

gods of Olympus, and it is only through her intercession that Prometheus' creatures can come to life.

But to return to the rainbow. The interplay of light and opacity concerns not only our "need for a bridge" (p. 971) in the philosophical sense but also the nature of beauty and of art. There is a surprising passage in a letter Goethe wrote to Friederike Oeser when he was nineteen years old: "Und was ist Schönheit? Sie ist nicht Licht und nicht Nacht. Dämmerung, eine Gebuhrt von Wahrheit und Unwahrheit. Ein Mittelding." Nearly twenty years later, Goethe writes to Charlotte von Stein (19 Sept. 1786) about poetry: "die Force des grossen Dichters, der aus Wahrheit und Lüge ein Drittes bildet, das uns bezaubert." Art is a bridge, like the rainbow, not an absolute, and the artist's is a mediating function: we can no more have Truth direct than we can look at the sun, but the artist can intimate it in his work.

There is, then, a continuity in Goethe's work that derives from the yearning for "a direct assault on ultimate values" (p. 972), and from the equally profound conviction that this direct path is barred and that an attempt to ignore that barrier leads to death, as it does for Euphorion. We have come upon one of the "many sets of polarities" (p. 967) that create both esthetic tension and poetic unity in Goethe's work. In this connection, the "very serious jests" of *Faust*, Part II, form a bridge between the desperate "no" of the soul to the harsh contingencies of human existence and the accepting "yes" of a spiritual attitude that hovers with a loving and ironic smile over both individual suffering and the never changing *Welttheater*. It is this double perspective that characterizes the Goethean poetic universe, early as well as late.

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Rousseau's "Passion primitive"

To the Editor:

The argument of Juliet Flower MacCannell in "Nature and Self-Love: A Reinterpretation of Rousseau's 'Passion primitive'" (*PMLA*, 92 [1977], 890–902) that Rousseau "throws the empirical existence of the self into radical question and finds it to be as insubstantial and empty a concept as the Western tradition has found it . . ." (Abstract, p. 869) is fallacious. Her argument comes to an erroneous conclusion because it is based upon an incomplete reading of Rousseau, particularly of *The*

Social Contract and *A Discourse on Political Economy*. In these political works one finds a strong concept of self.

For Rousseau it is the ability to will that distinguishes and defines man's nature and self. In *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* Rousseau notes that "It is not, therefore, so much the understanding that constitutes the specific difference between the man and the brute, as the human quality of free agency" (*The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole [New York: Dutton, 1950], p. 208). Therefore, liberty (freedom of choice and will) is the fundamental aspect of human nature and self. Man is immediately aware that he has the dynamic power of choosing. All men have an innate feeling of the vital force of will, which is beyond full comprehension or explanation. This freedom is not, as MacCannell so casually says, "arbitrarily suppressed" in the political works (p. 890) but is, rather, developed and completed in Rousseau's political theory.

It is only with the state that man gains true freedom and morality. As Rousseau says in *Emile*, man in the state of nature was not virtuous, for he simply followed his impulses. In *The Social Contract* Rousseau speaks of the remarkable change that man undergoes when he enters the state, whereby justice is substituted for instinct in his conduct and whereby duty replaces physical impulse as a basis for action. In the state man changes from a stupid, debased animal into "an intelligent being and a man" with stimulated faculties, extended ideas, ennobled feelings, and uplifted soul (*The Social Contract*, p. 19). Finally, within the state, man acquires moral liberty, whereby he becomes master of himself and gains true liberty, or selfhood. "Moral liberty . . . makes him truly master of himself; for the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty" (*The Social Contract*, p. 19).

What is this law that we prescribe to ourselves in the state? It is the general will—the real reason, will, and judgment of each individual. The general will expresses that which ought to be the content of man's true will, that is, a will not influenced by man's lower passions and instincts. Moral virtue is realized in one's conformity and identification with the general will. "Every man is virtuous when his particular will is in all things conformable to the general will . . ." (*A Discourse on Political Economy*, p. 301). Thus when we obey the general will we are in fact only obeying our own actual will, and to follow what is our own will is the essence of freedom, the subjective principle or, in other words, the self of man.

The individualistic nature of the general will is most clearly seen in the first draft of *The Social Contract* where Rousseau speaks of the general will as a pure act of the individual's understanding that recognizes the obligations of all to one another. We are presented here with a general will that is rational, autonomous, and practical, legislating both with respect to its subject, a universal act of the understanding, and with respect to its object, the good of all. Thus the state does not suppress man's self; rather, the state, for Rousseau, is grounded in the character and moral nature of those it comprises. Hegel in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* recognized the above argument when he said of Rousseau's political theory: "We see . . . that the innermost principle of man, his unity with himself, is set forth as fundamental and brought into consciousness, so that man in himself acquired an infinite strength. It is this that Rousseau . . . said about the state" (trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances Simson [New York: Humanities Press, 1950], III, 401). Thus one can conclude that a strong sense of self exists in the political works of Rousseau and that this self is preserved in the state.

No doubt there are problems inherent in Rousseau's theory of the self and in his political theory. However, it is one thing to say that there are difficulties with his theory and quite another to claim, as MacCannell does, that Rousseau has found the concept of self to be empty and insubstantial and that the self is arbitrarily suppressed in the state. Such is not the case.

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Ms. MacCannell replies:

John W. Ray's critique, while not based on a reading of my article, is an interpretation of Rousseau's sociopolitical thought that has enjoyed currency (see Cassirer's *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* [Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1963], pp. 77–78) and that should be reevaluated.

Ray's *étatiste* view of the *Social Contract* sees the state as rendering man free of subjugation by animal wants, uplifting him and granting him ultimate liberty. Such a view, while it tends to elide the deceptive dimension the state has for Rousseau, is nonetheless a possible reading of the work. It is, however, a distorted interpretation. To the extent that it fails to read other Rousseau works wherein the same liberating concept is discussed in non-political contexts, it is blind to the fact that the

"state" is not unique in being the liberator of man from his nature. For Rousseau, it is language (or linguistic possibility) that translates sensation into idea, need into passion, animal into "man" (see Paul de Man, "Theory of Metaphor in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 12 [1973], 480, and my *PMLA* article, pp. 893–94). Freedom, the will to undo nature, is simply not the exclusive domain of the state. Rather, the state merely participates in the same structurally liberating potency as do language and culture. When Ray writes, "Man is immediately aware that he has the dynamic power of choosing. All men have the innate feeling of the vital force of the will, which is beyond comprehension or explanation," he closes off the most interesting aspects of Rousseau from speculation: Rousseau tried to reach the "source" of the will and describe the structural situation that could render man aware that choices exist. The differentiating and equational powers of language precede the possibility of free options.

For Rousseau, guaranteeing "liberty" has priority over establishing a state, and the ruses of politics would be untenable were liberty not so prized (see *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Gagnebin et Raymond, III [Paris: Pléiade, 1964], 310, 364). Rousseau cannot therefore, as Ray would have us believe, terminate his analysis with the happy accession of man to the state (or language or culture). For the state, in becoming a "second nature," begins a process of dynamic conflict with its own will to freedom, even above the level of individual desire, since by definition the will is opposition to "nature." The state tends toward stasis, and the will must necessarily collide with it (see Paul de Man, "Political Allegory in Rousseau," *Critical Inquiry*, 2 [1976], 649–75, and my essay, "The Self and Modern Culture," presented at the Fifth Annual Conference on Sociology and the Arts, Stockton State Coll., April 1977).

Ray's reading of the general will as a kind of rational Kantian goodwill is the classical and beneficial liberal corrective to protototalitarian readings of Rousseau. Yet it fails to respect above all the radical tenor of Rousseau's critique of the assumption that we know the self that is the source of the will (see my *PMLA* essay, pp. 891–92). It also fails to account for the large role played by deviation, error, and weakness of will—associated with fictional, imaginative, and ethical thought—in Rousseau (especially the *IV^e–VI^e Rêveries*). The kind of triumph of the will in the form of virtue that Ray, citing Hegel, sees as the achievement of the state is for Rousseau quite simply an ambiguous, two-edged accomplishment: pity is the arch-virtue, but also the original sin.

Unless we are willing to make the distinctions