

# ROUSSEAU: AUTHENTICITY OR NARCISSISM?

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It is widely recognised that Rousseau is an important source to the, essentially modern, ethical ideal that the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor<sup>1</sup> has called “the ideal of authenticity”, the ideal that calls for the presence of the actor’s self in his or her experiences, actions and form of life. The ideal prescribes that these things should be formed as expressions of this self in the sense that the actor and others should be able to recognise him as the originator or owner of them.

Rousseau is in fact much of a paradigm example of the quest for the “true self” and its authentic expression. For that reason an investigation of Rousseau could throw light on some problems, I believe some internal contradictions, in the ideal of authenticity.

My claim will be that the authenticity-ideal, as articulated by Rousseau, should not be conceived as an *ethical* ideal at all. An ideal of personality – yes, an esthetical ideal – maybe, but an ethical ideal – no! The reason is that the ideal, taken as a guideline for a successful way of living one’s own life, presupposes either the indifference or insignificance of other people or their non-individuality. The first alternative is described in works like the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*<sup>2</sup> and the *Emile*<sup>3</sup>. The second alternative is the basis of the political state described in *The Social Contract*<sup>4</sup>. The first option can, for obvious reasons, not be regarded as *ethical*. The second is inconsistent with the recognition of individual autonomy that should be part of any modern ethical theory.

Correspondingly the individual trying to realise Rousseau’s ideal of authenticity is himself trapped between two roads, neither leading to personal fulfilment in any ethically relevant sense, that of narcissism and that of self-extinction.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Harvard University Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Rousseau, J. J. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Oxford Uni. Press, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Rousseau, J. J. *Emile*. The Everyman Library. London 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Rousseau, J. J. *The Social Contract and Later Political Writings*. Cambridge University. Press. 1997.

“Authenticity” is a term that may be predicated of some entity as far as this entity is regarded as an expression of some human subject. Its meaning is constituted on the presupposition of a certain possible relationship between the subject and his expression. The presupposition is partly descriptive and partly normative<sup>5</sup>. The descriptive aspect consists in the subject being the independent originator of the expression. The normative aspect is that he can be ascribed full responsibility for, and ownership to, the expression. In a sense derived from this, an expression or action may be said to be authentic. So far so good!

On the other hand, the authenticity needs some intersubjective confirmation, i.e. confirmation from others than the subject himself. As to the normative aspect, the reason is plain enough. Ascription of responsibility and ownership is *per se* something taking place in a cooperative field. As to the descriptive side, the situation is slightly more complex. The main point is however that for an action to be considered as an expression of an independent subject it is necessary that the subject would have acted likewise regardless of how others would have responded to his action, except in cases when he changes his line of action because of strategic considerations. He would have had the same convictions, values and general aims no matter what other people might mean. But how can he possibly know that this would have been the case? He might of course reject the question as uninteresting or irrelevant. He might shut down all sensibility towards others and their responses. This would however deprive him of the means to confirmation and recognition of his authenticity. He would be trading his authenticity for loneliness and isolation. In this imagined insulated sphere there is only one “author”, so the question of authenticity cannot reasonably be raised. Hence, the authentic subject is after all delivered to the judgement of others as to the authenticity of his expression. His attention is continuously engaged in the monitoring of other people’s responses.

The basic contradiction is therefore, in my opinion, the following: The “authentic” subject stands in a relationship to other subjects, a relationship in which he depends on their confirmation or recognition and, at the same time, has to conceive of their response as irrelevant as

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<sup>5</sup> Together the descriptive and the normative aspect could be said to constitute a new modality, that of *ascription*.

to the authenticity of this expression. In short, he is trapped in a sort of ambiguity or ambivalence in his relationship towards other people. By going through some main motives in Rousseau's thought I will try to show that this constellation corresponds to a basic structure in his conceptual edifice.

### Civilisation and Authenticity

For Rousseau, the threat to authentic expression comes from civilisation, civilized forms of life. Civilisation has two faces. It is seen as a potential for the development of authentic moral personal identities, but it is also seen as a menace to such an identity. The consequence of this is a very deep-rooted ambivalence to everything represented by modern culture. The ambivalence thus seems to mirror the two faces of modernity, the threatening and the promising one.

Rousseau's version of the ideal of authenticity stresses the ethical importance of a sort of sincerity or candour in human expression and experience. He experiences the life forms of modern civilisation as a threat to the individual's ability to make experiences as its *own*, have joys and sorrows that are the person's *own*, to live the life as one's *own* life. What is involved is a problem of the ownership of the standards of one's experiences as well as one's own inner emotions and self-feeling.

Most of Rousseau's writings are coloured by this ambivalent attitude toward civilisation. There is an aspect of civilisation that is a tragedy for human beings. It creates people that are discontented, envious, false, inauthentic and strangers towards others and themselves. On the other hand, the state of society, as opposed to the state of nature, creates, under certain conditions, a foundation for a moral and social identity that Rousseau regards as higher and more valuable than the form of identity made possible by the state of nature. Society in this respect is however an idealised construct, an edifice purified of all the dirty facts accompanying empirical human motives and actions. It is a society whose individual members are "no one in particular" (CS. I. VI.). However, if this idealised society in fact represents a possibility, then society and alienation are antithetical only in fact, not by necessity. Rousseau's strategy in the investigation of this is to try to understand why historical societies (understood as civilisation) as he sees it are coextensive with the negative consequences for human life that I have mentioned. Having

understood this, we may hope to understand whether or not these negative consequences represent essential features of civilised societies.

We will approach an investigation of the relationship between civilisation and authenticity by trying to answer two questions. The first is this: Why is civilisation a threat to authenticity, and what exactly is being threatened when authenticity becomes problematic? Second; what forms, if any, can authentic expression take in civilised societies?

### **Question 1: Why is Civilisation a Threat to Authenticity?**

Rousseau doesn't deny that a socially created I is an important part of the basis for a moral I. On the other hand, the socially created I is also the source of inauthenticity, to calculated theatrical forms of behaviour, to alienation and to an attitude towards the physical reality coloured by a sense of unrealness. It also threatens the individual's independence and is a source of what I will call "loss of experience". All this indicates that the term "ambivalence" provides a gateway to Rousseau's attitude towards society.

Rousseau's intuition is that there must be some sort of "natural I" at the bottom of our personality, a sort of I protecting the individual in a turbulent, treacherous and changing sociality. This natural I shall meet the need for a unity and continuity in the personality. This need can, according to Rousseau, not be safeguarded in relation to a social world characterised by contingent changes. We could say that Rousseau aims at the development of a concept of "primary naturalisation" (as opposed to "primary socialisation"). He tries to conceptualise a mental image that I believe is very commonly distributed in modern minds. The social world is conceived as unstable, full of accidental circumstances. To be delivered to other people's whims, caprices and moods is a potential menace to the possibility of living a life that is one's own. The self needs something that is inaccessible for the actors in this field.

This characteristic of Rousseau's picture of the condition of the self, gives birth to a strange sort of doubleness. On the one hand it stresses the importance of the real and the original in the unmediated encounter with the physical world. On the other, Rousseau gives words to a modality of experience that we may call "psychologism",

meaning that reality is experienced in the light of the private mental state. Anything that is experienced as foreign to, or unrelated to, this state is considered to be "unreal". It is not enough for an experience to represent something "objective" in a purely designative meaning, it must also have an air of the "genuine", the "truly", which means that it must have some intimate personal significance to the experiencing subject. This modality of experience is of course related to what many contemporary commentators of modern forms of personality and culture call "narcissism".

Maybe Descartes can be considered as one source, among many, to this mode of experience, the outlook that regards the world as potentially a treacherous place, a place where you cannot trust what meets the eye. As an asylum Descartes establishes an inner space, untouched by the world's potential deceit. This space has two basic characteristics. My immediate access to the things in it creates a form of security and certainty. Secondly, it is secured against the interference of others. It is situated beyond the conceptions of society and culture.

If this space-metaphor were to be transferred to Rousseau, it would work in the way that information from the world must be presented in this space for its truth, or rather truthfulness to be tested. When it reenters the world, in the form of communication and interaction with others, the authenticity of the expression will be the standard in which the result of this test is formulated. The I and its experience must be presented as the originating place of the content of the expression. Thus I become an independent source of the value of the experience being expressed.

Rousseau comprehends the concept of "nature" as antithetical to the concept of "the social", or, more precise, the concept of "civilised sociality". This limitation is doublesided: Nature is conceived as something unchanging, something predictable, something "to be counted on". And nature is, on the other hand, something without passions. The encounter with nature contains no threat to the self. In the text *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire* Rousseau finds peace of mind in the neglect of tiresome mechanisms of selfdelimitations. By enjoying natural phenomena like flowers, dawn and rivers, we may establish a relation to the world where the self becomes insignificant and unimportant and where there is no need to be on guard against irony,

condescending looks and other expressions of human mental warfare. Faced with nature, the soul can safely be naked.

For Rousseau, "nature" is something that meets the need for self-giving and self-abandonment. For him, modern selves are entangled in a sort of contradiction. The self is constituted, partly as something with a need to "give itself", but, for this very reason, becomes vulnerable. The self is doomed to a form of expression that threatens its very existence. *The vulnerable self* is an important figure in Rousseau's construction of modernity.

Another important motive in the extension of this image, is the *sincerity of the self*. Sincerity is a trait of characters that is being undermined by civilisation. The title of Rousseau's autobiography, *Confessions*, bears witness to the importance of the ideal of sincerity. The possibility of giving an uncovered exposure of one's own subjectivity becomes a vital need. For Rousseau, the independent existence of the self depends upon this possibility. In a world that threatens the independence of the self, the self must defend itself by giving sincere expression of itself. The basic message in the *Confessions* is that *this is my story and it cannot be told by anyone else, this is truly me*. The problem is of course that it is told to an audience, but at the same time denying that there is any real audience. It has already been established that their judgement does not matter.

But again, there is a sort of ambivalence connected to the ideal of sincere expression. The uncovered exposure of the self, increases its vulnerability. It therefore also gets an increased need for protection, which expresses itself in an emotional impulse in the opposite direction. This impulse makes the self want to be unreachable, or, at best, invisible. The self faces the unsolvable problem of staying secret in its own authentic expression, appearing as invisible. For Rousseau, the autobiographical form meets the need to unite exposure and protection of the self. On the one hand, it opens up the self for everyone to see. On the other hand, it has this element of being "mine", "my story", I am the one person in the world who is able to tell it and who can truly understand it.

Anyhow, the vulnerability of the self creates a need for protective mechanisms. A defensive strategy is not to be too closely connected to anyone or anything. Rousseau cultivates an image of himself as "the wanderer", the one who has always already left the

scene. A related motif, which is found in *Emile*, is the ideal of changing position in life without affecting the self. It is also a good thing to pass unnoticed. Whoever wants to be a good observer of human life, must avoid being observed. The presence of the body hides the soul.

### History of Civilisation

The following problem is the very axis around which Rousseau's philosophy of history turns: The creations of nature are good, the creations of society are evil, man is born free, but lives everywhere in chains! How has this twisting of things come about?

Answering this question involves a reconstruction of the development from a condition that Rousseau sees as natural, the state of nature, to the condition of modern civilisation. Rousseau imagines this process to have taken place in the history of mankind as well as taking place in the socialising process of the contemporary individual. The first is the subject of his treatise on the origin of inequality, the second of his treatise on education, *Emile*.

According to Rousseau, the history of mankind runs through three stages, the state of nature, the first societies and the developed societies. We shall take a brief glance at the first two, and then return to his diagnoses of the diseases of modern societies.

Rousseau often characterises the state of nature in terms that indicate that he regards it as a state that has really existed, not only as a theoretical construction. In this state we find "the natural man" (and woman). Rousseau's natural man is "a noble savage". One of his striking characteristics is his lack of passions. He also lacks the kind of love of self that is typical of civilised people. (Rousseau makes a distinction between love of self, *amour de soi*, and self-love, *amour propre*. Self-love is a natural propensity to preserve life under the given conditions. Love of self is a deviation from this, it expresses itself as the mental self-defence and self-assertion in a social space.)

The man of nature is governed by "real needs". By this is meant needs depending on the constitution of the body and its relation to the physical environment. He is living a sort of here-and-now life. He does not experience situations in the light of general concepts. Things are not examples of anything but themselves. His language (!) is a sort of collection of proper names.

The first societies come into existence from accidental causes. Under these new conditions passions are developed, and along with them the self as something vulnerable. For Rousseau, a passion is basically an inner representation of some form of dependence. Punishment is invented as a social reaction to certain actions. Hence we will meet not only natural consequences of our actions. Punishment is a social reaction directed towards the soul, aiming at humiliation and degradation. And it is exactly this humiliation and degradation that is the most painful consequence of punishment, not the pain inflicted on the body. The corporal side of the existence is pushed in the background. The body's social significance is restricted to its relevance as an entrance to the soul. The self, not the body, is the prime target of threat and attack. Dignity therefore demands that the communication-lines between the body and the soul must be blocked. Making the body a stranger becomes a strategy for self-preservation. The wise man may feel physical pain, but his heart remains unhurt. According to this view, modern culture creates estrangement towards the bodily. The body is a relatively unimportant defence-work that must be sacrificed to protect the soul. The body thus becomes instrumental for others to reach the soul and for oneself to hide and protect the soul.

The conception of the "savage" as being without passions and emotions implies a conception of passions and emotions as being socially constituted. Expressions of emotions are phenomena essentially situated in social contexts. I believe that Rousseau here primarily has in mind passions like love, hatred, pride, humility, ambition, jealousy etc., perhaps also joy, sorrow and fear. Passions and emotions are like social barometers, they measure the social pressure. The variable scale is the intensity of the passions.

Through such passions and emotions there is developed a self-conscious subject, and in this process there is also constituted "other selves" who falls within the emotional sphere of my self. But, as I have said, this emotion-dependant self is highly problematic for Rousseau, as it delivers us to, and makes us dependant on, others. We become dependant of a social field, full of caprice and prejudices. Emotions, thus understood, take away our control over our own lives, they victimise us. If my emotions say something about my identity, who I am, they at the same time say that I am situated in a field where I am



fragile and vulnerable, I am within the reach of other people's malice. To be a self and to be vulnerable is coextensive.

It is at this stage that the problem of authenticity comes into being. The reason is that there arises a need for self-presentation, or self-representation, and hence a motive for self-pretension.

What is it, according to Rousseau, about civilisation of developed societies that produces the misery he claims to identify? Basically two things: 1) Our increasing material and mental dependence on others. This is caused both by increasing division of labour and by a change in the structure of human needs. In an increasing degree we develop needs that we ourselves are not capable of satisfying. Rousseau claims that there is an inverse proportional rate between the individual's and the society's ability to provide security and welfare. The strengthening of society equals the weakening of the individual. (2) Increasing social mediation of our experiences. Rousseau regards this as a source to what I have called "loss of experience". I will comment on both these phenomena:

(1) As we develop increasingly finer shades of needs and requirements, our dependence upon others for the fulfilment of these needs also increases. Rousseau conceives this dependence as a loss of freedom. Only those are free who have few needs. The reason for this is that our ability to satisfy our needs grows weaker as the number and shades of the needs increases. The growth of needs is connected, not only to the problem of freedom, but also to the problem of authenticity. Rousseau makes a distinction between "natural" and "artificial" needs, and the increase comes on the part of the artificial ones.

Artificial needs are needs whose satisfaction depends on the approval of others. This approval is experienced as a sort of recognition of the needing subject. And this recognition is an essential part of the very need. This introduces a new form of dependence. In addition to the practical problem of satisfying our own natural needs, we are faced with a sort of psychological problem, other people's opinions are part of our own need-structure.

The idea is that our need to be recognised and to avoid contempt, expresses itself as a need to obtain certain sorts of things, results, positions, etc. The need to obtain these things is, nevertheless, experienced as a need for the things themselves, not for recognition.

Accordingly we are victims of self-delusion. Our interpretation of our needs is distorted. This self-delusion has grave consequences because the obtaining of aims set by artificial needs is not accompanied by genuine satisfaction. The discontentment of not having the desired things is considerably greater than the contentment of having them. By seeking to obtain them, we confirm our own insecure situation and dependence. Rousseau describes goals that are painful to seek and joyless to enjoy.

This situation adds fuel to the problem of authenticity. It locates a confusion between ourselves and others in the very needs that are experienced as our own. Hence it makes it difficult for us to distinguish between ourselves and others. In what sense should I interpret my felt needs as expressions of myself? In what sense are they expressions of foreign demands?

Rousseau thinks of "natural needs" or "real needs" as needs connected to my immediate physical existence, my life as it could be lived in relationship to a natural world. Real needs are the basis for meeting *nature as nature*, not as *materialised sociality*.

(2) In order to approach Rousseau's concept of experience, we will make a distinction between "primary experience" and "secondary experience". These terms are meant to mark the endpoints of a scale, not to serve as names for essentials of two distinct sorts of experiences. As an ideal type, secondary experience is an encounter with a phenomenon in the light of a relatively strong preinterpretation or preconceptualisation of this phenomenon. Accordingly, primary experience is an encounter without such preinterpretation or preconceptualisation. Philosophers will of course immediately object and say that every experience contains some sort of preconceptualisation, or else we would not be able to identify the object in the first place. But even philosophers would admit that there is a question of degrees here. And they would admit that certain cultural changes may be described as slides along the indicated scale.

I have briefly discussed the dependence following from the development of division of labour. This division affects not only satisfaction of needs that at the surface seems to be material or physical. It also extends to what is experienced as inner, private and intimate needs connected with the emotional life. Emotions are, according to Rousseau, social products, and they essentially occur

within a context of emotional division of labour. Rousseau, probably correctly, sees emotions as desires to be met with complementary emotions from others. Pride wants envy, malice wants humility, love wants love, feeling of debasement wants recognition and so on. If emotions are something to be expressed in authentic action, and if the success of their expression is to be measured in the response of others, then their very relational character seems to contradict the autonomy that is the precondition of the authenticity of the expression.

### **Property, emotions and dependency**

Emotions like pride, arrogance, shame etc. are foundations for dependence, dependence on things as well as other people. The reason for this is that such emotions are indirectly connected to who I am. Indirectly because they connect to what I *have*, and produce a self-image on this basis. To be proud or shameful is to be proud or shameful for something I have or do not have. To the degree that these emotions express a person's self-feeling they make this feeling dependent upon things.

Isn't it possible to be proud or shameful for what one *is*, regardless of other people's appraisals? In fact it seems that Rousseau denies that. This is indicated by his example, Emile, the imagined successful product of Rousseau's ideal education. Emile is free from such emotions as pride and shamefulness. In spite of being in possession of qualities that everyone should want to have, he is not proud of them. The ability to hold on to oneself as what one *is*, not as what one *have*, is, according to Rousseau, a source of indifference towards the estimations of others. Their judgements are insignificant. Such indifference leaves no room for pride and shame. They express not only our attitude towards what we have, but also towards other people's evaluation of these things. In these emotions we establish relations to others that are conditioned by them relating to what we have, not what we are. Pride and shame are ambivalent emotions, they cause us to be attracted to others in a repulsive way. Rousseau experiences this as intolerable, as something threatening the personal integrity.

We can "have" something, things, qualities, reputation etc., in different senses of the verb "to have". The senses which are relevant in the present context also covers cases that we usually express by using

“is” or “am” like “I am the head of the Department”, “I am stupid”, “He is rich”. Such expressions may usually be rephrased to a have-form. We may have a job, an appearance, money, intellectual abilities and so on. If we follow Rousseau, the use of the is-form would approach to a symptom of confusing what we have with what we are. Shame and pride, for him, reveal that we, in a fundamental way, identify ourselves with something foreign to us, something we have. He takes this to be a menace to the identity of the self, even its numerical identity. It creates a situation where one may ask questions like; “Am I who have this job the same person who has this family?” The possessive pronouns, my/mine, give a new and less directly experienced content to whatever a person is referring to when using the person indexical “I”.

A sense of “having” that has special significance is the one expressed in the institute of property, i.e. being in possession of property. According to Rousseau, the introduction of property is of decisive importance in the history of civilisation interpreted as a history of human decay. It formalises our status as possessors by making us owners. It gives a new meaning to “something being ours”. It binds us, with legal chains to the things alienating us from our own nature.

Rousseau is entangled in a strange paradox that may be expressed as follows: Civilisation is a precondition for the existence of an emotional self with a need for authentic expression. At the same time it represents conditions for human expression and action that exclude the authenticity of the same expressions and actions.

## **Question 2: Is civilised Authenticity possible?**

We will now approach the second question that was posed at the beginning of this paper: What forms, if any, can authentic expression take in civilised societies? This question is probably equivalent to the question of how a non-alienating sociality is possible.

I have said that Rousseau has an ambivalent attitude towards society and reason, but so far I have stressed the aspect of decay. Rousseau’s conception of the good society is formulated mainly in the *Contrat Social*. The central concept, beside that of the social contract, is *the general will*.

The problem of authenticity is also a part of the problem of politics. The central political question is the following: How is it

possible to establish and maintain a political order where the individual preserves his freedom? What makes this a problem is the fact that in political systems the individual is subordinated to something outside himself, which means that his life is no longer an unproblematic expression of himself or his own will, but of a foreign will.

The social contract is described as a product of an action wherein the individual hands over himself and his rights to "everyone" (society). How is it possible that Rousseau, who everywhere emphasises the value of freedom and independence can recommend such a disposal? The answer brings us to the core of the connection between Rousseau's political thinking and his critique of modern culture: "When everyone gives himself to everyone, he gives himself to no one in particular" (Rousseau, 1997, I. VI.). Who is this "no one in particular"? My answer is that it is some sort of collective variant of the indeterminate self.

The point seems to be that the forms of mutual dependence that we have described so far are connected with some sorts of mental power-struggles determined by accidental peculiarities of the actors involved. Relationships to everyone who is "no one in particular" is undetermined by the contingencies of the closer social relations. The social contract is thought to constitute a generally valid standard transcending the whims and tastes of any particular person. This standard is what Rousseau calls "the general will". What is this "general will"?

First of all, "the general will" is conceived to be a will that is not foreign to the will of the individual, it is thought to be his proper will. Action in accordance with the general will is therefore not at conflict with the authentic expression of the individual. Political action corresponding to this will is the authentic expression of a *moral I*. However, the general will is not natural in the sense that it follows from the human nature. It nevertheless expresses a freedom that Rousseau considers to be more valuable than the freedom of natural man.

Rousseau sees the general will as a principle of reason. It is of course tempting to compare it to Kant's categorical imperative. Rousseau however does not formulate the general will as a formal principle of moral action and judgement (even though he states some utopian procedures for its expression). The concept of the general will

is a notion of a precondition underlying a social order where the individual is not alienated. So, Rousseau must mean that reason constitutes a basis for a moral identity, a moral self, building on, but not following from the natural I. The general will expresses a vision of a possible authentic expression of reason in a non-alienating sociality.

There is however a question whether or not this social construction of reason will meet with the demands of freedom and authentic life that posed the initial problem. Is Rousseau's political construction likely to satisfy the human needs that Rousseau himself has described? My answer will be that it is not! This is probably not a very surprising answer given the fact that few of us make sense of what it means to be "forced to be free" (Rousseau, 1997, I. VII.). What interests me here is not to consider Rousseau's state as a possible alternative to a political framework for a good life, but rather to point out that Rousseau's initial emotional ambivalence to reason and civilisation is transformed into a problem formulated or rephrased in political terms so that it allows only of a political solution (or rather discourse). The problem was the threat to human freedom being represented by the emotions and thus by other peoples civilised behaviour (as the emotions to a large extent is a product of this). The solution consists in a delegitimation of the whole sphere of non-political social interaction, the point of which partly is to protect against emotions.

Rousseau constructs an emotional configuration that we can call "negation of dependence". This configuration originates in a kind of shame connected to being dependant on others. The feeling of shame is countered by a negation of the legitimacy of the demands and expectations of others, and the individual freedom is conceived to be a product of this negation. The core of this pathetic situation is that freedom becomes dependent on negation of shame.

In the non-political sphere, people interact on the basis of their own and other's particularity, their various determinate selves. But this is exactly what is experienced as emotionally threatening. There is of course a risk involved when people can change their mind for reasons beyond the reach of our control. It is this risk that the general will is designed to eliminate. From this perspective the general will and its institutional counterpart is a device that can only serve as an ordering of human expression that safeguards it from emotional

interference, but is still considered to be authentic. The ambiguity of emotions is done away with by encapsulating emotions in a sphere that has no legitimate place in the public interaction of men. The political edifice represents an institutionalized denial of the determinate particularity of human beings.

Rousseau has given to posterity a rather gloomy legacy concerning an aspect of the freedom that can be secured by the political body. To be sure, this does not exhaust the content of civil freedom, but it undoubtedly points to an aspect that it is important to remember. It is the aspect on which Max Weber has focused under the heading of "bureaucratic heartlessness"<sup>6</sup>. Who is this "no one in particular" to whom the citizen gives himself? Surely no one but himself! After all this is the very condition under which his political expression can be considered as authentic. So, the political expression, in Rousseau's reconstruction, does not escape the narcissistic psychologism that I mentioned earlier. The political expression meets the need of combining authenticity with the need to be invisible. As we can learn from Weber, this has two destructive consequences. The first is the bureaucratic spirit that isolates every expression of particularity into the shadowy realm of the private and intimate. The second is the re-entrance of the particular on the public stage in the shape of the charismatic figure who identifies his own authentic expression with reason itself.

### **Rousseau's problem**

Rousseau can be read as a constructor of a problem that is formulated in a way to allow no solution. The problem can be formulated in psychological terms or it can be put in terms describing modern civilisation. Formulated in the first way it becomes a description of a vital personal need of giving authentic expression to one's own feelings, one's own life, but having to do this under conditions that entails losing oneself in the act. Formulated in the second way it becomes a description of these conditions. Modern civilisation requires role-playing, the hiding of one's true feelings, and exactly this situation creates the personal need for authenticity. Rousseau's attempted solution to this problem consists of a recasting of the problem in political terms. In the act of establishing a political society through the

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Weber, Max. *Politik als Beruf*. Berlin, 1968.

social contract we at the same time constitute a new sort of personal identity, "the moral self". In that way the political system is entrusted the task of solving a problem of psychological and emotional origin. This is done by denying the significance of the origin of the problem, human particularity and individuality. And why shouldn't this be denied. It cannot be given authentic expression anyhow. The political relevant will that shall be given an authentic expression, is the *general* will, the will of no one in particular.