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Rousseau and Totalitarianism

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## ROUSSEAU AND TOTALITARIANISM

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### I

The search for intellectual forerunners of the totalitarian state has been widespread during recent years. Such impressive names from the past as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Hegel, and Nietzsche have been, with varying success, identified with the intellectual foundations of totalitarianism. It would be superfluous to review here the processes of thought and the criteria by which these and other thinkers have been connected with the contemporary authoritarian ideologies. Suffice it to say that in general it is the absolutist character of the political structure in the total state which is the standard by which thinkers of the past have been selected. The notable animus of each of the above named to popular rule has made certain his selection as a forerunner of the total state.

There is no doubt that in the writings of each of these men there are concepts and affirmations which link him in some manner to the contemporary states of Germany and Russia. Yet in spite of such elements the theories of these men pertain for the most part to a somewhat different order of society than is to be discerned in, say, contemporary Germany. Granted that the political cynicism of Machiavelli, the absolutism of Hobbes and Hegel, and the Nietzschean celebration of force are conspicuous factors in the working of the total state, they are nonetheless not those qualities which compose its essence. Such elements are, in the philosophical sense, accidental. They have, along with anti-Semitism, the secret police, and the denial of

civil rights to minorities, abounded in the history of European states, and it would be strange indeed if they did not enter into the operations of the total state.

What distinguishes totalitarianism from anything in the history of Europe since the late Roman empire is not the presence of factors within the political government so much as the radical relation between state and traditional society. It is recognition of this point which brings Rousseau clearly into view as one of the intellectual sources of totalitarianism. Machiavelli, Hegel, Nietzsche, even Hobbes, in their respective theories, left the structure of non-political society largely intact. The *Leviathan* of Hobbes, while fettering religion, the family, and associations, did not abolish their separate existence. In Hegel the existence of traditional society is held basic to the realization of the ideal state, and Nietzsche's attitude toward the monistic state is one of aversion. It is in Rousseau's absorption of all forms of society into the unitary mould of the state that we may observe the first unmistakable appearance of the totalitarian theory of society. More perhaps than any other theorist, Rousseau, by the sheer brilliance of his style, has popularized that view of state and society which underlies totalitarianism and which has indeed made possible the acceptance of the total state in this century.

## II

It is a mistake, and perhaps a dangerous one, to find the essence of totalitarianism solely in its dictatorial form of government. It is at best a superficial analysis which professes to see in National Socialism only another variant of political autocracy, all of a piece with the divine right absolutisms of the seventeenth century. Such analysis can have unhappy consequences if it alone is to become the basis of our preventive measures at home. We are hardly prepared intellectually if we feel we can take refuge in an educational system which simply warns its students to beware of individual despotism and doctrines of force and absolutism. Totalitarianism, if it arises in America, will not make its ideological appearance so crudely.

The real significance of totalitarianism is not to be inferred from its non-parliamentary form of government. What gives historical uniqueness to the social orders of Germany and Russia is the new relationship between state and society which prevails in those countries. It is not the political absolutism of a single individual or a small clique which is essential; rather it is the far reaching extension of the state structure into the realm of traditional society that provides the clue to the contemporary German and Russian orders. Seventeenth century France was ruled by a despot, by a "dictator" if we will, but the France of that age had few of the marks of totalitarianism. The celebrated assertion of personal authority made by Louis XIV would appear, in retrospect, to be a confession of the weakness of the French state rather than a testimonial of strength. A formidable barrier of medieval social power stood between the ruler and a centralized domination of the population, a barrier which was not removed until the Revolution. Modern authoritarianism really dates from the consequences of the French Revolution just as its ideology originates with Rousseau. It is in light of the decline of social authority and of the social group, with its claims to individual allegiance, that the extraordinary accomplishments of modern collectivism have been made. Between the neo-medievalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with its entrenched network of social authorities, and the contemporary world lies the whole chain of forces, many of them the legacy of the Revolution, which have disintegrated the structures of traditional society and elevated the idea of the unitary state. It has been the sinister genius of totalitarian leaders to recognize these forces and to give them systematic completion. The real significance of modern authoritarianism cannot be abstracted from the tides of events, many of them democratic, which so profoundly uprooted Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Totalitarianism, as Rauschnig has emphasized, is above all an ideology of nihilism, directed not only against the ethics of traditional society but against its structural forms

as well. It represents the final absorption into the administrative framework of the state of all the constraints and powers formerly resident in the groups and associations which compose non-political society. The Christian distinction between society and state, between social power and political sovereignty, is obliterated. The authorities and responsibilities belonging naturally to such groups as family, church, trade union and fellowship are destroyed or, rather, are transmuted into the single power-structure of the state. The effect of totalitarianism, whether in its Bolshevik or Fascist forms is to impose upon the pluralism of traditional society the centralization which is native to the political state. Totalitarianism involves the demolition of the social ties among a people, such as are represented by the family, church, or university, and the replacement of these by the unitary connection of citizen to citizen. It is the reduction of social man into political man, and involves the substitution of the state alone for the myriad relationships which compose traditional society.

The manifest objective of the totalitarian order is the politicization of the social world, the atomization of the social group, and the complete incorporation of the personality into the grey discipline of the garrison state. "What makes fascism an epochal change, a turning point in history, is that for the first time mankind must witness not the domination, but the destruction of society; the pulverization of all groups; the melting together of all the various layers of society into crowds; the transformation of these crowds into one social institution dominated and directed by doctrines intended to guarantee an eternal state in which nothing can change."<sup>1</sup> The totalitarian order is unique in modern history in that it first blurs, then obliterates the distinction between society and state; it is the state of the undifferentiated mass; undifferentiated, that is, in any except the political sense. Social differentia

<sup>1</sup> Emil Lederer, *The State of the Masses* (New York, 1940), p. 77. See also Ernst Frankel, *The Dual State* (Oxford, 1941), for some specific instances of litigation which illustrate the passage of social into political power in Germany.

whether vertical or horizontal have been abolished, and the whole of human population is contained in an organization that begins and ends with the state.

It is this character of totalitarianism, this radically new relation of human association and the state, which makes profitable the study of Rousseau as an intellectual antecedent of totalitarian ideology. So long as our vision of the Bolshevik and National Socialist states is restricted to their absolutist, non-parliamentary forms of government, the significance of Rousseau is obscured. It is in his theory of society, and in his conception of the relationship between society and the state, that we may see the germs of the philosophy underlying the modern mass-state. Granted that Rousseau's ideal was pure democracy in the realm of the political order, the social consequences of his theory of the state are nonetheless as drastic as those of any modern totalitarian philosopher. It was the achievement of Rousseau to popularize the state, to make it the all-in-all, and, in the process, to atomize the traditional forms of society which fall outside the pale of the pure state. Herein lies the essence of Rousseau's relationship to the total state, a relationship which deserves analysis in some detail.

### III

Two entities dominate Rousseau's thought; the individual and the state. In his mind, they are simultaneously sovereign, and, together, the only basis of a just human order. The result is a confluence of a radical individualism on the one hand and an uncompromising authoritarianism on the other. The parallel existence of these strands of thought on Rousseau's works has been the basis of numerous charges of inconsistency, charges, however, which are not true. The ideas of Rousseau, contradictory though they may appear to be at first sight, compose one of the most logically articulate systems of thought in the history of political theory. The authoritarian strain so plain in the *Économie politique* is the perfect complement of the individualism so manifest in the *Discourse on Inequality*. Both strains come together in the *Contrat social* and make

of that work a manifesto which served with equal adequacy the libertarian principles of '89 and the authoritarian principles of '93. The harmony of the two strains of thought becomes apparent when we realize what each is directed against.

The individualism of Rousseau's thought is not the individualism of a William Godwin; it is not the libertarian assertion of absolute rights against the *state*. Rousseau's passionate defense of the individual arises out of his opposition to the forms and observances of *society*. "What excites Rousseau's hatred," Professor Vaughan has commented, "is not the state, but society of any sort, quite apart from the civic ties by which in fact it is held together. His ideal, alike in the *Discourses* and in *Émile*, is no doubt individual freedom: freedom, however, not in sense of immunity from control of the state but in that of withdrawal from the oppressions and corruptions of society."<sup>2</sup> It is this ideal which animates the educational philosophy of *Émile*, the belief in the goodness and perfectibility of the individual when he is protected from the corruption of society. It is, perhaps above all others, the basic theme of the *Confessions*. The splendiddness of isolation from society is a *leit motif* which recurs again and again in the passages of that work.<sup>3</sup> The ideal lies implicit in the *Discourse on Inequality* where each stage of advancement that removes the individual from the isolation which was his existence in the conditions of nature is marked as a point on the way to degeneration. It is not the political state which inspires Rousseau's hostility, but the harshnesses, inequalities, and dissensions of civil society. In a letter to Mirabeau, he writes: "It is of the essence of society to breed a ceaseless war among its members; and the only way to combat this is to find a form of government which shall set the law above them all."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Contrat social*, ed. by Charles E. Vaughan (Manchester, 1918), Preface, p. xiv.

<sup>3</sup> See especially the closing pages of the *Confessions*.

<sup>4</sup> *Correspondance générale de J. J. Rousseau* (Paris, 1932), Vol. 17, p. 156.

The traditional bonds of society, the relationships we generally speak of as social, are the ties which to Rousseau symbolize the chains of existence. It is from these that he desires to emancipate the individual, and to replace their gross inequalities with a condition of equality approximating as nearly as possible the state of nature. "Each citizen would then be completely *independent* of all his fellow men, and absolutely *dependent* upon the state: which operation is always brought by the same means; *for it is only by the force of the state that the liberty of its members can be secured.*"<sup>5</sup> There is no other single statement in all Rousseau's writings which better serves as the theme of his political philosophy than this. In it is incorporated the essential argument of the two *Discourses* and of the *Contrat social*. His ideal is independence for the individual, but independence, it will be observed, not from the state but from fellow members of society.

The function of the state is made apparent by the same statement. Its mission is to effectuate the independence of the individual from society by securing the individual's dependence upon itself. The state is the means by which the individual can be freed of those restrictive tyrannies which compose society. It is the agency of emancipation which permits the individual to develop the latent germs of goodness heretofore frustrated by a hostile society. By entering into the pure state, Rousseau declares, "Man's actions receive a moral character which was wanting to them before," and "from a stupid and limited animal he now for the first time becomes a reasoning being and a man."<sup>6</sup> The state is thus of the essence of man's potential being, and far from being a check upon his development, it is the sole means of that development. Through the power of the state, man is spared the strife and tyranny which arise out of his selfish and destructive passions. But in order to emerge from the dissensions of society, and to

<sup>5</sup> *Contrat social*, Bk. 2, Ch. 12 (italics mine).

<sup>6</sup> *Contrat social*, Bk. 1, Ch. 8. In the *Confessions*, Rousseau tells us he had come to see that political action was the only means of furthering morals.



abide in the spiritual peace of the state, there must be "an absolute surrender of the individual, with all of his rights and all of his powers, to the community as a whole."<sup>7</sup>

Rousseau's emphasis upon the community has been too often interpreted in a sense that is foreign to his own aim. Commentators have occasionally written of his "community" as the revival of a concept which had disappeared with the Middle Ages. The mystic solidarity which Rousseau preaches is not, however, the solidarity of the community existing by custom and unwritten law. The social community, as it existed in the thought of Thomas Aquinas or, later, in the theory of Althusius, is a community of communities, an assemblage of morally integrated minor groups. The solidarity of this community arises out of the moral and social observances of the minor groups. Its unity does not result from being permeated with sovereign law, extending from the top through all individual components of the structure. Rousseau's community, however, is a *political* community, one which is indistinguishable from the state and which shares all the uniformitarian qualities of the state. It is, in his mind, a moral unity, but it is a unity conferred by the sovereign will of the state, and directed by the political government. Thus the familiar organic analogy is used to indicate the unitary structure of his political community.<sup>8</sup> The same centralization of control which exists in the human body must dominate the structure of the community; unity is conferred by the brain which in Rousseau's analogy represents the sovereign power. The General Will is the analogue of the human mind, and as such must remain as unified and undiversified as the mind itself. The *Volonté générale*, as he is careful to indicate, is not synonymous with the *Volonté de tous*, the will of all. It is the will of the political organism, an

<sup>7</sup> *Contrat social*, Bk. 1, Ch. 6. See also Bk. 2, Ch. 4. In light of this and the preceding citations it is difficult to understand the basis of the position taken by many students that Rousseau's teaching does not involve the subservience of the individual to the state.

<sup>8</sup> See the *Économie politique* where the analogy is developed in detail. (Everyman ed., p. 252.)

entity which has a life of its own quite apart from that of the individual members of which it is built.

In its supra-human reality it is always right, and while the *Volonté de tous* may be often misled, the General Will never deviates from the strictest rectitude. The General Will is indivisible, inalienable, and illimitable. It demands the unqualified obedience of every individual in the community, and implies the obligation of each citizen to render to the state all that the state sees fit to demand. This pre-eminence of the state in the life of the individual is not, however, despotism; it is the necessary basis of true individual freedom. "In order that the social contract shall be no empty formula it tacitly implies that obligation which alone can give force to all the others: namely that anyone who refuses obedience to the general will is forced to it by the whole body. *This merely means that he is being compelled to be free.*"<sup>9</sup> In this last phrase is revealed clearly the relationship between individualism and authoritarianism in the thought of Rousseau. The same rationale of values which leads him to restrict morality to life within the state, compels him similarly to regard the state as the sphere of freedom. The individual lives a free life only within his complete surrender to the omnipotent state. The state is the liberator of the individual from the toils of society.

The totalitarian implications of Rousseau's thought do not arise merely out of the severity of his theory of sovereignty. The most common form of criticism—that the theory sets up an illimitable power—is applicable to all monistic theories of sovereignty. In any social theory where the sovereign state exists as a concept there is implicit at least the idea of potentially unrestricted power. What gives uniqueness to Rousseau's doctrine is not so much its severity as its subtle but explicit identification with freedom. What has connoted bondage to the minds

<sup>9</sup> *Contrat social*, Bks. 1, 7 (italics mine). The statement is a measure of the grotesqueness of Rousseau's conception of freedom, and of its appositeness to the collectivist philosophy of "forced freedom." It is by such phraseology that Rousseau more than any other political philosopher has popularized the state idea.

of most men is exalted as freedom by Rousseau. To regard the power structure of the state as a device by which the individual is only being compelled to be free is a process of reasoning that sets Rousseau apart from the tradition of liberalism. The phraseology of liberalism in this case merely intensifies the authoritarianism which underlies it. What Rousseau calls freedom is at bottom no more than the freedom to do that which the state in its omniscience determines. Freedom for Rousseau is the synchronization of all social existence to the will of the state, the replacement of cultural diversity by a mechanical equalitarianism. Other writers have idealized such an order in the interests perhaps of justice or of stability, but Rousseau is the first to invest it with the value of freedom. Therein lies the real distinctiveness of his theory of sovereignty.

It is, however, in the bearing of Rousseau's General Will upon traditional society that the full sweep of its totalitarian significance becomes manifest. It has been made clear that the object of Rousseau's dislike is society, and the special merit of the state lies in its power to emancipate the individual from traditional society. The relationship among individuals which forms the General Will, and which is the true state, is obviously an exceedingly delicate one. It must be unitary and indivisible for its nature fully to unfold. In short, it must be protected from the operations of extraneous channels of constraint. "For the same reason that sovereignty is inalienable, it is indivisible," he writes; "the Will is general or else it is nothing."<sup>10</sup> To achieve a pure sovereignty, one which will be untrammelled by social influences, one which will encompass the whole of man's personality, it is necessary that the traditional social loyalties be abrogated. A unified, *general*, Will is incompatible with the existence of minor associations; hence they must be banished.

When the people, having been adequately informed, hold its liberation, and the citizens have had no communication among them-

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<sup>10</sup> *Contrat social*, Bk. 2, Ch. 2. Rousseau had only contempt for those who thought in terms of divided sovereignty.

selves, the whole number of individual opinions will always result in the General Will, and the decision will always be just. But when factions arise, and partial associations are created at the expense of the great association, the will of each of these associations becomes general so far as its members are concerned, and particular in its relation to the state: it may then be said that it is no longer a number of votes equal to the number of men, but equal only to the number of associations. . . . It is therefore essential, if the General Will is to be able to express itself, that there should be no partial society within the state, and that each citizen should think only his own thoughts.<sup>11</sup>

The proscription of all forms of association except that which is identical with the whole being of the state: such is Rousseau's drastic proposal. This is not to be regarded as one of these hasty, ill-considered remarks for which Rousseau is famous. Nor is it true that his banishment of associations is out of harmony with the rest of his thought. We have seen that Rousseau's animus is against society, against those ties which make individuals dependent upon one another. We have seen, further, that his conception of sovereignty demands the attributes of unity and indivisibility; the General Will is *general* or else it is nothing. Is it not then logical that the right of non-political association should be sharply restricted? In his earlier *Économie politique*, Rousseau, in almost the same words, had presented this analysis of the relation of associations to the state.<sup>12</sup> There is to be no bond of loyalty,

<sup>11</sup> *Contrat social*, Bk. 2, Ch. 3. Rousseau cites, with admiration, the "sublime system" of Lycurgus, and, in a footnote, quotes Machiavelli approvingly on the proscription of associations. That Rousseau tempers the severity of this decree by adding a brief sentence on a "second best" system does not mitigate the effect of his unitary preference.

<sup>12</sup> *Loc. cit.*, pp. 253-4. Alfred Cobban in his *Rousseau and the Modern State* (London, 1934), has attempted to exculpate Rousseau, to some extent, on the ground that others in that age expressed the same sentiments, and that many of the guilds and religious societies deserved banishment. Mr. Cobban might also have mentioned that the development of the whole theory of sovereignty from the fifteenth century was based upon a limitation of the social group. Hobbes' comparison of associations to "worms in the entrails of natural man" illuminates the restrictive effect his *Leviathan* has upon the social group. But Rousseau's theory of sovereignty by its very nature is based upon the complete *dissolution* of the smaller loyalties.

no social affiliation, no interdependence, save that which is symbolized by the General Will. Society is to be an aggregate of atoms held rigidly together by the sovereign will of the state alone.<sup>13</sup>

The practical implication of this doctrine is made strikingly evident by Rousseau's consideration of religion. A socially independent church, like any form of non-political loyalty, would constitute an interference with the functioning of the General Will. It would represent a flaw in that spiritual unity which Rousseau prizes so highly in his political order. Yet it would not do to repress the religious propensities of man, for "as soon as men come to live in civil society they must have a religion to keep them there. No nation has ever endured or ever will endure without religion."<sup>14</sup> But, argues Rousseau, it is not enough that a nation should have a religion. The religion must be identified in the minds of the people with the values of national life, else it will create disunity and violate the General Will. It is not enough that a religion should make good men; it must make good citizens. Religion has a responsibility toward civic or political ends before any others. It must reflect, above all, the essential unity of the state, and find its justification in the measures it takes to promote that unity.<sup>15</sup>

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To exonerate Rousseau on the ground of the occasional wickedness of eighteenth century corporate life misses the larger point that as an abstract theory it is equally efficacious against the good associations and groups. That, in fact, has been its destiny so far as the present age is concerned.

<sup>13</sup> Professor Baldensperger, in a study of Rousseau and romanticism, writes penetratingly of Rousseau's "indifference or hostility to intermediary groups in society." It was Rousseau's desire, the author continues, to "emancipate the self" not from all constraint but "from these protective groups intermediate between the individual and the state." See *Jean Jacques Rousseau* par Fernand Baldensperger, etc., (Paris, 1912), pp. 284 ff.

<sup>14</sup> See the first draft of the *Contrat social* in the *Political Writings of J. J. Rousseau* (ed. by Charles E. Vaughan, Cambridge, 1915), Vol. 1, p. 499.

<sup>15</sup> Rousseau singles out Hobbes for praise as the one who "has dared to propose the reunion of the two heads of the eagle . . . ; it is not so much what is false and terrible in his political theory

In light of these criteria, Christianity must be rejected as the religion of the true state. "For Christianity, as a religion, is entirely spiritual, occupied solely with heavenly things; the country of the Christians is not of this world." There are even greater objections to Christianity. "Christian charity does not readily allow a man to think hardly of his neighbors. . . . Christianity preaches only servitude and dependence. Its spirit is so favourable to tyranny that it always profits by such a régime. True Christians are made to be slaves, and they know this and do not much mind: this short life counts for too little in their eyes." It cannot be overlooked that it is the essential humanity in the Christian faith that Rousseau despises. Its very virtues, he tells us, are its vices, for a society of Christians with all its perfections would be neither the strongest nor the most lasting. The very fact that it was perfect would rob it of its bond of union. The disregard of the Christian mind for secular law, for the values of the nation, would be the undoing of that unity which is indispensable to the true state.<sup>16</sup> The spirit of subserviency which Christianity embodies would prevent any real flowering of the martial spirit. "Set over against Christians those generous peoples who were devoured by ardent love of glory and of their country; imagine your Christian republic face to face with Sparta or Rome; the pious Christians will be beaten, crushed, and destroyed before they know where they are." The ancient Romans were possessed of military valour until Christianity was accepted, "but when the Cross had driven out the eagle, Roman valour wholly disappeared." Christianity, then, because of its pacifism, its depreciation of

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as what is just and true that has drawn down hatred on it." (*Contrat social*, Bk. 4, Ch. 8. As will shortly be made evident the absorption of religion by the state is a more drastic process in Rousseau than Hobbes.

<sup>16</sup> Professor Vaughan has observed that the complaint of Rousseau against Christianity is that it is social to the excess. "It knocks down all the barriers which the state sets up and without which the state must fall in ruins: the bond it weaves is not between citizens but between men." See the "Notes" to the *Contrat social* (Manchester edition), p. 162.

the state, and because of its concentration upon men rather than citizens, must be replaced by another religion, one which will perfectly embody the measure of nationalist ardor necessary to the state.

There must be instituted a purely civil religion, of which the Sovereign should fix the articles of faith. "While it can compel no one to believe them, it can banish from the state whoever does not believe them . . . ; if anyone after publicly recognizing these dogmas behaves as if he does not believe them, let him be punished by death: he has committed the worst of all crimes, that of lying before the law." Other faiths will be permitted to exist along side of the Civil religion providing there is nothing in their articles which is deemed by the Sovereign to be inimical to the development of citizenship. "Tolerance should be given to all religions that tolerate others, so long as their dogmas contain nothing contrary to the duties of citizenship." It will be remembered, however, that the criteria of good citizenship are far reaching. Rousseau's prior criticism of Christianity on the ground of its intrinsic irreconcilability with good citizenship should serve as the grain of salt with which to take the protestations of tolerance. The articles of faith of the Civil religion as fixed by the Sovereign have as their fundamental objective the cementing of the social contract. We have already seen that the most basic values of Christianity at least are not regarded as compatible with the state. One may perhaps speculate on the extent to which tolerance as a practical policy would be deemed commensurate with Civil religion.

It is political religion which Rousseau extolls, one which in essence is indistinguishable from the law of the land. Like his forerunner Hobbes, Rousseau holds sin to be no more than a transgression of civil law, and in that fact lies the inspiring aim of *la religion civile*. Respect for the Sovereign, allegiance to the state alone, and subordination of all interests to the law of the realm: these are the primary attributes of the Civil religion proposed by Rousseau. The symbol of *patrie* is uppermost; religion and

patriotism will be but two aspects of the same thing.<sup>17</sup>

Hardly less than religion, the family itself, as a corporate entity, must be radically adjusted to meet the demands of the General Will. Morality is essentially a civic condition, and without citizens there can be no virtue. "Create citizens, and you have everything you need." To form these citizens is not the work of a day, nor is it a responsibility that can be left idly to the influences of traditional society. The unitary state calls for a remodeling of human nature so that there shall be no irritants to the body politic. According to Rousseau:

He who possesses the courage to give a people institutions, must be ready to change human nature, to transform every individual, who by himself is a complete and separate whole, into a part of a greater whole from which this individual in a certain sense receives his life and character; to change the constitution of man in order to strengthen it, and to substitute for the corporeal and independent existence which we all have received from nature a merely partial and moral existence. In short, he must take from man his native individual powers and equip him with others foreign to his nature, which he cannot understand or use without the assistance of others. The more completely these natural powers are annihilated and destroyed and the greater and more enduring are the ones acquired, the more secure and the more perfect is also the constitution.<sup>18</sup>

It is necessary to inculcate from infancy in the minds of the people the surpassing claim of the state to their loyalty. "If, for example," Rousseau writes, "the people were early accustomed to conceive their individuality only in its connection with the body of the state, and to be aware, of their own existence merely as parts of that of the state, they might in time come to identify themselves in some degree with the greater whole. . . ." <sup>19</sup> The family should not be granted the all important duty of education, for too great a responsibility hangs in the balance. The traditional educative function should be transferred from the

<sup>17</sup> Rousseau's treatment of Civil religion is to be found chiefly in the *Contrat social*, Bk. 4, Ch. 8. See also the relevant passages in the *Economie politique*, *loc. cit.*, pp. 268-9.

<sup>18</sup> *Contrat social*, Bk. 2, Ch. 7. The political psychology of totalitarianism is here revealed in terms whose clarity and forcefulness are not surpassed in any contemporary document.

<sup>19</sup> *Economie politique*, *loc. cit.*, p. 268.



family to the state, so that, as Rousseau states it, the "prejudices" of the father may not interfere with the development of citizens. However, the disintegration of this age-old basis of the family should in no wise create alarm. "Should the public authority, in assuming the place of father and charging itself with this important function, acquire his rights in the discharge of his duties, he should have little cause to protest; for he would only be altering his title, and would have in common, under the name *citizen*, the same authority over his children, that he was exercising separately under the name of *father*, and would be no less obeyed when speaking in the name of the law than when he spoke in that of nature."<sup>20</sup> In this almost incredible statement is to be observed what is surely the ultimate in the totalitarian absorption of society. Family-relationship is transmuted subtly into political relationship; the molecule of the family is broken into the atoms of its individuals, who are coalesced afresh into the single unity of the state.

Just as the religious bond is transformed into a spiritualized patriotism, the family tie is in effect disintegrated, and its members re-united in the tissue of the state. Underlying this proposal to eradicate the social unity of the family is Rousseau's encompassing desire to replace the natural diversity of society with the mechanical equalitarianism of the state. "If the children are reared in common in the bosom of equality, if they are imbued with the laws of the state and the precepts of the General Will, if they are taught to respect these above all other things, if they are surrounded by examples and objects which perpetually remind them of the tender mother who nourishes them, of the love she bears them, of the inestimable benefits they receive from her, and of the return they owe her, we cannot doubt that they will learn to cherish one another mutually as brothers. . . ." <sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269, a true believer in his doctrines, Rousseau delivered his own children to a foundling asylum, and in his *Confessions* tells us that when he did so he felt as if he were behaving as a citizen and

## IV

It is doubtful if the religion of nationalism has ever had more devotion paid to it than by Rousseau. In his mind the state alone is the repository of human fraternity, and the claims of the state must perforce call for the disruption of all competing associative allegiances. The popular sovereignty which is the basis of Rousseau's theory becomes in his hands a far more radical and repressive instrument than was the divine-right theory of Louis XIV. If we compare the monarchical theory of Bodin, or of James I, with Rousseau's *Contrat social*, we see doctrines which, whatever their nominal absolutism, were much less severe than Rousseau's. Bodin left intact the structure of non-political society, and in numerous passages paid his respects to the division between society and state. The theory of divine right, as pressed by the seventeenth century monarchs, never extended to the point of the dissolution of traditional society. The monarchical theory of Louis XIV, with its claim of personal absolutism, did not ever attain the degree of pure state power that is the essence of the *Contrat social*.

Nor did the actual structure of Bourbon France ever achieve, in its absolutist, personal sovereignty, the political unity and essential state-power that were to appear in that France which was the near embodiment of Rousseau's philosophy.<sup>22</sup> The social legislation of the National Assembly and the Convention came very near creating the society which had been the vision of Rousseau. The drastic legislation which atomized corporate religion, which liquidated all guilds and made membership in any economic association a crime, which abolished the autonomy of schools and universities, and which dissolved the economic unity of the family, must be seen in the light of Rousseau's *Social*

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considered himself a member of Plato's republic. In many respects Rousseau's state deserves comparison with Plato's political order, and it is not surprising to learn that Plato was acknowledgedly the strongest influence upon Rousseau.

<sup>22</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset in the *Revolt of the Masses* (New York, 1932), p. 131, has written in this connection that "it would be worthwhile insisting on this point and making clear that the epoch of

*Contract*.<sup>23</sup> The attempt to achieve a democracy that would be no less pure in fact than Rousseau's was in theory led inevitably to the France of 1793 with its rigid centralization and semi-totalitarian absorption of the social structure.

When Robespierre announced to the National Convention that the will of the Jacobins was the General Will, he could have cited Rousseau in support of his implicit position that the actual expression of a majority is not necessarily the *real* will. Who else but Rousseau could have prepared the minds of the Convention to accept credulously Robespierre's ringing declaration that "the government of the Revolution is the despotism of freedom against tyranny." Such a statement is no more than a rephrasing of Rousseau's argument that the omnipotence of the General Will is only a means by which men are "compelled to be free."

Rousseau had written that it is the force of the state which secures the liberty of its members; and *liberté* became a dynamic concept in the Revolution, in the name of which, the force of the state became ever greater. As early as 1791 it was proclaimed, in a law dissolving the guilds, that "there is no longer any corporate body within the state; there is only the particular interest of each individual and the general interest." This was indeed a tribute to Rousseau, a legislative commemoration of his desire to see individuals "absolutely independent of one another and absolutely dependent upon the state." The researches of Aulard have not affected the validity of Taine's basic position on the Revolution. France, at the height of the Revolution, and during the ensuing age of

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absolute monarchies in Europe has coincided with very weak states . . . contrary to common belief the absolute state instinctively respects society much more than our democratic state which is more intelligent but has less sense of historic responsibility." See also the comments of Frederic W. Maitland on the French revolution in his *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, 1911), Vol. 3, p. 309.

<sup>23</sup> "There is scarcely a paragraph in the *Contrat social* which did not, during the course of the Revolution, reappear either in a law, or a public declaration, or a newspaper article, or a speech in the national assembly, or in the very constitution of the Republic itself." George Brandes, *Main Currents of Nineteenth Century Thought* (2nd ed., London, 1923), Vol. 3, p. 18.

Napoleon, himself the outcome of the Revolution, was the harbinger of the contemporary totalitarian state. It represented the same subtle fusion of a glorification of the heroic individual and an exaltation of the total state, in the name of freedom. It was traditional society which suffered then, just as it is traditional society which has felt the brunt of the modern total state. The relation of Rousseau's theory to the contemporary totalitarian order is hardly less direct, in an ideological sense, than to the Jacobin France of 1793.

## V

The effect of Rousseau's philosophy upon the modern world has been to popularize the rôle of the state, not merely in the technical sense of expanding the sovereign base of the state, but in the more fundamental sense of rendering the political order attractive at the expense of traditional society. It is a truism that Rousseau's is the name most familiarly identified with the philosophy of democracy, and the result has been not seldom a collectivist and semi-authoritarian note implicit in that philosophy. There is nothing contradictory between democracy, in the Rousseauian sense, and the omniscient state. Power belongs to the *populus*, to the politically organized community, but the individual by entering therein must surrender all his rights; and Rousseau does not leave even the family intact as a barrier to the state, much less the larger forms of free association. It is the unified state, the absolute state, which Rousseau upholds at the expense of the other forms of human association.

The idea of state-power, as Tocqueville saw so clearly, has grown enormously in its democratic form; and in that fact lies much of the explanation of the contemporary total state. It was the merit of Tocqueville to warn his readers that democracy, as a state-form, lends itself more easily than other political types to a centralization and an omniscience, unless checked constantly by a solid structure of social power, the power, that is, which is distributed plurally in the numerous groups and associations of society.

It was this social power which Rousseau was so desirous of abolishing; in the process of vesting sovereignty in the *populus* he destroyed completely the separate authorities which had been resident in the structures of traditional society. We in America conventionally identify democracy and liberalism; we use the former in a sense that includes the latter. In our minds, democracy is the antithesis of the omniscient state, and is a philosophy of freedom from the state. But the residual notion of mass-sovereignty *need* not include the liberal view of state and society, and it is largely a matter of historical accident that in practice they have been so connected in this country. Liberalism is basically a conception of freedom from the state, freedom for the individual and the group. Democracy, as we have seen, is fundamentally a theory of political power, and it is not intrinsically predicated upon any notion of the immunity of society from the state.

Rousseau is the philosopher of democracy, but never of liberalism. The liberal view of social freedom is as absent from his thought as it is from the reality of the modern totalitarian order. It is this crucial fact which gives continuity to Rousseau and contemporary Germany. We may deny that Germany is democratic even in Rousseau's sense, though it is well to remember that Hitler has never been loath to ascribe sovereignty to the people. Hitler's repudiation of representative government has been volubly on the ground that the real interest of the people in Germany was not being faithfully served, an argument which could find its support in the *Contrat social*. At all times, Hitler has affirmed the basis of his government in the will of the people, a will which manifests itself in the plebiscite. It would not be easy to distinguish between the democracy of Rousseau and what J. P. Mayer has so aptly called "plebiscitary dictatorship." Similarly, if we find something paradoxical in the statement of Communists that under Stalin, the Russians have enjoyed true freedom, let us remember Rousseau's eagerness to compel Frenchmen to be free, and his insistence that freedom must be found in the absolutism of the state. Whether Rousseau would have used the firing

squad and labor camps to enforce freedom is a matter perhaps for conjecture; we do know, however, of his readiness to preserve Civil religion by the death penalty if necessary.

But even if there is an element in the political government of Russia and Germany which Rousseau would find distasteful, the relation which prevails between society and state in these countries is manifestly compatible with his thought. There is the perfect identity of society and state; the complete pulverization of the social group, the reduction of human nature, by education, to political nature, and the substitution of political power for all forms of social constraint. Gierke has referred to Rousseau's theory of sovereignty as a kind of "permanent revolution." The phrase is apt; more so than in the special sense in which Gierke meant it. For the General Will is nothing less than a continual revolution against all facets of human nature which are a reminder of traditional society. Is not this "permanent revolution" basically what inheres in the totalitarian theory of human organization? The all-embracing nature of the state is nothing short of a continuous eradication of those values, sentiments, and associations which have come to be identified with the heritage of Christian society in Europe. The proscription of groups, economic and social, the banishment of the free church, the withdrawal of education from the family and free school, and the replacement of each of these by an appropriate political form, are all marks of the impress which the total state has made. What is sought, avowedly, is that absolute identification of the *socially free* individual and the state which will confer upon man a "higher" moral nature. There is little in all of this which is foreign to the essence of Rousseau's political philosophy. No more passionate eulogy to the state is to be found anywhere than in the pages of the *Contrat social*, and the absolute identification of individual and state is nothing less than the sum of Rousseau's exclamations.

It was Rousseau's subtle achievement to enclothe the being of the absolute state in the garments of the terminology of freedom. By his paeans to the individual he

has been known as the apostle of liberty. By his theory of popular sovereignty he has become classified as one of the minds who have helped free the civilized world from despotism. The state is, in Rousseau's mind, the instrument of liberation, the sphere in whose absoluteness and fullness, the individual may achieve a higher morality and freedom. The individual renounces the social loyalties of traditional society, surrenders to the state the rights of association which are the fundament of religion, family, and community, and by so doing becomes free for the first time. Herein has lain the lure of Rousseau's philosophy, and here, too, is the essence of that confusion of freedom and authority which underlies all totalitarian philosophies.

We may agree with Rousseau that no practical freedom can ever be achieved by individuals in ragged isolation, that some kind of association must be the basis of freedom, but from this position to Rousseau's state-intoxication is a jump which can be made only by repudiating the existence of all forms of association intermediate to the individual and the state. Freedom to Rousseau consists in the individual's acceptance of a status which removes him from traditional society. The will of the individual, he declares, and the will of the state are identical, and if there should be conflict and repression it is only the individual being compelled to be free. Bakunin, with rare insight, referred to Rousseau as "the true creator of modern reaction," but he did not live long enough to learn how prophetic his words were. For it is in the totalitarian order that the implications of Rousseau's philosophy have become manifest. In this towering structure, cast in the mould of the "people's will," whose sole element is political man, and whose "higher freedom" is never trammled by extraneous association, we may observe the practical functioning of the General Will.