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A civic profession of faith: Rousseau's and nationalism

When Heinrich Heine, the German poet, visited Italy in 1828 he noted in his diary:

It is as if World History is seeking to become spiritual ... she has a great task. What it is? It is emancipation. Not just the emancipation of the Irish, the Greeks, the Jews and the Blacks of the West Indies. No, the emancipation of the whole world, especially in Europe, where the peoples have reached maturity. (Heine quoted in Gell 1998: 13)

In seeking national self-determination Heine was preaching a new doctrine, one which had been unknown a couple of centuries before. Elie Kedouri observed – perhaps not entirely accurately – that ‘Nationalism is a political doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century’ (Kedouri 1960: 1). This might have been an exaggeration but Kedouri had a point. Nationalism is not only regarded as a relatively recently established ideology, it is also regarded as a fatherless doctrine, without the illustrious intellectual ancestry which characterises socialism, liberalism, and even conservatism. Nationalism, it is asserted, lacks a coherent philosophical basis and does not have an intellectual founding father. In Benedict Anderson’s words: ‘unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its great thinkers; no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes or Webers’ (Anderson 1981: 5).¹ This view seemingly ignores the theory of nationalism developed by Rousseau before the nineteenth century.² Rousseau is rarely given full credit for his contribution to the development of the doctrine of nationalism. Unmentioned by Gellner (1983; 1996) and Miller (1995), Rousseau is only mentioned in passing by Anderson (1983) and Hobsbawm (1991). Kedouri acknowledges that Rousseau’s *Considérations sur la gouvernement du polonge* (Rousseau 1771 [1985]) influenced nationalist theoreticians (most notably Fichte), yet he maintains

that ‘Rousseau [did] not provide a complete and rounded theory of the state, a theory which embraces first and last things, and which can proceed only from a unified and systematic vision of the universe’ (Kedouri 1960: 33). Further, Rousseau’s status as a theoretician of nationalism is overlooked even by Rousseau scholars.³ Nationalism does not feature in the authoritative works on Rousseau’s political philosophy. Rousseau’s writings on nationalism are mainly contained in two treatises (although traces can be found elsewhere); in *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* (1764) and in *Considérations sur la gouvernement du Pologne* (1771). In *Du Contrat Social* Rousseau availed himself for advice on constitutional engineering to nations that were entitled ‘to be taught by some wise man how to preserve freedom’ (III: 391). Two countries requested his services: Corsica in 1764 and Poland in 1770.

In 1764 he was invited by Mathieu Buttafuoco (a former French soldier and Corsican nobleman) to draw up a constitution for Corsica. This request came against the backdrop of considerable tensions and civil war on the island. In 1735 the Corsicans had revolted against their masters, Genoa. Although Genoese rule was restored in 1748, the revolt resumed in 1752 under the popular leader Pasquale Paoli (for whom Buttafuoco worked) and was temporarily successful. The prospect of independence – and Rousseau’s testified support for the Corsicans – made him an obvious choice for a people in search for a constitutional engineer. The situation was, on the face of it, much the same in Poland.

In 1771 Rousseau was asked by Count Michel Wielhorski (an otherwise completely undistinguished Polish nobleman) to present a similar proposal for Poland following the accession to the throne of Stanislaw II, one of Catherine the Great’s former lovers.⁴ Wielhorski had been requested to seek information about the constitution by members of the *Confédération of the Bar* (a group of Catholic noblemen) who had revolted against the King in 1768. The Confederation was intent on winning Polish independence from Russian influence and sought advice as to how they could establish a political system to that effect (Cranston 1997: 177).

We would have expected that Rousseau (a man fascinated by Solon and Romulus) would have been thrilled to follow in the footsteps of Plato, Hobbes, Machiavelli and other colleagues who – albeit unsuccessfully – had advised politicians on constitutional affairs. While Rousseau claimed to be excited about the project,⁵ it is conspicuous that he is strangely unenthusiastic in his autobiographical recollections of the projects. In *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*,⁶ the most ruthless and colourful of his four *texte autobiographique*⁷ he notes simply – and without affection,

that in 1771 ‘Jean-Jacques devoted six months ... first to studying the constitution of an unhappy nation [Poland], then to propounding his ideas on improvements that needed to be made in that constitution’ (*‘employé six mois dans le même intervalle a l’examen la constitution d’une Nation malheureuse qu’à proposer ses idées sur les corrections à faire a cette constitution’*) (I: 836). He was scarcely more enthusiastic about his work on Corsica’s constitution. Reflecting on the invitation by Buttafuoco in *Les Confessions* he simply asserts that the undertaking of writing a constitution for Corsica ‘was beyond my strength’ (Rousseau 1992: 287). This might explain why he never published the two treatises and, indeed, failed to even finish *Projet*.

The fate of the two treatises may also owe much to the political developments which led to Rousseau’s invitations. Corsica – while technically a dependency of Genoa – was de facto a free country when Buttafuoco invited Rousseau to legislate. This, however, was to change. At the end of the Seven Years’ War, France had made an agreement with Genoa, as the titular possessor of Corsica, to be allowed to install garrisons at various posts on the Corsican coast. These would eventually be ceased to France. In 1769 Corsica was annexed by France. This development dissuaded Rousseau from concluding his essay.⁸ Disappointed – and with a touch of paranoia (he even believed that France had intervened as a personal vendetta against himself) – Rousseau abandoned the *Projet*, as rule by Paris would make it impossible to ‘former la nation pour la gouvernement’ (III: 901). Poland was to suffer a similar fate. It is rather remarkable, therefore, that only a couple of years later he embarked on a similar project there, as he knew that the country was in grave danger of being invaded. In *Considérations* – foreshadowing Fichte⁹ – he asserted that it was the threat of foreign invasion that made it imperative to try to ‘form a nation’. In *Considérations* he writes, ‘You cannot possibly keep them [the Russians] from swallowing you; see to it at least that they shall not be able to digest you. Whatever you do your enemies will crush you a hundred times before you have given Poland what it needs in order to be capable of resisting them’ (III: 959). This fear of an invasion was warranted – Poland was divided (for the first time) in 1771.

Rousseau and modern definitions of nationalism

That Rousseau encouraged the Poles and the Corsicans to develop strong cultural institutions to defend themselves against greater powers does not make him a nationalist in the modern sense. To render the conclusion

that Rousseau developed a doctrine of nationalism hinges on the premise that Rousseau's theory is consistent with commonly recognised and contemporary definitions of nationalism. There are an abundance of theories of nationalism: Hobsbawm (1991), Smith (1988), Kedouri (1960), Anderson (1981) and Gellner (1983), for example. The following analysis is based on Gellner's definition of nationalism, as this has acquired a paradigmatic status (Hall 1998: 1).

Ernest Gellner has defined nationalism as 'a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit shall be congruent' (Gellner 1983: 1). It is about 'entry to, participation in, and identification with a literate high culture, which is co-extensive with the entire political unit' (15). Nationalism is the embodiment of the new imperative of cultural homogeneity, which is the very essence of nationalism for the first time in world history a high culture becomes the pervasive and operational culture of an entire society.

The question is whether Rousseau developed the case for a political order based on cultural homogeneity and 'participation in, and identification with a literate high culture'? It is well known that Rousseau on several occasions advocated the necessity of establishing cultural homogeneity. In *Lettre à D'Alembert* (Rousseau 1758, Bloom 1960) he stressed the necessity of creating political and cultural cohesion through sports, games and national education (a view which also features prominently in *Considérations sur la gouvernement du Pologne* and in *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*. However, these efforts at creating 'cultural homogeneity' do not make him a nationalist in the strict sense, i.e. as defined by Gellner. Rousseau's considerations in the 1750s were – or, so it might be argued – mostly (un)original elaborations of the doctrine of civic virtue and patriotism developed by Nicolo Machiavelli, in *Discoursi*,¹⁰ and more recently by Pufendorf and Montesquieu. Pufendorf had argued that 'without religion no society can be maintained' (Hendel 1934: 221), a view, which Montesquieu had supported in *L'esprit des Lois* (Book 25, ch. 9). Machiavelli held Christianity responsible for the demise of that patriotism which he deemed necessary for maintaining a healthy republic. The Christian religion had – argued Machiavelli – preached subordination. Its ideas were based on 'humility, abnegation and contempt for mundane things', whereas for 'the Pagan religion the highest good [had been] magnanimity, bodily strength and everything that [was] conducive to make men very bold'. In other words, Christianity had 'made the world weak' and had 'handed it over as prey to the wicked' (Machiavelli quoted in Virolli 1988: 174). Rousseau accepted the thrust of this analysis, yet he

was – as we shall see – unwilling to adopt Machiavelli's anti-clerical conclusions.

There is nothing surprising in this lack of originality – from the point of view of traditional nationalism theories. Nationalist sentiments – it is often argued (Hobsbawm 1992) – were simply not connected with political ideas before the Napoleonic wars. Indeed, as Benedict Anderson has noted, the very word 'nation' 'did not come into general usage until the end of the nineteenth century ... if Adam Smith conjured with the wealth of nations he meant by that no more than societies' (Anderson 1981: 4).

Anderson was, perhaps, correct in stating that the nation means no more than societies in Rousseau's early works. Rousseau did not attach political meaning to the word as it was used in *Discourse pour des artes et des sciences* (Rousseau 1750) and in *Discourse pour l' économie politique*¹¹ (Rousseau 1755). Yet, Anderson was incorrect in stating that the word nationalism was used infrequently. Rousseau, in fact, used the word half a dozen times in the short treatise *Discourse sur l' économie politique*. Moreover, there is a world of difference between the way Rousseau used the term in his early writings, and the way in which he used the word in his mature work; in *Du Contrat Social*, in *Considérations sur la gouvernement du Polonge* and in *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*.

The core elements of Rousseau's theory of nationalism

While Rousseau may not have developed a 'complete and rounded theory' in his early writings, he arguably developed a doctrine of 'identification with' a culture 'which is co-extensive with the entire political unit' in his later writings. Writing about the risks facing the Polish people he stressed the imperative of shaping their, 'minds and hearts in a national [sic] pattern that will set them apart from other peoples, that will keep them from being absorbed by other peoples and ensure that they remain patriotic' (III: 960). He continued: 'How can we move hearts, and get the fatherland and its towns loved? Dare I say it? With childrens' games; with institutions which appear trivial in the eyes of superficial men, but which form cherished habits and invincible attachments' (III: 955).

Rousseau was not, in other words, stressing that a 'literal high culture' was necessary for creating 'cultural homogeneity', yet his view was still – at least on closer inspection – closer to Gellner's than one might initially suspect, especially because of his emphasis on education.

Under nationalism the state has not merely a monopoly of legitimate violence, but also the accreditation of educational qualifications. Rousseau

was in agreement with Gellner on this point. Writing about education in *Considérations*, he wrote: 'Here we have an important topic. It is education that you must count on to shape the souls of the citizens in a national pattern, and so direct their opinions, their likes, and their dislikes that they shall be patriotic by inclination, passionately, of necessity' (III: 966).

Yet education was not enough. Like Herder,¹² Rousseau stressed that the instruction of the pupils of necessity should be in their own language. Rousseau was adamant that he 'would not want to have children pursue the usual course of studies under the direction of foreigners and priests' (III: 966). The pupils should, for the sake of homogeneity, 'learn to read literature written in their own country' (III: 966).

The perceived need of establishing cultural homogeneity was not only developed in *Considérations*. Indeed, he outlined a similar argument in *Lettre à D'Alembert* (as noted above). What was new in the later writings was that he explicitly linked this need for cultural unity to national character and not, as earlier, to patriotism and civic virtues. While the early Rousseau stressed – in the *Discourse on Political Economy* – that we must begin by making men virtuous by 'making them love their country' (III: 255), the later Rousseau, no less interested in patriotism, cast this doctrine in nationalist terms. In *Project du Corse* he thus stresses that while 'establishing a nation is undoubtedly useful [he] knows an even more useful [strategy for maintaining cultural homogeneity] and that is establishing a nation for the government' (III: 901). Incidentally, a view which is strikingly close to Massimo d'Azeglio's utterance – following the Italian Risorgimento, that 'we have made Italy, now we have to make Italians' (Azeglio quoted in Hobsbawm 1990: 44).

A civic profession of faith

This doctrine can be traced back to 'On Civic Religion' in Book IV, Chapter VIII of *Du Contrat Social*. 'On civic religion' has puzzled Rousseau scholars (Wokler 1995: 82). The chapter was added to the final manuscript *after* Rousseau had submitted it (Levine 1976). This has been seen as an indication of Rousseau's inconsistency. Having written a radical – even revolutionary – account of political right, Rousseau succumbed to a medieval conception of political right founded upon religion. Whether this is correct remains disputed.¹³ Whatever Rousseau's reasons for not including the chapter in the first submission might have been, he had included the chapter in the first draft of *Du Contrat Social*, the *Geneva Manuscript*. This, however, does not resolve the problem. The chapter still

seems out of place. Rousseau's credentials as a defender of faith are legion – even if his religious views were controversial. Rousseau, alone among the major thinkers of the Enlightenment,¹⁴ defended Christianity, most famously in the *Professions of faith of the Savoyard Vicar* – the celebrated part of *Emile* (Rousseau 1762) – in *Lettres écrites de la montagne* (Rousseau 1764) (where he defended himself against the Genevan authorities' condemnation of *Emile*), and in *Lettre à Voltaire* (1756). What is perplexing is that Rousseau, at the very time when he authored these treatises supporting Christianity, denounced Christianity as a civic religion in *Du Contrat Social*.

Unable to solve the riddle Rousseau scholars have read the chapter on civil religion as a competent – if unoriginal – rehearsal of Machiavelli's considerations in *Discorsi* (Virolli 1988: 175). This is a sober and plausible interpretation. Machiavelli was revered by Rousseau and was frequently quoted as an authority (Virolli 1988: 174). There is undoubtedly some truth in this interpretation. Moreover, Rousseau was a philosopher with a taste for paradoxes and contradictions (Bloom 1987: 579).¹⁵ In the words of Allan Bloom, 'Rousseau's thought has an extremely paradoxical character, seeming at the same time to desire contradictories – virtue and soft sentiment, political society and the state of nature, philosophy and ignorance' (Bloom 1987: 559). Rousseau was aware of this. As he wrote in *Du Contrat social*, 'Please attentive reader, do not hasten to accuse me of contradiction. I cannot avoid a contradiction of words, because of the poverty of the language' (III: 373). The limits of his language were *not* – to paraphrase Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1984: 1) – the limits of his world.

However, the question is whether there is a paradox in Rousseau's writings on civic religion. The dominant interpretation cannot explain why Chapter VIII is full of pious references to the 'eternal truth of the Gospels'. An alternative interpretation could, therefore, be that Rousseau, rather than seeking to establish a modern variant of Machiavelli's civic religion of the Romans, seeks to establish a functional equivalent, which can substitute civic religion, and that this functional equivalent is what later becomes his doctrine of nationalism.

Rousseau argues that 'no state has ever been made without a religious basis' (III: 464). However Rousseau, the lamenter of modernity and secularism (c.f. the *Discourse sur les sciences et les arts*), concedes that a civic religion 'can be no longer' (III: 469). Christianity, the only credible candidate, has ruled itself out. Not because he is opposed to Christianity – which he calls 'a holy, sublime and real religion' ('*sainté. Sublime,*

véritable') (III: 465) – but because its teaching of a kingdom of another world makes it unsuitable as a means of achieving political cohesion, which is the *raison d'être* of a civic religion: 'the Gospels set up no national [sic] religion' (III: 467). This is not a wholly original interpretation. Pierre Bayle, the seventeenth-century lexicographer, expressed the same view:

They [the Christians] would have a conscience too delicate to make use of the thousand ruses of politics without which one cannot parry the blows of his enemy ... Do you want a nation strong enough to resist its neighbours? Then leave the maxims of Christianity as themes for the preachers; keep them for theory; and bring your practice under the laws of nature, which will permit one to render blow for blow' (Bayle 1984: 360–6)

However, while Bayle had correctly acknowledged that Christianity was an inadequate civic religion (like Machiavelli before him had done) he had, again like Machiavelli, failed to put anything in its place.¹⁶ Bayle's view was based on *realist* power politics and *Machtpolitik*. Rousseau was certainly not opposed to realist thinking – far from it¹⁷ – however he did not believe that *high politics* could create cultural homogeneity, hence the necessity of a civic profession of faith that differed from Christianity. Traditional society (such as depicted in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*) had ceased to exist and, as a result, a new sense of belonging had to be established; an imagined community based on an abstract (organic) solidarity.¹⁸

Hobsbawm hints at the same interpretation in *Nations and Nationalism after 1780* (Hobsbawm 1990), but does not pursue the argument. In his words:

Even when the state as yet faced no serious challenge to its legitimacy or cohesion, and no really powerful forces of subversion, the mere decline of older socio-political bonds would have made it imperative to formulate and inculcate new forms of civic loyalty (a civic religion to use Rousseau's phrase), since other potential loyalties were now capable of political expression. (Hobsbawm 1990: 85)

In other words, *realpolitik* was an insufficient reason for replacing religion.

However, Rousseau's theory is more than a proto-nationalist theory. It fits into his general philosophy – and resolved an apparent contradiction. The civic profession of faith resolves two problems facing Rousseau. It provides him with a mechanism for maintaining 'social homogeneity', and it allows him to maintain his Christian beliefs – even if Christianity is an inadequate civic religion. By introducing the 'civic profession of faith' he relieves Christianity from the burden of being a civic religion – something that this religion is incapable of being.¹⁹ By introducing a secular civic

religion he can recast Christianity as a religion, which is 'confined to the internal cult of the supreme God and the eternal obligations [which] is the religion of the Gospels' (III: 469).

What is needed to acquire that societal unity, patriotism and those civic virtues which are necessary for the maintenance of a healthy society, is not a metaphysical creed but a civic 'cult with love of laws', which teaches the citizens 'that service done to the State is service done to a tutular god' (III, 465). The alternative to Machiavelli's religious cult is secular version of the same, that is, a 'purely civic profession of faith of which the sovereign should fix articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which man cannot be a good citizen' (III: 468). This doctrine manifests itself in a state where to 'die for one's country becomes ... martyrdom' (III: 465). There is evidently, a link between this view of patriotism as martyrdom and that developed in *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* where he crafts an oath of allegiance to the nation which involved this: 'I join myself – body, goods, will and all my powers – to the Corsican nation; granting her the full ownership of me, myself and all that depends upon me. *I swear to live and die for her*' (III: 943, italics added).

Rousseau does not, therefore, contradict himself. In fact, his development of a civic profession of faith allows him to have his cake and eat it. It allows him to follow Machiavelli in stressing a need for a civic religion – albeit in Rousseau's case a secular one – and it enables him to maintain his defence for Christianity as an inner religion. By doing the latter he is even able to take a swipe at organised religion, which he loathed (Wokler 1995: 81). Disqualifying Christianity as an inadequate civic religion in favour of a 'civic profession of faith' leaves room for 'the religion of man or Christianity – not the Christianity of to-day, but that of the Gospel, which is entirely different ... all men being children of God recognise one another as brothers' (III: 465).

Faced with the problem of social cohesion in *Du Contrat Social* he turned to the need for establishing a 'national religion in order to safeguard its claim to absolute obedience from the citizen' (Kendal 1985: xxxiii). In *Considérations* and *Projet* he abandons the reference to religion and replaces it with the word nation. This move is first detected in the introduction to *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, where he, while recognising the importance of political institutions, stresses that it is impossible to establish a viable political system unless it is based on cultural homogeneity: 'the wise man, observing the due relations, forms the government to suit the nation' (III: 901). Thus while 'a thousand clogs and checks are invented for arresting its [the state's] decay ... if they do not tend towards its fall, neither

[do they] make any way towards fulfilling its end' (III: 901). All this, writes Rousseau, comes from 'the separation of two things which are inseparable, namely the body which governs and the body which is governed' (III: 901). This sentence might at first be read as a familiar – though often overstated – defence of direct democracy. However, the continuation indicates otherwise, as Rousseau stresses that the key to establishing the congruence between governors and the governed is to found a nation to suit the government – to establish cultural homogeneity, to use Gellner's terminology. If the government is formed to suit the nation then the two actors (governors and the governed) will maintain in balance and any 'change that takes place in one will take place in the other, and the nation, drawing the government with its own weight, will preserve the government as long as it preserves itself'. It is on the basis of this that he can conclude that the 'first rule, which we have to follow is, that of national character. Every people have, or must have, a character. If it lacks one, we must start by endowing it with one' (Rousseau 1962: 335). Yet, how to do this is a question which he only touches upon in *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* (ostensibly because the Corsican people were in the fortunate condition ('*Phereux état*') that they already had a nation (Rousseau 1962: 307). For a more elaborate treatment of how to establish a nation we must turn to *Considérations*.

We have already quoted Rousseau's views on the importance of education in shaping the nation. Yet Rousseau – as also alluded to – does not see education as the sole mechanism for creating cultural homogeneity. What makes Rousseau interesting as a nationalist theoretician – especially for readers at the beginning of the twenty-first century – is that he persistently emphasises the integrative effects of mass culture, such as sport and games (III: 955). While Rousseau closely follows Gellner's definition of nationalism in stressing the need for cultural homogeneity he parts company from Gellner in advocating a nationalism, which is based upon a low culture rather than *solely* on a literate high culture. Writing about this theme he finds it indispensable that the Poles 'create games, festivities and ceremonies, all peculiar to your court to such an extent that you will encounter nothing like them in any other country' (III: 962). As an example of how this might be achieved he suggests Spanish bullfights. 'Look at Spain, where the bullfights have done much to keep a certain vigour alive in the people', he writes, before going on to suggest that 'competitions in horsemanship' could have much the same effect in Poland, as they would be 'well-suited to the Poles and would lend themselves to a spectacular display' (III: 963).

What is remarkable in Rousseau's theory is that he – unlike Fichte and Herder – recognises that nationalism is, or can be, manufactured, and indeed must be established to ensure social cohesion, but that this must be done in a way which ensures public participation.

Moreover, and equally important, Rousseau shows that states do not merely succeed because of well-crafted constitutions and institutional frameworks. The dynamics of men's actions, he argues, lies in the sense of belonging to a community. In an age where the political importance of small communities has evaporated they must acquire this indispensable sense of belonging through a national community – an 'imagined community' to use Anderson's phrase (Anderson 1981). This is not to say that institutions are unimportant, but these are, according to Rousseau, subordinate to – and dependent upon – the sense of belonging to a community. What is of crucial importance, therefore, are institutions and processes which engender this sense of belonging to the imagined community of the nation. This is exactly what Rousseau does in *Considérations* – as usual by using the example of the ancients:

All the legislators of the ancient times based their legislation on these ideas. All three [Moses, Numa and Lycurgus]²⁰ sought ties that would bind the citizens to the fatherland and to one another. All three found that they were looking for in distinctive usages, in religious ceremonies that invariably were in essence exclusive and national (see the closing paragraphs of *Du Contrat Social*), in games that brought the citizens together, in exercises that caused them to grow in vigour and strength and developed their pride and self esteem; and in public spectacles that, by keeping them reminded of their forefathers' deeds and hardships and virtues and triumphs, stirred their hearts, set them on fire with the spirit of emulation, and tied them tightly to the fatherland. (III: 958)

Excursus: the decline of social capital

Nationalism has had a lot of bad press lately – and rightly so. In the twentieth century millions of people were victims of nationalist hatred. Was Rousseau wrong to advocate this doctrine? Possibly, if he had defended ethnic nationalism – of the racist *blood and soil* variant. Yet Rousseau supported another and rather different variant of nationalism; a civic nationalism – not an ethnic nationalism (Fetscher 1960: 179).²¹ Nationalism can be an evil if it degenerates into ethnic strife – yet it can also be a force for good if it is used as a mechanism for creating cultural homogeneity. Rousseau was not alone in thinking this. The great French

writer Alexis de Tocqueville reached the same conclusion in *Democracy in America*:

In order that society should exist and, *a fortiori*, that society should prosper, it is necessary that the minds of all citizens should be rallied and held together by certain prominent ideas; and that this cannot be the case unless each of them sometimes draws his opinions from a common source and consents to accept certain matters of belief already formed. (Tocqueville 1945: 9)

It was these ‘opinions from a common source’, these ‘matters of belief already formed’, which laid at the heart of Rousseau’s case for nationalism and his adamant insistence that no society could exist without a common culture. Like Tocqueville a century later, Rousseau knew that no society could survive without a common purpose and a feeling among its members that they belonged together and had responsibilities for each other:

It is national institutions which form the genius, the character, the tastes, and the morals of a people, which make it be itself and not another, which inspire in that ardent love of the fatherland founded upon habits impossible to uproot, which cause it to die of boredom among other peoples in the midst of delights of which is deprived in its own. (III: 960)

Once forged, this sense of belonging to the same community would have tangible effects – Rousseau *inter alia* believed that the crime rate would fall if the citizens were overwhelmed by patriotism: ‘they would refrain from picking people’s pockets and handing over large amounts of money to scoundrels’ (III: 961). However, the feeling of ‘being tied to the fatherland’ (III: 961), would not be possible if the citizens were but passive observers of, for example, ‘plays that are full of talk about nothing by love and historic ranting’ (III: 961). This disdain for theatres (which was also the main theme in *Lettre à M. d’Alembert*) may seem slightly odd – and sociologically implausible. Theatre cannot be a harmful form of entertainment – or so we seem to think today. However, substitute the word ‘television’ with the word ‘theatre’, and Rousseau’s diatribe begins to make sociological sense.

Robert Putnam, an American social scientist, recently published a study which showed that America’s ‘social capital’ – what we could call ‘mores’, common bonds, or sense of belonging – is at an all-time low, in large measure because of television. Americans are increasingly becoming disconnected from their communities and social structures. This, Putnam showed, had led to lower educational standards, an increase in the number of teenage pregnancies, lower political participation and higher crime rates. Putnam not only agreed with Rousseau – whom he cited (Putnam 2000:

404) – that the forging of social capital would relieve the community from social ills, he also shared Rousseau’s misgivings about passive entertainment. Not the theatre but rather its modern-day equivalent, television, was to blame for the malaise: ‘television is not merely a concomitant of lower community involvement, but actually the cause of it. A major effect of television’s arrival was the reduction in participation in social, recreational, and community activities among all ages’ (Putnam 2000: 236). Rousseau seems to have been thinking along the same lines when he, 242 years earlier, wrote, ‘[Passive entertainment] would serve to destroy the love of work ... render people inactive and slack, prevent the people from seeing the public and private goals with which it ought to busy it self’ (Rousseau 1960: 64). There is nothing new under the sociological sun.

Duty to the nation?

‘Our first duty is to the nation, the second to the one who governs it.’ Thus says Lord Bomston in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (Rousseau 1968: 139). It seems no coincidence that Rousseau lets one of his fictional characters utter this starkly nationalist sentence in the middle of the eighteenth century – decades before nationalism is said to have been developed (Kedouri 1960: 1). Considerations about state and nation were coherently integrated into his oeuvre. Rousseau – arguably the main social theorist in the eighteenth century – is thus not only the main theorist of popular sovereignty, but also a theoretician of nationalism. Rousseau proves that nationalism did exist before the nineteenth century, even by a modern definition (such as that developed by Gellner). Rousseau developed a theory of society based on cultural homogeneity and ‘participation in, and identification with culture’ as well as he evidently sought to establish a political culture (based on national sentiments), which were ‘co-extensive with an entire political unit’ – as required by Gellner’s definition. Realising the inadequacy of Christianity as a civic religion he developed a doctrine about ‘entry in, participation in, and identification with’ a ‘civic profession of faith’ based on patriotism and cultural norms. This doctrine was later developed into a proper nationalist doctrine in *Considérations*. This conclusion thus falsifies Kedouri’s thesis that nationalism was ‘invented’ in the nineteenth century.

Through his nationalist doctrine Rousseau succeeded in establishing a modern equivalent of the doctrine of patriotism, as well as finding a place for (what he saw as) true Christendom. This is no mean accomplishment.

This conclusion should be ample proof that Benedict Anderson's conclusion regarding nationalist political theorists was premature. At least one major philosopher has developed a political theory of nationalism; namely Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Not everybody will see this as an accomplishment. Rousseau's enthusiasm for nationalism is not in vogue today. Yet it is worthwhile to remember that Rousseau was not the only one to reach this conclusion. A respected and revered – liberal – thinker like John Stuart Mill concurred, noting that 'free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities (Mill 1861, 427). We do not have to agree with these masters; but they challenge our set ways. And we owe them a response in an age where rejection of the multiethnic society is deemed politically 'incorrect'.

Towards an ever closer union?

Rousseau, European integration and world government

Tout ça change mais plus c'est la même chose – at least in international politics. When politicians in the wake of the Second World War devised plans for a federal European super-state to prevent wars, they were not the originators of that idea. In the eighteenth century Abbé de Saint Pierre – a French writer with a poor reputation (Vaughan 1962: 359) – had developed the same idea. Saint-Pierre's plan would hardly have warranted a footnote in the history of ideas had it not been for Rousseau's interest in the project – or rather the interest that Rousseau was urged to take. In the *Confessions* Rousseau recollected

After my return from Geneva ... through the invitation of Madame Dupin [I was invited to work on the writings of de Saint-Pierre]. These works contained some excellent things, but so badly expressed that it was a wearisome undertaking to read them ... I did not confine myself to the part as translator ... I myself was often on the point of relinquishing it [the work on Saint-Pierre's writings], if I could have drawn back with decency. (I: 407)

This fading enthusiasm is perhaps understandable as Rousseau came to realise how much his own views differed from those of Saint-Pierre. In undertaking the project, Rousseau did not merely re-write the plan to do one of his female friends a favour (and he had a soft spot for women). He had, in fact, taken a long interest in international affairs and the problems of peace – and especially in the problem of creating the latter.²² In *The State of War* (1755–56) he had written eloquently and disturbingly about war:

I lift my eyes and look into the distance. There I see fire and flames, a countryside deserted, villages pillaged. Monstrous men, where are you dragging these poor creatures? I hear the dreadful noise, such uproar, such screams! I draw near. I bear witness to a murderous scene, to ten thousand slaughtered men, the dead piled together, the dying trampled by horses, everywhere the sight of death and agony. All is the fruit of peaceful institutions. Pity and indignation rise up from the depth of my heart. (III: 609)

A vivid and horrifying spectre such as this was bound to leave a lasting impression on a sensitive man. And Rousseau did not live at a time of peace. From 1740 and onwards the main powers of Europe were at war for fifteen out of twenty-three years. These wars solved nothing – but killed hundreds thousands of people (Hampson 1968: 174). The War of Austrian Succession (1740–48) failed to settle the colonial rivalry, nor did the Seven Year War (1756–63). Not only did the horrors of war prompt him to philosophise, it also gave him the impetus to devise a plan for eradicating it.

Rousseau – unlike Hobbes – did not regard man as evil in himself. The state of nature was not, argued Rousseau, a state of war, still less the nasty, short, brutish and mean existence depicted by the Wiltshireman. Whereas Hobbes' realism was comparable to that of Morgenthau, Rousseau's was closer to the *realpolitik* of Kenneth Waltz (Waltz 1959: 186). Rousseau believed that wars were created by a rivalry between states, not as a result of human nature. 'The war', he wrote in one of his Fragments, 'is not a relation between men, but between states, and here the individuals are only enemies by coincident, and less as citizens than as soldiers' (III: 345). As Christine Jane Carter wrote in *Rousseau and the Problem of War*,

What Rousseau wishes to establish is that whilst war has its origins in conflict amongst individuals, such conflict does not in itself constitute war, which is only 'natural' among states. For only in war do we see men fighting each other for reasons, which they scarcely know or understand; not as personal enemies but as representatives of the state. It is precisely this, which Rousseau wants to make fully explicit, in the hope that to expose war as the confrontation of artificial bodies will eliminate the persistent idea that it is natural. (Carter 1987: 110)

It is not difficult to find evidence for this interpretation. 'The state of war', wrote Rousseau in *Du Contrat Social*, 'cannot arise from simple personal relations' (III: 357).

As always fascinated by paradoxes – ('I would rather be a man of paradoxes than a man of prejudices', he wrote in *Emile* (II: 82)) – he noted the tragic irony that states which had been established to avert civil wars

gave rise to international wars. As he put it in *The State of War*, ‘we see men united by an artificial concord, assemble to slaughter one another, and all the horrors of war arise from the efforts made to prevent them’ (III: 603). Rousseau’s immediate solution – though hardly philosophically spectacular – was the establishment of a mechanism for protecting civilians (what international lawyers call *the doctrine of non-combatant immunity*). While this proposal falls short of the grandeur of utopian ideals – such as presented by Kant in *Zum Ewigen Frieden* – it is testament to the power of political ideas that it was Rousseau’s idea, which (at least indirectly) led to the establishment of international humanitarian law (Best 1980: 56–8).

However, Rousseau’s status as an important thinker of international politics does not rest on his input into humanitarian law, but on his work on – and critique of – Saint-Pierre’s proposal. And it is important to draw a distinction between editing and critique. In *Projet du paix perpétuelle* (III: 563–93) he neutrally outlined Saint-Pierre’s proposal, and in *Jugement sur le projet de paix perpétuelle* he passed his (rather harsh) judgement on the plan which he had edited. This distinction has often been lost on even the most prominent observers. Kenneth Waltz – otherwise a fan of Rousseau – is a case in point. Quoting from a passage in *Projet du paix perpétuelle* (which stresses the need for an international legislature for a federation of all European states), Waltz stresses that ‘it is easy to poke holes in the solution offered by Rousseau’, and he goes on to ask how this ‘federation could enforce its laws on the states that comprise it without waging war against them’ (Waltz 1959: 185–6). Good question! Indeed, Rousseau had asked the same question in *Jugement*. Rousseau did not write *Projet du paix perpétuelle*, he merely summarised it – and criticised it. Whether Waltz would have agreed with Rousseau’s answer to the question is another matter. Rousseau – like Waltz – found the plan unrealistic. He believed that ‘vice, deceit, which so many people use, emerges by it self, yet the common good, which we all benefit from, can only be established by war ... eternal peace is at the moment an absurd plan (III: 600).

That Rousseau’s thoughts were equated with a policy he disliked – and actively rejected – is hardly new. Further his readers might have been justified in their misperception. *Jugement* was published after his death, whereas *Projet du paix perpétuelle* had been published in 1761 (it was initially intended for publication in the periodical *Le Monde comme il est* in 1760 – but the French censor had qualms about it) (Vaughan 1962: 361–2). The *Projet*, which James Madison described as ‘preposterous’ and ‘impotent’ (quoted in Spurlin 1969: 85), was not Rousseau’s own, rather it

was Saint Pierre's. Its contents are nevertheless interesting as they seem to be a catalogue of the institutions which two hundred years later were established under the Treaty of Rome. The *Projet du paix perpétuelle* would be based on a 'federal government [which] shall unite nations by bonds similar to those which already unite the individual members'. In order for this to happen de Saint-Pierre envisaged the establishment of five institutions: the federation needs; all the important powers of the members; a legislative body; an executive with power to compel obedience to the federation's laws; and a prohibition against withdrawal. Whereas Waltz (wrongly) believed that Rousseau advocated this scheme, the latter in reality found that this plan was 'too good to be adopted' ('*étoit trop bon pour être adopté*') (III: 599).

Rousseau's reasons for rejecting the plan were based on two factors: the nature of international politics and the need for national cohesion. What he did not reject, however, was the principle of federation. The concept of federalism is often – though erroneously – believed to originate in the *Federalist Papers*. It did not. Indeed, it would be more historically accurate to credit Rousseau with the invention of federalism rather than Madison. While a major work on federalism by Rousseau seems to have been lost,²³ there are ample examples of his zest for the principle of federation. Rousseau found that the federal system of government was 'the only one, which combine[d] the advantages of large and small states – as essential to correct the radical vice of modern states; their sheer size' (III: 601). It is not, therefore, accurate to call Rousseau 'an armchair federalist' (Miller 1984: 139). Quite the contrary: it was a central tenet in his most practical work of politics.

In *Considérations sur le gouvernement du Pologne*, he stressed that the Poles should 'make it their business to extend and perfect the federal system of government' (III: 970), as well as stressing that they 'should never lose sight of how important it is for Poland to orient its constitution towards federalism' ('*Ne perdons pas de vue l'importance dont il est pour la Pologne de tourner sa constitution vers la forme fédérative*') (III: 986). However, and crucially important in the context of a proposal for a federal state comprising all European states, he rejected the idea of a multinational federation. For a start Europe did not have a common culture. Rousseau – unlike a globalist such as Kant – did not believe that the principle of humanity extended much beyond one's own country. 'It would seem', Rousseau wrote in *Political Economy*, that 'the sentiment of humanity dissipates and weakens as it spreads to the whole Earth ... this inclination in us can only be useful to those concentrated among fellow citizens' (III:

255–6). While Rousseau came to realise that the city state was inadequate, and therefore had to be combined with the nation state, he did not consider a European nation-state possible, simply because the Europeans did not share a common national identity or feeling of sameness. 'It is impossible merge these antagonistic countries: The proclaimed brotherhood of Europeans seems but a caricature, and one which scornfully disguises a mutual hatred' (III: 569). This lack of a common culture was, as we saw in the previous section, a central element in Rousseau's political philosophy. His objection against de Saint-Pierre was in large measure a result of this opposition.

Yet, Rousseau's opposition to the *Projet du paix perpétuelle* was also based on more traditional concerns – concerns which belong to the realm of international political theory. We are prone to forget that Rousseau – for political purposes – equated Europe with the whole world. When Abbé de Saint-Pierre proposed a federation of European states he, in effect, presented the seventeenth-century equivalent of World Government – not merely a forerunner of the European Union. And while Rousseau was favourably disposed towards the goal (i.e. perpetual peace) he considered the means thoroughly unrealistic and even somewhat ridiculous. Writing as a novelist, Rousseau had (at the time that he wrote *Jugement*) presented a caricature of Abbé de Saint-Pierre in his successful novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. The main character's uncle is depicted as a sad individual obsessed with international politics and the creation of peace – and as someone whose family life breaks down as a result of his interest in lofty ideals at the expense of the care for his daughter (Shklar 1969: 106). Julie – reflecting her creator's preferences – strongly objects to this character; why not concern yourself with the evil you can alter as opposed to the evil you cannot?

Rousseau's attitude towards de Saint-Pierre moved in the same direction. He saw the laws of international politics – i.e. the quest for power – as a fact of life; something that one could not alter. He consequently found it hard to believe that powers would willingly give up their power in pursuit of the common good. 'For the federation to be established it is important not to forget the vested interests' (III: 595). The chief problem of the plan for international peace was, as earlier mentioned, that its advocates forget that 'all observations of kings, or those who perform their roles, reveal that they are driven by two things, and two things only, to increase power externally and to strengthen their power internally' (III: 592). Consequently, the system proposed by Saint-Pierre – while commendable and altruistic – was a political impossibility as no ruler would be willing to

sacrifice his power for the general good. So while he might have envisaged that mechanisms for the protection of humanitarian rights could be enforced, he was unconvinced that public international law could prevent the outbreaks of wars:

As for what is called international law [*'droit des gens'*] it is certain that, for want of sanction, its laws are nothing but chimeras even weaker than the laws of nature. This latter at least speaks to the heart of individuals, whereas international law, having no other guarantee than their utility to the one who submits to it, are respected only as long as self-interest confirms it. (III: 610)

Power politics, realism and the nation state. These are not the ingredients we normally associate with Rousseau. History throws up strange bed-fellows. That Rousseau tends towards a conservative standpoint is not widely acknowledged – yet it is hard to deny, having surveyed his views on European integration and international affairs.

Notes

- 1 It will be noted that Anderson also ignored two other great nationalist minds, namely Herder and Fichte. Fichte especially is arguably a major philosopher.
- 2 *Rousseau's theory is acknowledged in Brendan O Leary, 'Ernest Gellner's Diagnoses of Nationalism: A Critical Appraisal', in John A. Hall (ed.), The State and the Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 32.
- 3 The issue is not mentioned in Jean Starobinsky, *Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Plon, 1957), in Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens. A study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) or in Robert Derathé, *Jean Jacques Rousseau et la Science Politique de son temps* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1988). The exception to the rule is Robert Derathé, 'Patriotisme et Nationalisme au XVIIIe Siècle', in *L'idée de nation, Annales de Philosophie Politique*, no. 8, 1969. Also Alfred Cobban argued that 'for the appearance of the nation state no political inventor can be given credit or blame ... but the fact that he [Rousseau] is the first is undeniable.' Alfred Cobban, *Rousseau and the Modern State*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 100.
- 4 We do not know why the Poles called upon the *philosophes* (Abbe Mably was also commissioned). The Polish Convention – of which Wielhorski was a member – had no political mandate and no authority to speak on behalf of the country.
- 5 Lettre à M. Buttafuoco, 22 September 1764, MS Neuchatel, 7899 (Rough Drafts of Letters I and II).
- 6 On this autobiography see James F. Jones, *Rousseau's Dialogues: An Interpretive Essay* (Genève: Droz, 1991).

- 7 These 'textes' include *Les Confessions*, *Dialogues*, *Reveries du promeneur solitaire* as well as other *fragments autobiographique*.
- 8 In *Confessions* he writes – seemingly without irony: 'I was unable to feel perfectly easy or to devote my attention seriously to the proposed work of legislation, until I had convincing proof that it was not a mere joke at my expense'. (XII: 287)
- 9 J.G. Fichte, *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (in Helge Grell, *Folkeaaand og Skaberaand* (Aarhus: Anis, 1988), p. 21), struck a similar note, stressing that is especially important to build a nation when the country in question has been defeated – or even apolitically annihilated. His *Reden* were written on the backdrop of Germany's defeat to France in the battle of Jena in 1806.
- 10 On Rousseau's indebtedness to Machiavelli see Maurizio Virolli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Well-Ordered Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 11 For example on pages 242, 246–8, 253 and 269.
- 12 On Herder noted 'Die ganze Volksseele geht in der Strache ein und klingt aus ihr wieder', Herder, *Ideen zur bestimmung des menschheits*, quoted in W. Dobbek, *J.G. Herders Humanitätsideal als Ausdruck seines Weltbildes und seine Personlichkeit* (Berlin: Braunschweig, 1949), p. 39.
- 13 The classical article on this subject is Robert Derathé, 'Le Religion Civil selon Rousseau', in *Annals de la Societé Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 1959–62. For a more recent study see Guglielmo Forni, 'L'Universalisme religieux de Jean-Jacques Rousseau', in Robert Thiéry (ed.), *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Politique et Nation* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), pp. 483–503.
- 14 This opposition to the atheists among *les philosophes* is eloquently expressed in Book III of *Les Reveries du promeneur solitaire*: 'instead of removing my doubts and curing my uncertainties ... these ardent missionaries of atheism, these overbearing dogmatists [*'imperieux doqmatiques'*] could not patiently endure that anyone should think differently than them on any subject whatsoever. I often defended myself rather feebly because of my distaste and lack of talent for disputation, but never once did I adopt their dismal teaching (desolante doctrine)'. Rousseau, *Reveries du promeneur solitaire* (Bourdeaux: Larousse, 1997), p. 58.
- 15 Rousseau's awareness of the paradoxical character of his work is well illustrated in *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*, in Allan Bloom (ed.) *Politics and the Arts. Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre by Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Glencoe Ill: The Free Press, 1960), p. 131.
- 16 It is interesting to note that Voltaire – his views on Christianity notwithstanding – insisted that citizens needed a civic religion. See Ronald Ian Boss, 'Rousseau's Civil Religion and the Meaning of Belief: An Answer to Bayle's Paradox', in *Studies of Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 84, 1971, pp. 123–93. For a more recent – albeit shorter – introduction see John Gray, *Voltaire* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- 17 See Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University

- Press, 1959), p. 181, in which Rousseau is described as a realist. For a more balanced account of Rousseau's thinking on international affairs see Stanley Hoffman and David Fidler (eds) *Rousseau on International Relations* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1991).
- 18 The Durkheimian term 'organic solidarity' is used deliberately. Durkheim was an avid reader of Rousseau and was inspired by his thinking. See Emile Durkheim, *Montesquieu and Rousseau: Forerunners of Sociology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970).
- 19 By relieving Christianity of the burden of being a civil religion, Rousseau – perhaps not surprisingly – followed Jean Calvin. Calvin wrote: 'Let us observe that in man government is two-fold: one spiritual, by which the conscience is trained to piety and divine worship; the other civil, by which the individual is instructed in those duties, which as men and citizens [they] are bound to perform ... The former has its seat within the soul, the latter only regulates the external conduct.' Jean Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1949) Part III, p. xix. 15. On Rousseau and Calvin see Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, III: 382.
- 20 Respectively the founders of Israel, Rome and Sparta.
- 21 Following a short review of this, Fetscher writes: 'It is obvious that Rousseau was in no way [*'keinerwegs'*] the war-mongering nationalist that many critics have claimed.' Fetscher, *Rousseaus politische Philosophie* (Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand, 1960), p. 179.
- 22 Other books on Rousseau and international relations include, *inter alia*, J.L. Windelberger, *Essai sur la politique étrangère de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Pichard et Fils, 1900). A more recent work is Grace Roosevelt, *Reading Rousseau in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
- 23 See G.L. Windelberger, *La République confédérative des petits états: essai sur le système de politique étrangère de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1900), chapter 2. However, there is some discussion about that. Patrick Riley (*The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001a) is sceptical as regards Rousseau's work. See 'Rousseau as a Theorist of International and National Federalism', *Publius*, vol. 3, Spring Issue, 3–17. See also Fetscher, *Rousseaus politische Philosophie*, p. 178 and Catherine Larrère, 'Fédération et Nation', in Robert Thiéry, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.