

Rethinking Modernity

Transitions and Challenges

Edited by

Oana Șerban

Rethinking Modernity: Transitions and Challenges

Edited by Oana Șerban

This book first published 2023

Ethics International Press Ltd, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2023 by Ethics International Press

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Print Book ISBN: 978-1-80441-117-9

eBook ISBN: 978-1-80441-118-6

Table of Contents

Introduction Rethinking Modernity: An Introductory Perspective - Oana Șerban.....	vii
Chapter 1: Rethinking Modern Property: Rousseau's concept of Private Property from <i>A Discourse on Political Economy</i> to <i>The Social Contract</i> - Ionuț Văduva	1
Chapter 2: The Limits of the Moral Public Discourse: the Foucault Habermas Polemic - Andreea Baciuc	28
Chapter 3: Rethinking the Transition from Modernity to Postmodernism from Process Philosophical Point of View - Vesselin Petrov	46
Chapter 4: Theory of Precedent in Arts: The Kuhnian Roots of Hancock's Radical Hermeneutics - Constantin Stoenescu	57
Chapter 5: Modernity on Trial: Liquid Art, Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism and (un)Destructive Mobility - Oana Șerban	76
Chapter 6: <i>Mona Lisa</i> and the recent "Modernities": Challenges faced by once Modern Aesthetic Concepts - Mihaela Pop	111
Chapter 7: Artistic Modernity and The Representational Theory of Art - Eva Ivan-Haintz	129
Chapter 8: A New 'Eco-sophia' and Eco-ethics: A New Paradigm for Modern Social Philosophy - Bogdana Todorova	146
Chapter 9: Death and Conflicting Identities during The Meiji Era through the lens of Natsume Sōseki's <i>Kokoro</i> - Andreea Ioana Vlad	161
Chapter 10: Forms of Refuge of Happiness: Phenomenological Incursions into Miloš Forman's Films - Ioan Mateiciuc	191

Introduction

Rethinking Modernity: An Introductory Perspective

Oana Șerban

There are many attempts to identify and define the pedigree of philosophical modernity, which has never been a domain excused of cultural contradictions (Bell 1979), scientific revolutions (Kuhn 1970), aesthetic revolutions (Șerban 2022) and political clashes. Therethrough, we must take into account that any such critical endeavour should have at its heart the premise that philosophical modernity is not a unitary project, but rather a complex ethos puzzling different ideologies and beliefs. Modernity should not be reduced solely to modernizing processes, such as modernization should not be understood just by its progressist trends, sometimes too energetic and disruptive. According to the general historical perspective of philosophy, modernity refers to a large period of time that has its beginnings at the heart of the Renaissance and the age of Cartesian rationalism. At a first glance, modernity has been deeply rooted in the principle of subjectivity as the source of knowledge, senses, wills and actions. Modern philosophy consecrated the perspective that the subject, depicted as the creative force capable to secure the order and the structure of knowledge – might perform cultural, social and political actions by engaging ideals prescribed both by the power of reason – for Early Modernity – and by the association of intellectual and sensitive capacities – for Late Modernity. However, this rigorous and systematic approach of modernity became later on complicated, suffering certain transitions

and amendments raised especially by Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophical works, challenging "modern theories" to embody a new way of thinking for which traditional "fundaments" should be absent. This new understanding which became symptomatic for postmodernist philosophers considered modernity as: (1) A historical homogenous era, dominated by the ideal of a historical evolution of human thought as a continuous vision on temporality, strengthened by the use of reason as an infallible source of knowledge; (2) An ethos determined by a nomological order prescribed by reason considered as a fundamental source to access principles; (3) A self-legitimation of scientific knowledge, in the spirit of Thomas Kuhn.

However, we cannot tackle the multiple understandings of modernity and its cognitive approaches without evaluating the impact of Bacon's "idols", that reflected, in the spirit of the beginning of modernity, reductive and illusionary images. In fact, debates referring to the use of reason, the complexity of the subject, the ambiguity of sciences and the contribution of technology to the new spirit of our era are not "dogmatic", as postmodernism rather claimed. Such debates reflected a deep awareness of the historical and social continuous dynamics that created multiple – and sometimes, contradictory – conditions for different philosophical traditions, that have not been excused of transitive processes, conceptual challenges, and critical clashes, complicating any hermeneutical attempt of deconstructing modernity as a whole (as Derrida or Gadamer rightfully observed). Transitivity capacitates not only cultural realms, values and norms, but also logical relationships that engage core-notions such as identity, equality, temporal succession, spatial movement. These transitions affect the power of discourses and propositional knowledge to prescribe the norms and values of truth.

The linguistic analysis has been challenged to address those changes that take place between an active and a passive propositional knowledge. In the generative grammar of Noam Chomsky, transformation is an operation capable of projecting a syntactic structure in terms of another syntactic structure. As communication has been reshaped, spirituality faced, at its turn, new milestones, partially impacting the rise of capitalism and the ascetical value of work, as Weber would argue. Religious modernity reflects the Christian heritage facing modern and contemporary manifestations of culture and science, whereas the Jewish modernism of the 19th century accelerates social and cultural changes of modern European societies.

As Early and Late Modernity dispute their authority on different ideologies – Rationalism, Enlightenment, Romanticism – and cultural revolutions – from which the Renaissance and the Rise of the Protestant Reform are the most notorious – artistic modernity and the 19th century confront the rise of authoritarian regimes and the effects of the Industrial Revolution: Baudelaire, in the name of artistic modernity, and the tradition of the Frankfurt School, in the name of post-industrial societies, are the most reputed figures that explained this particular historical time.

Last, but not least, this social and political dynamics reframed the centres and peripheries of the modern world. Imm. Wallerstein (1997) indicated the role played by economic processes in creating the system of global economy which is still active nowadays and which is based on a complex balance between states of the centre and those belonging to the periphery. This system is dominated by the extension of a central influence that creates a pole of trends, values and beliefs that are widespread progressively by engaging mimetic reactions of underdeveloped communities facing the

success of progressist societies. Modernity overcomes, therefore, a powerful wave of Western commitments that created the idea that modernity has, by all means, an Occidental paternity, and a holistic trend of centralising and uniformalising lifestyles, that made possible globalization.

Consequently, from all these trajectories of philosophical modernity we can easily understand that it is an urgent task to reframe the transitions and challenges that made modernity as an ethos being this puzzled domain that we know nowadays, beyond its historical commitments, political vulnerabilities, and social tensions. This volume represents an attempt to reconsider a few of the core-pillars of modernity, by targeting particular domains such as aesthetics and art, literature, political philosophy, ecology and social activism and metaphysics. Contributions gathered in this volume are the result of individual and common reflections that turned a philosophical friendship into a tradition of a decade of conferences that have at their heart the cooperation between the Faculty of Philosophy of University of Bucharest and the Bulgarian Academy, by its Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge. Although the formula of work varied over time, this volume is a celebration of common topics and interests that brought us together. Previously, other volumes highlighted our strengthened cooperation, such as *Culture and Religion in the Balkans: Philosophical Approaches*, ed. Mihaela Pop, Oana Șerban, University of Bucharest Publishing Press, 2015; *Philosophy during the Time of Pandemic. Geopolitics in the Balkan Sea Region*, Third International Scientific Conference, Book 34, vol. 3, *Proceedings*, eds. Slobodan Neskovic, Bogdana Todorova, Belgrade, 2021; *Reflections on Education and the Digital Transformation of Knowledge*, Fourth International Scientific Conference, Book 36, *Proceedings*, eds. Slobodan Neskovic, Bogdana Todorova, Belgrade

/ Sofia, 2021. The major difference is that this time we targeted modernity as a whole being a problematic field.

The volume opens with a political analysis on the dynamics registered by the concept of private property in modern times. Ionuț Văduva criticizes the concept of private property as it appears in Rousseau's writings, that radically influences the limits and role of sovereignty and individualism at the edge of Romanticism and Encyclopedism. The puzzle of social and political problems of modernity continues with Andreea Baciu's contribution on the limits of the moral public discourse, by engaging a very fashionable and yet controversial dispute, that between Foucault and Habermas. A "silent" debate, a transhistorical shift of perspectives that seek to address speech as a form of power and communicative rationality as a disposal of power offers us new insights on the biopolitical tests that modern communities have to pass in order to preserve their resilience and equilibrium.

The next philosophical layer of our volume triggers metaphysical challenges that modernity has confronted since its origins until the rise of postmodernism. Vesselin Petrov argues that the transition from modernity to postmodernity, which remains problematic both historically and ideologically, requires a metaphysical background of discussion that pleads for a new unity of scientific, ethical, and aesthetical aspects of reality. By the lenses of process philosophy, Vesselin Petrov engages Whitehead's writings to explain the major differences between deconstructive and constructive postmodernism. This analytical turn of modernity is continued in the logic of our volume by Constantin Stoenescu, who tackles the theory of precedent in arts, by exploring the Kuhnian roots of Hancock's radical hermeneutics. Retaking some of the major arguments developed by Kuhn in his *Structure of Scientific*

Revolutions, Stoenescu criticizes them by recourse to Hancock's perspective that tradition evolves in the field of arts by instances of precedents. The successive styles of the Greek temples are recalled as proper examples of explaining variations and mutual influences of actual, precedent, and future paradigms relevant along the history of architecture.

The third part of our volume is the most committed to the field of aesthetics, cultural capitalism, and history of arts. It opens with Oana Șerban's chapter on liquid modernity, a concept coined by Bauman. Her contribution advances aesthetic cosmopolitanism and artistic mobility to explain how liquid modernity develops a new and particular tradition, based on auto destructive art and invisible cities, pillars of three artistic project signed by Gustav Metzger, Manolo Valdes and Herman Braun-Vega, who admit to following Bauman's philosophy throughout their works. The list of aesthetic concepts challenged by different phases of modernity continues with the notions of representations and novelty, closely observed by Mihaela Pop. She operates a comparison between several depictions of Mona Lisa in modern art to argue that modernization is nothing less than a continuous battle for comprehension and expression, and that the artistic revaluation still has to confront ethical dilemmas, especially when traditions are undermined or renewed by revolutionary paradigms. In fact, artistic modernity is continuously challenged by the representational theory of art, a conviction critically framed by Eva Ivan Haintz in her article. Haintz emphasizes how Romanticism and Impressionism are critical turning points in the evolution of representation and imitation, and to what extent Heidegger's dispute with Shapiro might offer new understandings on this historical consecution and the tensions raised by the two paradigms. As we see by now, each cultural detour is based on an ethical dilemma. Artistic changes co-assist the

challenges faced by societies trying to democratize and drop out conservatory or fundamentalist attitudes. Therefore, a new social philosophy is at stake and the role to understand its turns and exigences belongs to Bogdana Todorova, who concludes on a new eco-sophia and eco-ethics that express the essence of the clash between modernity and postmodernity.

In the end of the volume, two innovative study-cases draw new insights on the power of modernity to shape and define identities, by means of literature and cinematography. Andreea Vlad reflects on individualism and finitude during the Mieji era through the writings of the modernist writer Natsume Sōseki. On this occasion, she explains how much modernity remains compatible with neo-Confucianism and to what extent alienation and distrust became core-attitudes of a vulnerable modernity. The volume closes with Ioan Mateiciuc's contribution on the phenomenological incursions of Miloš Forman's film, addressing two other core-values of modernity that transgress his cinematographic inheritance: happiness and freedom. Mateiciuc considers that we might be able to find a "teleological" formula of a total cinema with therapeutic potential in such movies that reconnect us to the core-values of modernity and to a particular sense of understanding the phenomenological stance of being-into-the-world.

To put all into a nutshell, this volume can be a very useful tool for scholars that question the philosophical axiological and conceptual challenges that we face at the slight shift from modernity to postmodernity. It promotes a balanced approach, without taking the side of continental or analytic philosophy, it targets modernity not only by its ideologies, but also by its values, and ultimately it gathers senior and junior researchers in philosophy, confronted into an interdisciplinary dialogue. And, for the future of philosophy and for

the sake of our work, we consider that this kind of interaction is the most appropriate whenever it comes about creating communities that share the same (modern) passions on different philosophical topics.

References

- Baechler, J. & Wallerstein, I. (1997). "L'avenir du capitalisme," in *Comment peut-on être anti-capitaliste? Revue du M.A.U.S.S.*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 13–35.
- Bell, D. (1979). *Les Contradictions culturelles du capitalisme*. Paris: PUF.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Șerban, Oana (2022). *After Thomas Kuhn. The Structure of Aesthetic Revolutions in Modernity*. Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter.

Chapter 1

Rethinking Modern Property: Rousseau's concept of Private Property from *A Discourse on Political Economy* to *The Social Contract*

Ionuț Văduva¹

Abstract

In this paper, I will analyze the consistency of Rousseau's concept of property in *A Discourse on Political Economy* with his critiques of private property and his political theory from *The Social Contract*. The concept of property, seemingly paradoxical in *Discourse on Political Economy*, has certain peculiarities that should be placed within Rousseau's argumentative purposes. These would frame the conceptual structure of *The Social Contract*. Thus, I will provide an analysis of the concept of property and public economy from the *Discourse on Political Economy* as the necessary ground for the later development of sovereignty in Rousseau's social contract project. I will argue that Rousseau's view on private property is not contradictory or inconsistent at all and that the view of property rights framed by his political economy is harmonious with his overall outlook on the topic. Rousseau resignifies the notion of property and its relationship to society as such aiming to conciliate class antagonism due to its unbridled effects. Moreover, his concept

¹ University of Bucharest, Faculty of Philosophy, Junior Researcher.

of private property is deeply original in its constitution and should be understood in all its complexity.

Keywords: *political economy, private property, Rousseau, sovereignty, public economy*

Introduction

In this paper I will argue that Rousseau's view on private property, as formulated in the *Discourse on Political Economy*, is consistent with his overall political theory and, more than that, it is a necessary condition for his theory of sovereignty. Property rights are coherent with his social contract and serve as a ground for reinforcing freedom among members of society. The principles of political economy articulated by Rousseau provide a theory of government whose main purpose is to tame class antagonisms by serving the public interest, progressive taxation, and reinforcing civic virtue. Thus, he develops a concept of property as foundational to society which seems to contrast with other of his writings, especially with *Discourse on the origins of inequalities between men*. I will reconstruct the arguments from his *Discourse on Political Economy* in light and comparison to others of his works; thus, essential common elements will be traced between them for providing the continuity of criticism along his works. In the second section, I will highlight the accusations of the incoherence of Rousseau's views on property. In the third section, I will reconstruct Rousseau's political economy with both his critiques and his positive principles already mentioned above. Refuting the analogy between household and state, he formulates a theory of government that would have to conciliate opposing interests within society. Proposing a general will to mediate particular wills as an expression of public interest, Rousseau will argue that it commands progressive taxation and

fulfillment of people's *most general* will, which government must serve. In the fourth section, I will provide two arguments proving that Rousseau's view on property is original and coherent with both his criticism and positive project of the social contract. The first one tackles the question of class antagonisms and the ways Rousseau tries to solve them and the second one, an already existing argument in the literature, regards his authorial intentions in each work, an argument I will try to reshape. In the fifth section of the paper, I will provide an analysis regarding the more intimate relationship between *Discourse on Political Economy* and *The Social Contract* stressing the importance that the view of private property from the former work has had on the theory from the latter. During the paper, I will use an abbreviate form of each title of Rousseau's writings: *DPE* (*A Discourse on Political Economy*), *SC* (*The Social Contract*), *DOI* (*Discourse on the origins of inequalities between men*), *DSA* (*Discourse on sciences and arts*).

Private property in Rousseau's writings

There has been much discussion over Rousseau's inconsistencies and contradictions regarding his views on property. In *DOI* he seems to argue that private property has been a historically contingent event, and it has led to the great inequalities that today's societies have to deal with. He does not seem to be sympathetic at all to this event, describing it as follows:

"The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared by someone who, uprooting the stakes or filling in the ditch, has shouted to his fellows:

Beware of listening to this impostor; you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all and the Earth to no one!" (Rousseau 1992, 43)

DOI isn't the only writing where Rousseau expresses his skepticism and antipathy towards private property: his discourses and other writings (as well as the secondary texts such as *Letter to Mr. d'Alembert on Spectacles* or *Constitutional Project for Corsica*), and even his pedagogical project should be regarded as a harsh critique of the modern (and not only) class divisions, and the morals it brings in effect. In *Emile*, for example, the property is portrayed as a contagious evil: "The demon of property infects everything it touches" (Rousseau 1979, 354). The first two discourses are a critique of, firstly, leisure class morals brought up by arts and sciences and, secondly, of the effects that private property, such a historically contingent event, with no fundamental base in any essential nature of man, has had on humanity as such. At first glimpse, *DPE* is a rupture. It seems very strange that here Rousseau advocates for the 'sacredness' of private property as the "true foundation of public society" (Rousseau, 1992, 157). He has already stressed this foundational aspect of private property in *DOI*: but as an anthropological *tragedy* for the future development of society. So, from a harsh critique of this event – to an advocacy of it being this way – thus, in normative terms, and not historically descriptively speaking – the foundation of civil society, it truly appears as deeply contradictory and inconsistent. Bertil Friden notes that "Rousseau's divergent statements on the property are not easy to reconcile" (Bertil Friden 1998, 120), recalling MacAdam and Chabert's interpretations on the topic, the latter accusing Rousseau of being an opportunist "because of his non-consistent attitude on private property" (Bertil Friden 1998, 120, note 5). But this reading of Rousseau's *DPE* isn't only superficial, but it has been scholarly

facilitated because it hasn't been given too much credit to the third discourse of Rousseau as a relevant constituent of his work, and therefore it has been easier to refute its arguments due to the contrast it seems to have with other writings. Whether or not have these views been justified, one should nonetheless engage with Rousseau's complex argumentation and reconstruct his arguments as relevant to his work and as a *necessary precondition* of the social contract. SC also seems to advocate for private property, but it is mixed with many other elements of his theory. This is so since elements of SC, apparently left in shadow, have been already grounded in DPE and the theory developed in the former has been seeded in the latter. As Ellen Meiksins Wood pointed out:

"In the *Political Economy* Rousseau introduces the concepts around which *Social Contract* is built: sovereignty, the distinction between sovereignty and government, and the general will. At least parts of the article seem to have been drawn from the work Rousseau had already done for his projected major study of political institutions, a project he never completed as planned except in the abbreviated form of the *Social Contract*, which he described as an extract from it. The essential unity of the *Discourse on Political Economy* and the *Social Contract* is evident in the final version of the latter work, the so-called Geneva manuscript ... The *Political Economy* and the *Social Contract* belong to the same structure of argumentation, and the logic of the latter work remains incomplete in the absence of the ideal contained in the former." (Ellen Meiksins Wood 2012, 198)

Rousseau's political economy and theory of government advocate for the right of property as the essential right of man, "and more important in certain respects than liberty itself" (Rousseau 1992,

157). But his arguments regarding political economy do not contrast at all with the critique of private property, and they have to be regarded as a whole. This view holds in as much as Rousseau understands private property in a certain way, and his insight into its *specific* place in society should be placed in the particular argumentative context. Without a specific framework in which Rousseau addresses private property, eventually reshaping property rights themselves, these prejudices would have been partly justified. I will thus argue in favor of the concept of property as a coherent and necessary component in the theory of sovereignty, regarding the unity of these two works, despite them being complementary from the very principle. Consequently, we will see how the articulation of private property is essential to the construction of the social contract because property itself is an inherent part of this project. Firstly, I will proceed to reconstruct the main arguments of *DPE* and later tackle the problems outlined above.

Governance and public interest

Rousseau formulates three principles in *DPE* aiming to reconcile the will of the people – public interest – with the government. The latter is eventually encompassed into the *general will* which commands it to satisfy the public interest. By Rousseau's intention of rethinking the relation between government – or magistrates – and public interest, there is, as Ellen Meiksins Wood noticed, an implicit revisiting of the relation between private interest and society as such: “the three discourses have at least one common theme, which would remain at the foundation of all his political thought: a challenge to social doctrines – such as those espoused, Rousseau suggests, by Hobbes and Mandeville – according to which society is bound together above all by the force of personal interest” (Ellen

Meiksins Wood 2012, 189). Considering Rousseau's purposes in *DPE*, the discourse implies from the very principle a reshaping of *property rights* as such. *DPE* opens with a critique of the household/state analogy, advocated by Filmer, Bossuet, or Ramsay. This theory holds that in as much as the household – run by a father – and the state – run by a governor (*magistrate*), king, etc. – are structurally analogical, their leadership should also be similar. His attack on the analogy is rather symptomatic for his later critiques and developments: the power of the father in the family is natural whereas that of government is founded on convention because it is directed by law; all the work of a family increases the wealth of the father – but the *general administration* should enforce the private property right: “The main object of the entire household's work is to preserve and increase the father's patrimony so that someday he can divide it among his children without impoverishing them; whereas the wealth of the public treasury is only a means ... to maintain private individuals in peace and plenty” (Rousseau 1992, 141). Moreover, the increase in wealth might be dangerous for the government, for reasons revealed later in the discourse; finally, the sovereignty of the father in a family is not the same as the sovereignty of the people in political economy because the latter is fundamentally directed by law; thus, the family and the government have a *different foundations*: nature, respectively, convention. The critique of the above-mentioned analogy is fundamentally motivated by the tension between private/public interest and Rousseau's general object in the discourse is grounded in a deep questioning of the antagonism between the two. Private interest has to be understood here not merely in economic terms, but in its broader understanding: political, power-motivated, *and* economical. The critique of the leaders is explicitly motivated rather by the first two, and only *implicitly* by the latter. Therefore, Rousseau's view on private property has also to be encompassed within this wider

critique of private interest within society; it is, essentially, a product of a more complex theory of government. The third element of the triad is the concern that public administration has to deal with.

Rousseau's critique of *magistrates* is grounded in a vaguely shaped view of the family – where the absolute, undivided authority is the father, and the role of women is left in a confusing shadow. Such aspects lead to other disputes on Rousseau's view of family and women's place in both family and society, but there is no room for discussion here on this topic. The father has, Rousseau argues, by the structure of the family, a natural interest in preserving the happiness of the family. Conversely,

“If you have only one leader, you are at the discretion of a master who has no reason to love you. If you have several, you must simultaneously bear their tyranny and their dissension. In short, abuses are inevitable and their consequences disastrous in all societies, where the public interest and the laws have no natural force and are continuously assailed by the personal interest and passions of both leaders and members.” (Rousseau 1992, 141-142)

Because the government isn't a natural phenomenon, the magistrates have no natural purpose to serve and they are easily liable to corruption and pursuing their ends. Once there has been made the distinction between the public economy (or political economy) and private economy (which refers to family) by refuting the household/state analogy, a new concept of sovereignty is necessary to ground the relationship between the leadership and the people. Rousseau distinguishes thus between ‘public economy ... which I call *government*, from the supreme authority, which I call *sovereignty*’ (Rousseau 1992, 142), the former playing an executive role whereas the latter refers to the legislative power. This idea will

be, of course, developed in detail in *SC*, where political institutions became only “emanations” (Rousseau 1987, 154) of sovereignty, as the absolute, inalienable, indivisible power, as the exercise of the *general will*. In *DPE*, the body politic – taken as an organized, living totality of the civil reality – has a general will “which always tends toward the preservation and welfare of the whole and of each part” (Rousseau 1992, 143). The concept of general will used here by Rousseau will be almost verbatim present in *SC*. But the main difference is precisely the argumentative context. In *DPE*, Rousseau introduces the notion of general will to discuss the relationship between particular will and *group* will; the will of these groups is often a threaten to the unity of the body politic, undermining general will. But in *SC*, the question of private/public interests, taken in its overall dimensions, is vaguely addressed in its economic dimension because it is precisely the aim of *DPE* to address it in such a way. *SC* only discuss the relation that particular individuals can have toward general will: “each individual can, as a man, have a private will contrary to or divergent from the general will that he has as a citizen ... whoever refuses to obey the general will, will be forced to do so by the entire [political] body. This means merely that he will be forced to be free” (Rousseau 1987, 150). In *DPE*, the problem is addressed differently. Rousseau argues that society is composed of the heterogeneity of particular interests and they are inevitable within society: “All the private individuals united by a common interest constitute as many others, permanent or temporary [smaller societies]” (Rousseau 1992, 144). Being part of a wider political society, they influence it in various ways. For its members though, the will of their smaller society *appears* as a general will, but for the society as such, it is only a particular society, and “it is very often found to be upright in the first respect and vicious in the latter” (Rousseau 1992, 144). But, given the potential divergences that these smaller societies or associations may have with the greater

society *they are actually a part of*, they have to be subordinated to it. Thus, “the most general will is also always the most just” (Rousseau 1992, 144). The general will does regulate the relation of these particular societies with the greater one, but it nonetheless implicitly mediates their relation to other associations. Because the *magistrates* are the primary subjects of these considerations, the general will is “the first principle of public *economy*, as the fundamental rule of government” (Rousseau 1992, 145). If the government is not following the general will, and thus its economy is not a *popular* one, it will immediately turn into being *tyrannical*:

“the first and the most important maxim of legitimate or popular government – that is, one that has the good of the people as its object – is, therefore, as I have said, to follow the general will in all matters. But in order to follow it, it must be known, and above all well distinguished from the private will, starting with one’s own.” (Rousseau 1992, 145)

The first duty of the legislator is to conform the laws to the general will, and the first rule of public economy is the accordance of the administration to these laws. The general will is the source and “supplement of all the laws, and which should always be consulted when are lacking” (Rousseau 1992, 148). The problem of consulting the general will is vaguely addressed in *DPE*, but it will be surveyed in more detail in *SC*. Here, Rousseau thinks that there is no fundamental need for “the whole nation be assembled” (Rousseau 1992, 148), because, given a large nation, is impractical. But, the responsibility of *knowing* a general will is left to leaders, thus these assemblies aren’t necessary as long as the government is “well intentioned” (Rousseau 1992, 148). The leaders should thus know the general will from an inverted formula: if they should serve the public interest, and the public interest is the expression of the

general will, the leaders should follow the former for serving the latter. In Rousseau's words, they should be "be just and one is assured of following the general will" (Rousseau 1992, 148). By contrast, Rousseau will state in *SC* that, if the state can not be reduced to the proper limits – as Antique cities did – there is nonetheless a solution: "not to allow a fixed capital, to make the seat of government move from one town to another, and to assemble the estates of the country in each of them in their turn" (Rousseau 1987, 196).

The second principle of public economy tackles virtue as a source of reconciliation of particular wills: "and since virtue is only this conformity of the private will to the general ... make virtue reign" (Rousseau 1992, 149). The question of virtue is a recurring theme in Rousseau's work: the main critiques regarding morals, sciences, and arts – the causes of the loss of civil virtue – have already been formulated in *DSA*. Criticizing luxury as the main cause of the development of sciences and arts, he claims: "Happy slaves, you owe them that delicate and refined tasted on which you pride yourself; that sweetness of character and that urbanity in mores which make relationships among you so cordial and easy; in a word, the appearances of all the virtues without having any" (Rousseau 1987, 4). Rousseau argues that the fall of great civilizations – Athens, Romans, Egyptians – have been concomitant to the development of arts, sciences, literature, and *philosophy* itself. These are fundamentally linked to luxury and idleness, causes of the decay of military virtues: "While the conveniences of life increase, the arts are perfected and luxury spreads, true courage is enervated, military virtues disappear" (Rousseau 1987, 15). Moreover, both *DPE* and *DSA* are together an overt critique of the rising cosmopolitanism and urbanization and thus they are harbingers of the numbness of civil virtues. The second principle of *DPE* is essentially advocacy of

patriotism, revitalizing Rousseau's rather pessimistic tone of the first discourse. It is fundamental for leaders, Rousseau argues, to acknowledge that "the greatest wellspring of public authority lies in the hearts of the citizens, and that for the maintenance of the government, nothing can replace good morals" (Rousseau, 1992, 149). When the leaders themselves aren't dedicated to their duty of serving the public interest but are directed by private interests neglecting the public ones, their power of example will have astonishing effects on people. Conversely, when citizens love their duty, and when the trustees of public authority sincerely apply to themselves to nourishing this love through their example and by their efforts, all difficulties vanish ..." (Rousseau 1992, 150). Thus, for Rousseau, the power of the example of leaders is essential to the authority of the government itself. But, among all virtues, the "love of the fatherland" (Rousseau 1992, 151), is the most effective in conforming the private interest to the public one. This also means for Rousseau that compassion for others should be compressed as much as possible to be activated because "the feeling of humanity evaporates and weakens as it is extended over the whole world" (Rousseau 1992, 151). But this feeling should necessarily become a principle of the leaders themselves, who must "leave a large enough share of the public administration to them so that they feel at home" (Rousseau 1992, 154). This would also have specific effects on *public education*, which is one of the fundamental maxims of popular government. The problem of patriotism as a civil virtue actually opens up for Rousseau the issue of class division, for he introduces thereby the problem of wealthy and poor classes. And this is not arbitrary at all: there is no unity, and it cannot even exist, in a country where rampant inequality is at home. One cannot even call for patriotism where unfairness reign over the country. Therefore, the government has to keep its "rigorous integrity in providing justice for all, especially in protecting the poor against the tyranny

of the rich. The greatest harm is already done when there are poor people to protect and rich ones to restrain" (Rousseau 1992, 154). The government should thus mediate the relationship between classes and there is no other way around assuring education in a spirit of patriotism other than making sure the class distinctions would not harm the unity guaranteed by virtue. The problem of private property is essentially addressed by the third principle, which will be discussed in the next section. Elements from *DSA* will be naturally reflected in his view on the right of property as such.

Two arguments in favor of Rousseau's coherency on private property

I will provide two main arguments to prove that *DPE* is a coherent component of Rousseau's work and thus there is no inherent contradiction or inconsistency in it, at least concerning private property. The first one regards his particular view of private property in *DPE*, and the second one, deriving from the first, considers an already existing argument in the scholarly literature on Rousseau. I will try to ground it on a new basis and understanding.

It is essential for understanding Rousseau's view on private property to note that he aims to reconcile the clash between private (or particular) and public interest, as we have already seen. Private property is one of the main causes of the disruption between the two, along with industrialization, uneven distribution of population, consumption of lux products, commerce, unfair taxes, and venality: "these are the most tangible causes of opulence and indigence, of the substitution of private interest for the public interest, of the mutual hate of citizens, of their indifference to the common cause ... and of the weakening of all the mechanisms of the government" (Rousseau 1992, 154). As it seems, at least three or four

of them are linked to private property, but certainly all of them are related to strong class divisions or class privileges: venality, luxury, and urbanization. The third principle of public economy, which deals with the administration of goods advocates for progressive taxation. This should again contrast with private property since it is “the basis of the social compact” (Rousseau 1992, 163), and progressive taxation means a violation of private property. But here Rousseau provides an immediate solution to the problem. Firstly, Rousseau states that the social compact requires every citizen to pay his share to the public needs: “the members of the society should contribute their goods toward [government’s] preservation” (Rousseau 1992, 127); but secondly, this payment should be made willingly. It is voluntary, Rousseau argues, not by a particular will, but because of general will: “to be legitimate, this assessment should be voluntary. It is not based on a private will, as if it were necessary to have the consent of each citizen, who should pay as much as he pleases... Rather, it should be through general will, by majority vote...” (Rousseau 1992, 132). Therefore, the public interest requires progressive taxation, and the private property right isn’t violated at all.

Which concept of property does Rousseau imply here? Unlike Locke, his notion of property is fundamentally an *unproductive* one. This perspective is reflected in both state revenues and individual property. For Rousseau, the first duty of administration of finances is “to work much more carefully to prevent needs than to increase revenues” (Rousseau 1992, 160). This is, as he claims, the *real* meaning of the notion of *economy*, which designates “wise handling of what one has than to the means of acquiring what one does not have” (Rousseau 1992, 160). The apparent contrast between private property and progressive taxation is perhaps due to a tacit Lockean bias regarding productive labor and property. For Locke, the

appropriation of land by labor guarantees the rights to property. He thought that “for the provisions serving to the support of human life, produced by one acre of enclosed and cultivated land, are ... ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land of an equal richness lying waste in common” (Locke 1980, 24). Labor provides ‘mankind’ with the product of land which could have otherwise been laid to waste and instead could be claimed by those rendering it useful. There is, of course, the problem of colonization which Locke’s theory seems to be legitimate when maintaining that uncultivated land is waste – hence appropriation is an imperative:

“for I ask, whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of *America*, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life, as ten acres of equally fertile land do in *Devonshire*, where they are well cultivated?” (Locke 1980, 24)

But whose labor is Locke talking about? For Ellen Meiksins Wood, the notion of *improvement* leads Locke to think of value as *exchange* value, which means, the potentiality to be sold rather than simply used for basic needs. In other words, for him, the utility of land consists in its *productive* capacities, in the potential its products have to be traded and increase one’s wealth. The necessary consequence is that unimproved land is straightforwardly a *waste* because it doesn’t contribute to profit-making. E. M. Wood also believed that Locke’s theory legitimizes the appropriation of other’s labor: “the landlord who puts his land to productive use, who improves it, even if it is by means of someone else’s labor, is being *industrious*, no less – and perhaps more – than the laboring servant” (Meiksins Wood 2002, 112). Thus, the productive property is essentially property leading to growth. Conversely, Rousseau’s political theory implies a

concept of property regarded through a rapport between necessity and futility:

“First, one should consider the relationship of quantities, according to which – all other things being equal – someone who has ten times more goods than another should pay ten times more. Second, the relationship of use, that is the distinction between the necessary and the superfluous. Someone who has only the bare necessities should pay nothing at all; taxation on someone who has superfluities can, if need be, approach the totality of what exceeds his necessities.” (Rousseau 1992, 164)

Thus, the public economy must guarantee the symmetry between tax and individual revenues. It disregards social ranks, for “a Nobleman has two legs just like a cowherd, and has only one stomach as he does” (Rousseau 1992, 164). Progressive taxation should fundamentally prevent the growing rate of inequality of fortunes and it should even: “gradually brought all fortunes closer to that middle level that creates the genuine strength of a state” (Rousseau 1992, 169). *The purpose of progressive taxation is thus the conciliation of class antagonism.* On that account, the property right is sacred for Rousseau because it is a right to autonomy and a source of liberty from the tyranny of the rich – it is therefore a means. On the one hand, it is an instrument of social stability and one life-preservation because this right fundamentally applies to the *necessary* fortunes of a citizen. On the other hand, it is a guarantee of citizens’ public engagement. Why would a poor citizen be interested in law or public economy if this law and the government only strengthen his oppression? If their fortunes were not enforced by law – that is, their immediate source of preservation – “nothing would be so easy as to elude one’s duties and scoff at the laws”