

Matthew W. Maguire and David Lay Williams, eds. *Fundamental Political Writings* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Trans. Ian Johnston. Broadview Press 2018. 392 pp. \$14.95 CAD (Paperback ISBN 9781554812974).

A half-century ago, famed Rousseau scholar and translator Roger Masters opened his consideration of Rousseau's political thought by questioning the relevance of the project: 'Another book on Jean-Jacques Rousseau?' Obviously, he answered his question in the affirmative, as he went on to write and publish *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau*. Moreover, although his interests are wide and varied, he continued to work on Rousseau well into the 1990s and early 2000s as the co-editor of *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*. Masters plainly does not think that the world has had enough of the sentimental Genevan. His question, however, is still pertinent. Given the high volume of Rousseau scholarship, which shows little sign of abating, it is probably necessary to explain, why Rousseau? Why now? Matthew Maguire, David Lay Williams, and translator Ian Johnston have not written a book on Rousseau. Instead, they have offered a new student edition of his major political writings, including the first two discourses, the *Preface to Narcissus*, and *The Social Contract*. Masters' question seems especially relevant to this project: Why this volume? Why now?

With regard to the translation, there is not an obvious reason this edition needs to exist. While it is an excellent translation perfectly suited to undergraduates, there is already healthy competition for cheap, readable translations of Rousseau's major political works. Hackett, Chicago, and Norton all offer editions that include *The Social Contract* and the two discourses for under twenty dollars. (The Cambridge editions are more thorough but more expensive and do not bundle *The Social Contract* with the discourses). The translations vary slightly; certainly not enough to justify a whole new edition. Even John Scott's University of Chicago edition, which aims for a more literal translation, does not differ significantly from the Hackett, Norton, and Broadview editions. Besides, some of the more frustrating aspects of bad translations can provide valuable teaching opportunities. For example, in Donald Cress' original translation of the *Second Discourse* for Hackett, he wrongly renders *amour-propre* as egocentrism. *Amour-propre*, literally translated as self-love, is a medieval Christian term translated into French by seventeenth-century Augustinian political theologians such as Blaise Pascal, Pierre Nicole, Jean-François S nault, and others. These neo-Augustinians consciously connect *amour-propre* to Saint Augustine and borrow his analyses of the term. Like Augustine, they define it aristocratically as pride and honor, and argue that it can be both a dangerous and a socially beneficial passion. By translating *amour-propre* in Freudian terms, Cress wrongly implies it is simply an extreme form of selfishness and downplays the social nature of the passion, its close relation to inequality, and its potential for good. Rarely do we speak of salutary egomaniacs. Good professors, of course, can point this out to students and remind them of the dangers of translation as well as imposing the moral language of one theorist on another. The world is better off studying Rousseau as Rousseau rather than as a precursor to Freud.

The distinctive value of Rousseau's *Fundamental Political Writings* comes from the editing. Maguire and Williams, like the editors of the Norton edition, chose to include a variety of accompanying authors in appendices to assist students in putting Rousseau in proper philosophical and historical context. Happily, they dig much deeper than the Norton editors and include thinkers beyond the usual suspects such as Voltaire, Hume, Diderot, Smith, and Kant. They cover not just basic reactions to his work from contemporaries and his influences upon later political philosophers but selections from Descartes, Hobbes, Pascal, Pufendorf, and Mandeville that help explain both the origin of his moral language and the inspiration driving his political commitments. This is especially

helpful with regards to *amour-propre*, as many people falsely assume the term originated with Rousseau and is fundamentally his invention. By including the selection by Pascal, “Letter to Monsieur and Madame Périer,” the religious origins of the concept become apparent. The selection from Bernard Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* is likewise worthy of mention, as Mandeville is now considered a minor thinker by many. His influence, however, was powerful in the eighteenth century and he arguably is the true foil for many of Rousseau’s positions in the *Second Discourse*. Not only does he offer a secular version of *amour-propre* that Rousseau challenges in the discourse, Rousseau directly refers to his discussion of pity from his “Essay on Charity-Schools.” As Maguire and Williams note, Rousseau ‘clearly learns a great deal from Mandeville’ despite the fact he rejects his ‘private vices, public benefits’ formula. The appendix on the French Revolution will also be helpful to students. It should stimulate discussion about the real world implications of political theory and how abstract theory is often distorted by the very people who act in its name.

It is easy to imagine criticisms of these appendices, as all the selections are short and some obvious candidates for inclusion were omitted. For example, d’Alembert’s *Preliminary Discourse* and Diderot’s defenses of the *Encyclopedia* are conspicuously missing from the volume. Given the attention to Rousseau’s critiques of the arts and sciences, their exclusion is somewhat surprising. Nonetheless, choices have to be made and not all relevant works can be included. No volume of this nature will satisfy everyone.

The most interesting editorial choice was to include the *Preface to Narcissus*, which is rarely taught to students. To put a fine point on this decision, it is inspired. The *Preface* was written between the *First* and *Second Discourse*, and both develops the argument of the former discourse and anticipates the political argument of the latter. Importantly, it is in the *Preface* that Rousseau introduces the language of *amour-propre* and transforms his cultural critique of Parisian intellectual life into a political and economic one.

In the *First Discourse*, Rousseau essentially makes three arguments. The first involves the utility of the arts and sciences and contends that they cause more problems than they solve. At best, much of the artistic and scientific advances have little to do with virtue and thus are socially useless. At worst, the arts and sciences undermine the old moral authorities that defend virtuous behavior. In the Enlightenment, religion and patriotism, which Rousseau believes are the mainsprings of virtue, became objects of ridicule. Second, Rousseau discredits the motives of the artists and scientists themselves. The intellectuals, he charges, are creatures of ego and desire nothing more than glory and ambition. Their only goal is to be publicly celebrated as the finest the species has to offer. Rousseau’s third argument continues with this theme of vanity, but instead focuses on its effect on the average person. He worries that Enlightenment societies will overvalue intellectual talent, and in the process demean the ordinary mass of citizens who will be denied social esteem and falsely come to believe they have no value as humans or citizens. Invariably, they will find life frustrating and demoralizing, and come to experience intense feelings of self-loathing.

In the *Preface to Narcissus*, Rousseau elaborates on all three of these contentions. The most valuable of these involve the second argument, which lays the foundation of the central theme of the *Second Discourse*. Specifically, he terms the ambitions and desire for glory of the artists and scientists as *amour-propre* and examines in greater detail how *amour-propre* leads to a disastrous society-wide civil war. As Maguire and Williams point out in their ‘Introduction,’ Rousseau’s analysis becomes more philosophical and takes aim at the leading political and social theories of his day. He is particularly concerned with commercial society and attacks the ‘harmony of interests’ model championed by Mandeville and Hume. If economic needs bring some individuals together, Rousseau

claims that, in general, they create a zero-sum competition in which individuals economically thrive by keeping the great masses in poverty.

In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau further refines these arguments. Driven by *amour-propre*, the talented and wealthy plot to get their hands on every last penny and invent ways to prod the poor to serve their needs. Worse still, the new aristocrats of Enlightenment societies become rapacious and cruel, and soon only wish to dominate and harm their fellow citizens. They become ‘ravenous wolves’ who can only satisfy their lust for domination by tormenting their weaker brethren. *The Social Contract* also figures in this narrative, as it offers Rousseau’s great solution to the problem of domination. By alienating one’s rights and powers to the collective, no one has the means to coerce and control their neighbors.

Ultimately, Masters’ concern may be overblown. As much ink as has been spilled trying to decipher the political thought of the enigmatic Rousseau, it is just as easy to state that scholars have only begun to scratch the surface as groan, ‘another book on Rousseau.’ Maguire and Williams’ latest scratch is a welcome one, for they have directed us to an often neglected yet vital portion of his works.

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