CHAPTER TWO

ROUSSEAU: THE UTOPIAN CRITIC OF CIVIL SOCIETY
The field of Rousseau scholarship is vast and the responses and reactions his works have evoked over more than two centuries have been varied. His contemporaries seem to have often been shocked by him and failed to understand him. They regarded him as cynical, exhibitionist, eccentric, misanthrope, apostle of ignorance and narcissist; his work, full of contradictions, paradoxes, sensationalism, and sophistry. From the earliest constructions of Rousseau the romantic anarchist to the most recent study tracing the roots of his concept of Order to St. Augustine, Cicero, and Plutarch there has been a steady stream of diverse interpretations. J.G. Merquior has noted some of these and from his account the reception of Rousseau’s ideas seems to have oscillated between two extremes: For Burke he was guilty of obnoxious individualism, de Maistre called him a romantic anarchist whereas for Constant and Talmon Rousseau was a protagonist of illiberal egalitarianism and ‘totalitarian democratism’ respectively. Vaughan introduced the idea of the individualism of the early Rousseau, still under Locke’s influence, and the collectivism of the later Rousseau, influenced by Montesquieu. Merquior says that the unity of Rousseau’s thought was restored by the Rousseau scholars like Henri See, E.H. Wright (writing in the 1920s), Cassirer (1930s and 1940s), Bertrand de Jouvenel and Robert Derathé in the post-War period and by Burgelin and Starobinski in the
The interpretation currently dominant, Merquior tells us, is that of Rousseau the pessimist, owing largely to the influential study by Judith Shklar. Shklar used insights of Jouvenel and Starobinski and constructed a Rousseau who was convinced of eventual deterioration of all politics and who theorized through the concept of General Will a politics of prevention, arresting, as long as possible, the inevitable decline. In what follows, however, I will not discuss all the major readings of Rousseau. Instead, I will attempt a plain presentation of Rousseau's narrative of the natural state of mankind, its evolution through history and the decadence of civilization. I will then present interpretations of Judith Shklar, Maurizio Viroli, and finally Colletti which highlight aspects of Rousseau's thought underplayed by the interpretations mentioned earlier and help us see him as a precursor of the Hegelian-Marxian critique of Civil Society, (this is particularly true of Colletti's interpretation), a precursor, however, limited in his utopianism (Shklar), and in his un-Marxian idea of 'order' (Viroli).

In the 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality', Rousseau says:

"O man ... behold your history ... not in books written by your fellow-creatures, who are liars but in nature which never lies .... The times of which I am going to speak are very remote .... you are about to inquire about the age at which you would have liked your whole species to stand still .... Discontented with your present state ... ; you will perhaps wish it were in your power to go back; and this feeling should be a panegyric on your first
ancestors, a criticism of your contemporaries, and a terror to the unfortunates who will come after you."13

The passage from the primitive condition to the present degeneration is marked by some stages which, following Starobinski and Colletti, can be outlined as follows:14

1. The 'State of Nature'. Men live in isolation from one another, labour singly or occasionally in collaboration, and satisfy their few and simple needs.

2. Men start building shelters and live in family-groupings. This, for Rousseau is the Golden Age.15 Development of labour and thought takes place.

3. Men hit upon methods of production which enable them to leave behind subsistence economy and produce surplus: division of labour, metallurgy, improved agriculture.

4. With surplus there is conflict for control over it. To avoid anarchy men come together and agree to form a society with laws and the sovereign. But this agreement only legitimizes pre-existing inequalities. Thus we enter the present day societies based on inequality.

While this narrative16 can be found in Rousseau's Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, it complements his critique of modern society begun in the Discourse on the Arts and Sciences. His Spartan utopia is presented in the Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract and the latter work also shows Rousseau stoically reconciled to the inevitable decay all polities must eventually degenerate into.
The speculative account of the State of Nature is put to many uses by Rousseau. Apart from being a stage in history leading to the Golden Age, it has four other functions in his system:

1. Denial of the supposedly natural sociability of man:
   Men in the State of Nature are solitary. They have 'no fixed habitation, no need of one another's assistance, the same persons hardly met twice in their lives'. There is no property, sexual union takes place casually without leading to any permanent companionship. Children born out of such union stay with their mothers till they are very young and leave them as soon as they are strong enough to look after themselves. So the institution of family has not yet emerged. Rousseau has a long discussion of development of language. He seeks to establish that for men and women in the natural state there can be no need for communication and that language can develop only over a long time.

2. Constrasting the Natural Man with the Civilized Man:
   Rousseau uses the strategy of setting up absolute opposites to make his view of history work. History is man's progression towards corruption and inequality. And the most vivid way of presenting it as such is to contrast the beginning and the end. Both, the natural man and the civilized man are abstractions. But they are abstractions of different kinds. What Rousseau has to say about the
modern man may or may not be true. But the claim here is empirical. Therefore the abstraction 'the civilized man', is arrived at by generalizing from experience and by choosing those of the attributes of modern man that Rousseau considers as the defining ones. The other abstraction - 'the natural man' - has, as its basis, negation of all experience. If all the social attributes are acquired by men in history, then the natural man is not what the civilized man is: he uses no language, he has no property, no permanent relationships. But Rousseau does not stop there. He invests the difference with normative significance. The natural man, we are told in the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, has robust constitution. Having virtually no weapons nor any instruments, he is forced to develop his skills and strength for protecting himself and for finding food. Solitary and perpetually in danger the savage man cannot be lazy or languid. He is an adroit, agile, and resolute creature. His wants are few and nature is abundant.

Rousseau says:

"His imagination paints no pictures; his heart makes no demands on him. His few wants are ... readily supplied."23

Ignorant of the excellences that whet the appetite, gratification comes easily.
"The imagination, which causes such ravages among us, never speaks to the heart of the savages, who quietly await the impulses of nature, yield to them involuntarily, with more pleasure than ardour, and, their wants once satisfied, lose the desire."\(^{24}\)

(Emphasis added.)

The civilized man, on the contrary, is effeminate, enervated by luxury, and voluptuous.\(^{25}\) His wants are many and insatiable.\(^{26}\) He has lost the simplicity and hardiness of the savage.

Of course Rousseau does not contrast the civilized man with the natural man alone; there is another, overlapping contrast with the man in the Golden Age (please refer to stage 2 above). One of the two utopian models constructed by Rousseau, the Golden Age is a picture of patriarchal rural life long before the onset of modernity. (The details of this utopia will be presented later in this chapter.)

Unlike the placid and uncomplicated peasant, who has very limited contact with others and who can live an uncompetitive, unimitative and frugal life, the civilized man is forever restless and discontented.

To appreciate fully Rousseau's critique of the civilized man we must understand 'amour-propre', a key term in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. The dictionary meanings of the word are:\(^{27}\)
1. Exclusive attachment to one’s own person, to one’s preservation and development.

2. Lively sentiment of dignity and personal esteem, desire to impose one’s own estimation of oneself on others.

The related words are - égoïsme (excessive attachment to oneself which involves searching exclusively for one’s own pleasure and personal interest), fierté (pride, a heightened sense of dignity and honour), and susceptible (being very touchy about one’s self-esteem). Though Rousseau scholars usually leave the word untranslated, we may substitute amour-propre by ‘vanity’ and ‘cupidity’.

Rousseau clarifies in a footnote\(^2^8\) that this vanity must not be confused with self-love (amour de soi) which the natural man feels. It is a natural concern for self-preservation, and it does not lead to competition, acquisitiveness and violence. Vanity, on the other hand, is a purely social, relative and factitious feeling. (We might add here that it arises in a society where there are inequalities, mutual dependence, explosion of wants and extensive contact of men with one another). It is a feeling which ‘leads each individual to make more of himself than of any other, causes all the mutual damage men inflict on one another and is the real source of the ‘sense of honour’.\(^2^9\)
In the natural state men do not know of this feeling. They do not compare themselves with each other, and therefore there is neither hatred nor revenge.

So vanity and the urge to distinguish oneself are at the root of civilization. Putting together Rousseau's account of the history (A Discourse on the Arts and Sciences) we get the following sketch of civilization:

Modern social life is a deceitful veil of appearances. To be and to seem are totally separated from one another. In the simple, rural life 'men could see through one another and this prevented their having many vices'. Whereas civilized men pretend to be civil, modest, and scrupulous though they are neither truly humble nor virtuous. We depend on each other's estimation:

"... the savage lives within himself while social man lives constantly outside himself and only knows how to live in the opinion of others so that he seems to receive the consciousness of his own existence merely from the judgement of others concerning him."

We seek to surpass each other and competitiveness - acquisitiveness - ambition reinforce each other in a spiralling effect.

This passion for one's interests and honour drives us to seek to dominate the weak and the vulnerable, making them subserve our ambition.
The powerful have a hierarchical and inegalitarian view of the world. They have contempt for the poor and the unsuccessful. The losers internalise the same attitude and thus contempt and servility generate each other.\(^\text{35}\)

Our excessive concern with ourselves is reflected in our pursuit of excellence, endless cultivation of taste, and sophistication of wants. But it has an obviously ugly face too: our vanity drives us to all manner of means of aggrandizement and gratification and fraud manipulation, and debauchery thrive.\(^\text{36}\)

With acute inequalities and self-obsession of the powerful, no real ties among men are left. Our callousness has suppressed the naturally felt compassion and with indifference to our fellow countrymen we wear the badge of spurious love for mankind.\(^\text{37}\)

Far from being indices of progress, arts and sciences have fuelled the evil dynamism of civilization.

"Astronomy was born of superstition, eloquence of ambition, hatred, falsehood, and flattery; geometry of avarice; physics of an idle curiosity; all, even moral philosophy, of human pride. Thus the arts and sciences owe their birth to our vices ...." "What would become of the arts, were they not nourished by luxury? If men were not unjust, of what use were jurisprudence? .... In a word who would pass his life in barren speculations, if everybody, attentive only to the obligations of humanity and the necessities of nature spent his whole life in serving his country, obliging his friends, and relieving the unhappy?"\(^\text{38}\)
Rousseau harks back the bygone age (though, as noted later in this chapter, he knows that going back in history is not a real option):

"Almighty God! Thou who holdest in Thy hand the minds of men, deliver us from the fatal arts and sciences of our forefathers; give us back ignorance, innocence, and poverty, which alone can make us happy and are precious in Thy sight."

Thus the 'State of Nature' provides Rousseau with ballast for a comprehensive condemnation of the civilized man. It gives a cutting edge to his view of history as passage towards darkness though, it must be noted, it is this view of history which in the first place allows him to draw a positive picture of the natural man.

3. Criticism of the Hobbesian Conception of Human Nature:

With this positive picture of the noble savage, Rousseau is in a position to assert, contra Hobbes, that the State of Nature cannot be (or, rather, could not have been) a situation of strife and general, heightened insecurity. Wild and ferocious though he is, the natural man is not forever 'intent upon attacking and fighting'. Man is corruptible and it is difficult to make anything straight out of the crooked timber of humanity; but Rousseau denied that man is by nature so. The natural man has no permanent relations and no obligations; he is therefore at a pre-morality stage. He is neither virtuous, nor vicious.
"Above all, let us not conclude, with Hobbes, that because man has no idea of goodness, he must be naturally wicked; that he is vicious because he does not know virtue .... "

Hobbes assumes that self-preservation involves gratification of all the multitude of passions known to man. But in this he is mistaken. Because those passions arise and establish their demonic rule in a certain kind of society, and make laws necessary. The savage is ignorant of vices and untroubled by cravings; his needs are few and easy to satisfy. His amour-propre not yet aroused, the State of Nature has none of the glow of impetuosity marking civilization. It is a state in which one's self-preservation is least harmful to others.

4. Denial of the Doctrine of Original Sin:
What Rousseau is doing in his Discourse on inequality is to put in place of the myth of the original sin an alternative account of the Fall of Man. Fall it has certainly been and, if Judith Shklar is right, there is no redemption even. But at the root of it is imagination and vanity of a different kind.

The Hebrew term for imagination is Yetzer. It has an etymological connection with creation and creativity. When Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they can be said to be awakening their imagination. For, imagination is a faculty
of thinking in terms of opposites: good and evil, past and future and finally, God and Man. This last particularly leads to a sense of division and from the harmony of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are 'exiled into history'.

To imagine is to indulge in a play of possibilities. In the Garden of Eden, there is only 'here' and 'now', and the blissfulness of that life is like horizonless space. To be in history, on the other hand, is to be cleft between memories and anticipations. It is sinful to imagine order of things other than what it is because it is sheer presumption to seek to create and thus to imitate the Creator. Sin is rebellion against the majesty of God.

When the Lord God comes to know that Adam and Eve have transgressed He expels them from the Garden because He thinks that by gaining wisdom, they had destroyed their peace and that in pride they may sin yet again.

So insolence and destruction of peace are associated with the Christian notion of the original sin. Rousseau retains the association of vanity and disharmony with historical decay. The amour-propre of the civilized man leads to competition, greed, ambition, and violence. This shatters the peace of the Golden Age and man has to forever carry the cross of disquiet and anxiety resulting out of multiple cravings. Imagination, too, is there in Rousseau's account of the Fall because it is through imagination that vanity works: in comparing, in revengefulness, in aspiring, etc.
But the great difference between this non-theological story and the Biblical story is that the development of man's vanity and his loss of the idyllic rural peace are social occurrences in History. They do not take place in the misty pre-historical realm of the Garden of Eden.

Rousseau said in *Confessions* that the one principle that his work consistently sought to expound was that society was at once the sole cause and the only cure of man's wickedness.49

The feeling evoked by his story of fall of man into civilizational decadence is that of shame and indignation and not guilt. At the end of the first part of the *Discourse on Arts and Sciences*, Rousseau says:

"How humiliating are these reflections to humanity, and how mortified by them our pride should be!"

(Emphasis added)

Rousseau thus transforms a theological problem into a socio-historical problem.

So the decadence of men in modern society is a historical occurrence. But the question remains: how does Rousseau 'solve' this problem? Before turning to Lucio Colletti, I want to briefly consider two interpretations of Rousseau's ideas: one by Maurizio Viroli and the other by Judith Shklar, both briefly mentioned earlier.51
1. First, the idea of order that Viroli finds in Rousseau. Order stands for harmony, for concord and cooperation between different parts of the whole, and hence for absence of internal conflict. Order, for Rousseau, is also 'the correct location of each part of the whole on a scale of values. For example, 'it is contrary to the order of nature that the highest positions in a society should be occupied by those who are morally the worst of men', and order also means moderation, temperance. Rousseau addresses himself to the question: how to create a well-ordered society for individuals who pursue only their own interests?

2. Rousseau, according to Viroli, has two answers. The laws of the republic should be so arranged that 'everyone is perfectly free with regard to everything which is not harmful to others'. The great and the powerful have no use for such laws made sovereign. It is the ordinary people and their interest in their possessions, their domestic lives and their socialising that need to be protected by the laws.

"The end of the good political order is not to destroy passions and private interests, but to moderate and direct them towards those objectives which are not contrary to the public interest."

3. But the well-ordered republic thus achieved is not a
utopia but a temporary victory. There are various ways in which the health of the body politic can be preserved (prevention of excessive inequalities, public reward for virtue, calling frequent assemblies to reaffirm the original contract, etc.), but this way the life of the republic can only be prolonged; its death cannot be forever postponed.  

Judith Shklar

Judith Shklar argues that Rousseau proposes two upptopias. She denies that he was either inconsistent or confused with the two upptopian models he constructs. The Spartan model and the model of rustic peace (the Golden Age) were each other's polar opposites and they were kept apart conceptually by Rousseau. As upptopias, both were equally valid for him.

The Spartan - Roman city was his image of a society in which everybody is perfectly socialized. That means, everybody is a citizen and this role absorbs the entire life of the person. He is a patriot, and by corollary, a xenophobe. He has had military training because martial virtues are conducive to the civic ethos that Rousseau considered to be the essence of this model. The bonds between citizens are of an impersonal nature, arising out of their duties towards each other and the common object of their patriotic sentiments. All other ties are annihilated, the intimacies of family life are crushed. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that they are not allowed to blossom in
the first place: the upbringing and education of the young ones is left to public authorities. Indifference to personal emotions and tragedies as exemplified by the Spartan mother who is thankful for the victory on the battlefield even as her sons are killed, or, by Brutus, who kills his sons to preserve the republic, is the very stuff of citizenship. For all this denaturing and absolute dedication to the republic, the person and property of the individual are inviolable. Property, Rousseau says in his essay on Political Economy, is 'the true foundation of civil society'.

"It is certain that the right of property is the most sacred of all the rights of citizenship, and even more important in some respects than liberty itself...."

The Spartan citizens have interests, both personal and common. As for the former, Rousseau seems to have thought that 'people', the peasants, craftsmen, and merchants have material and social interests which are not expansive, aggressive, and hence unlikely to lead to exploitation of others. The latter, the shared interest, brings us to Rousseau's concept of the General Will as interpreted by Shklar.

Shklar's Rousseau, (like Viroli's Rousseau), does not counterpose justice to interests. Justice is only 'well-understood, expanded, and properly directed self-interest.' Now, the Spartan city has no great
inequalities of wealth and in such a society education in civic-virtue and justice is effective. Because it is indeed in everybody's interest to prevent inequalities. The General Will is a faculty possessed by all the citizens. It is their vigilant guard against privilege, separatism, and vanity. The citizen guards himself as much against his own vanity and the urge to distinguish himself as against similar tendencies in others. The ordinary people favour equality because in a society where there are powerful and rich, it is the people who will be oppressed. The General Will is then their collective will against inequality. It is general because it insists on fairness and impartiality. It expresses itself through rules which are generally, that is, without exception, applicable.

The General Will does not do anything, it does not act:

"The general will is ... a state of mind, not a specific motive for action. The will creates, sets and strengthens character and standards of conduct. Specific courses of action are left to the determination of magistrates ...." 

"Moral self-defense, not action, is the concern of the general will." 

Rousseau's Spartan utopia is a model of preventive politics. Amour-propre, or the 'anxious awareness of oneself as a social object' and the attendant cupidity and vanity, cannot be totally and forever eradicated from the human heart. It can only bechanneled towards collective objects and aims. The military education, games, ceremonies and
assemblies are all preventive measures: these are fortifications - fortifications which will one day crumble - against the elemental forces of amour-propre. That these embankments have to be built again and again shows the fragility of the Spartan model.\(^7\) That the body politic must eventually decay, or so Rousseau believed, shows his pessimism.\(^8\)

Rousseau's other model is that of patriarchal rural life. If the Spartan model is built on destruction of all family life, family life is the very basis of the Golden Age.\(^8\) Here men are happy because they live uncompetitive relations of love. Much of their lives are spent inside their houses, within the cozy, primary families.\(^8\) With little social contact and virtually no dependence, there is as yet no 'anxious awareness of oneself, no vanity, no ruthless annexation of others to the expanding empire of one's ego. In this setup, everyone can be himself. The Spartan city is a model of self-repression;\(^8\) the Golden Age, of self-expression.\(^8\) The former, essentially political; the latter anti-political.\(^8\)

But Rousseau thought that it cannot last for long.

"The Golden Age is dull and men are restless. That is its great defect."\(^8\)

Sooner or later, amour-propre must emerge to disturb the family calm. It is facilitated, as mentioned earlier, by social and technological improvements in the methods of
production and the consequent surplus generation. With inequalities, cupidity gains momentum and the rural bliss is shattered.

Once it is lost, it cannot be retrieved. Rousseau, in the Appendix to the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, said:

"What, then, is to be done? Must we destroy, abolish mine and yours and go back to living in the forests with the bears? This is the sort of conclusion my adversaries would come to and I would sooner forsake it than leave to them the shame of drawing it."

In fact, Shklar claims, none of Rousseau's utopias were meant to be proposals, or schemes, that might be put in action. He was not a reformer and the models he constructed were only supposed to show 'the awful distance between the possible and the probable by showing ... how men could live, even though they always refused to.' The aim was to condemn the present, the actual, comprehensively by bringing to bear upon it a judgment of what might be:

"For the fault is not in God, fate, or nature, but in ourselves - where it will remain. To recognise this, to accept it, to contemplate and to judge: that was the function of the classical utopia. Utopia was neither in space nor in time. It was designed solely to induce moral recognition in the reader."

As a classical utopist, Rousseau suggested two models: the Spartan city and the peaceful rural life. Felicity requires that we choose: we must either be citizens or men. The Spartan citizen is completely devoted to the republic. He
has internalised public ends. Integrated and self assured, he is equipoised. The man in the isolated village also experiences the same equipoise because he is unaware of himself; as a result he does not compare and compete, hanker after things: he is at peace with himself because he is undivided.

The modern man, the man of civil society, (for Rousseau, the man of Ancien Régime), is split. He is half-man, half-citizen. In effect he is neither. His restlessness and the violence in his society emanate from this mixed condition. Rousseau remarks in the Œmile that every attempt to make a mixed creature out of the human individual - half 'natural', half 'social' - will come to grief.

"Forever in contradiction with himself, forever veering between his inclination and his duty, he can never be either man or citizen. He can be no good to himself, or to others. He will be a man of our times: a Frenchman, an Englishman, a Bourgeois. He will be nothing."

Men will always be urged to act in certain ways by their instinct of self-preservation. They will be moved by their interests. But in civil society, one's interests expand far beyond self-preservation, because one is influenced by competition and comparison. And these expanded interests do not coincide with what one's duty demands. The sense of justice now acquired is not strong enough to quell the tumult of greed. we are thus at war with ourselves and must hypocritically disguise our motives.
The two utopias thus pose a choice between coarse, uncultivated rustic life and the uncompromisingly public, one-dimensional, civic life:

"Choose, however, one must, or rather ought, eventhough one never does. To recognize the choice, at the very least, is to escape from the unthinking misery of actuality. Even if nothing is gained thereby in inner peace or social unity, one has been forced into an act of awareness which can never be undone. \[94\]

(Emphasis added.)

Three Rousseauian themes emerge from the interpretations of Shklar and Viroli:-

1) Pursuit of interests and principles of justice are not necessarily antithetical, they can even coincide.

Rousseau, like Machiavelli, saw society divided between the elite and the people (or, the grandi and popolo). The 'people' were the immense majority, those not rich, powerful or talented; the faceless nobodies of this world, on whose behalf he wrote. \[95\] They wanted to be left alone, with their meagre possessions, and enjoy their unmolested domestic lives. They shared an interest, therefore, in preventing arbitrariness through effective legal means. In the Ancien Régime society that Rousseau lived in, the class of artisans, peasants, merchants constituted such 'people'. Wherever there is a majority of 'small' people, on Rousseau's terms, interests and fairness may be said to coincide.
John Rawls's theory of justice frees Rousseau's insights from their Eighteenth century French context. Here interests and fairness coincide in the hypothetical 'original position' because the contracting parties do not know what interests they will have in the future, post-contract society and therefore they devise fair rules governing pursuit of whatever interests anybody may have. This abstraction however does not keep the theory from being relevant only to specific (that is, North-American) societies.

2) The second theme to emerge is the value of citizenship. In Viroli's Rousseau, this value is part of an overall republican perspective. Viroli's Rousseau and Quentin Skinner's Machiavelli both share the conviction that personal freedom and collective freedom are linked by a civic ethos or, to put it differently, individual liberty can be secured only in a self-governing community where everybody performs his civic duties. In Shklar's interpretation the importance of citizenship stems from its efficacy in arresting at least temporarily the inevitable processes of degeneration. Rousseau abhorred change. It was for him 'the proof of the imperfection of human life'. His utopias are images of frozen societies. But the actual man has no resting place. His capacity to choose sets him apart from animals. Having no pre-given nature, he changes and develops infinitely but felicity eludes him all along. His imagination and memory respond to innumerable stimulants.
and wreak havoc on his peace. Utopias, as models of unchanging world, serve only to remind him of a possibility that he will never realize.

In both the interpretations what is underplayed is Rousseau’s apprehension of material-economic change. Property was for him the basis of civil society and he was explicit that iron and corn ruined humanity. Though Judith Shklar admits that the institution of private property is a most destructive one for Rousseau she still interprets his account of human history in terms of man’s existential situation and the psychological drives that that situation triggers off. As a result she recognizes the importance of passivity, stagnation, vegetative life, etc., in Rousseau, but does not see in it his anxiety to arrest economic change.

Rousseau’s preference for simple, self-reliant, rural subsistence economy must be seen as an important complement to his republicanism, placing the latter in a new light. Agriculture had for him moral significance. Work had not only instrumental value but also intrinsic value - it produced physical and mental well-being of the worker.

"To work is therefore an indispensable duty for social man. Rich or poor, powerful or weak, every idle citizen is a rascal."

He advised the Poles to employ the masses in agriculture and ‘the arts necessary for life’. He did acknowledge the
necessity for some industry for the sake of self-sufficiency. But fearing that industry would eventually come to dominate, he suggested that it should be located in the least fertile part so that high transportation costs would keep down the profits for industrial workers, thus ensuring their equality with peasants. He also advised against industry producing for export fearing that this would upset the balance with the rural sector. He considered money as a most evil influence and even toyed with schemes to do away with money altogether.

Whatever the truth about the 'backward' and 'reactionary' character of Rousseau's economics, what is striking about it is his consistent and resolute effort to put politics in command of the economic processes. It may be that the Social Contract precipitated revolution and undermined the Ancien Régime is a myth. But the inspiration the Jacobins claimed to find in Rousseau can be made sense of if we highlight Rousseau's subordination of economics to politics. The Republic of Virtue that the Jacobins sought to establish was based on the perfectibility of man and the role played by the virtuous minority in keeping moral corruption at bay. Ferenc Fehér describes the terror as 'dictatorship over needs'. Here, once again we come across the attempt to arrest material developments through the politics of general will. The title of Fehér's book is appropriately The Frozen Revolution: An Essay on
Jacobinism. We can recognise in this frozen revolution tendencies inherent in Rousseau's republican utopia.

3) The third Rousseauian theme is what Shklar calls the semi-socialized state of the modern man. Rousseau instructs that the ills of the modern society can be traced to his half-natural, half-social state. In fact, to speak of 'half-natural' is somewhat misleading. The natural self-love of man (which is the least harmful to others) has given way to cupidity and vanity. Therefore, it will be more accurate to say that according to Rousseau the modern man is divided between his personal interests and the demands of his public role. In the context of the 18th and 19th century Europe, we can speak of the half-bourgeois, half-citizen here.

So the two points which are important are: (a) subordination of economics to politics, and (b) critique of the modern man as the man split between particular interests and general interests.

These points receive support and amplification in Colletti's interpretative essay, 'Rousseau as Critic of Civil Society'. Colletti discusses works of a large number of Rousseau scholars (as he himself remarks, his essay is partly like a bibliographical survey) and I will state here only the (provisional) conclusions that he reaches there.
1) Rousseau differs profoundly from Christian natural-law tradition on the question of the State of Nature. For that tradition, the State of Nature is a moral state and the Individual, as a member of that order, is a moral person. He is so before and independently of history and society. The social institutions and the historical development do not add anything essentially to his personality. The innate and inalienable rights that he has, derive from his membership of the State of Nature and not from social relationships. What the laws of the civil society do, or, are supposed to do, is protect his rights whose origin is pre-social. Freedom of the individual is freedom from the State, the society, the others. Laws limit his freedom but that is only for the purpose of making it compatible with that of others or, of making it part of a system of maximum possible freedom of everybody. Since a human being is essentially a spiritual entity - this spirituality always relating him to God - social arrangements are a mere means to creating congenial atmosphere for that spirituality. The contract whereby these social instruments come into being is an appendix to the eternally existing order. 

Not so in Rousseau. For him the contract is a momentous happening. The State of Nature is strictly speaking a pre-morality stage where man is neither good nor bad because he has not yet acquired the sense of right and wrong. This he acquires in history. His faculties also develop in and through his social interaction. As Rousseau remarks in The
Social Contract, the stupid and unimaginative animal of the State of Nature becomes an intelligent being and a man. Therefore freedom, for Rousseau, can be realized only in the society. Unlike in the liberal, Natural-Law tradition, it is not 'an enclave for individual autonomy'.

2) As a corollary to this view of society and history, politics comes to have supreme importance. The Christian doctrine of the Fall of Man, and its distinction between the inner life and the outer world, virtuous man and good citizen, were at the basis of the Natural Law school. Rousseau denied the idea of the original sin, he denied innate wickedness in man, though he was far from sanguine about human nature. With this denial he subverted the Natural Law school. Evil is inequality, injustice. But inequality arises in the course of history. It is a certain kind of society and certain forms of government that ought to be held responsible for this evil. Rousseau summons a new subject of imputability, as Cassirer says. And that subject is the modern society.

It is easy and tempting to extend this argument and say that salvation comes through transformative politics.

"The ethical task of the triumph of good over evil is therefore necessarily identified with the political task of the transformation of society."

Politics is primary; it grounds morality by bringing about a social order in which the civil institutions facilitate
justice and inhibit inequality. In so extending the argument, Colletti and Cassirer may be stretching it too far. Rousseau certainly recognized the redemptive potential of politics but there are two things which cannot be ignored here. Firstly, politics is supreme, but it is supreme in his Spartan utopia. To have placed the transformative activity in the region of utopia signified Rousseau’s deep skepticism about it in the real world. After all what guarantees that it will not be yet another ploy of the elite to legitimise the existing oppressive order? Secondly, it is also important to see that we donot attribute to Rousseau our sense of ‘politics’. What we come across in The Social Contract is civil religion, the Great Legislator, frequent ceremonies and affirmative assemblies - all that has now, in our century, come to be associated with the death of politics.

However, Colletti’s argument of the inseparability of politics and morality in Rousseau seems plausible.

3) Colletti sees Rousseau as a remarkably prescient critic of ‘Civil Society’ in the sense of bourgeois social order. To be sure his economics was backward and his view of economic developments undynamic,120 his inspiration and even solutions came from the ancient world.121 And he also conceives of them in a purely moral sense.122 But there is no doubt, Colletti thinks, that he anticipated and criticised Civil Society. On this he decisively parted
company with the *philosophes* with whom he condemned the Ancien Régime.\textsuperscript{123}

Rousseau was familiar with the *laissé-faire* doctrine from physiocratic sources and this doctrine was not substantially different from the ideas that Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant were to develop later.\textsuperscript{124} Smith thought that Civil Society was congenial to human nature because men are self-interested and they pursue their interests in a rational way. Here is a society in which the moving force is interest and though there is a clash of interests, through this competition, providentially, common interests are served. Similar role was accorded to competition by Kant. Given man's unsocial sociability no other society could have been possible nor, for that matter, desirable. It is through antagonism and discord that the powers of men are developed and progress made.\textsuperscript{125}

Evidently, Rousseau's views on man's cupidity and vanity are diametrically opposite. Of course *amour-propre* is the engine of historical development, but that development is seen by Rousseau as man's hurtling towards total degeneration. Unwilling to be taken in by the idea of sociability of mutual dependence born out of personal interest, Rousseau says:

"... it is an astonishing thing to have made it impossible for men to live together without being constantly on their guard, usurping each other's places, deceiving, betraying and destroying each other!"\textsuperscript{126}
The relationships of Civil Society are relationships of mutual use and exploitation. Men treat each other as tools at best, and rivals at most times. Property, the right to which is for Locke the foundation of the freedom of the individual, is the source of countless ‘crimes, wars, murders, horrors, and misfortunes’ in human history.\(^{127}\)

4) It follows then that Civil Society is not a ‘true’ society, nor can it ever be. What is lacking here is solidarity based on shared interests. Individuals isolated from one another by ungeneralisable interests cannot think and act in communitarian manner. Rousseau conceived the proper relationship between the individual and the social whole on organic model.

“Good social institutions are those which best strip man of his nature, taking away his absolute existence to give him a relative one, and transferring his self into a common unity; so that each individual no longer believes himself to be one, but a part of the unit and is no longer aware except in the whole.”\(^{128}\)

Civil Society cannot fully socialise the individual, it cannot give him a new self. It is an abstract society, society only in name, so called because of the mutual dependence of all, but without any common interests.\(^{129}\)

Unintegrated, self-centred individuals bound to each other out of their respective, private interests are both bourgeois and citizens. As members of the abstract society in its political expression, they are citizens; as part of
the Civil Society, they are bourgeois. But they are not citizens in the republican sense. They are not men either because they cannot pursue their interests in an anxiety-free, un-self-aware, manner. Neither citizens nor men, they are divided, restless, half-socialized creatures.

Christianity, with its idea of abstract community of all believers, is not just guilty of anti-republican cosmopolitanism. It duplicates the split between antagonistic particular interests and insubstantial community transcending them.

This dualism is the consequence of the confluence of the Natural Law stream and the Classical Political Economy steam. Hegel and Marx strive to overcome it by developing their respective criticisms of the Political Economy view of politics-economics relationship.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


5. Merquior, n.2, p.35.


7. Merquior, n.2, p.36.


11. Merquior, n.2, pp.54-6.


15. Golden Age, according to Shklar, in one of the two utopias in Rousseau, Spartan Society being the other. See Shklar n.12, ch.1, pp.1-32.

16. ‘Let us put facts aside’, Rousseau says and explicitly states that his account of history is but a hypothesis. This inspite of the use he made of some of the ‘facts’, of earlier and primitive societies as revealed by travellers’ accounts. See Cole, Brumfitt, Hall, n.13.
pp. 50-1, 345-46. Consistent with her interpretation of Rousseau as utopian pessimist, Shklar asserts that he was profoundly indifferent to past and future history and that he did not believe that either the Golden Age or the Spartan society ever existed historically. All he had were glimpses of both and that was sufficient to construct models showing up to the civilized man the choices he may never make. See Shklar, n. 12, pp. 6-7.

17. Cole, Brumfitt, Hall, n. 13, p. 64.
25. Cole, Brumfitt, Hall, n. 13, pp. 8, 9, 10.
28. Cole, Brumfitt, Hall, n. 13, p. 73.
29. Cole, Brumfitt, Hall, n. 13, p. 73.
31. Cole, Brumfitt, Hall, n. 13, p. 7. I have slightly modified the original sentence to express Rousseau’s general characterisation of civilisation.
36. Rousseau anticipates here the morally indignant criticism of inequalities and exploitation to be found in much of the late Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries socialism.
37. In heaping scorn over (bourgeois) cosmopolitanism, Rousseau takes a position diametrically opposed to that of Hegel.
45. Ibid., p.40.
46. Ibid., p.42.
47. Ibid., p.44.
51. See Viroli, n.3; see Shklar, n.12.
53. Ibid., p.160.
54. Ibid., p.162.
55. Ibid., p.168.
57. Ibid., pp.175, 177.
58. Ibid., p.170.
59. Ibid., p.175.
60. Shklar, n.12, p.3.
63. Shklar, n.12, p.193.
64. Shklar, n.12, p.21.
65. Shklar, n.12, p.22.
66. Shklar, n.12, p.21.
67. Shklar, n. 12, pp. 16-17.
69. Shklar, n. 12, p. 169.
70. Shklar, n. 12, p. 175.
71. Shklar, n. 12, pp. 186-88.
73. Shklar, n. 12, p. 185.
75. Shklar, n. 12, 188.
76. Shklar, n. 12, 190.
77. Shklar, n. 12, p. ix.
78. Shklar, n. 12, p. 16.
80. Shklar, n. 12, p. 209.
81. Shklar, n. 12, p. 21.
82. Shklar, n. 12, p. 23.
84. Shklar, n. 12, pp. 25, 26.
85. Shklar, n. 12, p. 27.
86. Shklar, n. 12, p. 29.
88. Shklar, n. 12, p. 2.
89. Shklar, n. 12, p. 2.
90. Shklar, n. 12, p. 5.
91. Shklar, n. 12, p. 16.
93. Shklar, n. 12, pp. 50, 62, 188.
94. Shklar, n. 12, p. 32.
95. Shklar, n. 12, pp. 108, 188.
97. This is so because the lexical ordering of the two principles of justice, where basic liberties have an absolute priority over the principle of distribution, can be justified as rational only for a people who have reached a certain level of affluence.

99. Ibid., pp.194-95.

100. Shklar, n.12, p.28.


102. Shklar, n.12, pp.ix-x.


105. Ibid., p.31.

106. Ibid., p.31.


108. This is Colletti’s observation. See Colletti, n.1, p.157.


111. Ibid., p.85.

112. For the clarification of the various senses of ‘Bourgeois’ see n.46 in the next chapter.


114. Colletti, n.1, pp.149-150.


123. Colletti, n.1, p.171.


130. Colletti, n.1, pp.177, 180.