

LA FILOSOFIA DI JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

PRESENTATION

by Annamaria Loche*

As everybody knows, 2012 was “Rousseau Year” with its proliferation of conferences, study groups and publications. A further seminar was held in Cagliari (Sardinia) on 18-19 April 2013. Entitled “The Philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau”, it was structured around precise programmatic aims. Firstly, there was the intention to investigate Rousseau’s philosophy from several angles rather than from only the most common ones of political philosophy and the philosophy of education. Secondly, the organizers wanted to provide a platform for contributions from scholars who were young, but whose academic credentials could in no way be doubted.

Rousseau’s thinking was thus examined from various points of view. For example, Marco Menin (*La forza della tenerezza. La teoria “vettoriale” dell’emozione secondo Rousseau [The strength of tenderness. Rousseau’s “vectorial” theory of the emotions]*) singles out the concept of *attendrissement* as a thread that runs through the entire thought of the Genevan philosopher from *Épître à Bordes* to *Rêveries*, and which is particularly evident in *Discours sur l’inégalité* and in *La nouvelle Héloïse*. According to Menin, focusing on *attendrissement* serves at least two essential purposes. The first is to shed light “on Rousseau’s complex idea of the dynamics of passion”, which enables us to understand the transition from *homme de la nature* to *homme de l’homme*. The second is to make it possible to address the problem of man’s dependence on the opinion of others, defined by Menin through the category of “recognition”. *Discours sur l’inégalité* was examined also by other rapporteurs, though with different intentions, and it was sometimes used to look at the links between Rousseau and other philosophers. A contribution along these lines was that from Andrea Lanza (*Delle analogie avventate. Rousseau giudicato dalla scienza sociale francese [Hasty analogies. Rousseau judged by French Social Science]*), dedicated to the role played by the interpretation of Rousseau in French social science from Comte and Durkheim to Lévi-Strauss.

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Lanza identifies a series of “torsions” carried out on Rousseau’s philosophy. While Comte sees in him a philosopher “that conceives politics, the whole of society and the possibility to change it as a logical result of his theory of sovereignty,” Durkheim turns Rousseau into a “Durkheimian sociologist”, in which the general will becomes “one possible form of the relation between a society and its moral social norms.” Quite different, lastly, is the Rousseau of Lévi-Strauss who engages mainly with *Discours sur l’inégalité*, highlighting above all the relation between nature and culture.

Rita Fanari (*Rousseau e Leibniz: elementi leibniziani nella discussione dei problemi di teodicea in Rousseau* [*Rousseau and Leibniz: elements of Leibniz’s philosophy in Rousseau’s theodicy*]) discusses the presence of Leibnizian elements in Rousseau’s theodicy in analyzing certain texts such as *Lettre à Philopolis* (c1755), *Lettre à Voltaire* (1756), *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard* (1761) and *Lettre à M. de Franquière* (1769). Here too, the fundamental ideas on the relation of Rousseau to Leibniz (harmony and order) come from a reading of above all *Discours sur l’inégalité*. Fanari’s main theses show that, with respect to Leibniz, Rousseau rehabilitates in opposition to Voltaire the role of Providence and, at the same time, reveals “the link between the questions of theodicy and the rejection of materialism”. Thanks to the reference to the divinity and the immortality of the soul, this allows Rousseau “to find a coherent answer to the problem of evil.”

The twofold reference to *Discours sur l’inégalité* and to the connections with other thinkers is also to be found in the contribution from Mauro Simonazzi (*L’idea di degenerazione nel pensiero di Rousseau* [*The idea of degeneration in Rousseau’s thought*]). In it he deals with the theme of degeneration, at the center of the *Discours*, and links it to the degenerationist theory that was developed in France from the 17th to the 18th century. Important from this perspective is the role played by the theses of Buffon, explicitly quoted by Rousseau. Simonazzi underlines that the Genevan philosopher uses the category of degeneration in a natural, moral and political sense. Political degeneration, in particular, “is the consequence of the two previous kinds of degeneration [...] [that] develop in a pre-political phase.” Hence, the man that sets up political society is already a corrupted and degenerate figure and political society, outlined in the *Discours*, contains “already in itself the seed of its own generation.”

Mauro Simonazzi’s contribution paved the way for those that focused chiefly on Rousseau’s political philosophy. In particular, resonant with the themes in this last study were those taken up by the author of this presentation, whose paper (*Le forme del patto e la teoria dei governi nel Discours sur l’inégalité di Rousseau* [*Forms of social contract and theory of government in Rousseau’s Discours sur l’inégalité*]) deals with the last part of the *Discours*. Here Rousseau discusses the two different forms of social pact present in the entire work and the consequent theory of government. He demonstrates that it is impossible to live outside a politically organized society, from which

emerges the importance that the idea of social pact takes on in his political philosophy.

Gabriella Lamonica (*Libertà contro vantaggi in Rousseau e Rawls [The priority of liberty for Rousseau and Rawls]*) analyzes *Discours sur l'inégalité* alongside *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* by John Rawls, making her contribution to those studies in recent years that see more and distinctly in Rousseau an unavoidable theoretical landmark for Rawl's philosophy. The main thesis is the similarity in the relation between freedom and inequality in their thinking. For both of them, she explains, individual freedom has priority over equality and, what's more, the two philosophers "viewed economic inequality as underlying the erosion of such freedom."

Emilietta Murgia (*Il concetto di cittadino in Hobbes e Rousseau tra continuità e rovesciamento [The concept of citizen between continuity and reversal in Hobbes and Rousseau]*) dedicates more space to *Du contrat social*, enquiring into whether there is a change in philosophical approach on the part of the Genevan when compared to Hobbes, above all regarding the concepts of citizen and pact. Having criticized Hobbes's "confusion" of natural and civilized man, in the *Discours* Rousseau takes up again the image of the political body as an organism and in *Manuscrit de Genève* he uses Hobbes against Diderot, while in *Du contrat social* he no longer appears to refer to Hobbes. The issue, however, is somewhat complex since though we cannot maintain that Rousseau makes a clean break with Hobbes, it is nonetheless true that to see Rousseau as following in the wake of a Hobbesian perspective is an unacceptable exaggeration.

The reference point for Gabriella Silvestrini is also *Du contrat social*, in particular the fifth chapter of Book II, "Du droit de vie et de mort", described as "among the most controversial" in the work. This scholar argues that the difficulties faced in reading this chapter can be overcome in part by contextualizing the arguments within in the debate on the right to war and the right to punish among modern theorists of natural law. Rousseau takes up Pufendorf without however accepting all of his assumptions. From this perspective, once you admit that the "right to life and death [...] is compatible with the contractual act" and accept a "natural" correspondence between murder and capital punishment, what is at issue is to justify the sovereign's right to kill. Like many other theorists of natural law, Rousseau maintains that this right derives from the right to war. But, like Pufendorf, he "attributes a political origin to war", which is therefore an effect, not a cause of politics. It follows that if capital punishment is put in relation to the right to war, the right to kill lapses "when the purpose of war lapses", that is the danger that the State may be destroyed.

Roberto Gatti (*Émile, "aimable étranger"*) provides an interpretation of the figure of Emile in connection with history and politics. Regarding the first, it can be said that Emile "is 'in' history although he is not 'part' of that history". This is precisely what is required from the process of education in his case. As for the second, if the goal of Emile's education is to find a place where it is

possible to be at one and the same time *homme* and *citoyen*, then it is a failure since this place does not exist, or does not yet exist, as the conclusions in *Émile et Sophie* demonstrate. Emile is thus a part of society only as an *aimable étranger*, and politics remains essentially alien to him. This happens, concludes Gatti, because politics is unable to go beyond the evil that “turns out to be inscribed in human nature” and, not being the result of contingent social or historical factors, there is no education that can eliminate it.

This, in short, is what the contributions below aimed to express in their attempts to meet the objectives set the Seminar¹.

1. The contribution from Marco Geuna, *Rousseau lettore di Machiavelli [Rousseau as reader of Machiavelli]*, is not included here since it has already appeared elsewhere.