

THE GOVERNMENT
OF POLAND

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

*Translated, with an Introduction
and Notes, by*

WILLMOORE KENDALL

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The edition of Rousseau's works used
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DEDICATION

To Leo Strauss, the colleague and teacher
under whom, Willmoore often said, he put
himself to school again to learn what the
ancients and the moderns have to teach us.

NELLIE KENDALL

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Be sure to compare all this
to the B.C.!

INTRODUCTION

How to read Rousseau's

Government of Poland

"Jean-Jacques," writes Rousseau in his *Rousseau Passes Judgment on Jean-Jacques* (the last and most bitter of his writings about himself),

devoted six months . . . first to studying the constitution of an unhappy nation [*i.e.*, Poland], then to propounding his ideas on the improvements that needed to be made in that constitution, all at the urging, reiterated with great stubbornness, of one of the first patriots of the nation in question, who made a humanitarian duty of the tasks he imposed.¹

Rousseau, as he is likely to do when recounting an incident in his own life, is here mixing fact and fancy. First, he probably did undertake this final venture into political theory with some reluctance—in part because he had announced his intention to have done with political problems (his mind, in this the evening of his life, is increasingly filled with thoughts about *religion*), in part because he was determined to have

¹ *Oeuvres complètes de J. J. Rousseau*, (Paris: Chez Furne, 1835), vol. IV, p. 82.

done with writing altogether (after the age of fifty, he seldom took pen in hand except for this or that polemic in defense of his reputation). One should also remember that Rousseau had made clear in *The Social Contract*² his "vocation" for the role of Legislator for any and every "unhappy nation" that might, in its hour of need, wish to avail itself to his wisdom. He had, indeed, already "legislated" for Corsica, in his *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* (1765), and while one can imagine his having wanted some persuading by the Poles as regards his stipend, since he was invariably short of money, and about the delivery date of his manuscript, since he was, and thought of himself as being, undisciplined about his literary work, no one familiar with his life and personality could conceive of his actually saying "No" to an invitation to wrap himself, even momentarily, in the mantle of Solon. His lips may have been saying No, but his heart must have been saying Yes.

Second, while we know very little about Count Wielhorski, who "commissioned" the writing of the *Poland* (we do not, for example, possess the initial correspondence between him and Rousseau), and while we certainly have no reason to question his patriotism, his position as a leading Polish patriot, as we hear of it in Rousseau's version, is unsupported by evidence. All we know is that a Polish Convention sitting at Balia, in 1769, and without clear authority to act for Poland, resolved to request the advice of contemporary French political theorists as to the kind of constitution Poland should give itself if and when it found itself in control of its own destiny, and that Wielhorski was named as the Convention's *agent* for the relevant negotiations; there is no evidence that his role in Polish affairs was, or was likely to become, one of power and influence, certainly no evidence that he was in a position to name a Legislator for Poland.

Third, Rousseau, in point of fact, was only one of three political theorists whom Wielhorski put to work on Poland's constitutional problems, and not even the first of those three.

² Book II, Chapter X.

The Abbé Mably,³ who was the first, completed his work so speedily that Rousseau saw, and took into account, what he had written before submitting his own manuscript. Moreover, Mably's proposals—Mably was not, at that time, inferior to Rousseau in point of reputation—seem to have received a certain amount of attention from participants in the then furious debate in Poland concerning constitutional problems; whereas Rousseau's book, to judge from the evidence readily available, went pretty much unnoticed.

But, fourth, and most importantly in understanding his intentions, Rousseau considerably exaggerates the amount of homework (six months of study) he did before writing his book. As he makes clear on the first page of his manuscript, he pretends to no knowledge of Poland beyond what he has picked up from a manuscript written, and placed in his hands, by Wielhorski himself (presumably the manuscript of the book, *The Ancient Constitution of Poland*, which in due course was published in London and, curiously enough, in French). Besides this information, Rousseau knew only what he might have picked up from the newspapers.

This fact alone should have caused Rousseau's critics to treat *The Government of Poland* with at least a certain minimum of caution, which, however, is nowhere to be found in the relevant literature: Rousseau, as we know him from his other writings, is above all a "demon" for homework—that is, a man who writes always out of an encyclopedic knowledge of the literature bearing upon the topic he has in hand. Only in the *Poland* do we find him insisting, if I may put it so, upon his ignorance; and only in the *Poland*, and in one of his later works, do we find him apologizing for his allegedly failing intellectual powers. One wonders that no critic has asked why,

³ Gabriel Bonnot Mably was commissioned by Wielhorski to submit his suggestions for the reorganization of the Polish Constitution sometime early in 1770. He completed the first installment of his work in August of 1770 and the second in July of 1771. In general Mably called for a much more radical change in Polish political institutions than Rousseau felt to be necessary.

knowing so little about it, he was willing to write on Poland at all. How seriously should we take his statement that he is no longer, intellectually, the man he once had been? Similarly, should we not view with some skepticism his account, both in the passage I have cited and in the finished product itself, of the motivations that led him to write the book we have before us? This is not to say that Rousseau did not work hard on the book, which could not have been easy to write, but simply that the book and Rousseau's homework on the book are different matters, and that it would be difficult to point anywhere in the book to evidence that Rousseau's intelligence had at this time fallen on evil days; the *Poland* is certainly as shrewd and sharp as anything Rousseau has bequeathed to us.

One final point needs to be made before we understand Rousseau's intentions. Charles Hendel, an able Rousseau scholar, writes of the circumstances attending the composition of *The Government of Poland*: "A few years later," says Hendel in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Moralist*,

the cause of liberty again drew him away from his own concerns and memories, when a call came, in 1771, from certain patriots in Poland, to be their legislator. He worked hard at this task and finished his [book] . . . the very next year, only to see it rendered impracticable by . . . the partition of Poland.⁴

We have already indicated some of our doubts concerning this account which Hendel simply accepts from Rousseau. But beyond the points already made above, Hendel's reference to "the cause of liberty" as the motivation that produced the *Poland* wants some thinking about, though not because it is gratuitous: Rousseau does, in the course of his argument, repeatedly refer to Poland's "freedom" as one of his central concerns. But the "freedom" in question is not, as Hendel's

⁴ Charles W. Hendel, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Moralist* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1934), Volume II, p. 314.

"again" would suggest, the *liberté* of Rousseau's earlier political writings, which is the freedom of the *individual* over against his society and his government. The "freedom" of *The Government of Poland* is, quite simply, the freedom of the Polish people from foreign domination, that is, in the jargon of our own contemporary politics, "self-determination"; and even that is put forward not as a "cause," a principle applicable to all peoples everywhere and always; it is, specifically, the *Poles'* freedom, from, specifically, *Russian* domination. Nor is it true, as Hendel apparently would like us to believe, that the First Partition "rendered" Rousseau's proposals about Polish freedom "impracticable," since Rousseau must have known about the Partition before he submitted his manuscript to Wielhorski.⁵ Furthermore, the *Poland* is, from first to last, clearly pessimistic about Poland's prospects for self-determination. Indeed, Rousseau tends to take it for granted that the Poles will, in due course, become Russian subjects. It would, in point of fact, be no exaggeration to say that on the deepest level *the* problem of the book, *as far as Polish affairs are concerned*, reduces itself to this: How can the Poles remain "free" even under a Russian occupation? And Rousseau's solution to that problem—let the Poles build their republic in their own hearts, beyond the reach of foreign swords—is not without interest in connection with Rousseau's motivation (of which I have spoken above, and will have more to say below) in addressing a book to Poland; he is, he says, attracted to the Poles precisely because he sees in them the capacity for being "free" in a very special, if paradoxical, sense of the word "free." To anticipate a little again, it helps explain his glorification, throughout his book, of Moses as the supreme Legislator, or Lawgiver: Moses' act of founding, by contrast with that of lesser Founders, formed a people able to maintain its identity, and thus its "freedom," even when scattered to the four winds and without a "State" or government of its own.

⁵ C. E. Vaughan, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Political Writings* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962), pp. 391-394.

The last of the points I have made in the foregoing analysis cannot be overemphasized: Henedel clearly sees no problem, particularly no problem of "continuity," as regards the relation between *The Government of Poland* and even the more recent of Rousseau's other ventures in political theory. For Henedel, one might say, as also for the remaining handful of critics who have written on the *Poland* (let me note in passing that it is the least written about of Rousseau's political writings), the book is precisely what we might fairly have expected from the author of *The Social Contract*, given the invitation from a people "struggling to throw off its chains." And that, let us notice in fairness to Henedel, is just the impression that Rousseau, on the surface at least, seeks to convey in the book itself, where he misses no opportunity to refer back to the *Contract* for the "principles" whose validity the reader takes for granted as he proceeds with his argument.

I do not, as the reader will have guessed, think for a moment that we can leave it at that; indeed, my first obligation in writing this introduction—for readers who, presumably, approach the *Poland* for the first time, but are more or less familiar with *The Social Contract*—is to alert them to the emphases in the book that, on the face of it, come strangely from the pen that wrote "All men were born free, but are everywhere in chains." Item: We think of the Rousseau of the *Contract* as, above all, a *revolutionary*, prepared, out of hand, to declare all States illegitimate that do not meet the test of his "principles of political right," most especially that test of all tests, which is the supremacy of a "general will" from whose formation no individual is flatly excluded. Thus the first thing we should expect him to say to Poland, which concentrates all political power in the hands of an aristocracy and keeps most of its population in perpetual serfdom, is that it is illegitimate, a tyranny. But *The Government of Poland* does not, even by the remotest implication, strike any such note; far from claiming "freedom" for Poland's serfs, Rousseau counsels *against* their liberation within any foreseeable future, and he makes no mention of the "general will." Item: We think of the Rousseau of

The Social Contract as centrally preoccupied with, *inter alia*, the need for a "civil religion" as a cohesive force in any legitimate society. *The Government of Poland*, by contrast, avoids the topic of religion as if it belonged to the category of the unmentionable; one searches its pages in vain, for example, for any recognition of the fact that the country whose institutions he has under the knife happens to be a Roman Catholic country (though the Rousseau of *The Social Contract* certainly seemed to be saying that Roman Catholicism is incompatible with any defensible political order). Item: *The Social Contract* does not so much as mention education, and the educational "system," as a problem for political philosophy. In the *Poland*, by contrast, we are told at an early moment (Chapter Four, beginning) that education is *the* "important topic." Item: *The Social Contract*, in listing the several "kinds" of "law", conspicuously omits the "law of nature," or "natural law," thus breaking on a fundamental issue with the Great Tradition in political philosophy, and even with Locke, to whom Rousseau often points as one of his great teachers. In *The Government of Poland*, by contrast, we find Rousseau appealing to "natural law" as if it were a principle of long standing with him.⁶ Item: *The Social Contract* certainly seems to be saying (on this point, at least, the spokesmen of the French Revolution were not demonstrably wrong when they styled themselves pupils of Rousseau) that man's political legacy from the past is a millstone about his neck—that he must, if he is to order his affairs rationally, wipe the slate clean and build his political institutions anew. Nothing in the *Contract* would prepare us for the theme, reiterated *ad libitum* in the *Poland*: Change nothing. Do not tamper with what you have. (Burke, who never missed an opportunity for excoriating Rousseau but was, presumably, unfamiliar with the *Poland*, was if anything less respectful than Rousseau here appears to be of the prescriptive claims of inherited institutions; would he, we wonder, had he read the *Poland*, have hailed Rousseau as the other great Tory of the century?)

⁶ X, page 63. (WK transl.)

The question, once we lay the *Contract* and the *Poland* side by side, cannot be avoided: What, if we are to understand Rousseau and "place" him in the history of political philosophy, are we to make of such glaring discrepancies between two books by one and the same writer? Had Rousseau—as I perhaps seem to be wishing the reader to conclude—"changed his mind" in the interval between the two books, so that the repeated appeals in the *Poland* to the principles of the *Contract* are mere window dressing? That is indeed one answer to our questions, but not, let us notice, the only one possible, since at least two other answers readily suggest themselves: First, it could be argued that the Rousseau of the *Poland*, in order to ingratiate himself with those conservative Roman Catholic nobles who govern Poland, and to command their attention for his proposals, is willing to "pretend," for the purpose, he has in hand, a kind of conservatism that certainly did not reflect his own deepest convictions—wherefore his sudden conversion to natural law, his astonishing silence about equality, etc. Perhaps, in order to carry the Polish nobles with him on certain matters of highest priority, Rousseau is prepared in the *Poland* to adjourn any differences he has with them on other matters. A second possibility is that the relation between *The Social Contract* and *The Government of Poland* is a re-enactment (and probably a deliberate one, since Rousseau's mind is always filled with the classics) of the relation between Plato's *Republic* and Plato's *Laws*. Rousseau's *Contract*, like Plato's *Republic*, is a venture in "pure theory," in which the philosopher adjourns all considerations of "practicality" and seeks, for the questions he poses, answers that however impracticable are true universally and in all times; like Plato's *Republic*, Rousseau's *Contract* adumbrates a "pattern laid up in heaven." *The Government of Poland*, by contrast, like *The Laws* over against *The Republic*, brings the principles of *The Social Contract* "down to earth," and is thus a venture not in "pure theory" but in *practice*; it shows us what a putative Legislator, moving from certain more or less tacit principles on the level of pure theory, would recommend as "the thing to

do" about politics at a specific time and place. As Eric Voegelin has ably demonstrated in the case of Plato, we should not expect a one-one correspondence between the theoretical principles and the practical recommendations—just as we should not hastily conclude, from apparent discrepancies between the principles and the practical proposals, that the latter do not flow consistently from the former. The proposals may embody all of the theoretical "model" that, given the circumstances of that time and place, can possibly be achieved there and then; or, an equally interesting possibility, they may seek to alter those circumstances in a way that, off in the future, will prepare the way for a further realization of the theoretical model.

I will content myself, for the tentative purposes of this Introduction, with directing the reader's attention to the question, How can we explain the discrepancies between Rousseau's *Contract* and his *Poland*? and to listing for him what seem to be the three most plausible answers that suggest themselves to a critic who has lived with the question for many years. The reader will, this critic believes, find the *Poland* all the more interesting if, as he reads it, he will attempt to decide for himself which of the three is the correct one.

This further word about our three possibilities (that Rousseau had changed his mind on some important questions, that Rousseau was being something less than open and candid with the Poles in the *Poland*, that the *Poland* is to the *Contract* what *The Laws* is to *The Republic*): if either of the first two possibilities is the correct one, we are entitled to read the *Poland* merely as what it purports to be, namely, an attempt (either by a "new" Rousseau, suddenly turned conservative, or by the "old" Rousseau prepared to "play games" with the Poles in order to carry them with him on certain major issues) to come to grips with the Poles' peculiar political problems and to point them along a path leading to a solution of those problems; that is, to read it as a prescription, written by Rousseau the political "physician," by way of ministering to the ills of Poland, the political "patient." If on the other hand the

third possibility is correct, the *Poland* acquires an importance, for the history of political philosophy, that places it in an altogether different category, especially for those who think of Rousseau as one of the truly great political philosophers of modern times; it becomes a work that we must master in order to "round out" our understanding of Rousseau's whole political teaching. Put otherwise: If either of the first two possibilities is the correct one, the book stands or falls on its merits as "therapy" for the specific maladies of Poland. But if the third possibility is the correct one, if we must go to the *Poland* in order to learn the meaning, on the level of practice, of that one of the classics of modern political philosophy whose meaning remains most obscure—if the *Poland* is Rousseau's "last word" on the political plight not of Poland, but of modern man—it indeed becomes, for the student of political philosophy, a pearl of great price.

Again, if either of the first two possibilities is the correct one, the question of Rousseau's real reason for writing it remains on our hands, as does that of Rousseau's failure to do his homework before writing it: his treatment of Poland's peculiar problems, as the reader will see for himself, is at best superficial, hasty even; and, as we have seen, he loses the book upon the world at a moment when its chances of affecting those problems are infinitesimal. But if the third possibility is the correct one, if the book as a whole is directed not at Poland but at any and all countries more or less like Poland, if the book is a prescription not for Poland but for the territorially extensive modern nation-state as such, then Rousseau's motive in writing it becomes one that the student of political philosophy can guess for himself: Rousseau, who had made no secret of the fact that the *Contract* was a book that "needed to be done over," had to write it, since the alternative, intolerable for a philosopher with Rousseau's determination to have his impact upon the future of mankind, would have been to die without having revealed that part of his political teaching that would tell his future adepts what they must do. If either of the first two possibilities is the correct one, then the *Poland* is a

book that means, quite simply, what it seems to say. But if the third possibility is the correct one, then the *Poland*—like most of the great works of modern political philosophy—becomes a venture in what Professor Leo Strauss has identified as "secret writing," and the critic's task thus becomes that of tearing from it its secret.

My answer to the question implied in the title of this Introduction cannot, then, be a simple one; rather, it must run in terms like the following. One can read the *Poland* in either of two ways: (a) as a book dealing centrally with Poland, and saying pretty much what it seems to say; or (b) as a book dealing centrally with the territorially extensive modern State, and saying much more than—and something different from—what it seems to say. Now, if we read it in the first of these two ways, we shall wish to fix our attention on those of Poland's problems that are peculiar to Poland, and thus on those aspects of Poland's political system that set it apart from this or that other emergent modern national State; while if we read it in the manner called for by the second approach, we shall wish to fix attention on those aspects of the Polish political system that it shares in common with those other states, and on what Rousseau proposes in connection with them.

Eighteenth-century Poland could indeed point to political maladies peculiar to herself, and these maladies were, in all conscience, sufficiently grave to challenge the capacities of any and all the political physicians she might have summoned, from France or wherever, to her bedside. I content myself with listing, and explicating in the briefest possible manner, at least the major ones.

a) Poland was, and had been for a long while at the time Rousseau wrote, *helpless militarily*, and thus at the mercy of her more powerful neighbors (Russia and Prussia, but Russia especially) as regards both her external and her internal affairs. Her inability to defend her frontiers, moreover, was not, or at least not primarily, a matter of insufficient natural resources in point of men and the sinews of war, but rather of the Poles' traditional jealousy of centralized authority. Poland was ham-

strung by the unwillingness of the nobility to provide the central government with the funds it needed in order to maintain an adequate army; by its unwillingness to make available the necessary man power; above all, perhaps, by the nobles' refusal, symbolized by a *laissez faire* policy toward the existence of private armies at the command of local magnates, to concede to the central government that monopoly of force that had already revealed itself as the characteristic feature of the modern nation state.

b) Poland was, if not the unique, at least the extreme, case of a nation state that, by mid-eighteenth century, had failed to develop a representative assembly capable of speaking, more or less authoritatively, as the "voice" of the Polish people. (England, of course, was the extreme case at the other end of the spectrum.) This "failure," which was the topic of a flood of "reformist" literature by Polish publicists throughout the eighteenth century, was attributed, by common consent, to two long established Polish political institutions, plus a more or less recent "perversion" of one of those institutions. First, the Polish Diet, in accordance with custom deeply rooted in centuries-old tradition and to the horror of Poland's "modernizers," maintained in its proceedings *the unanimity principle*; that is, it refused to go along with the apparently universal trend toward decisions by vote of the majority. Second, the delegates who composed the Diet (the "nonces") continued, again in accordance with long established custom, to arrive from their home constituencies with *imperative mandates*; which is to say their votes in the Diet were actually cast not by the nonces themselves but by the local "dietines" that elected them. Now, Poland's famed *liberum veto* had traditionally been synonymous with the unanimity principle (that is, it did not allow for legislation by "mere" majority rule). Indeed, no little confusion has been caused by the use of the term *liberum veto* to denote a perversion, or abuse, of the unanimity principle that presented itself at a relatively late moment in the history of the principle of majority rule and that, by carrying the logic of the unanimity principle on out to its unavoidable conse-

quences, had reduced Poland's national assembly to utter impotence. The nonces asserted, and in due course made good, a claim not merely to prevent any piece of legislation, or even any rule of parliamentary procedure, that any of them (whether in response to his imperative mandate or a personal whim) saw fit to oppose, but also to "veto" the deliberations themselves. That is to say, any nonce could, by pressing his veto, suspend the Diet altogether until his wishes, on an issue at stake, were met to his own satisfaction. (The first instance of such use of the veto occurred in 1669, and afterwards, during the reign of John Sobieski, 1674-1696, the precedent was employed with embarrassing regularity; half of the Diets convened during this period were not brought to a successful conclusion.) The two traditional institutions, the unanimity principle and the imperative mandate, would by themselves, of course, have sufficed to prevent the Polish Diet from becoming a *deliberative* assembly like, say, the House of Commons of the day. Because of the former, it was improbable that any decision could be taken; because of the latter, minds were already made up, so why deliberate? The two traditional institutions plus the perversion of the first deprived Poland, to all intents and purposes, of any national assembly at all, and thus invited the charge often heard in the eighteenth century that Poland had been reduced, or had reduced herself, to a state of *anarchy*.

c) Poland had refused to "follow the trend" on yet another matter; she had not provided herself with a hereditary monarchy; by long established custom *the Poles elected their kings*. Moreover, since on the face of it the choice of a new king, upon the death of his predecessor, did not lend itself to *imperative mandates*, the Polish nobles refused to entrust the king's election to the Diet. Rather, out of their imperturbable and rigorous anarchic logic, they insisted upon being present in the flesh at the elections and casting their votes personally—as well as upon tying the lucky man's hands with the famous Polish *pacta conventa*, or coronation oath. Suffice it to say that the latter left him as nearly naked of power as a man

could conceivably be and still, without appearing ludicrous, call himself a king. The mind boggles as it attempts to conjure up the spectacle: *several hundred thousand* electors, each with a vote that, again by immemorial custom, was as "good" as that of every other man, assembled in one place to elect, and then politically emasculate—a king! To which we may add: the Polish throne, again by time-honored custom, was up for sale to the highest bidders, foreign and domestic, so that to ask a Polish noble to absent himself from elections, or to help create machinery for electing the king in some more "sensible" manner, was to ask him to renounce his proper share of the "take." He had traditionally preferred, down to the moment at which Rousseau writes the *Poland*, to be present. (With a hereditary monarchy we see the last of those perilous *interregna*, with their accompaniments of chaos and corruption.)

d) Unwilling as they were to provide themselves with a *constitutional* government capable of taking effective action in moments of national emergency, the Poles had formed the habit of relying upon an *extra-constitutional* device known as "Confederation." Once organized as a Confederation (Confederations, when they occurred, appear to have sprung up spontaneously and with amazing celerity) the Polish nobles did act by majority vote. One might say, indeed, that they had it both ways: a constitutional system built on the "golden right" of the *liberum veto*, too sacred to be sacrificed to majority rule, and extra-constitutional machinery capable, via temporary suspension of the *liberum veto*, of getting the country out of the major crisis which the constitutional system was sure to produce.

One readily sees first, why in the eyes of Poland's "modernizers"—encouraged (as modernizers usually are) by the intellectuals—all this called imperatively for "reform," and second, the general shape that the modernizing program would necessarily take: make the monarchy hereditary, so that centralized power can accumulate, from generation to generation, in the hands of a dynasty which can be counted on to surround itself with the typical paraphernalia of the great modern

state. (extensive government departments, bureaucracies, what have you). Get rid, as a matter of course, of the perverted form of the *liberum veto*, which enables those mandated noncés to arrest the proceedings of the Diet. Abolish the Confederations, or rather render them unnecessary by giving up the unanimity principle, so that the king will be able to deal with a Diet reflecting the "will of the people" and know, from the way the winds are blowing in the Diet, where he stands and what he must do about it if he is to accomplish "great things" (foreign conquests? colonies abroad? what have you?). Abolish, above all, the imperative mandate and so wear down the power of those pestiferous local assemblies, so that the executive authority need no longer confront parliamentarians for whom all the important issues are "non-negotiable." Finally, let Poland provide herself, like other countries, with a regular army capable of making Poland's power felt, in international affairs, at least in proportion to her resources (and, if it be a good army, perhaps even more than in proportion to her resources). One readily sees, too, why it made sense for the modernizers to import (as Wielhorski was authorized to do) a little *expertise* from foreign parts and especially, since French political theory was "riding high," from that most modern of modern nations, France. The experts could be counted on to back up the reformers and strengthen their hand (though, one suspects, they should have known better than to call on Rousseau, whom they might easily have identified as a man unlikely to play their game).

Rousseau, as the reader will see for himself, does not play their game. He does, to be sure, take up one by one the alleged maladies of Poland as we have just listed them and does, in each case, offer a sort of solution. But in each case (this entirely apart from the general counsel to make as few changes as possible) he either takes sharp issue with the modernizers or gives to their proposal a "twist" that would produce a different result from that which they desire; or, almost but not quite the same thing, he "absorbs" their proposal into, or makes it serve the purposes of, a series of proposals for the po-

litical future of Poland that Poland's modernizers could only have regarded as "reactionary." Concretely; Rousseau urges the Poles, *mirabile dictu*, to retain their elective monarchy, contents himself with teaching them how to eliminate both the chaos and the corruption of the *interregna*, and then absorbs the whole business of electing the king into a general proposal for turning Polish society into a glorified civil-service. He also pauses to start, as vigorously and shrewdly as anyone has ever put it, the "case" against a hereditary monarchy—those pages alone might justify the book's claim to be included among the masterpieces of modern political philosophy.) Far from adopting the modernizers' proposal for a professionalized army (which, of course, centralized authority would be able to use, domestically, *against* those "pestiferous" local assemblies), Rousseau counters it with a proposal, modeled upon his beloved Switzerland, for a *citizens' army*, organized on the basis of local units, and, far more likely, though Rousseau does not come out and say so, to check centralized authority than to expand it. Far, too, from going along with the modernizers' proposal to abolish the *imperative mandate*, Rousseau, advises to keep it, and strengthen it, by having the dietines, call the nonces on the carpet after each Diet and—ah! Jean-Jacques!—chop off their heads if even in the smallest particular they have disobeyed their instructions. Only on the *liberum veto* does he "go along in order to get along," and even here he wants watching. His animus, clearly, is against majority rule, and what his advice boils down to is, in effect: Get rid of the *liberum veto*, but also keep it. Abolish it with respect to the day-to-day business of government, he says in what is surely of all his proposals the most impossible to apply in practice, but retain it for certain matters of "fundamental" importance—though with the understanding that the man who imposes his veto, and thus frustrates the will of his fellow-parliamentarians, shall appear in due course before a Tribunal, which must either reward him as his country's savior or have him executed as a public nuisance! In other words, keep the *liberum veto*, but see to it that men think twice before resort-

ing to it. As for the Confederation, again Rousseau refuses to go along with the modernizers: the memory of it, especially that of the recent Confederation of Bar (to which he refers repeatedly), must be cherished, as well as the possibility of resorting to it in future moments of need—which, should the Poles follow Rousseau's counsel and retain even a modified *liberum veto*, are only too likely to occur.

Rousseau's principal methods of handling the problems that preoccupy the Polish modernizers, then, are either (a) to deny that they *are* problems, and so brush them aside, or (b) to offer solutions that bear scant evidence of his having paid much attention either to their workability or to their chances of adoption, or (c), if I may put it so, to talk about something else, which, as I have already intimated, is what he does, for the most part, throughout the book. From first to last, one might say—and I am still speaking as I promised to do, in abstraction from any "hanky-panky," that is, secret writing, on Rousseau's part—Rousseau is quietly taking issue with the Polish reformers, and with the countless eighteenth-century publicists who have ridiculed and scorned the Polish Constitution, on an issue that is logically prior to any and all issues having to do with Poland's form of government, namely: Does Poland *want* to be a modern nation state—like, for example, France and England? And if it does not want to be such a state, should it want to be? All other participants in the discussion are tacitly assuming that Poland (that is, the politically active Poles) does want to follow the major European "trends," and that, therefore, the Poles are behaving foolishly in not giving themselves a form of government, a centralized authority, that will enable them to do so: Don't try to be powerful, Rousseau bids them; don't try to be rich; don't envy other nations their great and teeming cities, their industry, their foreign trade, their theaters and opera houses, their fancy clothes: all that sort of thing will, even if you achieve it, only turn to ashes in your hands. Furthermore, he tacitly assumes throughout his argument that he has the rank and file of the Poles *with* him on this prior issue—that, if you like, he is saying things that they

have been waiting for someone with a tongue in his head to say to them; and that the alleged "vices" of the Polish Constitution represent a clearheaded and intelligent choice on the part of the rank-and-file Poles; against the centralized authority that their intellectual betters are urging upon them, and are, therefore, not vices but *virtues*. Why? Because it is precisely these apparent vices that prevent the Poles from having within their reach the false goods that they might otherwise pursue. It is hardly too much to say that the *Poland* is an open and unabashed appeal over the heads of the very elite that has commissioned it to the hearts and minds of the Polish people themselves—or, failing that, to some future elite which, having displaced the modernizers, will embrace the national *ethos* that Rousseau spells out in what finally emerge as the key chapters of the book.

One further point, and I shall have done with the first of our two ways of reading *The Government of Poland*. Just to the extent that Rousseau, in his overall argument, shifts attention from the alleged vices of the Polish Constitution to the national *ethos* he would like (as the case may be) to reinforce or to inculcate among the Poles, the book ceases, as I have tried to prepare the reader to expect it to, to be a book addressed to Poland and a future Polish elite. And, in doing so; it becomes, *mutatis mutandis*, a book addressed to all large nation states (all of them, he insists, are "hastening to their doom") and to a future elite in each of them which, after the inevitable disaster that awaits them, will teach their people to turn their backs on false goods, and to adopt political institutions appropriate to the pursuit of the genuine goods embodied in the way of life that Rousseau urges upon the Poles. But that leads us into the *Poland* as a venture in "secret writing," that is, it leads us to consider the *Poland* as a work that is apparently addressed to the Poles but is actually intended for a much wider audience, encompassing all those who find themselves unwilling participants in the modern, territorially extensive political regime.

Is there indeed a second possible reading of *The Government of Poland* that (a) places it in the category of "secret

writing," and (b) makes of it a book that we must master if we are to arrive at a full understanding of Rousseau's political teaching and of, *inter alia*, *The Social Contract* itself?

As the reader already knows, I believe the correct answer to the question to be "yes." But within the limitations of this Introduction, I can hardly do more than scratch the surface of the problems that our book poses when approached on the assumption that it says something different from, or something more than, it seems to say. The most I can hope to do is to give some illustrations of the sort of teaching that, though demonstrably present in the *Poland*, is in one way or another so handled as to escape the notice of the ordinary, casual, or hasty reader, and so convince the reader that the book requires the most careful kind of "close reading," that is, textual analysis. Not more than that, if only because, first, the *Poland* as a venture in "secret writing" is inseparable from *The Social Contract*, so that one must constantly weave back and forth between the earlier work and the later one in order to fully understand either of the books and, second, because I must pause to say a word about certain favorite techniques which Rousseau uses when he wishes to get across, to the careful reader for whom he is really writing, a point which he would prefer to be "lost" on most readers. These are not the techniques that Leo Strauss has ascribed to Machiavelli and Locke; they cannot be, because Rousseau resorts to them for a reason entirely different from that of Machiavelli or Locke. Machiavelli and Locke conceal their meaning because, to use Professor Strauss' terms, they are "cautious" men, who wish to say "shocking" things without bringing upon themselves the consequences of a reputation for entertaining "shocking" beliefs. Rousseau, by contrast, is by no means a cautious writer in that sense. Locke, for instance, would have regarded him as bold to the point of rashness; witness, for example, Rousseau's repeated open challenge to the prevailing religious orthodoxy of his day.

Rousseau—so at least this critic has come to believe after many years of poring over his writings—resorts to "secret writing" for a single and intimately personal reason, namely, to

distract attention from any idea or proposal that might lay him open to ridicule, or that, in his own view, was not worth pressing upon his contemporaries (whom he had written off as hopeless), but *was* worth handing along to posterity. Put otherwise: More than any other political philosopher one can name, more even, I think than Hobbes, Rousseau was convinced that he "knew all the answers," and that his were the answers that mankind would one day be driven to adopt. But, he was equally convinced that his "answers" were without relevance to the age in which he lived (unless, perhaps, in Geneva and Corsica and, just possibly, in Poland); and, at the same time, proud and sensitive man that Rousseau was, he was quite unwilling to accept, much less invite, a reputation for impracticality, or absurdity, or "utopianism." When, therefore, we find him concealing something—as, on the record, he successfully concealed what a careful reading will show to be the major proposal he had to make as a political philosopher—the first thing we notice is that it is something that his contemporaries would have deemed too foolish to be worth discussing, that is, the notion of giving up the large nation state for another form of polity.

Let me come a little closer to the point by spelling out that last remark. The central theme of *The Social Contract*, the idea that, now in one form and now in another, turns up again and again in the course of the argument, is the idea that man can be "moral" and "free" only in a self-contained community small enough to enable the citizens to meet and deliberate together in an assembly; that only in such a community are man's "chains," his "bondage," capable of being "justified," because only in such a community is it possible for the citizens to arrive at a "general will"; that any other form of political organization, above all the territorially extensive modern state, is *ipso facto* "illegitimate." That idea, along with the unavoidable implication that man, if he had his senses about him, would write off the modern state as an intolerable tyranny, fairly cries up at you out of the book—if you are prepared to take notice of it and treat it seriously. How explain

the fact, then, that not one critic in a hundred who has written on Rousseau attributes that idea to *The Social Contract* as its central teaching, and that even the one critic who does is well nigh certain to sweep it aside as an "anachronism" on Rousseau's part, well nigh certain, that is to say, *not* to take it seriously. How explain the fact that though the number of critics who have "refuted" *The Social Contract* is legion, no critic comes to mind who has come to grips with that idea, and torn it to pieces? The only possible answer, I think, is that Rousseau has, with breath-taking artistry, so handled the idea that, in the very act of insisting upon it, he leads the reader's attention away from it, and sees to it that it will go unnoticed—as, on the record (I repeat), it for the most part has. One of Rousseau's techniques for concealing something, then, is that of making it simultaneously obvious and (for most readers) invisible.

In *The Government of Poland* Rousseau continues his attack on the typical form of the modern political regime, but he does so now in order to call for a return to what he conceives to be ancient virtue rather than to extemporize the conditions necessary for the formation of the "general will." In a sense, the *Poland* can be read as perhaps the last and certainly one of the most significant rehearsals of a theme that had absorbed French and English writers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The prevailing theme of the work is that of "Ancients vs. Moderns," and the book is characterized by Rousseau's continual confrontation of modern political and cultural practice with what he considers to be the superior modes and orders of Rome, Sparta, and Israel. He would have the Poles "establish a republic in their own hearts" that would effectively set them apart from their European contemporaries and would restore to them a sense of the healthier bonds of association enjoyed by the ancient polities. As he says, the key problem of devising a constitution for Poland (and, should we not infer, the central problem in founding an appropriate regime for any of the modern peoples?) is the task of raising contemporary man "to the pitch of the souls of the an-

* cients." The *Poland*, then, can be taken as a kind of provisional model for the grander program of refounding the nation-state along lines prescribed by the study of the ancients.⁷ Poland, according to Rousseau, is confronted with the opportunity of forming for a large body of people dispersed over a wide area a government that may yet avoid the seemingly chronic despotism of other modern states. But this can be accomplished only by making the Poles into a tightly closed society with respect to the influence of other European regimes; and, above all, it can only be accomplished if the Poles are made to become so dependent upon one another that they come to feel they cannot exist apart from their unique political life. In this way the Polish citizen can be imbued with a sense of piety towards his native land and be made to feel a healthy repugnance for the cosmopolitan habits of the degenerate modern European. The Rousseau of the *Poland* seems simply to identify patriotism with virtue; consequently, he feels that to raise the souls of Polish citizens to the dignity of ancient virtue it is sufficient merely to diminish personal individuality by inculcating in the Poles an all-consuming devotion to the political order. Furthermore, it is Rousseau's contention that freedom is intimately connected with the kind of virtue he is describing in the *Poland*; and thus, somehow, true liberty is to be achieved only through the form of total government which he is proposing.

Rousseau indeed is proposing in the *Poland* a radically paradoxical, though by no means a totally new notion of freedom. Liberty, he says, is a food for strong stomachs; and it can only be attained as the result of a prior act of establishing rather harsh and extensive restraints:

I laugh at those debased peoples that let themselves be stirred up by agitators, and dare to speak of liberty without so much as having the idea of it; with their hearts still heavy with the vices of slaves, they imagine that they have only to be munificent in order to be free. Proud, sacred liberty! If they but knew

⁷ III, pages 11-12. (WK transl.)

her, those wretched men; if they but understood the price at which she is won and held; if they but realized that her laws are stern as the tyrant's yoke is never hard, their sickly souls, the slaves of passions that would have to be hauled out by the roots, would fear liberty a hundred times as much as they fear servitude. They would flee her in terror, as they would a burden about to crush them.⁸

What needs to be restrained so that liberty may flourish are, first of all, those selfish and private attachments of modern man that cause division in society. More specifically, it is above all the passion of acquisitiveness, which must be rooted out from the hearts of men and replaced by the desire for honor. Honor in turn is a monopoly of the state; Rousseau would deny all avenues to glory except those that lead to the service of the state. The Poles should follow the example of the Romans and spurn all luxurious acquisitions as being inherently degrading; they should discourage commerce with other countries and foster a frugal but self-sufficing agrarian economy. The trouble with modern European man, as Rousseau insists throughout the *Poland*, is that the failure of contemporary legislators to provide him with institutions that promote a fully politicized existence leaves him free to pursue—indeed forces him to pursue—the divisive ends dictated by private interests. In view of this increasingly desperate situation, the only way to prepare man for good legislation is by a prior founding of unique "national institutions" that will so fill up the horizon of his interests that he will have no opportunity for creating private ends. As for the nature of Rousseau's envisaged ethos, he seems to say that almost anything will do as long as it serves to promote a distinctively national character.

You must maintain or revive (as the case may be) your ancient customs and introduce suitable new ones that will also be purely Polish. Let these new customs be neither here nor there as far as good and bad are concerned; let them even have their

⁸ VI, pages 29-30. (WK transl.)

bad points; they would, unless bad in principle, still afford this advantage: they would endear Poland to its citizens, and develop in them an instinctive distaste for mingling with the peoples of other countries.⁹

It becomes more and more clear as one reads the *Poland* that Rousseau identifies the viciousness of the moderns with a certain randomness in the pattern of their lives. His notion of virtue, then, involves simply the replacement of "random man" with the kind of person whose life is ordered by some consistent purpose. This kind of person is the citizen or the completely public man; and it is the business of the state, or, more properly, it is the business of the founder of the state to see to it that the citizen passes every waking moment within institutions that will insure his constant attention to public affairs. To put it another way, for Rousseau the random life is slavery because it is constantly subject to the vicissitudes of the moment, whereas even under the most authoritarian regime the genuine citizen enjoys a superior freedom by virtue of his sense of purpose. Apart from being grounded in an intense piety toward the fatherland, Rousseau's notion of virtue is almost without content. Throughout the *Poland* he holds up the example of Sparta as the ancient regime most worthy to be emulated for the hardihood and simplicity of its citizens, but most of all for the unparalleled devotion to the state which was exemplified in its heroes from the time of Lycurgus onwards.

On the surface, at least, Rousseau's attack on the moderns may seem to be directed against what he sees as an all-pervasive egoism among contemporary man, and his model regime may recommend itself as a more noble polity based, as it seems to be, on unselfish motives of corporate piety. Rousseau certainly attempts to give the impression that he is urging a redirection of man's interest from the inherently base to the inherently noble. But if he is successful in conveying this impression, it is only because he very skillfully suppressed some

⁹ III, page 14. (WK transl.)

of the more questionable implications of his teaching on virtue and freedom.

For example, Rousseau says nothing or next to nothing about the role of the Church in Polish affairs, and his silence on this point is more obtrusive in view of his many admonitions to preserve the traditional institutions of the country. Certainly we must suppose that Rousseau recognized the central place of religion in the lives of the Poles, and certainly we must credit him with realizing the difficulties posed by the Church's authority for the working out of his political model. How indeed can the citizen be expected to maintain a pure allegiance to the secular regime, as Rousseau would expect him to, when at the same time he is allied to the Church, which claims a superior authority over the individual conscience?

When faced with the same problem in *The Social Contract*, Rousseau gave the unequivocal answer that the state must create its own national religion in order to safeguard its claim to absolute obedience from the citizen.¹⁰ In the *Poland*, however, the problem is never raised in the explicit manner of the earlier work. Instead, Rousseau chooses to drop the notion of a national religion and to severely limit the Church's influence by more indirect and subtle measures. Aside from a proposal regarding a rather insignificant administrative reform, Rousseau's only advice to the Poles on the issue of religion is imbedded in the context of his plans for a comprehensive system of state-controlled education. It would be wise, Rousseau suggests, to eliminate priests from the schools and to restrict the job of teaching to those who have entered upon a career in the state bureaucracy.¹¹ One may suspect that here is an instance of "secret writing" on Rousseau's part. The point he seems to be making might very well be ignored by the Poles, the immediate audience of this work, but a reader attentive to the implications of this recommendation—especially, we might add, a reader who is familiar enough with *The Social Contract*

¹⁰ Cf. *The Social Contract*, Book IV, Chapter VIII.

¹¹ IV, page 20. (WK transl.)

to be sensitive to any change which Rousseau may now make on the teaching of that work—would quite likely seize upon Rousseau's suggestions on education as a new method for undetermining the influence of religion in political life. Whereas the Rousseau of *The Social Contract* would replace revealed religion with some form of national moral creed, the Rousseau of the *Poland* prefers the more oblique strategy of leaving the Church pretty much to itself while quietly eliminating its hold on the schools. One might speculate, however, that the ultimate effect of the different strategies, if they are practiced successfully, would be the same: in either case the authority of religion will be eliminated, and the political order will be made absolute. By forcing the priests out of the schools the way is cleared for the purely nationalistic curriculum that Rousseau envisages as the first step in the process of radically politicizing the youth of the country.¹² Within a few generations religion will have ceased to be a significant part of Polish life, and subsequently its institutional structures will have become atrophied. Thus there will eventually be no voice to claim a "higher" law over against the laws of the political order.

The case against a higher authority is conveyed by Rousseau with an extraordinary degree of reserve, but the implications of his proposals force one to see the attack on revealed religion as one of the crucial features of the *Poland*. Similarly, it should become obvious for the attentive reader that the work is also a veiled attack on the classical tradition of political philosophy, inasmuch as that tradition points to a source of right, *i.e.*, the "natural law" or, simply, "philosophy," which is of greater authority than the laws of any particular regime.¹³ There is no place in Rousseau's scheme of education for either religion or philosophy—both of these activities are implicitly excluded by the tightly closed curriculum that he proposes. These considerations should lead us to recognize an important qualification in his enthusiastic and, seemingly, unalloyed encomium upon "ancient" teachings. His approval of the ancients is actually restricted to one aspect of their life, and by

¹² Cf. IV, page 20. (WK transl.)

no means does it extend to all of their teachings. Rousseau rather ingeniously contrives in the *Poland* to present a myth of the ancients that excludes what one might well consider the most important feature of classical culture, its absorption with the questions of philosophy, and chooses instead to identify ancient virtue with the kind of political life created for Sparta by its founder, Lycurgus. One might indeed be justified in accusing Rousseau of having rejected the best and espoused the worst in his carefully biased portrayal of the ancients.

In any case, it is curious that Rousseau's version of ancient virtue is entirely compatible with the notion of "republican virtue" taught by that most notorious of "moderns," Niccolò Machiavelli.¹⁴ Rousseau follows Machiavelli in his equation of the virtuous life with service to the state (or, to be more precise, he follows one part of Machiavelli's teaching, for the idea of republican virtue is not, I suspect, Machiavelli's final word concerning virtue), and he follows his predecessor in his attempt to undermine the authority of religion and classical political philosophy. In reading the *Poland* one should bear in mind Rousseau's peculiarly "modern" notion of "ancient" modes and orders: indeed the implications of Rousseau's selectivity with regard to the old leads one to question the seriousness of his repeated exhortations to return to ancient political forms. The regime proposed for the Poles and, by implication at least, for all other modern peoples is perhaps more radically new than the surface rhetoric of the *Poland* would lead us to suspect.

Thus far I have attempted to indicate the general outline of the peculiar ethos that Rousseau feels is a necessary prerequisite for effective legislation. The first task of the founder of a political regime for a modern people is to refashion the attitudes of his potential citizenry; only after this task has been successfully completed can one hope that the laws will be obeyed. Rousseau realizes, however, that to establish a favorable ethos is not by itself a sufficient solution to the problem of

¹³ Cf. Leo Strauss' *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe; Illinois: The Free Press, 1958).

refounding the modern state. He is still faced with the question of the large state with its attendant evils of despotism and inefficiency. Poland may be blessed with men whose souls approximate the grandeur of the souls of the ancients, but it is still an extensive territory with a large population concerning which Rousseau laments, "Large populations, vast territories: There you have the first and foremost reason for the misfortunes of mankind, above all the countless calamities that weaken and destroy polite peoples."¹⁴ The problem now becomes that of securing the freedom of a small republic within the constitution of a large elective kingdom, and the dominant theme of the *Poland* changes from the philosophical treatment of Ancients and Moderns to the more practical analysis of the conditions necessary for representative government.

Rousseau's remedy for the evils that attend the large nation-state is the federal system. He envisages an association of numerous semiautonomous states bound together by a common legislature whose laws will be binding on each member but whose deliberation will be controlled by the individual constituent petty states. The representatives who deliberate at this grand assembly will be tied to mandates that have issued from prior deliberations at the level of the local assemblies. Rousseau seeks to avoid the kind of deliberative body whose members are concerned primarily with the interests of the large aggregate, in favor of a body composed of men who are devoted to the good of their particular communities. It must be admitted that Rousseau is not as clear as he could be on the question of the limits on the power of the central government. There is, for example, no list of prohibitions against the central authority in favor of the individual constituent states, as there is in the American Constitution. Furthermore, on the crucial issues of education and the administration of the extensive civil service system Rousseau is silent, so that it is difficult for us to determine whether he wants these areas to be under the exclusive control of the central government or under the direct management of the local dietines. However, Rousseau's pro-

¹⁴ V, page 25. (WK transl.)

posal that the *liberum veto* be retained, though in a modified form,¹⁵ in the new system indicates his concern for the rights of the localities over against the central power. Possessing this resource, any one of the individual dietines may check legislation on constitutional or other "fundamental" issues (Rousseau leaves it to the Poles to decide which laws other than constitutional amendments are in fact "fundamental") and thus protect its essential sovereignty against encroachments by the central government. Apparently, Rousseau feels that the combined forces of the two provisions—for instructed representatives and for the limited use of the *liberum veto*—will be sufficient to insure that degree of local autonomy which is his remedy for the evils of the large nation-state. The efficacy of such measures may be questioned, but it is clear enough that Rousseau wants to achieve the maximum degree of freedom within the federal system that will be consistent with the prior need of achieving Polish independence *vis-à-vis* the other European nations.

It is interesting to compare Rousseau's elaboration of his federal regime with the version of federalism proposed some twenty years later in America by Madison and Hamilton. The central problem of *The Federalist* is in essence the same problem that confronts Rousseau in the *Poland*: how to make possible the large republic that will avoid the despotic excesses of the large nation-states. But the different solutions offered by the two works are almost antithetical. Publius, on the one hand, develops a system that presupposes a high degree of diversity among the people of America. In fact he realizes that it is essential to foster diverse interests among the people since the interplay of these conflicting pursuits will safeguard

¹⁵ Rousseau would have the Poles establish a board of review, which would consider particular uses of the veto and which would reward profusely those who used the veto justly while punishing severely, even with death, those who upon review were shown to have misused the privilege. He would also have the use of the veto restricted to certain "fundamental" laws. Cf. IX, pages 57-59. (WK transl.)

against the rise of tyrannous factional majorities. Secondly, Publius' legislative model works through the deliberations of representatives who are not previously instructed by their constituencies. *The Federalist* conceives of the legislative process as a kind of replay of the conflict between diverse interests that goes on in American society. The individual representatives are presumed to embody in some fashion the attitudes of the sections from which they are drawn, but they are not obligated by any specific mandate from their constituents. Finally, the federal system envisaged by Publius creates a central government that is so strong that it is indeed questionable whether in any meaningful sense the model can be called federal at all. *The Federalist* promises extensive freedoms to individuals under its proposed regime, but it is difficult to see how the work redeems its title by allowing any such equivalent liberties to the participating states. The central government counts for everything in the Madison-Hamilton model while the local communities count for nothing, or next to nothing.

Rousseau, by contrast, founds his political regime on a people who have been made more or less homogeneous through the inculcation of a national *ethos*. There is no room in his model for the competition of different social, economic and religious groups, which is the mainspring of the Publian model. Of course there must be expected a mutual striving for ascendancy among the men who seek to advance through the ranks of the civil service, but this is a carefully directed sort of competition, which benefits the whole polity while it smothers those radically divisive purposes fostered by selfishness or by devotion to transcendent truths. Like Publius, Rousseau invests the supreme authority of his republic in the legislative branch (the elected king is conceived to be little more than an errand boy for the Diet, and his powers are rather less extensive than those of the President in the Publian model), but the representatives who comprise the national assembly are bound by law to act according to the instructions that have been previously given to them by their local assemblies. Finally, and again in contrast to the philosophy of *The Federalist*, Rous-

seau's system is designed to give the local communities a strong hand against the power of the central government. He seems to feel that the only sure means of providing against the despotism of the large nation-state is to decentralize the deliberative process so that the general wills of the local assemblies may assert themselves, when the occasion demands, against the incursions of the national legislature. Rousseau's system, in other words, is heavily weighted in favor of corporate interests beneath the national level, while on the contrary the Publian model is designed to achieve legislation that can be applied to all individuals irrespective of their subsidiary corporate allegiances. Rousseau's regime seems the more genuinely federal of the two models since it allows for a high degree of autonomy among the local communities, whereas one suspects that the federalism of Publius is open to question.

The Government of Poland acquires a further dimension of importance when we read it in the context of democratic theory, since along with *The Federalist* it is possibly the first attempt by a political theorist of great standing to apply principles of democratic theory to a concrete political regime. Thus the *Poland* not only gives us a new perspective, as I have tried to show, on some of the more puzzling features of Rousseau's earlier political thought; it also provides us with a model for representative government which, because it is in many ways opposed to the prevailing Publian version, enables us to better understand both the virtues and the limitations of our current practices. To return to the promise implicit in the title of this Introduction, *The Government of Poland* should be read both as a clarification and a criticism of the political teaching of *The Social Contract* and as a comprehensive attempt to deal with those central problems of democratic theory that have continued to exercise our minds to this day.

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