ When the products of this particular source are quantified, French industrial output presents a different picture. The annual rate of growth of French industry and handicrafts in the eighteenth century was estimated at 1.91 per cent; according to Roehl, this would put France's growth at a rate higher than England's. In addition, Marczewski and Markovitch's research indicates that per capita output in France was equivalent to, and perhaps even surpassed, that of England in the early 1800s.²⁵

Proto-industrialization contributed to the rapid growth of traditional, market-oriented, primarily rural industry and facilitated changes in the spatial organization of the rural economy. Labor was easily obtained since agriculture requires workers only in compressed and short intervals. Most peasant families could afford the cost of one or several looms and other basic tools necessary to participate in textile production, the largest European industry. Being the poorest, these

24. Mendels (1972), p. 241.

25. Roehl (1976), p. 243-244.

families held insufficient land to survive after rent and taxes; the income from weaving was therefore crucial to the family economy. Involvement in rural industry was not a separate activity undertaken by peasants: rural industry improved the time patterns of rural employment, "not so much increasing the productivity of labor as increasing the productivity of workers." Given the conventional belief that England had been in the midst of her "revolution" for 20 years and that France had several decades to go before beginning her own development, these reformulations are significant in clarifying the role of agriculture in nascent capitalist economies.

The development of technology occurred alongside that of agricultural transformation in the course of French economic development. Some historians writing as late as 1973 reported the lack of French inventiveness in the eighteenth century: they generously, if a bit vaguely, referred to France's "less congenial climate of innovation." Others, however, maintained that French inventions of "real significance" exceeded those made in England. Roehl, examining data on the registration of patents, notes that, although a number of French patents were recording "highly impractical schemes," there were numerically more patents recorded in France than in England. In addition, whereas English patents were granted for ideas alone, the French Academie Royale des Sciences required drawings and scale models for registration of all patents.²⁶

In seeking to reconstitute the state according to more equitable principles, Rousseau confirmed Condorcet and Descroix's criticism: he attacked contemporary arrangements of society and, in the *Discourse on Political Economy* providing his first version of a political alternative to government by a legal despot. In the legislation and administration of the state, Rousseau proposed the supremacy of the people over that of such a despot. Government thus assumes executive but not legislative power; the latter residing in the people alone.²⁷ Consequently, the first rule of political economy consists of ensuring the existence of an administration that will conform to the general will as manifested in the

26. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

27. For a discussion stressing the conservative rather than radical notion of democracy, and the representative nature of the state, see Richard Fralin, *Rousseau and Representation: A Study of the Development of his Concept of Political Institutions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). I believe that this is a useful and accurate reading of Rousseau's recommendations to his fellow Genevans, if not of his understanding of democracy as it unfolds.

laws of the state. The legislator responsible for the codification of these laws has fulfilled his task correctly only if he has taken into account all that is required by the location, climate, soil, mores, surroundings and particular relationships of the people he was to institute. The successful legislative task is, therefore, to be based on material conditions, both human and geographic/ecological: the primary economic task for Rousseau was, therefore, essentially political.

Rousseau's second, "essential" rule of political economy deals primarily with the necessity of conforming individual wills to the general will — civic virtue being nothing other than the conformity of private wills to the general will. Rousseau advocated patriotism as the best way to encourage such congruence; and, instead of pointing to reason or self interest, he pointed to love as the emotion capable of inducing civic obedience. Man's willingness to desire "what is wanted by the people we love" is the only lure the wise legislator will require. Given his severe castigation of love as the social creation of one gender for the enslavement of the other, it seems surprising initially to read Rousseau's advocacy of love as the sentiment appropriate to effect the dramatic accommodation of particular wills and interests to the general will. The seeming contradiction between Rousseau's perception of love as a social invention for enslavement and as a basis for civic freedom is resolved if the reader recalls Rousseau's injunction about using the agent of corruption to transcend and defeat the effects of that corruption.²⁸

Rousseau's advocacy of patriotism identified the power of erotic love as a form to be sublimated into a love of homeland. Let men substitute one for the other, and virtuous citizens will be born from the ashes of chastened libertines. "The ecstasies of tender hearts appear as so many chimeras to anyone who has not experienced them," wrote Rousseau as one who knew the empire of emotions as well as their awesome power to motivate specific human behavior: "love of homeland, a hundred times more ardent and delightful than that of a mistress, likewise cannot be imagined except by being felt."²⁹

28. See Carol Pateman for a critical treatment of the role of women in Rousseau's political thought: "Women, Love, and The Sense of Justice," *Ethics*, vol. 91, no. 1, Oct. 1980, pp. 20-34, and Penny Weiss, "Rousseau, Antifeminism, and Woman's Nature," *Political Theory*, vol. 15, no. 1, Feb. 1987, pp. 81-89, for an excellent corrective to Pateman's argument.

29. Pl. III, p. 254.

It was only in his discussion of what he calls “the third principle of political economy” that Rousseau addressed the “economic” question: the administration of goods and services. Rousseau correctly identified a correlation between one’s material condition, understood in social as well as in metaphysical and economic terms, and individual happiness. Rousseau was contemptuous of philosophical flights of detached speculation which affirmed man’s capacity to experience contentment regardless of his struggles for physical survival. Further, Rousseau pointed to the political realm rather than the market or the family for the correction of injustices. This proved problematic to those who like Locke advocated the separation of private contentments from the adjudication of the public realm. Rousseau, in the *Discourse on Political Economy*, in a clear renunciation of that viewpoint, wrote that a crucial responsibility of government — and the only one leaders of the state share with leaders of families — is the obligation to make the individuals under their tutelage happy. The state must assure its citizens access to prosperity through labor, keeping “abundance so accessible that, to acquire it, work is always necessary and never useless.” This injunction was tantamount to assigning government the responsibility to create the preconditions for the right to full employment for all citizens. Believing that man is constituted by and within his relationships, especially those by which he secures the means of his physical survival, the relationships of labor, he remarks in *The Origin of Language* that “everything corresponds in its origins to the means of providing subsistence.”

*Nicole Fermon
Fordham University at
Lincoln Center*