

# Specialization and the Division of Labor in the Social Thought of Plato and Rousseau

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The differing attitudes of Plato and Rousseau toward specialization and the division of labor color their views on who should formulate policy on political questions. In the theories of each thinker, the observations and evaluations made in such areas of social life as the production and exchange of services and material goods are carried over and applied to politics. In particular, the striking difference in the locus of sovereignty in the utopias of the two authors can be traced, in part, to their different attitudes toward specialization.

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates explains the origin of the *polis* in terms of a logical reconstruction of history.<sup>1</sup> In this reconstruction, the division of labor is described as the source of organized society.

A State . . . arises . . . out of the needs of mankind; no one is self-sufficient, but all of us have many wants. . . . As we have many wants, and many persons are needed to supply them, one takes a helper for one purpose and another for another; and when these partners and helpers are gathered together in one habitation the body of inhabitants is termed a State. . . . And they exchange with one another, and one gives, and another receives, under the idea that the exchange will be for their good.<sup>2</sup>

The "barest notion of a State" described in this reconstructed history contains at least four persons who each have occupational specialties corresponding in Plato's analysis to the greatest human necessities: a farmer, a builder, a weaver, and a shoemaker.<sup>3</sup> Socrates contends that it would be better if each of these inhabitants practiced his own craft and supplied the others rather than each attempting an autarkic, self-sufficient existence. *Specialization is advantageous, Socrates says, because "we are not all alike; there are many diversities of natures among us which are adapted to different occupations."*<sup>4</sup>

Plato's reason for the division of labor is quite like the reason provided by modern economist Ludwig von Mises, who writes:

Historically division of labor originates in two facts of nature: the inequality of human abilities and the variety of the external conditions of human life on the earth. These two facts are really one: the diversity of Nature, which does not repeat itself but creates the universe in infinite, inexhaustible variety. . . .

Had the strength and abilities of all individuals and the external conditions of production been everywhere equal the idea of division of labor could never have arisen. . . . No social life could have arisen among men of equal natural capacity in a world which was geographically uniform. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Plato then finds that more artisans must be added to his initial group of approximately four specialists. Because of geographical differentiation in Nature—"to find a place where nothing need be imported is wellnigh impossible"<sup>6</sup>—merchants engaged in intercity trade must be added. And, in addition, there must be retailers.<sup>7</sup> If there is to be development beyond this primitive city (beyond this "city of pigs," as Glaucon calls it), a larger population is required, according to Plato. Plato's Socrates argues that once a city has gone beyond such necessities as houses, clothes, and shoes, a social transformation takes place.<sup>8</sup> Once citizens can obtain comforts of life beyond what satisfies natural needs, the society will be beset with conspicuous consumption and the occupations which cater to it. This new situation entails a population increase in order to fill all the new occupations. The society will expand by conquering the territory of its neighbors.<sup>9</sup>

There are a number of loose ends in Plato's explanation. He does not show why shoes are a natural need, but sauces to go with food are a luxury. He does not show why the conquest of neighbors begins with the onset of luxury, rather than with the expansion of the city from four inhabitants to eight. In fact, he neglects the possibility of purchasing land from one's neighbors.

Most importantly from an economic standpoint, Plato considers his hypothetical city as essentially a single political unit, even though he has described it only as an economically rational cluster of traders.

What Plato seems to be getting at is a version of Adam Smith's theorem that the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market.<sup>10</sup> In order for the degree of specialization to increase, the size of the market must increase. However, there is a difference between having a larger available market and increasing the size of a political state.

Because Plato is trying to reason forward through time to the city he knows, he sees the city as a political entity. In fact, however, Plato does not describe how humans have entered into political society. His primitive

grouping based on the division of labor sounds somewhat like one example that Aristotle gives of a nonpolitical society. Aristotle writes:

If men dwelt at a distance from one another, but not so far off as to have no intercourse, and there were laws among them that they should not wrong each other in their exchanges, neither would this be a state. Let us suppose that one man is a carpenter, another a husbandman, another a shoemaker [precisely three of Plato's first four occupations—W.M.E.], and so on, and that their number is ten thousand: nevertheless, if they have nothing in common but exchange, alliance, and the like, that would not constitute a state. Why is this? Surely not because they are at a distance from one another: for even supposing that such a community were to meet in one place, but that each man had a house of his own, which was in a manner his state, and that they made alliance with one another, but only against evil-doers; still an accurate thinker would not deem this to be a state, if their intercourse with one another was of the same character after as before their union.<sup>11</sup>

In any event, Plato's "luxurious" city, his "State at fever-heat," is going to engage in military conquest to obtain more land. In order to fight, soldiers are needed. At this point, Plato engages in a well-reasoned defense of a professional army as opposed to a citizen-militia (or conscript army).<sup>12</sup> He shows that military activities are not exempt from the general desirability of specialization of function.

It is worth noting that Plato's Socrates still has not shown why the introduction of the political state is necessitous and unavoidable. These specialist, mercenary warriors could still be hired directly via a commercial contract by some or all of his now vastly expanded membership in the division of labor.<sup>13</sup> It is only when we get into the training of the warriors that we realize that we are deeply immersed in a powerful and totally-encompassing political state.

It turns out, therefore, that Plato's military mercenaries are mercenaries of a special sort. They are specialists whose pay is communally provided in kind by the state. They are isolated from what Plato sees as the corrupting potential of the cash nexus.

The guardians were not to have houses or lands or any other property; their pay was to be their food, which they were to receive from the other citizens, and they were to have no private expenses. . . . They will not tear the city in pieces by differing about "mine" and "not mine;" each man dragging any acquisition which he has made into a separate house of his own, where he has a separate wife and children and private pleasures and pains. . . . They will be delivered from all those quarrels of which money or children or relations are the occasion.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to recall that in the dialogue Socrates has discovered the division of labor in the course of an inquiry into the nature of justice. Thus,

for Plato economic inquiry is primarily an investigation with moral ends. Modern economics and sociology, in contrast, are often a scientific search for laws of human action and social organization. Although Plato describes the division of labor as arising naturally from the diversity of human talents, he also rejects the luxurious city as the best city. He intends to purify the degenerate city through educational reform and by a philosophically considered reimposition of the specialization of functions along certain lines.

For Adam Smith, the division of labor is an environment in which men may grow more prosperous.<sup>15</sup> (And ultimately, for Smith, since prudence as well as sympathy are proper attributes of man, such prosperity can be a condition making moral endeavors possible.)

But for Plato, the moral function of the division of labor is much more direct. Since justice consists in every man's attending to his business,<sup>16</sup> the specialization of functions (when reordered and defined by the philosopher) makes possible the conformity of a community with the Greek cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice.<sup>17</sup> As Ernest Barker notes,

To Plato the state, viewed merely as an economic concern, contains features valuable not only in themselves, and from an economic point of view, but also as types and foreshadowings of political truths. It contains the feature of specialization; and if the cobbler sticks to his last, and thereby produces better work and more work, why should not the statesman stick to his statesmanship, and produce the same result. . . . Specialization is the author of unity everywhere: the doctrine of specific function will eliminate unlimited competition in every sphere. "The intention was, that . . . each individual should always be put to the use for which Nature intended him, one to one work, and then every man would do his own business, and be one and not many; and so the whole city would be one and not many."<sup>18</sup>

For non-Marxian modern thinkers generally the division of labor has no moral quality itself. Liberal political philosophers view wisdom, courage, and temperance as personal moral attributes (and possibly as components of personal morality), but not as attributes of a society or a government. Justice, on the other hand, is for liberals preeminently a social virtue pertaining to relations in a society, not to relations among the components of an individual's character or soul. Plato, on the other hand, applies all four cardinal virtues both to the individual and to political society.

Plato locates the overseeing moral guidance for everyone in the state, and he severs the life of the warriors and lawgivers from the marketplace and from money, in order to preserve their moral character.

This isolation from money is no accident. Plato does not approve of commodity currencies like gold and silver,<sup>19</sup> because he believes their existence leads to extremes of poverty and wealth (which in turn foster envy that

undermines the stability of the social order<sup>20</sup>). He also argues that love of gold and silver causes corruption of the soul.<sup>21</sup> Further, a major part of Plato's dislike of commodity currencies is their universal acceptance by other peoples outside the state he is setting up. Because gold and silver have an independent monetary existence apart from any authorization by government, they are a potential threat to a community's moral regulation by the rulers. For example, in the *Laws*, he says:

The law enjoins that no private man shall be allowed to possess gold and silver, but only coin for daily use, which is almost necessary in dealing with artisans, and for payments of hirelings, whether slaves or immigrants, by all those persons who require the use of them. Wherefore our citizens, as we say, should have a coin passing current among themselves, but not accepted among the rest of mankind.<sup>22</sup>

Thus Plato calls for a fiat currency and goes on to place heavy fines on the importation of gold from abroad. He hopes in the *Laws* that a government-controlled monetary system will prevent what he sees as the subversive effect of money. In the *Laws* Plato also excludes from citizenship all traders and artisans who deal with money.<sup>23</sup>

We have seen that Plato finds exchange fundamental to the origin and existence of society. In the *Republic*, his division of labor includes retailers and those engaged in foreign trade. But those who live for the sake of gain are consigned to an inferior status.<sup>24</sup> In the *Laws*, retailing is not permitted to citizens at all.<sup>25</sup> Only aliens can be retailers, and are to be under strict regulation.<sup>26</sup> Plato also opposes locating new colonies where they will be primarily affected by foreign trade, and he calls for the prohibition of luxury imports.<sup>27</sup>

Looking at Plato's moral analysis of commerce, it is not surprising that he excludes the society's leading occupations from the cash economy. Plato hopes in this fashion to prevent the corruption of public servants. Barker writes:

Platonic communism is ascetic; and just for that reason it is also aristocratic. It is a way of surrender; and it is a surrender imposed on the best, and only on the best. It exists for the sake of the whole society, but not for the whole society. It exists only for the governing classes. In that sense it is a political, and not an economic communism which Plato preaches. Its aim may be said to be the substitution of a trained and professional government, supported by a system of regular taxation, for an unprofessional and unpaid government supporting itself by corruption. One may even say that here was the Periclean system of pay for political work, safeguarded from abuse by being combined with the Spartan system of common tables, and reconciled with an attempt at professional specialization which Periclean Athens would have repudiated.<sup>28</sup>

The culmination of Plato's examination of the specialization of functions is his placing of rulership in the hands of the philosopher. Sheldon Wolin writes:

The practice of [the arts of ruler, physician, weaver, and artist] involved three elements: the active agency of the skilled practitioner; the Idea at which he aimed, such as health or beauty; and the passive material receptive to the impress of the Idea. The materials in each case possessed no "claim" of their own, because the only way that the sick body, the unshaped marble, and the unwoven strands could attain their respective ends was through the skilled art of the practitioners. The criteria for judging the product of each art were dominantly aesthetic; harmony between the parts; symmetry of proportion; a moderate blend of diversities. All of these aspects, in turn, were carried over by Plato into his conception of rulership. Like the artist, the statesman too was inspired by a pattern of beauty, which issued in the impulse to create an ordered harmony by assigning the "parts" of the community to their rightful functions.<sup>29</sup>

Plato's plan to organize the state on the basis of specialization is intended to produce harmonious unity. But his assignment of guardianship and rulership to persons whose lifestyle is radically different from that of the masses may produce disunity. It seems that Plato is setting up a distinction in his model that liberal political theory makes as well. That distinction is between the state and society. Whereas the liberals do not seek an essential unity of state and society, Plato does. Aristotle asks in his critique of the *Republic*, "Must it not contain two states in one, each hostile to the other? [Plato] makes the guardians into a mere occupying garrison, while the husbandmen and artisans and the rest are the real citizens."<sup>30</sup> Following one lifestyle are the governing classes; following another (comparatively undetailed) lifestyle is the great bulk of the population, which engages in trade, uses money, and does manual labor.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was familiar with Plato's *Republic*, the *Statesman*, and the *Laws*. This much is clear from the references he makes to them in his writings.<sup>31</sup> There also exists in the British Museum an edition of Plato owned by Rousseau that contains his own marginal notes and underscorings.<sup>32</sup> But Rousseau does not take up Plato's suggestion of making specialization of function a central feature of societal organization. Rousseau has a radically different view of elemental human nature and of the historical development of the human race.

In Rousseau's hypothetical history, the human species exists first in a primitive, animal-like condition, independent and isolated from one another. But the situation of the species on the planet, the environment of the species, forces the humans to modify technologically their way of life.<sup>33</sup> As more and more human interaction occurs in technologically determined

stages, people begin to compare themselves to others and take notice of others' evaluations of them. From this more social situation stems envy and vainglory.<sup>34</sup> Yet this status of man—midway between his animal-like primitive status and his present status in civil society—was, according to Rousseau, man's happiest epoch. Here men were "free, healthy, good, and happy insofar as they could be according to their nature."<sup>35</sup> But once the division of labor and interdependence were introduced, once there were jobs that required "the cooperation of several hands," once "one man needed the help of another," then "equality disappeared."<sup>36</sup> Metallurgy and agriculture effect this technological revolution,<sup>37</sup> and systematic agriculture leads to the institution of property based on homesteading.<sup>38</sup>

Things in this state could have remained equal if talents had been equal, and if, for example, the use of iron and the consumption of foodstuffs had always been exactly balanced. But this proportion, which nothing maintained, was soon broken; the stronger did more work; clever turned his to better advantage; the more ingenious found ways to shorten his labor; the farmer had greater need of iron or the blacksmith greater need of wheat; and working equally, the one earned a great deal while the other barely had enough to live. Thus does natural inequality imperceptibly manifest itself along with contrived inequality; and thus do the differences among men, developed by those of circumstances, become more perceptible, more permanent in their effects, and begin to have a proportionate influence over the fate of individuals.<sup>39</sup>

While Rousseau goes on after this passage to describe how theft, envy, and greed lead the human species into a Hobbes-like state of war and how men can only escape from this mutual destruction into the unequal constitution of governmental society,<sup>40</sup> we must pause here to examine Rousseau's account of the origin of "contrived inequality," as described in the passage above.

Though his terminology clearly shows that Rousseau intends to distinguish between human contrivances and the products of Nature, all the events described in the hypothetical history can be shown upon examination to be natural.<sup>41</sup> The social evolution of man came in response to natural occurrences. The examples Rousseau gives of problems men faced are the height of trees; the ferocity of animals; differences of soil, climate, and season; seaside, riverside, and forest locations; floods, earthquakes; and continental drift.<sup>42</sup> All these are products of Nature. Likewise Rousseau even describes ironworking as an imitation of volcanic processes.<sup>43</sup> Not only is this social evolution caused by Nature. But it doesn't seem possible, within the bounds of Rousseau's story, for the development to have happened in any other way under the circumstances.

In Rousseau's specific description of the origins of inequality, all the elements are natural as well. First, he says equality of talents would have

been a necessary condition for social equality. (But it is a natural fact that people are unequal at singing, dancing or making speeches.<sup>44</sup>) And, Rousseau says, if this equality of talent were combined with an exactly balanced use of iron and consumption of foodstuffs, there might have been social equality. Here Rousseau is combining apples and oranges. It seems that he wants to balance the two on the basis of the uniform labor-time it takes to support them. However, marginal utility theorists since Rousseau have shown that the labor theory of value is incorrect. In any case, Rousseau notes that "nothing maintained" or sustained any such balance of iron use and food consumption.

Next Rousseau says that the stronger, the cleverer, and the more ingenious took advantage of their attributes. Again these would seem, at first glance at least, to be natural attributes. But we must recall that Rousseau says in the first part of this discourse that "among the differences that distinguish men, some pass for natural that are uniquely the work of habit and the various types of life men adopt in society."<sup>45</sup> He also maintains that there are natural inequalities based on age, health, bodily strength, and qualities of mind or soul.<sup>46</sup>

Looking over the attributes we have discussed so far, physical strength and talent in singing are certainly largely hereditary and hence natural, while talent in dancing, talent in speech-making, cleverness, and ingeniousness are certainly a product of heredity and environment (plus any contribution from the will and capacity for perfectibility that Rousseau has earlier described as gifts of Nature<sup>47</sup>). But since Rousseau has made social environment directly the product of nature, the environmental factors have to be looked at as natural at one remove.

So we must conclude, if we argue on the basis of Rousseau's hypothetical history, that human envy, competition, inequality, and private property are all natural. And we must answer the question posed by the Academy of Dijon by saying that inequality among men is authorized by natural law.<sup>48</sup>

While we have seen that Rousseau's account of the road to the depravity of civilized life cannot exclude Nature, we must recess this critical analysis here and return temporarily to Rousseau's ideological system to see where his view carries him on certain particulars. First, we will examine his portrait of the division of labor itself as the cause of unhealthy dependency and the generator of false desires. Second, we will note how, in Rousseau's view, this dependency effect causes insincerity and loss of intimacy, with special emphasis on Rousseau's contrast between autarkic country life and specialized city life. Third, we will look at how Rousseau's view of the division of labor manifests itself in his comments on certain concrete features of public life such as the military, commerce, and public finance. Lastly, we will



examine Rousseau's proposed societal solution to the depraved life of civilized man.

Unlike Adam Smith, Rousseau does not proclaim man's natural sociability and hence his interdependence. Unlike Adam Ferguson, Rousseau does not simply take man as is—living in society—and then analyze the workings of interdependent specialization. As we have seen in Rousseau's hypothetical history, the introduction of jobs requiring one man to help another is the source of human dependency. In part one of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau writes:

Since the bonds of servitude are formed only from the mutual dependence of men and the reciprocal needs that unite them, it is impossible to enslave a man without first putting him in the position of being unable to do without another.<sup>49</sup>

In *Emile*, he writes that there is

dependence on things, which is the work of nature; and dependence on men, which is the work of society. Dependence on things, being non-moral, does no injury to liberty and begets no vices; dependence on men, being out of order, gives rise to every kind of vice, and through this master and slave become mutually deprived.<sup>50</sup>

The proximity inherent in a dependent work situation engenders "a multitude of new needs," which in turn bind man more fully into a permanent dependency. These new desires do not serve man's real nature, but only his imagined preferences in a social situation that makes him consumed by envy.<sup>51</sup> Man is consumed by "the fervor to raise one's relative fortune less out of true need than in order to place oneself above others."<sup>52</sup>

Now, although property has already begun in the course of systematic agriculture (in the form of land and livestock), with comparison facilitated by the necessary physical closeness of one's fellow participant in the division of labor, there come into being "representative signs of wealth" that have public meaning in the eyes of others.<sup>53</sup>

At this point, the entire earth is divided up into property, and in this universe of proprietorship, those who do not adapt to the changed situation, through "weakness or indolence" (again natural attributes—*aspects of physical strength and quality of soul*), are driven into slavery, theft, and war.<sup>54</sup> A war of all against all is the consequence, and the escape from this war into civil society is designed by the rich to preserve artificial inequality.

In the context of this ubiquitous and relentless striving, men have fallen into ranks (social classes) determined by both their aptness for and success in the division of labor (for Rousseau, artificial inequalities) and their "mind, beauty, strength, or skill, upon merit or talents" (natural inequalities).<sup>55</sup> And

since such attributes determine one's social status, men begin to pretend to have them even when they are lacking. This is the origin of insincerity and inauthenticity.

These qualities being the only ones which could attract consideration, it was soon necessary to have them or affect them; for one's own advantage, it was necessary to appear to be other than what one in fact was. To be and to seem to be became two altogether different things; and from this distinction came conspicuous ostentation, deceptive cunning, and all the vices that follow from them.<sup>56</sup>

Not only is insincerity a necessary tactic in social striving, Rousseau contends, in addition, that the differentiation and instability of social roles and stations causes insincerity. In the *New Eloise*, Rousseau writes:

When a man speaks, it's his costume, not he, that's expressing a feeling. . . . Each coterie has its own rules, its own standards, its own principles, and will admit no others. . . . There's one mode of reason for the robe, another for finance, another for the sword.<sup>57</sup>

In *Emile*, he describes how a person who moves up in social station, recasts, reforms, and redefines his character. In Marshall Berman's words, in modern society

a striking contradiction developed between the permanency of men's pretensions and the transience of their conditions, between the solidity of the identities they claimed for themselves and the fluidity of the roles they actually played.<sup>58</sup>

The triumph of insincerity means that in the Paris of civil society men wear faces that are masks rather than direct revelations of their characters.<sup>59</sup>

Another facet of inauthentic life is the effect which encountering strangers will have upon one's disingenuous openness. In the absence of strangers, as in the family life of *Emile* and the *New Eloise*, it is possible to be one's true self.<sup>60</sup> A society of envy and artificial inequality, however, in which one is joined to strangers in the division of labor, does not permit the perfect intimacy that would make for sincerity.

The city of modern society was the primary location of the division of labor and interdependence that Rousseau believed bred vice and depravity. It has long been a commonplace observation that the city is characterized by a greater division of labor than the countryside. One finds this noted in Xenophon and in Adam Smith,<sup>61</sup> and it is also the central theme of a modern book by Jane Jacobs.<sup>62</sup> Judith Shklar offers an account of Rousseau's attitude toward specialization and urban life:

The division of labor is the source of [the related evils of change and social complexity]. Village life is not only uneventful, its social structure is elemental. In this it is the non-city, rather than any actual place. It is

the sum of all that Rousseau missed in Paris. It is not a complex web of relationships, it is not based on specialization of functions, and, above all, it is not riven by the inequalities that necessarily mark urban life. The division of labor, the vehicle of progress, was evidently nothing but an infernal engine in Rousseau's eyes.<sup>63</sup>

In *Emile*, Rousseau writes:

Men were not designed to live in ant-heaps. . . . The closer you pack them the more they spoil. . . . Towns are the sink of the human species.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, in the *New Eloise* the principle by which the Wolmars live is self-sufficient farming, rather than farming for the market and participation in the social division of labor. This is a moral imperative in order to stay isolated from urban mores.<sup>65</sup> Early in the same book, when Saint-Preux visits the Haut Valais region in the remote Swiss Alps, he discovers that its economy is self-sufficient. Very little money circulates. There is no occasion for foreign trade. The villagers of the Haut Valais are trusting and open in comparison to city dwellers.<sup>66</sup>

In the *Letter to D'Alembert on Geneva*, Rousseau describes the peasant society around Neufchatel. His account is summarized by de Jouvenel as follows:

Here equally spaced farms display the equality of land possessions of the farmers, and afford the inhabitants the advantages of privacy together with the benefits of society. These happy peasants are all in favorable circumstances, free from any levies, dues or taxes, they each live from their own produce; they have leisure to display their natural creative genius in many handiworks, especially in winter, each family isolated by snow in the nice house built by its own hands, practices many arts which are both pleasurable and useful. "No carpenter, locksmith [etc.] ever entered the country; they have no need of specialized craftsmen, each is his own craftsman. . . . Indeed they even make watches; and, incredible as it may seem, each united in his own person the various professions which watchmaking, and its very tooling, seem to require."<sup>67</sup>

Here in these idyllic country scenes, Rousseau finds luxury, the division of labor, trade, money, insincerity, distrust, and suspicion to be conspicuous by their absence.

With the moral standards that Rousseau applies to the division of labor and its effects now quite fully fleshed out, we might ask what the reply of liberal social theorists is to the critique presented by Rousseau. Ludwig von Mises, a *laissez-faire* liberal, writes:

It is futile to look for the harmoniously developed man at the outset of economic evolution. The almost self-sufficient economic subject as we know him in the solitary peasant of remote valleys shows none of that noble, harmonious development of body, mind, and feeling which the

romantics ascribe to him. Civilization is a product of leisure and the peace of mind that only the division of labor can make possible. Nothing is more false than to assume that man first appeared in history with an independent individuality and that only during the evolution [of society] . . . did he lose . . . his spiritual independence. All history, evidence and observation of the lives of primitive peoples is directly contrary to this view. Primitive man lacks all individuality in our sense. Two South Sea Islanders resemble each other far more closely than two twentieth-century Londoners. Personality was not bestowed on man at the outset. It has been acquired in the course of evolution of society.<sup>68</sup>

While we have seen the moral standard of Nature that Rousseau holds up and have seen how the standard is applied in his account of man's development, and while we now know something of the liberal critique of Rousseau's account, we must now turn briefly to some of Rousseau's remarks about specialization in the military and in the economy.

In Rousseau's *First Discourse*, the dissolution of morals caused by the progress of the arts and sciences is primarily a dissolution of military virtues. For example, he argues that history shows that the absence of luxury leads to military prowess, hence the necessity of sumptuary laws regulating the economy. Also he relates an anecdote in which the conquering barbarians do not burn the libraries because book-reading is a sedentary occupation and will keep the conquered peoples away from military exercise.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, we should note that Rousseau praises Plato's account of the education of the military class as "the best treatise on education in the world."<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Rousseau appears from the marks he made in his own copy of Plato to have been particularly impressed by the passage in Plato's military rules in the *Laws*<sup>71</sup> in which he calls for unthinking absolute obedience by soldiers.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, Rousseau does not take up Plato's suggestion that the military be organized as a specialized profession. He despises mercenaries as unvirtuous and as working for no moral goal. He says disparagingly in the *Political Economy* that we may judge their merit "by the price at which they sold themselves."<sup>73</sup> For Rousseau, a professional army is another instance of virtue and public spiritedness being placed on a cash basis.<sup>74</sup>

For both Corsica and Poland, he recommends the feudal, nonmarket institution of universal male conscription, modeled on Switzerland and on ancient Rome.<sup>75</sup> Service in the citizens' militia is to be a duty. Shklar has this comment on Rousseau's militarism:

The military life is the most perfect model of public service. Here, as in no other form of social endeavor, the individual loses his personal identity and becomes a part of a purposive social unit. Here alone the group absorbs all his resources, emotional as well as physical. . . . In the

citizen-army, the *moi humain* really is crushed by the *moi commun*. And this is the very essence of the psychological transformation of man into citizen.<sup>76</sup>

The evidence clearly shows that between Herbert Spencer's models of the military society (organized like a homogeneous army) and the industrial society (heterogeneously differentiated and organized on a market basis), Rousseau's ideology belongs to the militarist camp.

Rousseau maintains this ideological preference consistently throughout his economic thought. We have seen that he was distressed that the possibility and actuality of shifting occupational roles would lead to inauthenticity. Change and social mobility were so psychologically destructive in his view, that he came to praise the caste system of ancient Egypt because it forced sons to follow their fathers' occupations.<sup>77</sup>

In the *Political Economy*, the *Poland*, and the *Corsica*, Rousseau favors the feudal *corvée* system of forced labor rather than taxes in money.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, in the *Corsica*, he says, "The people must be made to practice this system, to love the occupation we decide to give them, to find in it their pleasures, their desires, their tastes, their happiness in general, and to limit their ambitions and projects to it."<sup>79</sup> In the *Poland*, he also suggests taxes in kind in the form of goods and privileges.<sup>80</sup>

In his plan for the reform of Polish society, he advocates a nearly moneyless, primitive agricultural economy. At length, he attacks the cash nexus and the use of money. Here, as elsewhere, he opposes the economic to the political and moral, and subordinates the former to the latter.<sup>81</sup>

By now in this essay, some elements of Rousseau's solution to the deprivileged conditions of civilized life have emerged. But at this point we are ready to look in a systematic fashion at Rousseau's proposal—his plan to revive virtue without sending men back to live among the bears.

The citizens of Rousseau's virtuous society are able to escape dependence on other individuals—an effect of the division of labor—by adhering totally to impersonal law which guarantees the independence of men.<sup>82</sup> We have seen earlier that Rousseau regards dependence on things as natural, but believes dependence on men in the division of labor gives rise to every kind of vice. He hopes that the social environment can be reconstructed so that it acts on man in the same way that the natural environment does. In *Emile* he writes:

If the laws of nations, like those of nature, could be so inflexible that no human force could ever bend them, man's dependence would again be a dependence upon things. All the advantages of the natural state and of the civil state would be united in the republic. The morality that lifts man to the plane of virtue would be joined to the freedom that keeps him free of vice.<sup>83</sup>

In his letter to Mirabeau, Rousseau states what he calls "the grand problem in politics"—"to find a form of government that places the law above man."<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to Rousseau's hopes, it seems that in reality, law not made (or discovered, in the case of natural law) by persons is an impossibility. In Rousseau's *Social Contract*, the Legislator, an almost superhuman religious figure, remolds the population from men into true citizens, using his spiritual power and not force or rational argument. The Legislator has no personal gain to expect from his work, any more than did Lycurgus of Sparta or the foreigners who often framed constitutions for ancient Greek city-states.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, great lawgivers like the Legislator will attempt deceptively to make the transformation of society appear impersonal.

In all periods, the Fathers of their country have been driven to seek the intervention of Heaven, attributing to the Gods a Wisdom that was really their own, in order that the People, subjected to the laws of the State no less than those of nature, and recognizing in the Creation of the City the same Power at work as in that of its inhabitants, might freely obey and might bear with docility the yoke of public happiness.<sup>86</sup>

This adherence to impersonal law will free men from their dependence on the wills of other individuals. Rousseau writes in the eighth *Lettre de la Montagne*:

Freedom consists less in asserting one's will than in not being subject to others. It consists also in not subjecting the will of others to our own. He who is a master cannot be free.<sup>87</sup>

Human insincerity and inauthenticity have existed in civil society because of human interdependence, according to Rousseau. Berman writes:

The task Rousseau set for himself as a political theorist was to imagine a community in which men could be freely and openly themselves, and in which they could discover and express the fullness of their powers, and in which personal authenticity could be a politically cohesive force.<sup>88</sup>

The new society will provide a moral context in which the realization of authenticity for each citizen through political life and in willing the public-good becomes possible. In addition, the small size of the state, in which "all the citizens know each other and watch over each other,"<sup>89</sup> makes intimacy possible.

Rousseau sought, as Plato did, to prevent in his new society extremes of wealth and poverty and to find a middle position into which the entire population would be moved. He seeks to modify inequality by regulating the extent of land holdings, limiting each person's plot to what will support subsistence.<sup>90</sup> Property conforming to this regulation (wrought by the general will) is legitimate and worthy of protection by the government.<sup>91</sup> In

other circumstances, he seeks to modify inequality via progressive taxation and the regulation of commerce.<sup>92</sup> His goal is to compensate by a moral and political rule for the natural inequalities from which men suffer and to provide a social setting that does not foster artificial inequality.<sup>93</sup>

To mitigate the destructive effects of envy and rivalrous striving, Rousseau channels them, reformed into moral incentives, into the service of the state.

I should like each rank, each employment, each honorific reward, to be dignified with its own external badge or emblem. I should like you to permit no office-holder to move about *incognito*, so that the marks of a man's rank or position shall accompany him wherever he goes. . . . Every citizen shall feel the eyes of his fellow-countrymen upon him every moment of the day. . . . Everyone . . . shall be so completely dependent upon public esteem as to be unable to do anything, acquire anything, or achieve anything without it. The resulting emulation among all the citizens would produce a ferment that, in its turn, would awaken that patriotic fervor which raises men—as nothing else can raise them—above themselves.<sup>94</sup>

This could transform into virtue what had formerly been, according to Rousseau, the source of vice.

The key to Rousseau's entire solution is his concept of popular sovereignty. As the positivist legal theorist Hans Kelsen states, there can be "a division of labor not only in economic production but within the domain of the creation of law as well."<sup>95</sup> We have seen one sort of application of the division of labor in this domain in Plato's assignment of rulership to the philosopher. Rousseau, however, rejects giving any primary or important consideration to the claims of the division of labor in the domain of law-making and is bound to reject Plato's suggestion. As Roger Masters argues, this is not because in peeling the layers of artificiality off modern man (shaped by the division of labor) Rousseau finds—instead of Plato's tripartite soul (wisdom, passion or spirit, appetite) and the social classes that represent its parts—nearly equal natural men with instincts of self-preservation and pity.<sup>96</sup> Nor is it particularly because the Greek cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance, justice) are too closely tied into the world of depraved civil society. Rather it is the case that, for Rousseau, the division of labor plays such an important initial and sustaining role in the corruption of man that any place it has in virtuous law-making will be minor and strictly subordinate. Just as Lycurgus, in suppressing cupidity, substituted a fiat iron currency for gold in Sparta,<sup>97</sup> so Rousseau will substitute mandatory commissions for the administrative work of the sovereign governments of modern civil society. John Plamenatz writes that Rousseau

disliked the social and political effects of an extensive division of labor. The more numerous men's wants, the greater the division of labor

needed to produce what satisfies them, and the greater the division of labor, the larger the number of persons on whose labor each man depends. But Rousseau thought that a political community could not be truly independent unless it was economically self-supporting, or at least not dependent on foreigners except for what its citizens could easily do without. More important still, he believed that a large community could not be truly democratic. Therefore, where there is an extensive division of labor, a community large enough to be self-supporting is too large to be democratic; it is too large to allow all its members to take an active part in the making of law. It cannot be a true society of equals because it is divided into two parts, of which the smaller makes the laws and the larger is required to obey them without having helped to make them.<sup>98</sup>

We can see that Rousseau's solution was designed with the intention of avoiding the two-states-within-the-state problem that Aristotle discerned in Plato's model. Inalienable, unlimited, and indivisible sovereignty is located in the people as body politic.<sup>99</sup> The government is not an entity to which the people hand over sovereignty.<sup>100</sup> People can fully acquire and sustain an understanding of the common interest, the public good, only by actively participating together in the making of the law and in the ceremonial public life of the society. Moreover, once they have been properly prepared by the Legislator or by a special sort of socializing public education,<sup>101</sup> all can participate on equal terms in the exercise of political sovereignty. (In this respect, Rousseau approaches the Sophist Protagoras who holds the brief for Athenian political society in the Platonic dialogues.<sup>102</sup>

This does not mean that Rousseau does not find a subordinate role for the division of labor in the law-making domain. Durkheim writes:

The unity that Rousseau attributes to the sovereign power . . . is constituted . . . by a homogeneous force, and its unity results from this homogeneity. It springs from the fact that all citizens must contribute to the formation of the general will, and they must unite if the differential characters are to be eliminated. . . . He did not conceive [society] as a whole made up of distinct parts, which work together precisely because they are distinct. His view is rather that it is or should be animated by a single, indivisible soul which moves all the parts in the same direction by depriving them, to the same degree, of all independent movement. . . . Rousseau was certainly not unaware of the importance of the division of functions; and even in this respect his analogy holds up. However, this division of labor is for him a secondary, derivative phenomenon that does not create the unity of the individual or collective organism, but rather presupposes it. Hence, once the sovereign authority has been constituted in its indivisible unity, it can generate various organs (executive bodies) which it entrusts, under its control, with the task of implementing it. The parts which thus come into being are not parts, but emanations of the sovereign power, to which they remain subordinate, finding their unity in it and by it.<sup>103</sup>



In sum, Plato saw the specialization of functions as the model on which to base the organization for a just society. He extended this insight, in full, into the political realm, while keeping the political realm free from the corrupting taint of commerce. Rousseau saw the division of labor as the apple that, once bitten, would cause the fall of natural man. Therefore, he tried to reinstitute moral life through a form of community participation that denies primary status to the division of labor.

### NOTES

1. In the use of such logical reconstruction, Rousseau is like Plato. But one seminal thinker on the subject of the division of labor disdained such devices. See Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), p. xvi.
2. Plato, *The Republic*, 369, in *Dialogues*, ed. B. Jowett, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1892), vol. 3, p. 49.
3. *Republic*, 369, Jowett, vol. 3, p. 49.
4. *Republic*, 370, Jowett, vol. 3, p. 50. Adam Smith, in contrast, believes that the division of labor stems from a propensity in human nature "to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another." Smith believes that the division of labor itself is the major cause of human differentiation. *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1937), pp. 13, 15. Herbert Spencer argues that natural differences produce specializations. *Principles of Sociology* (New York: Appleton, 1897), vol. 3, pp. 342-49.
5. Quoted in Murray N. Rothbard, "Freedom, Inequality, Primitivism and the Division of Labor," *Modern Age* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1971).
6. *Republic*, 370, Jowett, vol. 3, p. 51.
7. *Republic*, 371, Jowett, vol. 3, p. 52.
8. *Republic*, 372-373, Jowett, vol. 3, pp. 53-54.
9. *Republic*, 373, Jowett, vol. 3, pp. 54-55.
10. See Albert Augustus Trever, *A History of Greek Economic Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), p. 35. For a modern discussion of Smith's theorem, see George J. Stigler, "The Division of Labor is Limited by the Extent of the Market," *Journal of Political Economy* 59, no. 3 (June 1951): 185-93.
11. Aristotle, *Politics*, book III, 9, *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), vol. 9, p. 478. In what may be a reference to this passage in Aristotle, Shorey writes, "It pleased Plato to unfold his design in this order, and we may ignore as impertinent Aristotle's captious criticism of the minimum city." Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), p. 217.
12. *Republic*, 374-376, Jowett, vol. 3, pp. 55-58.
13. Plato himself, when he has Socrates recapitulate the *Republic* at the beginning of the *Timaeus*, says "the guardians were to be like hired troops, receiving pay for keeping guard." *Timaeus*, 18, *Great Books*, vol. 7, p. 442.
14. *Republic*, 464, Jowett, vol. 3, p. 159.
15. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 5.
16. *Republic*, 433, Jowett, vol. 3, p. 123.
17. *Republic*, 427-435, Jowett, vol. 3, pp. 116-27.

18. Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1947), p. 166.
19. *Republic*, 547–548, Jowett, vol. 3, pp. 251–53; *Laws*, 679, 705, 742, 831, Jowett, vol. 5, pp. 58–59, 87, 124, 213.
20. *Republic*, 548, Jowett, vol. 3, p. 253; *Laws*, 679, 744, Jowett, vol. 5, pp. 58–59, 127.
21. *Republic*, 547–548, Jowett, vol. 3, pp. 251–53; *Laws*, 831, Jowett, vol. 5, p. 213.
22. *Laws*, 742, Jowett, vol. 5, p. 124; see also *Republic*, 548, Jowett, vol. 3, p. 252.
23. *Laws*, 846, 847, 918, Jowett, vol. 5, pp. 229, 230, 305.
24. *Republic*, 581, Jowett, vol. 3, pp. 291–92.
25. *Laws*, 741, 743, 919, Jowett, vol. 5, pp. 124, 125–26, 307.
26. *Laws*, 920, Jowett, vol. 5, p. 307.
27. *Laws*, 705, 847, Jowett, vol. 5, pp. 87, 230.
28. Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, pp. 212–13. According to Barker, “Under the Periclean system the citizen was paid for . . . service in the army and navy, and for attendance in the Council and the courts of law,” (pp. 29–30). See also Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, *Great Books*, Vol. 14, p. 125.
29. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1960), pp. 46–47. See *Republic*, 485–489, 581–582, Jowett, vol. 3, pp. 181–87, 292–94. On the limitations of Plato’s analogies, see Renford Bambrough, “Plato’s Political Analogies,” *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, ed. Peter Laslett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), pp. 98–115.
30. *Politics*, book II, 5, *Great Books*, vol. 9, 459.
31. Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, p. 388.
32. M. J. Silverthorne, “Rousseau’s Plato,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 116 (1973), pp. 235–49.
33. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1964), *2nd Discourse*, part II, pp. 143, 148.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 154; cf. *ibid.*, p. 141 where Rousseau states that property begins with claiming and fencing, rather than with transformation by the first occupant.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 154–55.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 158–60.
41. Cf. Sanford A. Lakoff, *Equality in Political Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), pp. 108–109.
42. *2nd Discourse*, part II, pp. 142–43, 148.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
45. *2nd Discourse*, part I, p. 138.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
50. Quoted in Daniel Bell, “On Meritocracy and Equality,” *The Public Interest*, no. 29 (Fall 1972), p. 48.
51. F. A. Hayek, “The Non Sequitur of the ‘Dependence Effect,’” *Southern Economic Journal* (April 1961).
52. *2nd Discourse*, part II, p. 156.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–57.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 155–56. One of these vices resulting from the division of labor and subsequent insincerity is the impossibility of genuine aesthetic criticism. See Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 126–27.
57. Quoted in Berman, *Politics of Authenticity*, p. 116.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

59. *Ist Discourse*, pp. 37-38.
60. Judith Shklar, *Men & Citizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 24-25.
61. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VIII, ii, 5-6; Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 8-9, 358.
62. Jane Jacobs, *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Random House, 1969).
63. Shklar, *Men & Citizens*, p. 29.
64. Quoted in Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Rousseau the Pessimistic Evolutionist," *Yale French Studies* no. 28, (Fall-Winter 1961-62), p. 87.
65. Shklar, *Men & Citizens*, p. 152; de Jouvenel, "Rousseau," pp. 88-89.
66. Berman, *Politics of Authenticity*, pp. 219-20.
67. de Jouvenel, "Rousseau," p. 89. Cf. Adam Smith on the country workman, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 8-9.
68. Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 305.
69. *Ist Discourse*, pp. 50-52, 54.
70. Shorey, *What Plato Said*, p. 218.
71. *Laws*, 942-943, Jowett, vol. 5, pp. 3330-331.
72. Silverthorne, "Rousseau's Plato," p. 248.
73. Rousseau, *A Discourse on Political Economy*, *Great Books*, vol. 38, p. 380.
74. Cf. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, book V. ch. i.; Adam Ferguson, *Essay on Civil Society*.
75. Lester G. Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), p. 33. Rousseau, *The Government of Poland* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), pp. 81, 83.
76. Shklar, *Men & Citizens*, p. 15.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
78. Rousseau, *Political Economy*, *Great Books*, vol. 38, p. 383; *Poland*, pp. 71, 74; Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract*, p. 28.
79. Quoted in Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract*, p. 28.
80. *Poland*, pp. 70-71.
81. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-78.
82. See Emile Durkheim, *Montesquieu and Rousseau* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 94, 99-100, and R. J. Howells, "The Metaphysics of Nature: Basic Values and Their Application in the Social Philosophy of Rousseau," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 60 (1968), pp. 162-67.
83. Quoted in Durkheim, *Montesquieu and Rousseau*, p. 94.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
85. Rousseau, *Social Contract*, ed. Ernest Barker (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 206.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
87. Quoted in Durkheim, *Montesquieu and Rousseau*, p. 100.
88. Berman, *Politics of Authenticity*, p. 203.
89. Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract*, p. 34.
90. *Social Contract*, p. 187.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
92. Berman, *Politics of Authenticity*, pp. 209, 281.
93. *Social Contract*, p. 189.
94. *Poland*, pp. 72, 87.
95. Hans Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 289.
96. Roger D. Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 102-105.
97. *Poland*, p. 73.
98. John Plamenatz, *Man and Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), vol. 2, p. 56.
99. *Social Contract*, pp. 190-99; see Crocker, *Rousseau's Social Contract*, p. 69. A liberal critic, while pointing to the problems with finding the general will and the impossibility of any past or future social contract, should cut to the bone of Rousseau's argument by pointing out that Rousseau's total alienation of each to all (*Social Contract*, p. 181) is

- negated by his own proper strictures upon slave contracts and obedience to absolute authorities (*Social Contract*, p. 175).
100. See Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin* (New York: Monthly Review, 1972), p. 183, and Otto von Guericke, *The Development of Political Theory* (New York: Norton, 1939), pp. 92-98, on Rousseau's thesis "that the institution of government is not a contract" (*Social Contract*, pp. 263-64).
  101. *Poland*, pp. 19-24. For discussion of Rousseau's opposition to mercenary (that is, profit) motives in education, see Istvan Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (New York: Harper, 1972), p. 55.
  102. *Protagoras*, 320-323, *Great Books*, vol. 7, pp. 44-45.
  103. Durkheim, *Montesquieu and Rousseau*, pp. 111-12.