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MIGHT THE NOBLE SAVAGE HAVE JOINED  
THE EARLIEST CULTS OF ROUSSEAU?

At least one of the master-thinkers of the Renaissance, Montaigne<sup>1</sup>, and several of the European Enlightenment, such as Diderot<sup>2</sup>, share a strange and inspired image: *l'état sauvage, la vie primitive, les Sauvages*, or what (for the first time in English) John Dryden in 1670 calls the *noble savage*<sup>3</sup>. Rousseau expects it to provide insight into human nature. He deploys it as a key to unlock the question he poses at the very beginning of his *Discours sur l'inégalité*: « comment l'homme viendra-t-il à bout de se voir tel que l'a formé la Nature, à travers tous les changemens que la succession des tems et des choses a dû produire dans sa constitution originelle, et de démêler ce qu'il tient de son propre fond d'avec ce que les circonstances et ses progrès ont ajoûte ou changé à son Etat primitive? »<sup>4</sup>

Some artifacts of the human imagination sometimes can affect what humans believe and how they behave. Legal, economic, medical, and educational institutions are such artifacts. As products of human agency, they in turn affect agents, for example by legally proscribing certain behaviors or by defining what constitutes health and illness. So if the idea of l'homme Sauvage does not, in fact, tell us much about human nature, it still might affect human belief and behavior. To the eighteenth century it might have offered some perspective on how the West of that era might best regard the indigenous peoples in the various colonial empires.

Rousseau is unlikely to have thought of les Sauvages this way. In some passages, in distinct contradiction to others, he treats the idea not as

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Des cannibales*, in *Les Essais*, Paris, Abel l'Angelier, 1588.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Diderot, *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, in Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, t. XII, Paris, Hermann, 1989 [1772], pp. 577-647.

<sup>3</sup> John Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards: In Two Parts, Acted at the Theater-Royall*, London, Henry Herringman, 1672.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi des hommes*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, t. III, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1964 [1754], pp. 109-223, here 122.

construction but as empirical descriptor. Consider the remark that « tant que nous ne connoîtrons point l'homme naturel, c'est en vain que nous voudrions déterminer la Loi qu'il a reçue ou celle qui convient le mieux à sa constitution »<sup>5</sup>. Wherever he offers an artifact as < natural >, he can then turn around and decry < the artificial > as obscuring or even altering < the natural >. His most significant misrepresentation of an artifact of the human mind as something < natural > is what he calls, in line with ancient tradition, the < nature of man, > by which he intends the humanity each of us is born with as something given not created. The very idea of l'homme Sauvage carries this contradiction within itself.

A contradictory idea is not necessarily a useless one, and l'homme Sauvage aspires to utility as a moral universalism. Not only does it claim universal validity, valid for all human beings; it seeks as well to unmask the moral weakness of modern social structures by measuring them against a standard of < nature > in the form of < natural man. > Even as its proponents implausibly deny its social constructedness, the idea of l'homme Sauvage still might redeem its Enlightenment promise to benefit any political community able to read it as a call for egalitarianism. I intend *egalitarianism* in a large sense, such as universally legitimate social, political, and legal rights of man. *La vie primitive* might be read to mean that humans are morally equal and therefore equally deserving of the kinds of protections associated with human rights. Or one could argue, as I will, that Rousseau's idea of l'homme Sauvage has cosmopolitan potential yet contains distinctly anticosmopolitan elements. This moral ambivalence characterizes the other great Enlightenment thinkers as well. In the name of natural equality and the inalienable rights of all persons, many of the period's authors reject feudal hierarchies that distribute social standing on the basis of birth. But many of them promptly legitimize observable inequalities among human populations, predictably to the disadvantage of the non-white populations of Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

Voltaire for example promotes a certain égalité: all men are equal who by their nature possess the relevant skills. Yet he then construes phenotypical differences (the visible characteristics of an organism that follow from the combined effects of genes and environment) between dark- and light-skinned humans toward assigning each race a different relative < value > in a hierarchy of mankind. His vision of blacks (« on peut dire que si leur intelligence n'est pas d'une autre espèce que notre entendement, elle est fort inférieure »)<sup>6</sup> extends to Jews as well (who are not indigènes but a people

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Voltaire [François-Marie Arouet], *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, t. XII, Paris, Alexandre Houssiaux, 1878 [1756], p. 357.

often enough lumped in with other disfavored groups): « On les regardait du même oeil que nous voyons les Nègres, comme une espèce d'hommes inférieure »<sup>7</sup>. Where he speaks of the biological generation of humans as the generation of beings endowed with freedom, Kant implies from an ethical viewpoint that all persons are free by virtue of their humanity alone: « Da das Erzeugte eine Person ist und es unmöglich ist, sich von der Erzeugung eines mit Freiheit begabten Wesens durch eine physische Operation einen Begriff zu machen, so ist es eine in praktischer Hinsicht ganz richtige und auch notwendige Idee, den Akt der Zeugung als einen solchen anzusehen, wodurch wir eine Person in die Welt gesetzt haben »<sup>8</sup>. But from an anthropological standpoint Kant declares various human groups (including those defined in terms of race or ethnicity) to be *unequal*: « Die Menschheit ist in ihrer größten Vollkommenheit in der Race der Weißen. Die gelben Indianer haben schon ein geringeres Talent. Die Neger sind weit tiefer, und am tiefsten steht ein Theil der amerikanischen Völkerschaften »<sup>9</sup>. This anthropological standpoint refers to the individual's morphological features of appearance, from which Kant derives such racist conclusions. Diderot, in his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, clearly champions diversity among human beings and among cultures yet also deploys his version of the idea of a *great chain of being*<sup>10</sup> to elucidate and legitimize social inequalities among different human communities as differences in motivation, productivity, and social utility<sup>11</sup>. According to his *Encyclopédie* article titled *animal*, « l'état de cette faculté de penser, d'agir, de sentir, réside dans quelques hommes dans un degré éminent, dans un degré moins éminent en d'autres hommes, va en s'affaiblissant à mesure qu'on suit la chaîne des êtres en descendant, & s'éteint apparemment dans quelque point de la chaîne très éloigné »<sup>12</sup>. His article on *humaine espèce* concludes that « Il n'y a donc eu originairement qu'une seule race d'hommes » even as it distinguishes various

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<sup>7</sup> Voltaire [François-Marie Arouet], *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, t. XI, Paris, Garnier Frères, Librairies-Editeur, 1878 [1756], p. 223.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, in *Kants Werke*, Akademie Textausgabe, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1968 [1797], pp. 280-281, hier § 28, Das Elternrecht.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Physische Geographie*, in *Kants Gesammelten Schriften*, Akademieausgabe, Bd. IX, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1923 [1804], pp. 151-436, here p. 316.

<sup>10</sup> Scala naturae, échelle des êtres, Seinskette: a metaphysical conception of the universe, found in both Plato and Aristotle and revived by Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, among others.

<sup>11</sup> D. Diderot, *Voyage de Bougainville*, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Denis Diderot, *Animal*, in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers par une société de gens de lettres*, t. I, Lettre A, eds. Denis Diderot/Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert, Paris, Hermann, 1976 [1751], pp. 635-648, here p. 642.

non-European peoples as « une race d'hommes dégénérée », « grossiers, superstitieux & stupides », with « les traits de la race primitive ». Further, « Ils n'ont ni mœurs ni religion » and « en général les nègres aient peu d'esprit »<sup>13</sup>.

Likely no community ever learned much from the idea of l'homme Sauvage, even if the larger idea of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism seems to have become part of the necessary furniture of our times. For example, although the United Nations' 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is nowhere on Earth contested, and in many places even celebrated, it remains largely without consequence in many if not most parts of the seven continents. To work my way toward a reading of Rousseau's l'homme Sauvage from which political communities today might learn egalitarian cosmopolitanism, hence a reading that frees itself of the shadows cast by Rousseau's treatment, I compare les Sauvages as Rousseau constructs them with les Sauvages as one might infer their moral character from the two earliest cults of Rousseau.

### **Les Sauvages as Rousseau constructs them**

*The good*, for Rousseau, is natural – or rather, he constructs the social category of *the good* as something natural. So in his version of noble savagery, nature should limit, shape, and inform culture. Nature is that which properly defines good and evil in human behavior. This concept of nature delivers into his hands the normative foundation for a critique of modern European society: where nature increasingly yields to culture, the consequences for political community, and those who inhabit it, can only be disastrous.

In fact, Rousseau constructs his normative standard not as pure nature but as a stage more < civilized > than nature yet more < natural > that civilization, « un juste milieu entre l'indolence de l'état primitif et la pétulante activité de nôtre amour propre, dut être l'époque la plus heureuse, et la plus durable » and « le meilleur à l'homme »<sup>14</sup>. Rousseau imagines a sedentary life with simple forms of private property (no large farms, for example) and political community united not by formal rules but by the members' moral character: « unie de mœurs et de caractères, non par des Réglements et des Loix, mais par le même genre de vie et d'alimens, et par l'influence commune du Climat

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<sup>13</sup> Denis Diderot, *Humaine espèce*, in: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers par une société de gens de lettres*, t. XVIII, H-IT, eds. Denis Diderot/Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert, Stuttgart, Frommann, 1966 [1755], pp. 344-348, here pp. 348, 344, 345, 345, 347.

<sup>14</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

»<sup>15</sup>. This amalgam of nature and culture is superior to pre-civilizational nature and high civilization alike:

Quoiqu'il se prive dans cet état de plusieurs avantages qu'il tient de la nature, il en regagne de si grands, ses facultés s'exercent et se développent, ses idées s'étendent, ses sentimens s'ennoblissent, son ame toute entiere s'éleve à tel point, que si les abus de cette nouvelle condition ne le dégradent souvent au dessous de celle dont il est sorti, il devoit bénir sans cesse l'instant heureux qui l'en arracha pour jamais, et qui, d'un animal stupide et borné, fit un être intelligent et un home.<sup>16</sup>

Is the amalgam of nature and culture really that superior? As so often, Rousseau makes a vigorous case for each of two irreconcilable positions. Precisely the distinctly human capacity for perfectibilité allows human communities to transform natural differences among its members into artificial moral distinctions and social inequalities. Here we have civilization as slavish interdependence: « cette faculté distinctive, et presque illimitée, est la source de tous les malheurs de l'homme; [...] c'est elle qui le tire, à force de tems, de cette condition originaire, dans laquelle il couleroit des jours tranquilles, et innocens; [...] c'est elle, qui faisant éclore avec les siècles ses lumières et ses erreurs, ses vices et ses vertus, le rend à la longue le tiran de lui-même, et de la Nature »<sup>17</sup>. The capacity that distinguishes humankind from all other animals, perfectibilité, in raising man above the animals, in fact only prepares man to « retombe ainsi plus bas que la Bête même »<sup>18</sup>. If the human being does not make use of his unique capacity, he will never come forth as a human being in any cultural sense but remains, happily, a human being in a sense only biological: « l'homme Sauvage, privé de toute sorte de lumières, n'éprouve que les Passions [...]; Ses desirs ne passent pas

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<sup>15</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>16</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

<sup>17</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>18</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 142. Rousseau transposes the *Genesis* trope: « Because thou [...] hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return » (*Genesis* 3:17-19, Authorized Version King James, London, Robert Barker, 1611). In Rousseau it assumes « l'allure d'une chute accélérée dans la corruption ... Rousseau transporte le mythe religieux dans l'histoire elle-même » Jean Starobinski, *Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1971, p. 24.

ses besoins Physiques »<sup>19</sup>. As absurd as this argument is (the happiness of biological man is through and through a cultural construct), it would seem to entail a heightened appreciation of Rousseau's fellow Europeans towards the indigenous peoples they encountered in the New World and elsewhere.

By elevating the value of nature vis-à-vis the value of modern European civilization, Rousseau would seem to elevate les Sauvages vis-à-vis Europeans, not to denigrate them as inferior. He explicitly defends les Sauvages – the empirical, not the hypothetical<sup>20</sup>, ones – against some of the derogatory European accounts of them: « il est d'autant plus ridicule de représenter les Sauvages comme s'entrégorgeant sans cesse pour assouvir leur brutalité »<sup>21</sup>.

And he criticizes European colonialism, at least as territorial theft:

Suffira-t-il de mettre le pied sur un terrain commun pour s'en prétendre aussi-tôt le maître ? Suffira-t-il d'avoir la force d'en écarter un moment les autres hommes pour leur ôter le droit d'y jamais revenir? Comment un homme ou un peuple peut-il s'emparer d'un territoire immense et en priver tout le genre humain autrement que par une usurpation punissable, puisqu'elle ôte au reste des hommes le séjour et les alimens que la nature leur donne en commun ? Quand Nuñez Balbao prenoit sur le rivage possession de la mer du sud et de toute l'Amérique méridionale au nom de la couronne de Castille, étoit-ce assez pour en déposséder tous les habitans et en exclurre tous les Princes du monde ?<sup>22</sup>

Rousseau rejects « un principe assés plaisant c'est que tout terrain qui n'est habité par les Sauvages doit être censé vacquant et qu'on peut légitimement

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<sup>19</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau describes his claims as hypotheses: « Il ne faut pas prendre les Recherches, dans lesquelles on peut entrer sur ce Sujet, pour des verities historiques, mais seulement pour des raisonnements hypothétiques et conditionnels; plus proper à éclaircir la Nature des choses au'à montrer la véritable origine » (J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133). Yet he repeatedly supports his claims by reference to travelogues of various European contemporaries reporting on Amerindians, the Caribs of Venezuela, the Hottentots of southern Africa, and other indigenous peoples: « Tel est l'état animal en général, et c'est aussi, selon le rapport des Voyageurs, celui de la plupart des Peuples Sauvages » (J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 140-141). What Rousseau represents as his speculative anthropology is not, for Rousseau, so speculative after all.

<sup>21</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p.158.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contract social; ou, principes du droit politique*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, t. III, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1964 [1762], pp. 347-470, p. 366.

s'en emparer et en chasser les habitans sans leur faire aucun tort selon le droit naturel »<sup>23</sup>.

And to the challenge, « Si des Barbares ont fait des conquêtes, c'est qu'ils étoient très-injustes » Rousseau replies:

Qu'étions-nous donc [...] quand nous avons fait cette conquête de l'Amérique qu'on admire si fort? Mais le moyen que des gens qui ont du canon, des cartes marines et des boussoles, puissent commettre des injustices! Me dira-t'on que l'événement marque la valeur des Conquérans? Il marque seulement leur ruse et leur habileté; il marque qu'un homme adroit et subtil peut tenir de son industrie les succès qu'un brave homme n'attend que de sa valeur.<sup>24</sup>

But Rousseau elsewhere argues that *the natural* is actually inferior to *the cultural*. The natural is not only a state of innocence; evidently a state of innocence is not necessarily a state of virtue: « les Sauvages ne sont pas méchans précisément, parce qu'ils ne savent pas ce que c'est qu'être bons; car ce n'est ni le développement des lumières, ni le frein de la Loi, mais le calme des passions, et l'ignorance du vice qui les empêche de mal faire »<sup>25</sup>. Rousseau depicts a state of natural innocence as a state of cultural idiocy that renders its inhabitants woefully incompetent and vulnerable:<sup>26</sup>

Son ame, que rien n'agite, se livre au seul sentiment de son existence actuelle, sans aucune idée de l'avenir, quelque prochain qu'il puisse être, et ses projets bornés comme ses vûes, s'étendent à peine jusqu'à la fin de la journée. Tel est encore aujourd'hui le degré de prévoyance du Caraybe : Il vend le matin son lit de Coton, et vient pleurer le soir pour le racheter, faute d'avoir prévu qu'il en auroit besoin pour la nuit prochaine.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social ou essai sur la forme de la république (première version)*, in *ibid.* [unpublished, written 1756], pp. 279-346, here p. 301, note.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dernière réponse de J.-J. Rousseau, de Genève*, in *Œuvres complètes*, t. III, *op.cit.* [written 1751], pp. 71-96, here p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> On the one hand Rousseau seems at least open to the possibility that the l'homme Sauvage is, in fact, childlike : « Il reste à savoir si l'Homme Sauvage est un Enfant robuste »; on the other hand, he constructs the pre-social status as childlike: « Il n'y avoit ni éducation ni progrès, les générations se multiplioient inutilement ; et chacune partant toujours du même point, les Siècles s'écouloient dans toute la grossièreté, des premiers âges, l'espèce étoit déjà vielle, et l'homme restoit toujours enfant » (J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op.cit.*, pp. 153, 160).

<sup>27</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op.cit.*, p. 144.

In this state of cognitive dimness, les Sauvages are physically strong but only in a way that can amuse the European observer, whose cultural strengths (in technology, military, and economy) negate the one quality Rousseau is prepared to leave to the indigenous peoples: « les Hotttentots du Cap de Bonne Espérance découvrent, à la simple veüe des Vaisseaux en haute mer d'aussi loin que les Hollandois avec des Lunettes » and « les Sauvages de l'Amérique sentissent les Espagnols à la piste, comme auroient pu faire les meilleurs Chiens »<sup>28</sup>. In short, they are strong in body but weak in mind (a weakness not congenital, however, but contingent on lack of cultural formation, such as that offered by education).

Rousseau's speculative anthropology does not reduce indigenous populations to their particular physical or biological features, such as skin pigmentation, but to their ignorance relative to the knowledge of the Europeans. His anthropology naturalizes their lack of advanced knowledge and complex social practices; it animalizes their superior physicality. It affirms their species membership but regards as their highest merits qualities that are not their own achievements but merely givens of nature: natural pity and natural instincts not yet corrupted, as distinguished from culturally honed intelligence in the forms of curiosity, creativity, foresight, planning, imagination, and abstract thought.

Even the moral goodness of les Sauvages turns out to be hollow: because they possess no moral code, they are incapable of doing evil; they are beyond good and evil by dint of ignorance. And Rousseau constructs that ignorance in such a way that its replacement with knowledge would still leave les Sauvages inferior to their European conquerors, for that replacement would entail the loss of their physical superiority and moral innocence without raising them socially and politically to the level of the Europeans:<sup>29</sup> « D'où

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<sup>28</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>29</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville posits the exitless entrapment confronting indigenous peoples of North America: « The very qualities that ennobled American Indians prevented them from joining Anglo-American society. Indians, he wrote, could only save themselves through war or civilization; but for war the time was past, and as for civilization, they shared the noble prejudice against regular, settled work as unworthy of a free human being ». Harry Libersohn, « Discovering Indigenous Nobility: Tocqueville, Chamisso, and Romantic Travel Writing », *The American Historical Review*, vol. 99, 1994, pp. 746-766, here p. 763. Unlike Rousseau but like other upper-class European travelers of noble background, Tocqueville takes seriously the suggestion that premodern indigenous non-European communities already possessed some of the cherished values of modern Western society: « Dans la deuxième leçon de son *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe*, Guizot affirmait que la vie sauvage des Indiens américains avait quelque ressemblance avec les mœurs des anciens germains. Il ajoutait que l'idée de l'indépendance individuelle, celle de la liberté personnelle moderne, était apparue en Europe à l'occasion des grandes invasions germaniques ». Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie*



il suit que l'homme Sauvage ne desirant que les choses qu'il connoît et ne connoissant que celles dont la possession est en son pouvoir ou facile à acquérir, rien ne doit être si tranquille que son ame et rien si borné que son esprit »<sup>30</sup>.

Les Sauvages are perpetually inferior to Europeans even as they can serve a European intellectual elite as a foil to perceive the morally debilitating effects of modern Western culture<sup>31</sup>. L'état sauvage does not rise above the level of the domesticated slavery of eighteenth century European empires. That self-incurred slavish condition easily legitimizes the subjection of non-Europeans to Western culture and institutions in the sense that John Stuart Mill articulates: « nations which are still barbarous have not got beyond the period during which it is likely to be for their benefit that they should be conquered and held in subjection by foreigners »<sup>32</sup>.

In this way, Rousseau naturalizes socially constructed inequality. His perspective transforms geopolitical weaknesses and other vulnerabilities of indigenous populations into anthropological constants such that the creators and carriers of culture, by making themselves ever more independent of nature, make themselves superior to the indigenous in all ways save a naïve understanding of morality. And it gives the lie to Rousseau's claim that the problem of Western modernity is the yielding of nature to culture. The great critic of Western culture in fact now appears to celebrate it – and to do so to the disadvantage of non-Western sauvages.

### The earliest two cults of Rousseau

That Rousseau is not the author celebrated in contemporary cults of Rousseau. They likely focus on the more positive aspects of eighteenth century Enlightenment. But consistence with Enlightenment principles of truth-seeking would require any contemporary cult of Rousseau to include a critical evaluation of a tradition that also casts long shadows. As part of the

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*en Amerique*, Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1990 [1835], t. I, p. 254, note, referring to M. (François) Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe: depuis la chute de l'empire romain jusqu'à la révolution française*, Nouv. éd., Paris, Didier, 1846.

<sup>30</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op.cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>31</sup> The état sauvage served several authors as a normative basis for criticizing the ancient régime, for example Guillaume Raynal, whose *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (Genève, Jean Leonard Pellet, 1780) was among the eighteenth century's three bestsellers (together with Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) and Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*).

<sup>32</sup> John Stuart Mill, « A Few Words on Non-Intervention », in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. Robson, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984 [1859], pp. 109-124, here p. 118.

tradition of < noble savagery >, les Sauvages, l'état sauvage, la vie primitive imply, as an antecedent condition, Europe's conquest and subjugation of the African and American continents. It accompanies the onset of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. And it relies on travel reports from various parts of the world that spurred natural science and anthropology to systematize humankind, sometimes to differentiate among various peoples, sometimes in ways to the distinct disbenefit of some indigenous populations (as Rousseau himself observes).

The maîtres-penseurs of the Enlightenment, including Kant, Fichte and Hegel, Voltaire, Diderot and d'Alembert, believe both that all individuals are equal and that certain groups (whether conceived as < races > or < ethnies > or < cultures >) are unequal. Here cosmopolitan thought is laced with antic cosmopolitanism: where it depicts non-indigenous peoples as morally, socially, politically, or otherwise inferior to their European observers. Depictions like these authorize a patronizing stance toward the represented, like the outsider telling locals what their moral worth is because « sie können sich nicht vertreten » (*cannot* in the sense of *incapable of*), such that « sie müssen vertreten werden », incapable as they are of moral autonomy<sup>33</sup>. No wonder, then, that in the mid-nineteenth century John Stuart Mill, whose work contributed much to the political liberalism that defines contemporary Western political thought, was illiberally persuaded that, in the modern world, dominated by the West for the last five centuries, non-Europeans are lost without Europe's imperial, colonial, paternalistic protection.

Unlike, say, Diderot, his friend and collaborator on the *Encyclopédie*<sup>34</sup>, Rousseau never directly addresses the « predicament of New World peoples themselves, especially in light of European imperialism ». Rather his concern is « almost exclusively » with the great civilizational problems facing

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<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Ausgewählte Schriften in zwei Bänden*, vol. 1, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1975 [1852], pp. 226-316, here p. 307.

<sup>34</sup> Approximately 2250 persons contributed to the *Encyclopédie*, published in 28 volumes between 1751 and 1772. It conveys no unified vision, and not only because it is a work of thousands. Still, it marks the loose collaboration of several maîtres-penseurs of the Enlightenment, including Rousseau, who contributed articles on both political theory and music; its editor, Diderot (economics, mechanical arts, philosophy, politics, religion); its co-editor, d'Alembert (mathematics, contemporary affairs, philosophy, religion); Voltaire (history, literature, philosophy); and Montesquieu (taste). Perhaps the influence between Diderot and Rousseau ran in only one direction: « Rousseau exerts an enormous influence over Diderot, who would appropriate much of Rousseau's conjectural history and the incisive social criticism of European society that it made possible, while also rejecting the naturalistic (that is, the noble savage) elements of his philosophical anthropology », according to Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 44-45.

Europeans. To « decry European materialism, corruption, and injustice », he constructs les Sauvages « at the level of an idealized, < natural > standard ». He does not « attack the injustices committed against aboriginal peoples »<sup>35</sup>.

Instead he admires l'homme Sauvage as a being exquisitely sensitive to the suffering of other humans in ways that have atrophied in complex modern societies:

Il n'y a plus que les dangers de la société entière qui troublent le sommeil tranquille du Philosophe, et qui l'arrachent de son lit. On peut impunément égorger son semblable sous sa fenestre; il n'a qu'à mettre ses mains sur ses oreilles et s'argumenter un peu, pour empêcher la Nature qui se revolte en lui, de l'identifier avec celui qu'on assassine. L'homme Sauvage n'a point cet admirable talent; et faute de sagesse et de raison, on le voit toujours se livrer étourdimement au premier sentiment de l'Humanité.<sup>36</sup>

But that same l'homme Sauvage is cognitively incapable of the kind of concern for the welfare of others that European societies make possible, certainly in such distinctively modern forms as the welfare state, medical research, technological innovation, systematic attempts to define and practice legal justice, social wealth and economic growth.

### **Les Sauvages as one might infer their character from two early cults of Rousseau**

If universal moral equality today seeks a venerable eighteenth-century pedigree, few of Rousseau's Enlightenment confrères can provide it – at least not in untroubled form. They purvey cosmopolitanism laced with moral provincialism. I have argued that Rousseau does as well; he is not, after all, unique among the great Enlightenment figures, unique because free of chauvinism toward the indigenous peoples of the world<sup>37</sup>.

But from the standpoint of contemporary advocates of universal human rights – which presupposes a thorough-going egalitarianism – Rousseau's influence might be thought more on point than whether that influence is based on getting Rousseau's text < right >. In any case, achieving an < accurate > reading of his work is, in some passages, quite a challenge. His self-understanding is uncommonly problematic because so often paradoxical

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op.cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>37</sup> The question of Rousseau's possible uniqueness occurred to me as I wrote « Genetic Enhancement: A New Dialectic of Enlightenment? » in Dietmar Wetzels, ed., *Perspektiven der Aufklärung: Zwischen Mythos und Realität*, München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2012, pp. 133-146. The present essay would answer what there remains open.

if not contradictory. Thus he explicitly rejects slavery: « Soit d'un homme à un homme, soit d'un homme à un peuple, ce discours sera toujours également insensé. *Je fais avec toi une convention toute à ta charge et toute à mon profit, que j'observerai tant qu'il me plaira, et que tu observeras tant qu'il me plaira* »<sup>38</sup>. And yet, with considerable sociological naïveté, he tends to think any person enslaved who is not recognized by others as their legal, social, and moral equal. Perhaps for that reason his various discussions of slavery tend to the metaphorical. We humans enslave ourselves to our appetites: « la liberté morale [...] seule rend l'homme vraiment maître de lui; car l'impulsion du seul appetit est esclavage »<sup>39</sup>. We enslave ourselves to those we love: « il s'élève un nouvel ennemi que tu n'as pas encore appris à vaincre et dont je ne puis plus te sauver. Cet ennemi c'est toi-même. [...] en apprenant à desirer tu t'es rendu l'esclave de tes desirs »<sup>40</sup>. And we enslave ourselves to social inequalities:

[L]e Citoyen [...] travaille jusqu'à la mort, il y court même pour se mettre en état de vivre, ou renonce à la vie pour acquérir l'immortalité. Il fait sa cour aux grands qu'il hait et aux riches qu'il méprise; il n'épargne rien pour obtenir l'honneur de les server; il se vante orgueilleusement de sa bassesse et de leur protection, et fier de son esclavage, il parle avec dédain de ceux qui n'ont pas l'honneur de le partager.<sup>41</sup>

These passages recognize forms of self-enslavement less as « insensé » and more as descriptive of the many tensions, including tense inequalities, within everyday social life, and the compromises one often makes in coping with such tensions.

Rousseau's historical influence depends on how he is read, not whether any particular reading is hermeneutically accurate. Historical receptions may be relevant to contemporary receptions of Rousseau. After all, cosmopolitans are more likely to embrace Rousseau as standing close to them – to recognize themselves in him, to cultify him today just as earlier generations cultified him – if Rousseau's work offers a reading that can redeem the contemporary conviction that human beings are morally equal as such. Such a reading need not depend on Rousseau's conception of l'homme Sauvage but it must be

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<sup>38</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Du contract social*, *op. cit.*, p.3 58.

<sup>39</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Du contract social*, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile ou de l'éducation*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, t. IV, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1969 [1762], pp. 239-868, here p. 816.

<sup>41</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

able to resonate with a moral egalitarianism that would < amend > for the inequalitarian aspects of Rousseau's conception.

That reading can be found in the two earliest cults of Rousseau (which do not address the Europeans treatment of indigenous peoples but, I would argue, read Rousseau in ways that imply the inhumanity of that treatment). By *cult* I mean a self-invented community of intense feeling that generates emotional energy in individuals, solidarity in the group, and symbols that unite participants<sup>42</sup>. It is one form of what Émile Durkheim calls « conscience collective », that is, intersubjectivity marked by a common focus of attention, with participants entrained in each other's emotions, generating feelings of solidarity that increase as entrainment increases; feelings of membership (and felt boundaries excluding non-members); feelings of righteousness from adhering to the cult; and attachment to cognitive symbols that, in the minds of the participants, represent the group.

If these short-term emotions become long-term, the cult will endure; to endure, the emotions continually need to be re-invoked, through symbols. By focusing on the symbol, participants experience episodic and volatile feelings of community, emotions of varying intensity. Situations of high emotional intensity are ephemeral yet can be prolonged through the circulation of symbols, either accompanying participants from one collective experience to the next (each time fading in between) or as expressions of participants' personal identity. Symbols of the cult may be venerated, even sacralized, whereby the moment-to-moment flow of internal mental life may wax and wane. Cults fluctuate as participants' emotions rise and fall<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> In developing this notion of cult I draw loosely on Randall Collins's discussion of rituals in *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Emotional experience has political potential. Socially constructive emotions (*constructive* in the sense of human-rights friendly) might be fostered by nurturing positive emotions and incentive-based altruism (in distinction, say, from competition and dominance). Nurturant emotions and altruism-relevant emotions could contribute to political solidarity. By *solidarity* I mean an ecumenical effort to generalize, to « see others as the sorts of being who can suffer pain and humiliation in the same ways as < we > do », to « extend our sense of < we > to people whom we have previously thought of as < they > » (Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.192). It addresses the very intersection of belief and emotion by expanding our notion of *we*. Richard Rorty suggests something along these lines where he advocates *sentimental stories* as part of a *sentimental education* that « sufficiently acquaints people of different kinds with one another so that they are less tempted to think of those different from themselves as only quasi-human. The goal of manipulating sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms < our kind of people > and < people like us > » (Richard Rorty, « Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality » in: *On Human Rights. The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, eds. S. Shute and S. Hurley, New York, Basic Books, 1993, pp. 112-134). On this approach, generating a sense of shared solicitude

A cult is sustained over a chain of experiences in which the individual participant is a precipitate of past cult experiences and an ingredient of current ones. The electric feeling of collective effervescence may be built up spontaneously, as in the early days of the French Revolution (before the cult of the Revolution became state-organized), or in the political cult of Rousseau. That feeling can be built up equally by individuals upon reading privately and then communicating that experience with others, as in some literary cults. At their most intense, cults can affect the behavior of their participants and sometimes even change social structure, suddenly and abruptly. Cults may provide a transformative experience for individuals and communities alike. This appears to have been the case with the earliest cults of Rousseau. He functioned as a symbol of his writings, sometimes directly, sometimes distantly.

A literary cult coalesced around him in 1761 or 1762. It centered on the 1761 novel, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*<sup>44</sup>, which is all about sentiment, including passionate love and marital devotion, but also the emotional devastation wrought by the depredations of the privileged classes on their servant girls,

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toward all humans need not always take the route of discursive, rational argumentation – < Why should I be moral? > – but rather an emotion-laden route that relates viscerally to some of the tasks of everyday politics: « Why should I care about a stranger, a person who is no kin to me, a person whose habits I find disgusting? » (*ibid.*, p. 133). The notion of *sentimental education* combines the rational and the emotional toward inculcating a conviction of shared responsibility that might take flight on emotional wings. Rorty's example is the « sort of long, sad, sentimental story which begins < Because this is what it is like to be in her situation – to be far from home, among strangers, > or < Because she might become your daughter-in-law, > or < Because her mother would grieve for her. > Such stories, repeated and varied over the centuries, have induced us, the rich, safe, powerful, people, to tolerate, and even to cherish, powerless people – people whose appearance or habits or beliefs at first seemed an insult to our own moral identity, our sense of the limits of permissible human variation » (*ibid.*, pp. 133-134). Solidarity in this politically ecumenical sense might be encouraged by communicating emotionally compelling accounts of hardship and suffering, and by doing so in ways that allow the addressee to imagine what it would be like to experience what is being described (as in novels like *La Nouvelle Héloïse*). So understood, a human-rights solidarity, generated through socialization in culture and institutions, would combine principled ethics with emotion-bound ethics (or an ethics without principles) as an attachment to the human-rights idea that is both emotional *and* rational. For a theory of emotions and natural altruism in support of human rights, cf. Benjamin Gregg, *Human Rights as Social Construction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, ch. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, t. II, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1961 [1761], pp. 7-793.

among others<sup>45</sup>. It focused as well as on the 1762 treatise on education for life, *Émile* and, to a lesser extent, *Les Confessions* (published 1782-1789) and *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (also published posthumously, in 1782)<sup>46</sup>. Readers unmoved by the healthy portions of Enlightenment rationalism served up by Rousseau's close contemporaries, such as Voltaire, found in these books a rich and affirming exploration of emotional life. They appeal to the reader with respect to romantic love, simplicity (as a lifestyle aesthetic), virtue (as the subject's interiority, transformed), as well as a devout theism.

A political cult began later, in 1789, the year of Revolution. Here the primary texts were the *Contrat social*<sup>47</sup> (republished four times in 1790 and three more in 1791)<sup>48</sup> and the *Discours sur l'inégalité*. These are deeply philosophical disquisitions of speculative intensity. While they have a feel very different from that of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or *Émile*, they also convey a « romantic belief in self-transformation » and an emotionally charged vision of « life style in cultural change »<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Popular enthusiasm quantified: the novel went through forty editions before Rousseau's death in 1778 and another seventy before 1800. Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La nouvelle Héloïse, Nouv. éd. publiée d'après les manuscrits et les éditions originales avec des variantes, une introduction, des notices et des notes par Daniel Mornet*, Paris, Hachette, 1925, t. 1, pp. 178-209, 232.

<sup>46</sup> The cult-ripe qualities of the *Reveries* follow from Rousseau's reasoned attack on reason, a strike of an almost mystical quality, *mystical* in the sense of a desire to escape thisworldly moral failure for the supernatural or otherworldly sphere of religious faith that promise moral perfection, an approach he takes in other of his writings as well: « C'est la Philosophie qui l'isole; c'est par elle qu'il dit en secret, à l'aspect d'un homme souffrant, peris si tu veux, je suis en sureté » (J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité, op. cit.*, p. 156), and thus « le plus digne usage de ma raison est de s'anéantir devant [Dieu] » (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre a Christophe de Beaumont*, in *Œuvres complètes*, t. IV, *op. cit.* [1762], pp. 925-1007, here p. 959). « This helps us make sense of Rousseau's claim in the *First Discourse* that, all things considered, the savage was better off than we are. For [...] abstract reason has done humanity more harm than good » whereas rêverie, as the annihilation of one's reason, opens up the « clearest, most direct pathway to the heart and its *sentiment intérieur* » (Jason Neidleman, « Rousseau's Rediscovered Communion des Coeurs: Cosmopolitanism in the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* », *Political Studies*, vol. 60, 2012, pp. 76-94, here p. 85).

<sup>47</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Du contract social; op. cit.*, not reprinted between 1775 and 1788. Cf. Théophile Dufour, *Recherches bibliographiques sur les Œuvres imprimées de J.-J. Rousseau, suivies de l'inventaire des papiers de Rousseau conservés à la bibliothèque de Neuchâtel*, Paris, L. Giraud-Badin, 1925, t. I, pp. 117-147.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 117-147.

<sup>49</sup> William Blanchard, « Rousseau and the Modern Radical », *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 10, 1971, pp. 300-308, here pp. 306, 301.

To be sure, the *literary* Rousseau may plausibly be read also as *political*, given the social impact of *Émile* on educational reform, say, or of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* on early human-rights thinking. Like other sentimental works impregnated with Enlightenment humanitarianism – including, in England, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and, a century later and a continent away, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) – Rousseau’s books may have encouraged, among their more elite readers, empathy with servants and slaves. Perhaps they generated a contagion of feeling embodied in secular, emotive appeals to humanity transmitted by cultural means, contributing in the latter half of the 1700s to an explosive spread and wide popularity of sympathy for the downtrodden and socially marginalized (at least in fictional representation)<sup>50</sup>. The genre was explosive in another sense: it tended to dissolve class-based and faith-based identities to allow readers to empathize with victims of other classes and competing faiths.

As an emotional, self-consciously unorthodox vision – both literary and political – of how best to live life, Rousseauian romanticism spans the two cults. Both respond to Rousseau as someone who, with uncanny accuracy, grasped the *Zeitgeist*, first in the agitated last years of the Ancien Régime and then in the heady, early years of the Revolution. In each case Rousseau managed to express that *Zeitgeist* with as much linguistic flair as conceptual élan.

As a spirit of life, or as an ethics for how to live life, or as a public policy for organizing life, le rousseauisme has always had plural meanings. Thus it cannot surprise us that it found expression in both the individualism of the literary cult and equally (if differently) in the communitarianism of the political cult. Whereas the literary cult was personalized (reading in private solitude) and sentimental, the not unromantic political cult was at the same

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<sup>50</sup> Lynn Hunt (*Inventing Human Rights*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2007) speaks to the possibility of emotions transmitted by culture, and by literature in particular. She claims not only that reading-driven social change transformed average European individual sentiment; she thinks it transformed the individual’s very *capacity* for empathy across social boundaries. The novel-reading individual became more inclined to see other human beings – whether male or female, rich or poor, master or servant, citizen or foreigner – as possessing the same moral status as the reader. If other human beings have the same capacity as the reader for pain, suffering, and humiliation, they might well be morally worthy of what the reader takes to be his or her own right to be free from physical or psychological maltreatment. A contagion of feeling constitutes a peculiar kind of < we-ness, > perhaps engaging the same primordial sentiments that incline one to favor one’s kin altruistically. Inclinations of this sort are mood states. They are intersubjective, occur in community, and find cultural reinforcement in some traditions and institutions.



time an impersonal mass phenomenon, reading in public and collectively<sup>51</sup>, even if less genuinely felt by more than a few of its participants. The literary cult clearly cultivated sensitive souls; but the political cult, in its own way, was emotional in its own right: while not without cynicism, it sought romantic sociability and perhaps even a kind of public intimacy. The literary cult was one of polite society whereas the political cult involved a harsh, new, revolutionary community. The political cult displaced the literary one but also continued it, if by other means<sup>52</sup>. For the literary cult was moved by psychological interiority; the revolutionary cult, by political opportunism, that is, less through political theory than by the suggestive power of emotional experience. Here that experience took the form of « rage against injustice » together with a « romantic view of man as naturally good »<sup>53</sup>, but also a belief in human perfectibility<sup>54</sup>.

Rousseau's work certainly invites opportunism; as he readily concedes, his oeuvre bears any number of contradictory veins. Competing factions – conservative anti-revolutionaries and radical democrats – could mine, with equal plausibility, different passages of one and the same author in support of their respective position. To adopt Rousseau as a cult-like symbol was to claim his authority to justify the adopting faction's preferred policy. Thus proponents and opponents of the Revolution alike acknowledged the influence of Rousseau – « *l'un des premiers auteurs de la Révolution* »<sup>55</sup> – on the dramatic course of world-shaking events. And « conservatives insisted

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<sup>51</sup> Selected phrases of the *Contrat social* (e.g., « L'homme est né libre ») were borne as slogans in public ceremonies apotheosizing Rousseau. Cf. Hippolyte Buffenoir, « L'Image de J.-J. Rousseau dans les sociétés de la Révolution en Province », *La Révolution française*, vol. 71, 1918, pp. 50-54.

<sup>52</sup> Many of the Jacobin clubs and popular societies between 1789-1791 < repurposed > the literary societies and cabinets de lecture of the Ancien Régime even as textuality after 1789 became anti-bibliographic with the mushrooming of the periodical press and political ephemera. Some members of the literary cult were deeply involved with the French Revolution. Some, including Germaine de Staël, opposed it; others served it, such as Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac, a member of the *Assemblée nationale* (1789-1791); Abbé Brizard, the last surviving member of the *de facto* executive government in France during the Reign of Terror (1793-1794); and Comte de Mirabeau, an intermediary between the monarchy and the revolution. Others found death by revolutionary guillotine, including Marie-Jeanne Roland in 1793, who re-read *La Nouvelle Héloïse* as she awaited her death; Charlotte de Corday, assassin of Jean-Paul Marat, in 1793; Jean-Antoine Roucher in 1794; François-Noël Babeuf in 1797.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Daniel Mornet, *Les origines intellectuelles de la révolution française (1715-1787)*, Paris, Librairie Armand Colin, 1933, pp. 228-30, 476.

<sup>55</sup> Louis Sébastien Mercier, *De J.J. Rousseau, considéré comme l'un des premiers auteurs de la Révolution*, Paris, Buisson, 1791.

that what Rousseau had proclaimed as indisputable political theory was just the opposite of what was being done. In their pamphlets and other writings, they quoted Rousseau against the practicability of attempting to free a people once enslaved and give them a democratic government, and against some of the specific reforms being adopted »<sup>56</sup>. Another striking example: in the Revolution's early years, what had long been considered sacred rights of property came under attack. Evidently « conservative writers derived some consolation from being able to cite » – in Rousseau's *Encyclopédie* article titled « De l'économie politique » – « several passages in which [he] had defended property rights as the most sacred of all »<sup>57</sup>.

To be sure, political opportunism need not defeat humanitarian cosmopolitanism<sup>58</sup>; in some circumstances, opportunism might well advance it. Indeed, if the Revolution generated a political cult of Rousseau as part of a larger cult of the Revolution itself, and if both growth and decline of the one was tied to the growth and decline of the other, through it all the Revolution influenced how Rousseau was read, particularly in its initial, enthusiastic years. Nothing in any of the rationales for the Revolution – and nothing in any of its various aspirations, and naught in the political cult of Rousseau – advocates, countenances, or tolerates the unequal treatment or oppression of the world's indigenous peoples at the hands of the Europeans. The same may be said for the literary cult that generated sympathy for some of the poor, beleaguered, and marginalized members of European community. Neither cult appears to have read Rousseau in ways that could possibly redeem colonial prejudice.

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<sup>56</sup> Gordon McNeil, « The Cult of Rousseau and the French Revolution », *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 6, 1945, pp. 197-212, here p. 202. Such authors include Antoine-François-Claude Ferrand, *Adresse d'un citoyen tre\_s actif [Ferrand], ou Questions [tire\_es du < Contrat social > de Rousseau] pre\_sente\_es aux E\_tats ge\_ne\_raux du mane\_ge, vulgairement appelle\_s Assemble\_e nationale*, S.l., [1789]; Emmanuel Louis Henri Alexandre de Launai Antraigues, *Quelle est la situation de l'Assemble\_e nationale?*, S. l., [1790]; Charles-Franc\_ois Lenormant, *J.J. Rousseau, aristocrate*, Paris, Chez les Marchands de Nouveaute\_s, 1790.

<sup>57</sup> Gordon McNeil, « The Anti-Revolutionary Rousseau », *The American Historical Review*, vol. 4, 1953, pp. 808-823, here p. 817. Cf. Rousseau, « De l'économie politique », in the *Encyclopédie*, in Charles Vaughan, ed., *The Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, vol. I, 1915, here p. 416.

<sup>58</sup> Evidently the counter-revolutionary Rousseauists were more circumspect in their citation-practice than the Jacobins, who paraphrased and tailored to immediate circumstances, yet even then their readings were not necessarily more faithful than those of the Jacobins. Cf. Lionello Strozzi, « Interprétations de Rousseau pendant la Révolution », *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 6, 1968, pp. 187-223.

Regardless of whether either cult offers a persuasive interpretation of Rousseau, what might they tell us about the perspective of some of his readers and followers? The literary cult, in its capacity to inspire empathy for some of society's weaker members, was implicitly human-rights friendly; the French Revolution explicitly so<sup>59</sup>. That stance, in both cults despite their differences from one another, precludes colonial apologetics for domesticated slavery. Whereas the literary cult was intensely personal, the political cult – even though carried by political disciples aplenty – was carried as well by others for whom « the name Rousseau and the *Contrat social* were merely weapons for ideological battles » as « thousands paraded and sang in honor of Rousseau without having more than a vague idea as to just who Rousseau was or why he was being honored »<sup>60</sup>. Surely some readers considered Rousseau's views on indigenous peoples. For example, in the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*<sup>61</sup> – championed in the political cult – they would read that les Sauvages are better, and better off, than modern Europeans along a number of dimensions (moral health, social behavior, individual level of happiness, sense of self) because they follow a way of life more in tune with their sentiments (which Europeans, it was argued, learn to stifle). From this perspective, emotional response is morally and politically preferable than the culturally acquired preference of Europeans – for Enlightenment « reason » – because more than reason, sentiment leads to a moral concern for the welfare of others. This view found support in some of the eighteenth century travelogues that Rousseau read to craft a theory of human nature. He read them in a way later celebrated in both cults: as indices of universal humanity. Both cults picked up on the idea of universal humanity, as a moral and political project, and in this way each venerated *the good*, in the individual and in political community.

In Rousseau's construction, les Sauvages would be cognitively incapable of participating in either of these cults. But from the standpoint of their own interests and self-regard, they would have had good reason to participate. For the cults were guided by a cosmopolitan interest (cosmopolitan in the sense,

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<sup>59</sup> Including, prominently, the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* adopted by the revolutionary *Assemblée nationale constituante* in 1789. Or consider Citizen Villette's envisioning Paris as blazoned throughout with what he regarded as Rousseau's writings championing the rights of man. Letter of Charles Villette of 13 April 1791 in Alphonse Aulard, ed., t. III, *La Société des Jacobins, recueil de documents pour l'histoire du club des Jacobins de Paris*, Paris, Librairie Jouaust, Librairie Nobelet, Maison Quantin, 1889-1897, p. 318.

<sup>60</sup> G. McNeil, « Cult of Rousseau », *art. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>61</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, t. III, *op. cit.* [1759], pp. 1-96.

say, of human rights) that challenges *l'homme Sauvage* in Rousseau's construction. Of course, the cults are not Rousseau himself and he is hardly responsible for their interpretations, good or ill. But to deploy Rousseau in criticizing the domesticated slavery of European colonialism, say, or in rejecting the historical European antipathy toward indigenous peoples, politically compelling readings need not share the author's self-understanding<sup>62</sup>. The early cults did not share it as they opened up perspectives on the author's potential even for contemporary projects of Enlightenment.

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<sup>62</sup> As an example of interpreting texts toward improving morally on the author's self-understanding, consider the United States Constitution. The text adopted in 1787 legalizes slavery in Article 1, where it speaks of « three fifths of all other Persons ». The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) abolishes slavery and Fourteenth Amendment (1868) implies the legal equality of all citizens: « No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws ». These two amendments do not nullify the 1787 text or subsequent amendments in toto. Rather they extirpate one textual element they interpret as morally incompatible with others.



Zwischen Vielfalt  
und Imagination  
Praktiken der Jean-Jacques  
Rousseau-Rezeption

Entre hétérogénéité  
et imagination  
Pratiques de la réception de  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau



Édité par / Edited by  
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Diffusion France: HONORÉ CHAMPION ÉDITEUR, Paris  
2013



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