

---

H-France Review Vol. 17 (August 2017), No. 131

Anne Deneys-Tunney and Yves Charles Zarka, eds., *Rousseau Between Nature and Culture: Philosophy, Literature, and Politics*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2016. vi + 206 pp. Bibliography and index. \$126.00 US (cl). ISBN 978-3-1104-5075-0.

Review by Gary Kates, Pomona College.

This book includes thirteen brief articles, most under fifteen pages, regarding both an “historical examination of Rousseau’s works and ideas, and an illustration of the ways in which these texts and ideas shed light on contemporary problems within the humanities and social sciences” (pp. 1-2). However, if our primary mission is to use Rousseau to learn more about the eighteenth century, such contextual analysis is largely absent from this volume.

Pierre Guenancia begins this anthology by investigating the ways in which Rousseau inspired anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss throughout his career. It is clear and telling how Rousseau’s ideas affected the author of *Tristes Tropiques*. What is less clear is how this relationship illuminates Rousseau’s writings. When, for example, Guenancia notes that Lévi-Strauss’s method requires a reciprocal empathy and mutual understanding between the indigenous subject and the European anthropologist, Guenancia exclaims: “Isn’t it in very similar terms that Rousseau evokes the function of pity in the Second Discourse?” (p. 23). Well, no, at least I don’t think so. Lévi-Strauss was reflecting upon his relationships with actual indigenous Brazilians; Rousseau was conducting an abstract thought experiment, a form of philosophy. There is certainly nothing wrong with emphasizing the extent to which Rousseau inspired modern anthropology so long as we don’t confuse Rousseau himself with doing it.

Phillip Knee’s helpful article tries to establish the influence of Malebranche and Pascal on Rousseau’s key political ideas in the *Social Contract*, especially how notions of the general will resolved problems inherent in *amour propre*, or individual egotism. This is well-worn ground, of course, and the scholarly literature on the Jansenist links to the origins of *amour propre* makes one look forward for a more sustained treatment of Malebranche’s place in this story.

Stephane Lojkin interrogates the ambiguity of Rousseau’s concept of nature, arguing that it was neither really meant as a particular historical period nor as a purely abstract concept, but rather as something in between. Anne Deneys-Tunney argues that Rousseau ought to be seen as “the founder of ecological thinking” (p. 62), and she is undoubtedly right. Masano Yamashita plays with the ambivalent notion of “the mechanical life” in which Rousseau regrets the drudgery of certain manual tasks, but at the same time, reflects positively on his own work as a music copyist, which is less stressful for him than other types of writing or social interaction.

Paul Audi shows how Rousseau redirects self-love away from Hobbesian selfishness towards a type of autonomy only possible when the self desires that which it may immediately obtain. Pasquale Pasquino moves in the opposite direction, suggesting that Rousseau’s positive gloss on Roman dictatorship

foreshadows Carl Schmitt's understanding of how tyrannical authority can stem from a democratic basis.

Simon Critchley offers an important contribution to Enlightenment intellectual history by arguing that Rousseau's intended ideal reader in the *Social Contract* was someone like Diderot, who harbored a Hobbesian rational egotism. The invention of the general will was intended to convert such individualists towards a more communitarian and republican notion of virtue.

Mira Morgenstern is concerned with Rousseau's legacy today, and how we are to address what appear to us as obvious contradictions in his work. She addresses this huge challenge indirectly, by arguing that Rousseau "formulates not one, but two visions" (p. 129) of alienation that, when used in combination, can serve an authentic republic. Only in this way can individual citizens both recognize selfish desires in themselves while advocating for the community's best interest. Yves Charles Zarka compares Rousseau's notion of popular sovereignty with three other early modern theorists: Machiavelli, Grotius, and Burlamaqui, each of whom recognized it in theory only to cover it up in practice. According to Zarka, Rousseau is the only one among them to stake out how to put popular sovereignty into operation. Unfortunately, at the very end of the essay, Zarka declares that the failure of the French Revolution proves Rousseau wrong and that the other three theorists were essentially right. Clearly such a contentious remark deserves its own full-fledged analysis.

In a final section, Christophe Martin, Lucien Nouis, and Tanguy L'Aminot relate political themes to Rousseau's two literary masterpieces, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Emile*. Martin argues convincingly that many of Rousseau's ideas regarding education were presaged in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Nouis takes very seriously Rousseau's repeated declaration: "I hate books" (p. 168). In Nouis's view, Rousseau despised books as "prostheses that allow the reader to use words without investing them with any sort of intimate experience of the world" (p. 168). No doubt there is much truth in this observation. But it also belies Rousseau's own love for books and book learning. As the work of Raymond Birn makes clear, Rousseau obsessed over the publication and distribution of his own books. [1] Finally, L'Aminot leaves us with a large paradox at the heart of Rousseau's writings. Although the *Social Contract* and *Emile* were written at roughly the same time, L'Aminot argues that the eponymous protagonist would make a very bad citizen in Rousseau's republic. The adult Emile is "a man who lives in alienating and oppressive societies who shelters himself as much as possible and who stays outside of the trends that steer the herd" (p. 194).

The best feature of this book is that it provides a representative sampling of current Rousseau scholarship, primarily in literary criticism and philosophy. Despite the good efforts of the volume's editors, however, these papers move in several different directions without much cross-fertilization. The brevity of each article turns out to be a handicap, in which arguments require truncation and implications are often ignored.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Anne Deneys-Tunney and Yves Charles Zarka, "Introduction"

Pierre Guenancia, "Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss's 'Master'"

Philip Knee, "Rousseau and the Authority of Nature"

Stéphane Lojkine, "Nature as Blind Space"

Anne Deneys-Tunney, "Rousseau and Technology: The Invention of a New Ecological Paradigm"

---

Masano Yamashita, "Rousseau and 'The Mechanical Life'"

Paul Audi, "Rousseau's Ethical Freedom"

Pasquale Pasquino, "Remarks on Rousseau's Dictatorship: Between Machiavelli and Carl Schmitt"

Simon Critchley, "Politics and Religion in the Social Contract"

Mira Morgenstern, "Alienation and Freedom: Rousseau and Transcending Nature/Culture Dualism"

Yves Charles Zarka, "Rousseau and the Sovereignty of the People"

Christophe Martin, "Nature and Supplementation in *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*"

Lucien Nouis, "Recomposing the Diffracted Text: Rousseau and the Metaphor of the Book of Nature"

Tanguy L'Aminot, "Nature, Culture, and the Social Contract: Emile's point of view"

#### NOTES

[1] Raymond Birn, *Forging Rousseau: Print, Commerce and Cultural Manipulation in the Late Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001).

Gary Kates  
Pomona College  
[gary\\_kates@pomona.edu](mailto:gary_kates@pomona.edu)

Copyright © 2017 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of *H-France Review* nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of *H-France Review*. The views posted on *H-France Review* are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172