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Jean-Jacques Rousseau (approx. 1,700 words)

In 1756, Mendelssohn translated Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (1755) into German, and J.G. Hamann mentioned Rousseau in a December 1759 letter to Kant (AA 10 30). The influence of Rousseau (1712-1778) on Kant was profound, and it came most forcefully when Kant was about forty, as notes written in Kant's own copy of the *Observations* around 1764-1765 reveal. In those notes he claimed that Rousseau stood to the moral world as Newton did to the natural world (Obs-R 58-59). The Swiss thinker's influence on Kant was above all (but not exclusively) in anthropology and social philosophy, pedagogy, and ethics and political philosophy.

In his writings in the 1750s, Kant mostly examined natural philosophy (physics and geography) and theoretical metaphysics. After reading the British empiricists and especially Rousseau's *Émile* and *Of the Social Contract* (both published in 1762), Kant addressed the ends of *human* nature, intrigued by Rousseau's notion of the difference between natural and civilized human beings. Rousseau led Kant to reconsider the aims of the arts and sciences and especially philosophy, to think that philosophy should have practical and moral consequences, and to believe that knowledge for its own sake was not sufficient to justify intellectual pursuits.

On might think that the Swiss thinker did not influence the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which Kant was still composing when Rousseau died in 1778, but the very notion that reason was in need of a critique is in part traceable back to Rousseau's diagnoses that social ills were caused by a use of reason that overstepped its bounds, creating desires it could not satisfy. ("Diminish desires, and you will increase strength," Rousseau advised in *Émile*.) This arguably influenced Kant's claim that pure theoretical reason had a natural and inevitable tendency to fall into an illusory dialectic that could be properly understood, if not avoided (A 298/ B 354). In the notes that reflect Rousseau's influence, Kant had defined metaphysics as "the science of the limits of human reason" (Obs-R 181), and in the contemporaneous DSS (1766) Kant published this definition of metaphysics (DSS 368). Rousseau's accounts of reason and alienation and the generally practical orientation of his philosophy also arguably influenced Kant's assertion that pure practical reason was primary vis-à-vis speculative reason (CPrR 119).

Anthropology and social philosophy. In late 1763 Kant saw the discovery of a boy roaming outside Königsberg as confirmation of Rousseau's anthropology, as EMH (1764) showed. Kant's notes reveal that he was moved by Rousseau yet struggled not to be enchanted by his style and wit. Kant famously claimed that Rousseau "set him straight" and inspired him to defend the rights of humanity, whereas before he had thought that one's worth was linked to intellectual achievements (Obs-R 44). He held that Rousseau was the first to discover "the deeply hidden nature of humanity" and "the secret law whose observation justifies Providence" (Obs-R 58-59), and that whereas "belief in

inequality also makes human beings unequal," only Rousseau's teaching could make it so that even the most learned philosopher did not see himself as better than the common man (Obs-R 176). Yet he had to keep reading Rousseau until the beauty of expression did not unsettle him and he could read again with reason (Obs-R 30). His reading proceeded in stages, from a first impression of finding an "uncommon mental acuity, a noble flight of genius, and a sensitive soul," followed by the impression of "alienation over strange and nonsensical opinions" that conflicted so strongly with general opinions that one was inclined to suppose that Rousseau only wanted to show off the magical power of his eloquence (Obs-R 43-44). This view of philosophical writing perhaps helps us better understand Kant's conscious adoption of a relatively dry and abstract style in the *Critiques*, as the Bacon epigraph at the beginning of the B edition of CPR demonstrates: *de nobis ipsis silemus* ("of our own person we will say nothing") (B ii).

Contrasting his method with Rousseau's "synthetic" method, which began with the human being in the state of nature, Kant described his method as "analytic" since it examined humans in the civilized condition (Obs-R 14). In the notes, Kant adopted a Rousseauian distinction between a primitive innocence, ignorant of artificial goods, and a wise innocence (Obs-R 77) that was familiar with, yet controlled, artificial impulses. Kant assessed the happiness of primitive humans not in order to "return to the forests," but to see how far humanity had been artificially constructed and what had thereby been lost or gained (Obs-R 31; cf. Anthr 326). Likewise, in a published announcement of his lectures (1765), Kant distinguished between wise ("civilized") and primitive innocence, and urged us to understand human nature before attempting to state what should be done (AL 311-312; cf. Anthr 326-327). Kant agreed with Rousseau that the arts and sciences required a degree of corrupting luxury, but also believed they "cultivated" us (UH 27). Although Kant agreed that social decorum could have a negative influence, he thought Rousseau failed to offer a compelling plan for bringing about the final, most important stage of humanity's development: moralization (UH 26; cf. CBH 116; Anthr 324). In addition, what Rousseau called *amour propre* emerged as Kant's key notions of self-conceit (CPrR 73), unsocial sociability (UH 20), and radical propensity to evil (R 28-32).

Kant held that Rousseau's writings seemed to conflict with each other and were often misinterpreted. Kant thought Rousseau's two *Discourses* correctly showed the unavoidable conflict of culture with our physical nature, but also that in *Émile* and *Of the Social Contract* and "other writings," Rousseau sought to solve the harder problem of how to reconcile moral and natural predispositions (CBH 116). Yet Kant held that since the proper education of the youth and citizens had not yet been carried out, every ill and vice arose from this culture-nature conflict.

Pedagogy. Kant had worked as a private tutor for well-off families between 1747 and 1754, before returning to the Albertina University. Kant concluded Obs (1764), which even contained a footnote on Rousseau (Obs 246), with Rousseauian references to "noble simplicity" and the "as yet undiscovered secret of education" (Obs 255). Yet Kant's call to activate and raise the moral feeling in the breast of "every young citizen of the world" revealed a cosmopolitanism that went beyond Rousseau.

The notes again showed a deeper, more critical reception of Rousseau. While Kant agreed with him that education should be "free" and also "make a free man" (Obs-R 167), Kant did not see how Rousseau's program for the pupil Émile could be made practical for instruction in schools (Obs-R 29). Perhaps drawing from his experiences as a

tutor, Kant considered Rousseau's ideas impractical since they were based on a tutor-governor model, for in order for schools to be possible, one must "draw on" or extend *Émile* and show "how schools could arise from it" (Obs-R 29). Yet Kant esteemed Rousseau's views on education, calling them the "only means of bringing prosperity back to civil society" in an age of luxury, since political laws apparently did not suffice (Obs-R 175).

A Rousseauian, naturalist, and child-centered approach to teaching was ground for Kant's avid support of the Philanthropinum Institute established by Johann Bernard Basedow (1724-90) in Dessau in 1774, as anthropology lecture notes reveal (LA 722-723). In *Essays Regarding the Philanthropinum*, Kant held that the proper educational method should be derived from nature and that schools should develop new methods that did not slavishly copy habit and tradition (AA 2 449). In his pedagogy course, given four times between 1776 and 1787, Kant cited Rousseau often – for instance, to support his views that discipline should come before informative instruction and that the development of children's bodies through physical activity shapes them for society (LP 469; cf. 442).

Ethics and political philosophy. Kant's appeal to common moral knowledge in the first section of G shares the spirit of Rousseau's conviction that fundamental moral truth is just as accessible to common human reason as to philosophical reason. Moreover, there is a superficial resemblance between Kant's view of autonomy as the property of the will to be a law to itself (G 440) and to both Rousseau's *moral* liberty ("obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves") and *civil* liberty limited by the general will (*volonté générale*) (*Of the Social Contract*, i.viii). G's Formula of Autonomy (G 431), and its variant, the Formula of the Realm of Ends (G 439), also sound somewhat like Rousseau's claim that citizens should be subject to laws that they themselves author. However, these notions are at most analogous. Rousseau's claim applies to legislators of a political law in a community of citizens, that is, to deliberation and the public process of voting in an ideal state, and he presents a political theory concerned with coercive laws of a state within a limited jurisdiction. A citizen can be "forced to be free" (*Of the Social Contract,* i.vii), and a public authority exists to ensure that the laws are obeyed. Kant's ethical theory is based on autonomy as (non-coercive) inner legislation of the will. Here autonomy is ascribed to all rational beings, not just to citizens of a particular political community (and is not to be confused with autocracy, or self-mastery and control of inclinations). Kantian autonomy of the will is an internalization of what remains in Rousseau a political notion.

Like the author of *Of the Social Contract*, in MM Kant developed a social contract theory. Moreover, Kant's thoughts on global peace explicitly referred to Rousseau, who himself publicly endorsed a European alliance for peace (1761). However, Kant proposed a cosmopolitan (not just European) federation of states (PP 360, cf. MM 352), which he believed Rousseau ridiculed as fantastic – since Rousseau may have considered the league to be imminent (UH 24). In the notes, Kant had repudiated a general love of humanity since it could lead to chimerical, idle wishes (Obs-R 25), but his later theories of respect for humanity and human rights, so indebted to Rousseau, were arguably not subject to this criticism (MM 352).

– Robert R. Clewis

Further Reading

E. Cassirer, *Kant, Rousseau, and Goethe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

K. Deligiorgi, *Kant and the Culture of Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2005).

K. Reich, 'Rousseau und Kant', in K. Reich, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. M. Baum (Hamburg: 2001), pp. 147–165.

S. Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

S. Shell and R. Velkley (eds), *Kant's* Observations *and* Remarks*: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

R. Velkley, "Transcending Nature, Unifying Reason: on Kant's Debt to Rousseau," in O. Sensen (ed.), *Kant on Moral Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 89-106.