

Utopia in Rousseau: Some Jamesonian Reflections

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It is easy to forget the extent to which the modern world is a product of utopian imaginings. The dream of something better, that “each generation should live better than the last” (to quote a recent advertising campaign for a major bank) has made a crucial contribution to the drive for scientific and technological innovation, revolutionary and reformist politics, and the desire for constantly renewed commodities. As I will argue, these utopian imaginings and aspirations have been accompanied from the outset by their apparently reactionary opposites. The desire for simplicity, to live more “naturally”, in harmony with each other and our environment, has been an inescapable counterpart and companion to the progressive utopia of continuous improvement.

The case of Jean-Jacques Rousseau will be used to demonstrate the inescapable mutual implications of imagining, on the one hand, a utopia of scientific, social and moral progress, and on the other, a utopia of escape from all that in a return to our “natural” origins. I will argue that this appearance of a utopian aporia can actually give rise to a third moment of utopian imagining, utopia as the inspiration for adopting a critical attitude to the present. Reading Rousseau in the light of Fredric Jameson’s recent study of utopia, I will make a case that Rousseau was the first to combine utopia and Enlightenment, not as aspiration, but as critique, not as a dream of a better world awaiting us in another place, another time, but as inspiration to work on ourselves, here and now.

Rousseau stands at a utopian crossroads. On the one hand, the Enlightenment introduced a faith in the necessary unfolding of history towards a kind of perfection in which error and darkness would be replaced by reason and truth; injustice and the arbitrary exercise of power by enlightened constitutions; scarcity, poverty and debilitating manual work by the abundance promised by scientific progress. On the other, and in some ways in reaction to that prospect, “romantic” utopians imagined natural communities of the unsophisticated, whose simple and honest encounters with each other, and intimate and tender relationships with their environment, would guarantee their happiness. While most commonly associated with the latter vision, Rousseau in fact had a foot in both camps. Not just any natural community will do. Rather, the utopian republic of *The Social Contract*¹ requires the intervention of an enlightened “lawgiver”, the individual fit for utopia in *Emile*² requires that of an enlightened tutor. In this essay I will be concerned less with trying to establish which of these represents the “real” Rousseau, as with trying to understand the nature and status of the various utopian imaginings in his work.

Rousseau presents us with three distinct utopias, one each in *The Discourse on Inequality*³, *Emile* and *The Social Contract*. From the outset they were each attacked as incoherent and impractical⁴. Rousseau anticipated these attacks and, in *Emile*, goes so far as to insist that the impracticality of the educational arrangements he recommends⁵, their great unlikelihood on many different grounds, not least the difficulty of finding an appropriately virtuous tutor⁶, in no way tells against the central thesis he is proposing. Far from encouraging his readers to adopt the arrangements he presents, as so many recommendations, he asks instead that they be taken as a provocation to reflect on what is, not what might be. Similarly with the other two utopian visions, Rousseau recognises their impracticality⁷ and acknowledges at least the appearance of incoherence, yet insists that this does not detract at all from the power of the utopian imagining he presents.

This should remind us of some of Jameson’s reflections on utopia. For Jameson has long maintained that the power of utopian vision and writing does not lie in the actual worlds and social arrangements imagined, that they should not be read as recommendations to change the world in any specific way. Rather, he argues that it is precisely the failure of utopian projects and imaginings that lends them their strength. For Jameson, it is the very impracticability and incoherence of utopian works that lends them whatever cultural and political power they may have.⁸

I wish to approach Rousseau in the light of this insight using a framework proposed by Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future*. He suggests

that there are two ways of seeing and presenting utopias, depending on whether the ideal situation depicted is a development of already existing elements in this world, or whether the imagined utopia represents a break with the present requiring an external stimulus or catalyst. Jameson recognises the dilemmas in both approaches⁹. Ultimately, these dilemmas guarantee that any given utopian dream or text must fail. They must either be impractical, requiring a break that cannot be expected and would in any case not be a utopia for us, but only for those fortunate “others” on the other side, or be incoherent, both the “same” as this one, yet so different as to be unrecognisable.¹⁰

For Jameson this is simply the starting point for what he sees as valuable and necessary in utopian works. On his account, utopia is a powerful reminder that the world, here and now, is far from perfect, but that it can and should be changed. Jameson is convinced that without utopian provocations to imagine the world differently we are unlikely to develop the political and personal energy to act for a better world. He is despondent about what he sees as the necessary conservatism, on the left and the right, of a world that has forgotten how to dream of an ideal.¹¹

If we read Rousseau’s utopian visions in this light perhaps we can dispel some of the traditional concerns about their practicality and coherence, and move beyond debates about whether Rousseau can be claimed for either the liberal or totalitarian camps¹². Claims on either side will simply stop making sense if we abandon strategies that resolve the alleged incoherence one way or another.

The Discourse on Inequality and The Social Contract as Utopian Texts

I will focus primarily on the *Discourse on Inequality* (or *Second Discourse*) and *The Social Contract*, although *Emile* will be drawn upon where it is particularly pertinent. I will try to identify features of each that render them both incoherent and impractical. I will argue that these should not be revised to render them coherent and practical, which tends to make them amenable to exploitation or dismissal as either liberal or totalitarian. Nor should they be seen as symptoms of Rousseau’s incoherent or impractical mind. There can, of course, be no definitive hermeneutic discovery of their true or truly intended meaning. But by applying the analytical framework set out above I believe we can fruitfully approach them as imagined utopias serving to provoke more than to recommend.

Incoherence

Firstly, let us note the fundamental incoherence of the *Second Discourse*. For Rousseau simply fails in his attempt to show what “man”, having left his animal state definitively behind, but not yet become “social”, must have been like. Rousseau acknowledges this within the text itself, precisely in his discussion of the characteristics “proper” to “man” in transition from animal to social being.¹³ The question of the origin of language Rousseau admits to be an impossible question, yet one crucial to the whole issue of the “state of nature”:

Frightened by the increasing difficulties, and convinced of the almost demonstrated impossibility that Languages could have arisen and been established by purely human means, I leave to anyone who wishes to undertake it the discussion of this difficult Problem: which is the more necessary, an already united society for the institution of Languages, or already invented languages for the establishment of society?¹⁴

Language and society are each other’s prerequisites, rendering the question of their origins in the other insoluble. And the solution is crucial to the task Rousseau set himself. For if language existed before society, that is, in the state of nature, then it would be a very different state than if it had not. A whole chain of paradoxes is thus opened up concerning different phases within the state of nature, which Rousseau simply cannot allow to corrode his principal thesis requiring that “natural man” not be amenable to development. These paradoxes relate not just to language but to a whole series of questions about what precedes, exists within, and comes after the “natural” state. Rousseau frequently acknowledges these difficulties but ploughs on as if they have been resolved and the exact features of the state of nature thereby established.¹⁵

Rather than solve these puzzles, Rousseau latches on to three features which he insists must have been “proper” to “man” in the state of nature. The first is “amour-de-soi”¹⁶, the kind of care for the self crucial for “natural man” to survive and enjoy life. The second is “pity”¹⁷, the faculty that ensures that we do not wantonly allow, or cause, a fellow creature, human or animal, to suffer. Now, neither of these is distinctly human, since Rousseau insists that animals share them, and neither survives the state of nature, being replaced by “amour-propre” when social man usurps natural man.¹⁸ Finally, Rousseau notes that, alone of the animals, “man” possesses a capacity for “perfectibility”, the ability to change and improve by the exercise of his freedom.¹⁹ But this perfectibility is only latent in the state of nature, and comes to be exercised only after the birth of the “social”.

The incoherence of this account threatens to render the whole notion of a state of nature worthless. Rousseau fails to establish a clear border between the animal and the natural human or between the natural and the social human. Moreover, the state of nature, which should be stable, must have a history. There cannot have been a sudden emergence from the animal state followed some time later by a sudden dawning of the social. Rousseau acknowledges this with respect to language and much else besides. But he also needs the state of nature to be a stable state where only the distinctly pre-social human exists. If it is a state of change and development, particularly towards the social, then not only is the border necessarily porous, but he is left with the problem of deciding which point along the way is the “most natural”.

Rousseau has two strategies for dealing with these dilemmas. On the one hand, he ignores the “pre-social”, takes society as a given and develops an imaginative history of humanity in society, in which change and degeneration occur gradually, largely as the result of a series of accidents, or catastrophes, the consequences of which are the corruption of otherwise stable, happy and simple communities. The dilemma here is well brought out:

beginning Society and the already established relations among men required in them qualities different from those they derived from their primitive constitution; ... the goodness suited to the pure state of nature was no longer the goodness suited to nascent Society; ... although men now had less endurance, and natural pity had already undergone some attenuation, this period in the development of human faculties, occupying a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our amour propre, must have been the happiest and most lasting epoch. ... he must have left it only by some fatal accident which, for the sake of the common utility should never have occurred.²⁰

His other strategy is simply to ignore the problem and present an imagined state of nature, or at least, once he has acknowledged its incoherence, to continue writing as if he had not.

In *The Social Contract*, the major coherence issues concern the concept of freedom. Rousseau is happy to acknowledge he has set himself a paradoxical task. Freedom is necessary to be truly human, and not to be free is the worst possible state for any person: to “renounce one’s freedom is to renounce one’s quality as man, the rights of humanity, and even its duties. ... to deprive one’s will of all freedom is to deprive one’s actions of all morality.”²¹ And yet, *The Social Contract* is a defence of the loss of free-

dom necessary to establish a civil and especially a political society. His famous declaration that “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” is followed by the question: “What can make it legitimate?” He announces that the text will answer precisely this question.²² Little wonder that it abounds with paradoxical formulations that have inspired a wide variety of readings and interpretations. Thus each person must alienate all of his rights to the collective, yet “obey only himself and remain as free as before.”²³ Or, equally famously, Rousseau insists that “for the social compact not to be an empty formula, it tacitly includes the following engagement which alone can give force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body: which means nothing other than that he shall be forced to be free.”²⁴ Such formulations can be multiplied almost at will.

The general will itself, what should and must be required and willed, exists independently of what any, or indeed every, individual happens to choose freely.²⁵ In fact the collective, the government, has not only the right but the duty to override the free choices of individuals, to remake them according to its own model:

While it is good to know how to use men as they are, it is much better still to make them what one needs them to be; the most absolute authority is that which penetrates to man’s inmost being, and affects his will no less than it does his actions. Certain it is that in the long run peoples are what governments make them be.²⁶

And yet governments, for Rousseau, must always be secondary to the general will as expressed by the sovereign people, and never try to override that will. Indeed, they should be little more than mere administrators of the laws demanded by the general will.²⁷ These paradoxes seem to require a deeper philosophical or theoretical approach to the concept of freedom. Yet Rousseau, perfectly conscious of this, insists that this is not what he intends:

To the preceding one might add to the credit of the civil state moral freedom, which alone makes man truly the master of himself; for the impulsion of mere appetite is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself is freedom. But I have already said too much on this topic, and the philosophical meaning of the word freedom is not my subject here.

In other words he is happy to let the paradoxes stand, just as he was in the *Second Discourse*.

Impracticality

The impracticality of the *Second Discourse* is a given: from the outset, we are told that the state of nature “no longer exists, ... perhaps never did exist, [and] ... probably never will exist.”²⁸ Rousseau says both that it is irretrievable, that once we have entered the social state there is no going “back”, and that since we have now entered the social path, the path of ongoing “perfectibility”, we have gained much that could never have existed in the state of nature. That is, no matter how grotesque the reality of the present social world, without it there could be nothing of what we value about being human, no virtue, no justice, no citizenship or “patriotism”, in short, none of the “freedom” that can only be exercised once we have left the state of nature.²⁹ It would seem, then, that questions of practicality simply should not arise when dealing with an imagined world we are emphatically told is neither possible nor desirable.

And yet there is no doubt that Rousseau intended his work to have a practical effect in the contemporary world. He was accused of wanting people to give up the “advantages” of culture and science, to revert to the lives of “savages” in the forest. He could not make it clearer that he is arguing for no such thing, both in the *Discourse* itself and especially in his replies to critics. What he does demand is that we stop living outside ourselves “solely in the opinion of others” and ask of ourselves what we are “forever asking of others”, the question of “what we are”.³⁰ Here we see the genuine “impracticality” of the *Second Discourse*. The state of nature is lost forever, so that we are left with what society has made us. But Rousseau seems to ask that we step outside of our socially constructed subjectivity to examine ourselves, while insisting that no such outside is available.

He is also adamant that there is no available path to bring about the utopia he constructs in *The Social Contract*. Once a given society is too far gone, it is beyond all hope of cure: “once customs are established and prejudices rooted, it is a dangerous and futile undertaking to try to reform them.”³¹ Even in a society amenable to redemption, the steps needed to convert corruption into a capacity to find and act on the general will are unlikely or impossible to take. At the very least, they would require a “law-giver” so uncorrupted and disinterested that a fallen society could not possibly produce one.³² We will return to this paradox when we consider the contrast between the solitary “Socratic” individual and the ideal citizen modelled by Rousseau on the example of Cato.³³

The inside and the outside

As Jameson observes, however, incoherence and impracticality may not be weaknesses but rather essential characteristics of utopian works. Rousseau was himself highly conscious of these features of his work, yet quite untroubled by them. To try to extract either coherence or practicality from them is thus to run up against the problem of whether the kind of change they are demanding relies completely on what is already “inside” the “real world”, or instead must await the kind of fundamental break that can only come from the “outside”. For Jameson, to take these demands for coherence and practicality seriously is to run up against the twin dilemmas of “reformism” or “revolution”, building on “what is” from the inside, or shattering it by bringing to bear an “outside” not subject to the laws or judgments of the present. The former case is ultimately conservative whilst the latter not only carries the typical revolutionary danger of the suspension of the law, the perpetual “state of exception”, but tends to reduce “what is”, our present, to the unworthy, to be abrogated and replaced.³⁴ In Jameson’s words:

the ideals of Utopian living involve the imagination in a contradictory project, since they all presumably aim at illustrating and exercising that much abused concept of freedom that, virtually by definition and in its very structure, cannot be defined in advance, let alone exemplified: if you know already what your longed-for exercise in a not-yet-existent freedom looks like, then the suspicion arises that it may not really express freedom after all but only repetition; while the fear of projection, of sullyng an open future with our own deformed and repressed social habits in the present, is a perpetual threat to the indulgence of fantasies of the future collectivity.³⁵

Rousseau has been read in both ways, often simultaneously. From Burke³⁶ to Talmon³⁷ to Crocker³⁸, he has been seen as an exponent of revolution and a harbinger of its totalitarian implications: if the people are misguided, if their culture blinds them to their true interests, if they will poorly because of what society has made them, then they must be corrected by those who can see the true will of the people, who are untainted by the corruptions of a depraved society. With equal passion he is feted as the true founder of modern theories of freedom, democracy, and liberalism.³⁹ Scholars in this camp have little trouble reading the very passages used to condemn him as a totalitarian manqué as little more than admonitions to virtue and duty which urge the responsibility to adjust anti-social selfishness to the demand

for the liberty and rights of all.

Even if we accept a reading of Rousseau, not as an advocate of particular solutions to contemporary social ills, but as presenting utopian visions to provoke our critical capacities, we still must recognise that he remains torn between two strategies of criticism, alternatives that threaten to rupture utopian thought and imaginings as such. For Rousseau raises the question of the nature of the self that is being provoked, and therefore the nature of the freedom to be exercised.

It is a commonplace that Rousseau saw humans as bifurcated between “man” and “citizen”, social being and solitary, contingently limited member of a fatherland and universal instance of the “idea” of mankind. *The Social Contract* is the work in which the rights and duties of the citizen, the member of the “fatherland”, the sacrifice of individual private interest to the general will, are stated clearly. The *Second Discourse* is usually seen as the work in which “man” is represented as completely separate from his fellows. On this reading, the two halves are imaginatively combined in *Emile*: first, a person is brought up as closely as possible to the state of nature; then the fact of society is unavoidably encountered, not least in the person of the highly socialised tutor, which radically compromises the “natural” status of the education; finally, the “artificially naturally” educated individual is compelled to undertake the all but impossible task of becoming a citizen.

When dealing with the question of the individual, in contradistinction to the social person, Rousseau appears to offer contradictory options. The individual, solitary, pre- or asocial natural person is fabricated by an imaginary abstraction of each and every aspect of the human Rousseau considered attributable to life in society. He says his task is “to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in man’s present nature.”⁴⁰ This leaves a being with almost no features save a love of self and pity, almost indistinguishable from the beasts, an empty space incapable of evil, but for the same reason incapable of good.⁴¹ Thus conceived man’s freedom is so latent that it cannot be exercised until after the natural state has been left behind.⁴² Rousseau seems tempted by the claim that such a being remains the underlying substance beneath the social person, whose truly human nature, simplicity and transparency, have been distorted and repressed by amour-propre, the sophistication and opacity that accompanies constant vain comparisons between individuals. On this reading his strategy for dealing with the unfortunate and depraved consequences of amour-propre is to look inside ourselves, to rediscover our repressed “essence” and, by that rediscovery, to see through the debilitating consequences of social life. This does not imply a return to the “savage” life of the state of nature. In-

stead, Rousseau insists, we would be “freed” to recognise our corruptions as caused by constantly looking outward to compare ourselves with other and to compete with them. By looking inward to our true “nature” we should be able to see the truly good and virtuous, not just what is esteemed by our fellows, and act in accordance with that recognition.⁴³

But there is another dilemma here for Rousseau. If we were ever to reach this underlying bedrock we would find neither the good and the virtuous nor the freedom to act on them since these are social products. And if there is a “good” amour-propre, it is surely not to be found by interrogating the type of beings we would be without it. This dilemma seems to mirror the failure to identify a state of nature beyond the purely animal, but not yet social.⁴⁴

Rousseau has another solution in tension with the first throughout his work. Rather than looking for the repressed “natural” person beneath the surface, it takes people as they are in their contingent reality. It does not start out from some hidden, lost, and ultimately unreachable purity, divorced from all “outside” determination. Rather, any given society or “fatherland”, just as it exists, right now, becomes the basis for the building of the individual and the citizen. Rousseau thus recognises a type of “unwritten law”:

The most important of all; which is graven not in marble or in bronze, but in the hearts of the Citizens; which is the State’s genuine constitution; which daily gathers new force; which, when the other laws age or die out, revives or replaces them, and imperceptibly substitutes the force of habit for that of authority. I speak of morals, customs, and above all of opinion; a part [of the laws] unknown to our politicians but on which the success of all the others depends: a part to which the great Lawgiver attends in secret, while he appears to restrict himself to particular regulations which are but the ribs of the arch of which morals, slower to arise, in the end form the immovable Keystone.⁴⁵

We see repeated here the dilemma of the inside and the outside, the utopia requiring a radical break with the present conditions as against that which relies solely on what is already here and now. On the one hand, Rousseau insists that always and everywhere people as they are must be the starting point to be built upon. Sometimes he writes as if the contingent reality of any society and community is to be celebrated as the basis of the “social cement” of commitment to one’s “fatherland”, one’s “civil religion”⁴⁶, and one’s acceptance of the responsibilities and duties of citizenship. His dilemma is how to square this with his thoroughgoing condemnation of al-

most all societies as they are or have been.

Sometimes he writes as if whatever we are, here and now, must be judged against some “higher” standard, to be brought from outside in the shape of a “lawgiver”, who will at best manipulate the actual contingent nature of the people to shape an ideal world that only “he” can bring about. At others, precisely the current cultural circumstances are valued in themselves. But in this latter case, how can Rousseau maintain a critical attitude? From where can he bring values and standards with which to judge? Not only is this precisely the dilemma of utopian thought articulated by Jameson, it has also continued to be a central dilemma of all post-enlightenment thought and philosophy.

Rousseau presents very clear preferences for one kind of society over another: Sparta and Rome, Geneva, Corsica and Poland are clearly preferred to ancient Athens or contemporary France. The preference relates to the close identification of individuals with the collective, the resistance to factions and, above all, the willingness of individuals to sacrifice the self, private and personal interests, for the good of the “state”. Thus he cites with admiration the example of Brutus, who put the needs of the state ahead of the very lives of his children, along with the Spartan mother for whom the victory of the state was much more important than the loss of all five of her sons in achieving it.⁴⁷ The societies he criticizes are characterised by a tendency for private interests to be preferred to the collective. Yet who is this self with private interests distinct from the collective? There are three options: either it is the underlying “natural” person; or the individual created by cultural determination; or an individual able to step outside the present, outside the contingent culture and society to identify with the transcendent and eternal, at once both solitary and distant.

For reasons outlined above the first option is unviable. While the state of nature may be a device to provoke Rousseau’s readers to imagine themselves differently, it does not “live on” as the repressed and violated truth of the social person. This is not to say that the attractions of this view are wholly absent either from Rousseau or from subsequent “Enlightenment” thought. In particular they provide the foundations of theories of individualism, being relied upon by individualists who support Rousseau, such as Rawls and his followers, just as much as by those who attack him, like Talmon and Crocker. But it seems impossible to square this with the Rousseau who values citizenship above all else, and for whom the fatherland is always prior to the individual.

However, Rousseau clearly does want to defend a view of the individual over against the citizen, as in the third option above. His failure to square the human as citizen with the human as an individual is a conse-

quence of this unresolved dilemma. Todorov, in his remarkable *Frail Happiness*⁴⁸, works through the implications of a deep divide between the citizen and the solitary individual, arguing that Rousseau's position allows for some reconciliation between them in the "moral individual". But such reconciliation is always fragile, always subject to the tendency to succumb to the attractions of the one or the other. In relying on *Emile* for the presentation of this "third way", Todorov tends to run together the solitary individual, as the "natural" person, and the solitary, Socratic, individual, who has transcended contingent social identifications through a more "metaphysical" identification with humanity as such, the ideal and eternal.⁴⁹

Todorov's reading is authorised by Rousseau's own frequent running together of the two distinct types of solitary individual. But when he keeps them apart, as when he draws the contrast between Cato and Socrates, he is not arguing that Socrates is close to the state of nature. On the contrary, the "ideas" that guided Socrates' life and relationship with his fellow citizens were a result of the kinds of ability to conceptualise and draw differences that are unavailable to the type of person imagined in the state of nature.

Rousseau struggled all his life to resolve this issue, finally giving up on the social to concentrate on his own private story, ending with the solitary existence of the isolated individual.⁵⁰ However, perhaps there was a solution which could overcome the chasm between the individual and the collective, "man and citizen", which could reconcile them in a robust rather than a fragile way.

Perhaps paradoxically, Jean Starobinski can help us think this reconciliation in Rousseau. This may seem unlikely, since Starobinski is perhaps the greatest interpreter of Rousseau to see his work as a desperate and inevitably doomed attempt to recover a lost nature. He writes:

Has the primal transparency really disappeared? Or has it been preserved in the transparency of memory and thereby saved? Has it deserted us entirely, or does it still loom nearby? Rousseau cannot choose between contradictory answers. At some point the myth gives rise to two distinct versions. In one of these, the human soul has degenerated; it has been deformed, totally transformed, and has forever lost its primal nobility. In the other, however, what has occurred is not a deformation but a kind of eclipse: man's primitive nature persists, but hidden, veiled, shrouded in artifice – yet intact. What we have, then, is an optimistic and a pessimistic version of the myth of origin: Rousseau believes sometimes in one, sometimes in the other, sometimes in both simultaneously.⁵¹

And yet, if Rousseau is not looking for a lost nature, but rather arguing that

what should be natural to social man is his capacity to exercise freedom, then Starobinski is remarkably close to seeing Rousseau as the kind of self-creator and self-transformer I have been presenting. He writes: "Previously, transparency was possible because man existed naively under the gaze of the gods; now transparency is an inward condition, a matter of one's relation to oneself."⁵² For "transparency" we can perhaps read "freedom". He continues: "To restore goodness is therefore to rebel against history and, in particular, against the present historical situation. If Rousseau's philosophy is revolutionary, it is revolutionary in the name of an eternal human nature rather than of historical progress."⁵³ Again, "eternal human nature" must be seen as the permanent capacity for social man to exercise freedom, and the rebellion against history as a kind of hermeneutic engagement in which the self made by that history is risked and thereby transformed. Further:

Personal reform comes at the moment when Rousseau becomes aware of the incoherent character of his life and makes an attempt to dominate that incoherence. He suddenly sees his changeability as an inconsistency that must be eliminated. It becomes unbearable to him that no invariable principles govern his conduct, his speech, or his feelings ... Hence from the moment Rousseau sets himself in opposition to false appearances in the world, inner conflict becomes inevitable. The virtue in whose name he sets out to do battle with a perverse and masked society is a cruel master. It makes him aware of an inner division, a lack of unity within his own mind.⁵⁴

The utopias of the state of nature, the state governed by the general will, and the solitary individual remain in tension in Rousseau. While this tension can be fruitful, it seems to leave him offering stark and irreconcilable choices, between the life of the citizen and the individual, Cato and Socrates. Jameson's utopia of the provocation to imagine outside the here and now, allows us to read these utopias not as choices but as challenges to the self. Todorov's moral individual emphasises that, while this self may be divided, Rousseau's provocation should be seen as an impetus to perpetual negotiation, never to be settled as a choice, of the border in us all between the solitary and the citizen. Starobinski allows us to see the creative and free subject as distinct from, yet bound to, the here and now, the determinations of the citizen.

Conclusion

This is perhaps the perfect reminder of just how hard the task is for those who would insist that we find an “exit” from the cruelties and perversions of our present without relying on any privileged access to knowledge of a better condition to which we could aspire. For now, suffice it to say that Rousseau provides an exemplary, if tragic case, of an attempt to find such an “exit”. Perhaps the “critical attitude” he helped inaugurate to restrain the dreams of his contemporaries, by envisaging a world in which such dreams could not simply be imposed, is some compensation for the cruelties of his internal exile from an age not quite yet ripe for this “Enlightenment”.

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NOTES

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Of the Social Contract”, trans. V. Gourevitch in *Rousseau: The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. V. Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or On Education*, trans. A. Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men or Second Discourse”, trans. V. Gourevitch, in *Rousseau: The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. V. Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴ See Gourevitch’s “Introductions” to his two collections of Rousseau’s political writings cited in the notes above.

⁵ Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 2-3.

⁶ Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 17-21.

⁷ For example, Rousseau, “Second Discourse”, pp. 186-187; “Of the Social Contract”, pp. 70-71.

⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, (London and New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 211-233.

⁹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 48-49.

¹¹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 227-233.

¹² On this debate see V. Gourevitch, ed., *Rousseau: The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, pp. xxxix-xl.

¹³ See for example Rousseau, "Second Discourse", pp. 144-149.

¹⁴ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", p. 149. Of course Rousseau returned to this question at greater length, but essentially continued to leave the dilemma in its paradoxical state in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*.

¹⁵ If Jacques Derrida is the most renowned of those who identify this chain of paradoxes, similar insights are also developed by scholars in more traditional philosophy. See, for example, John Charvet, *The Social Problem in the Philosophy of Rousseau* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp 5-35.

¹⁶ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", pp. 127, 153-154.

¹⁷ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", pp. 127, 153-154.

¹⁸ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", pp. 153-160.

¹⁹ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", pp. 141, 159.

²⁰ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", p. 167.

²¹ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", p. 45.

²² Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", p. 41.

²³ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", pp. 49-50.

²⁴ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", p. 53.

²⁵ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", pp. 62-65.

²⁶ Rousseau, "Discourse on Political Economy", trans. V. Gourevitch, in *Rousseau: The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, pp. 12-13.

²⁷ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", p. 117.

²⁸ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", p. 125.

²⁹ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", pp. 185-187.

³⁰ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", p. 187.

³¹ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", pp. 62-65.

³² Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", pp. 68-72.

³³ Rousseau, "Discourse on Political Economy", p. 16.

³⁴ See especially the chapters "Morus: The Generic Window" and "Progress versus Utopia, or, Can we Imagine the Future?" in Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*.

³⁵ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 385.

³⁶ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on Certain Societies in London Relative to That Event* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

³⁷ Jacob Leib Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Sphere Books, 1970).

³⁸ Lester Gilbert Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract, An Interpretive Essay* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Press, 1968).

³⁹ For example Robert Wokler, *Rousseau* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Christopher Bertram, *Rousseau and the Social Contract* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁰ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", p. 125.

⁴¹ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", p. 187.

⁴² Rousseau, "Second Discourse", pp. 141-142.

⁴³ Rousseau, "Second Discourse", p. 187.

⁴⁴ An excellent discussion of these issues can be found in Laurence D. Cooper, "Rousseau on Self-Love: What We've Learned, What We Might Have Learned", *The Review of Politics*, 60.4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 661-683.

⁴⁵ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", p. 81.

⁴⁶ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", pp. 142-151.

⁴⁷ Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract", p. 78; *Emile*, p. 40.

⁴⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, *Frail Happiness: an Essay on Rousseau* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Todorov, *Frail Happiness*, pp. 55-66.

⁵⁰ Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

⁵¹ Jean Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 15.

⁵² Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*, p. 19.

⁵³ Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*, pp. 54-55.