

ROUSSEAU'S GENERAL WILL IN THE LIGHT OF ISAIAH BERLIN

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to investigate Rousseau's General Will in the light of Isaiah Berlin's views on negative freedom, positive freedom, political monism and political pluralism. It is argued that, along with the romanticist readings of the General Will which rely on compassion to explain the General Will, a rationalist reading of the General Will, as exemplified by Isaiah Berlin, is also a possibility. According to that reading, the General Will is associated with positive freedom (i.e. rational autonomy) and therefore taken as a rationalist project.

The singularity (or monism) of the General Will is criticized in the thesis since it might possibly lead to authoritarianism. However it is also argued that pluralism, as exemplified by Berlin, might also turn out to be authoritarian if it seeks to ground itself upon an objective reality. This leaves us at an impasse with regard to the Rousseauian legacy, for it might leave us with no basis from which to challenge it.

Keywords: Rousseau, General Will, Negative Freedom, Positive Freedom, Romanticism, Rationalism, Political Monism, Political Pluralism.

ÖZET

ISAİAH BERLİN'İN GÖRÜŞLERİ IŞIĞINDA ROUSSEAU'NUN GENEL İRADE KAVRAMI

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Bu tezde, Rousseau'nun Genel İrade kavramı Isaiah Berlin'in görüşleri ışığında ele alınmıştır. Berlin'in 'negatif özgürlük', 'pozitif özgürlük', 'siyasal tekçilik' ve 'siyasal çoğulculuk' hakkındaki görüşleri Genel İrade kavramına uygulanmış ve bu kavramın 'pozitif özgürlük' arayışı çerçevesinde değerlendirilebileceği sonucuna varılmıştır.

Tezde, Genel İrade kavramını, toplumcu şefkat görüşüyle açıklamaya çalışan romantik okuma biçimi genel çerçevesiyle verilmiş, fakat Berlin'in önerdiği rasyonalist okuma biçimi öne çıkarılmıştır.

Tezde, Genel İrade kavramının dayandığı tekçilik, otoriterliğe kapı açabilecek bir olasılık olarak sunulmakla birlikte, Berlin gibi modernist liberallerin çoğulculuğu mutlaklaştırmalarının ve herkese dayatmalarının da aynı şekilde otoriterlik olarak sunulabileceği savunulmuştur. Bu bağlamda Michael Kenny ve Richard Rorty'nin Berlin'e yönelttiği eleştirilere yer verilmiş, ve böylelikle Berlin'in Rousseau'yu okuma biçimi eleştirel bir açıdan değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rousseau, Genel İrade, Negatif Özgürlük, Pozitif Özgürlük, Romantizm, Rasyonalizm, Siyasal Tekçilik, Siyasal Çoğulculuk.

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INTRODUCTION

The central aim of this dissertation is to investigate Rousseau's conception of General Will and give a general account of the romanticist and especially the rationalist readings of this conception. It is correct to say that, in the history of ideas, Rousseau's conception of General Will has been interpreted and 'used' both in romanticist and rationalist ways. Notwithstanding the enduring effects of the romanticist reading within the history of ideas, I aim in this dissertation to give specific emphasis to the rationalist reading of Rousseau's General Will. On that basis, we can associate Rousseau's General Will with what Berlin characterizes as positive freedom.

It seems that the analytical distinction between "compassion" and "reason" makes the two readings irreconcilable: Whereas the romanticist reading explains the General Will on the basis of "compassion", the rationalist reading explains the General Will on the basis of "reason". Since compassion and reason are totally different faculties, one should provide good reasons for reading Rousseau's General Will either as a romanticist or a rationalist project. We should acknowledge that none of the commentators of Rousseau have had any doubt about the fact, particularly in the *Discourse on Inequality* and *Discourse on Political Economy*, that Rousseau has a romanticist dimension. Throughout these books, Rousseau gives an anthropological account of the inequality in the society, and argues for the necessity of simplicity and equality among men. Rousseau says in the *Discourse on Political Economy* that we should have a homeland which is unanimously loved by its people, and which rests on the "protection of the least of its members" (*Discourse on Political Economy* in *Rousseau's Political Writings*, p. 70). Rousseau

seems to justify his egalitarianism in *Discourse on Inequality* and *Discourse on Political Economy* on the basis of one's pity for others. Egalitarianism in these two books is presented as constitutive of social justice, and thus presented as the core of the public morality. Throughout these two books, we see Rousseau as a romantic republican, and there is hardly any argument there, which relies on reason or rational reflection. In the *On Social Contract* however, which is Rousseau's most recent and mature work, he presents a quite different element into his system, namely rational self-control, which he formulates as "consulting one's reason before listening to his inclinations" (*On Social Contract* in *Rousseau's Political Writings*, p.95). Those who tend to read Rousseau's *On Social Contract* with *Discourse on Inequality* and *Discourse on Political Economy* in mind, assume that the General Will rests necessarily on the mutual and generalized 'compassion' that the citizens feel for each other. (Judith Skhlar and Hannah Arendt carry out such a romanticist reading as I will show in Chapter 1). However one can also find good evidence throughout *On Social Contract* that the supposed General Will rests on a different human faculty, namely rational self-legislation. In *On Social Contract*, Rousseau no longer relies on feelings (like compassion) to justify his idea of a common good and General Will, but relies on what he formulates as man's 'moral liberty' which he says "makes man truly his own master [since] impulsion by appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to the law that one has prescribed for oneself is liberty" (*On Social Contract* in *Rousseau's Political Writings*, p.96).

We could safely argue that there is some divergence between Rousseau's earlier work and his later recent work, *On Social Contract*. In the earlier books, Rousseau relies on

compassion as the basis of a homeland, whereas in *On Social Contract* he relies on rational self-reflection of the citizens as the basis of the country's self-government. Since there is no theoretical mid-point between compassion (which is spontaneous) and reason (which is reflective), it is not possible in any way to fill the gap between Rousseau's earlier political writings and his *On Social Contract*. My interpretation of this irreconcilability is that Rousseau might have thought that since man's uncorrupt feelings (that are best seen in the savage man and his way of simple living) have already passed away long ago in history, and since we are now living in a highly sophisticated society, the realistic solution for today's society should exclusively rely on, not spontaneous feelings, but on rational self-reflection. We should admit that Kant took such a position in his political writings and said that while we could possibly rely on the feelings of the savage man in the past, we are now in an age of reason and civilization, and thus we should somehow rely on a rational morality which, he says, we are still far short of. (See *Kant's Political Writings*, p. 49).

It could be argued that while *Discourse on Inequality* and *Discourse on Political Economy* reflect Rousseau's longing for a rustic simplicity and equality merely at a romantic level and on the basis of mutual feelings, *On Social Contract* seems to rely on a more reflective and calculative language. Rousseau might have implied by this shift that man might gain through rational self-reflection (i.e. social contract) what he has lost by losing his natural and spontaneous feelings by the advent of the idea of living in a 'society'. That is to say, he might have thought of rational self-reflection as the only possible solution after the fact that man has lost his natural innocence by living in a

society, and thus he should not rely on his feelings or instincts (as did the uncorrupted savage man), but on his reason. Rousseau's conception of 'moral liberty' is thus the negation of instincts and the affirmation of reason, which he reflects in his *On Social Contract* as the basis of a country's just laws.

While authors like Judith Skhlar and Hannah Arendt read Rousseau's General Will in a romanticist way, authors like Isaiah Berlin and Margaret Canovan interpret Rousseau's General Will as a rationalist project. Throughout the thesis, I am going to focus on the rationalist reading in order to show that Rousseau's conception of General Will might also be read as a rationalist project. We should say that Berlin's and Canovan's criticisms towards Rousseau basically converge around the idea that the General Will is singular and thus it precludes a pluralist society (We should admit that, either we read Rousseau's General Will in a romanticist way or a rationalist way, it is still singular and therefore against pluralism). Throughout the thesis, I am going to explain the possible monistic dimensions inherent in Rousseau's General Will with reference to Berlin's conception of 'positive freedom' and with reference to his epistemological explanations on political monism and political pluralism.

Supposing that Berlin is right in calling Rousseau as a monist, I believe that the question as to why Berlin's own attitude (i.e. pluralism) should be taken as better than Rousseau's, needs to be asked. The possible connotations of Berlin's claim to objectivity, that

pluralism and negative freedom are inherently the good form of life for people¹ is criticized by authors like Michael Kenny and Richard Rorty on the basis that Berlin himself also turns out to be authoritarian in as much as he forces people into what he takes as the good form of life (i.e. pluralism). Throughout the thesis (in Chapter 3), I am going to give a general account of these criticisms towards Berlin to further our ideas on whether Rousseau's General Will is criticized on sound grounds or not, and whether we could take liberalism and pluralism as inherently good projects vis-a-vis non-liberal ones, or not.

The structure of my thesis will be such that in Chapter 1, I give a general impression of Rousseau's General Will and investigate the theoretical implications of the inalienable, indestructible and indivisible general will. Throughout the chapter, the possible romanticist and rationalist readings of this concept will be mentioned and put into context.

In Chapter 2, I give an account of negative freedom and positive freedom with reference to Isaiah Berlin, and argue that we can associate Rousseau's General Will with what Berlin calls as positive freedom (i.e. rational autonomy). Such a reading of the General Will would suggest that Rousseau's General Will is a 'rationalist' project. So Chapter 2 gives the background of a rationalist reading of Rousseau's General Will. Throughout Chapter 2, I will give a long account of political monism (singularism) and political pluralism (political diversity) with reference to Berlin's epistemological characterization

¹ Although Berlin views negative freedom as merely a procedural issue, we cannot deny that negative freedom itself also reflects a certain world view on the good form of life. This point will be mentioned later

of the two traditions. I am going to argue that Rousseau's General Will fits Berlin's characterization of monism, and in this regard might be taken as a project whose singularism might lead to authoritarian results.

Chapter 3 is a critique of Berlin by thinkers like Michael Kenny and Richard Rorty. In other words, a challenge to Berlin's critique of Rousseau's General Will legacy. In this chapter, I am going to give a general account of the criticisms towards Berlin, which argue that Berlin's defense of pluralism seems to situate itself as a supra-historical reality, as if it was a transcendental truth. In order to illustrate the point, I will discuss Rorty's criticism of the modernist liberals', and Rorty's own ideas on historical contingency, to give a critical sense of the cleavage between political monism (as characterized through Rousseau's General Will) and political pluralism (as characterized through Berlin's characterization of negative freedom).

in the context of critics towards Berlin.

CHAPTER I

ROUSSEAU'S CONCEPTION OF GENERAL WILL AND POSSIBLE READINGS OF IT

In this chapter, I aim to give a general impression of Rousseau's conception of General Will with textual support, and the possible ways to read it with reference to Rousseau's written work. There is no doubt that Rousseau's articulation of the General Will as the basis of a society's self-government has been influential on democratic theory. Although some authors argue that his conception of the social contract and General Will lack a participatory character, we still cannot deny that his democratic ideas have been extensively used and have been inspirational for many projects of self-government.

1.1. A General Impression of Rousseau's General Will

Rousseau's problematization of the one and the many in political discussions is interesting in terms of his theory of democracy. We actually have enough evidence that he views society as an entity which has a *self* and a *will*. (See *Discourse on Inequality*, p.61 and *On Social Contract*, p. 93). This conception of a society with a self and a will might imply that Rousseau's level of analysis which he applies to the society converges towards the idea of a single solitary individual. Some authors have argued that reflecting upon society as if it was a single individual with a single will might cause serious problems in the sense that the many might be collapsed into one (See Arendt's *On Revolution*, p.74). Whether Rousseau aimed for such a thing is another question, but since there is textual evidence to interpret Rousseau's General Will as a singular project, it could be interesting to investigate how Rousseau handles the question of one and the many in political life.

Since the central aim of this chapter is to explain Rousseau's conception of General Will, I am going to refer to the texts where he elaborates on this concept. Although Rousseau first explores the concept of General Will in his *Discourse on Political Economy*, we should admit that he gives a more detailed account of it through his *On Social Contract*. The question as to how we can define the General Will is a difficult question, even for Rousseau we should admit; however Rousseau seems to give a functional, if not a conceptual, definition of the General Will in *Discourse on Political Economy* on page 61 where he talks about the General Will for the first time. On this page, just after saying that a society has a *self* common to the whole with its own integrity, Rousseau reflects upon the General Will as such, which is the most explicit and integrated expression of the General Will:

The body politic is, therefore also a moral being which has a will and this general will, which always tends towards the conservation and welfare of the whole and of each part, and which is the source of the laws, is, for all the members of the state, in their relations to one another and to the state, the rule of what is just and unjust. (*On Political Economy*, p.61).

There is good evidence, not only in *Discourse on Political Economy* but also *On Social Contract*, that Rousseau equates the General Will with 'justice' and 'welfare of the whole' (public utility). For Rousseau, the General Will is the integrated will of the society towards the good and the just. It is argued by Rousseau that once one becomes part of the General Will, that person automatically becomes part of an indivisible civic identity. Rousseau argues that while the single individuals give up their natural liberties in the name of forming a state, they gain civil liberties which makes them equal citizens

with equal and undifferentiating rights (*On Social Contract*, p.92). Rousseau argues that such a social contract which makes men equal citizens does not take away from the individuals their individual freedoms, but makes them equally free under a civic equivalence. As an expression that could give some clues about Rousseau's views on the political problem of one and the many, he depicts the civic equivalence as such:

Finally each person in giving himself to all, gives himself to no one, and as there are no associates over whom he does not acquire the same right as he concedes to them over himself, he gains the equivalent of all that he loses and more force to preserve what he has.

1.2. The idea of an inalienable, indestructible and indivisible General Will

Rousseau says that the General Will is inalienable, indestructible, indivisible and that it cannot err in any way. Rousseau says the sovereignty is inalienable and cannot be transferred, since it is the 'will' of a specific people, which is exclusively peculiar to that society and therefore inalienable (See Book II, Chapter 1 in *On Social Contract*). Rousseau says the sovereignty is also indivisible, since it is a singular will. Rousseau states that dividing sovereignty into parts such as executive or legislative is not to divide the sovereignty in principle but merely in its practical purposes. He says, despite the differentiations in the state's functions, the will lying behind the differentiated functions is in fact always the single General Will without being ever divided.

Rousseau says the General Will is indestructible and can never err unless it is deceived.

He says the General Will would always tend toward the public utility:

The general will is always in the right and always tends toward the public utility, but it does not follow that the decisions of the people are always equally correct. A person always wills his own good, but he

does not always see it; the people is never corrupted, but often deceived, and it is only then that it appears to will what is bad.

Here it is implied that the society has an objective and constant general will which is out there and which exists even if the society might somehow be ignorant of it. This implies that Rousseau's General Will relies on an objectivist claim about the society's common good, in the sense that he envisages the society as having an objective public utility, independent of how the society actually views itself. This claim to objectivity will be criticized in the later sections.

Rousseau says, as long as the private interests in a society do not take precedence over the public good, the General Will would always prevail and there would be no partiality that would harm the General Will (See *On Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter 3). It seems from all these features that, the General Will is reflected by Rousseau as an urge towards a singular ethical community.

Although we could admit that people gain a civic identity by adhering to a civic totality, the point as to how one does not lose any freedom in that case is conceptually criticized by authors like Benjamin Constant (See Constant's views on Rousseau in a supplemented part within *Rousseau's Political Writings*, p. 213-215). Rousseau actually does not explicitly say that one does not lose freedom by becoming a citizen but that he loses his natural liberties in the name of gaining the civil liberties. It is a fact that Rousseau associates the civil liberties with a philosophical and moral meaning and attaches to them the term 'moral liberty' which you would gain by becoming self-legislating citizens. The

issue of 'moral liberty' will be explained in much detail in positive freedom section in Chapter 2).

We could say that Rousseau's General Will is foremost a theory of legitimate government. All Rousseau does in his political writings is to investigate the necessary conditions of the just and legitimate government. Rousseau says that a legitimate social order should necessarily bind upon consent and agreement (*On Social Contract*, p. 85). Rousseau says the legitimacy of a social order might only be possible through a social contract to which all the members of the society become equal partners. This social pact becomes possible, says Rousseau, by the "total alienation of each associate with all his rights to the whole community" (*On Social Contract*, p. 92).

1.3. 'Will of all' versus the 'General Will'

Since the General Will is depicted by Rousseau as the will of the society that tends towards the just laws, it becomes crucial to differentiate what is just and unjust for Rousseau. In this regard, Rousseau's distinction between the partiality and the generality reflect many of the subtleties within the conception of General Will. Rousseau's value hierarchy, which is based on the acceptable and unacceptable forms of social and political life, relies on his distinction between the partiality and generality, where the partiality is associated with what is private and therefore against public morality, and the generality is associated with public utility and thus justice. Rousseau argues that public utility (general will) should always prevail over the private interests (particular wills). This means nothing else than that Rousseau is foremost a 'populist' who associates the General Will

with the public utility. Rousseau's antipathy with what he calls the 'will of all' is because Rousseau sees it against the public utility. He says that the partial groups, pacts, associations do not aim towards the public good but they form tacit organizations to gain private benefits at the expense of the more general popular benefits (See how the 'will of all' is contrasted with the 'general will' in *On Social Contract*, p. 101). It is clear that Rousseau is against all sorts of partial organizations that might be against the public good.

Rousseau depicts the public utility, especially in the *Discourse on Political Economy* as a strict socio-economic egalitarianism. In this regard, liberal interest-seeking through factions and interest groups (i.e. will of all) is taken by Rousseau as socially unacceptable since it is assumed by him to be against the public utility. Rousseau assumes that if the partial groups would intervene into the public discussions, the strong and the rich would somehow repress the poor and thus the general will (i.e. general welfare) would be destroyed. Rousseau's doubt against the inequalities within societies makes him negative towards discussions in the society among partial groups. Such a reflected restriction on partial associations is taken by most of the liberal thinkers as being against individual liberties, however it seems that, for Rousseau, egalitarianism is the pre-requisite of the healthy life of the civil body, and thus it is politically and morally constitutive.

It seems that Rousseau does not envisage any tragedy between partial interests and the public interests, but straightforwardly gives priority to the public utility and drops the possibility of forming partial associations. This might be normal in the sense that

Rousseau sees luxury, sophistication and diversification as corruptness, and therefore he does not reflect upon the partial associations within the language of rights and negative liberties but as a moral problem (In this regard, please see the relevance of Rousseau's General Will with what Berlin calls as positive freedom which I am going to elaborate in Chapter 2).

1.4. Rousseau's characterization of partiality versus generality

Rousseau's reflection upon partiality and generality is actually very central to Rousseau's political system. We could say that this distinction emanates from a system of hierarchies in Rousseau's mind. Rousseau says that one is part of many inclusions at the same time. One is part of a family, tribe, church, country and humanity at the same time. Rousseau says however that these attachments should not have the equal status on the hierarchy. Rousseau explains it as such:

A certain person might be a devout priest, or a brave soldier, or a zealous professional, and yet a bad citizen; a certain decision may be advantageous to the small communities and very pernicious to the great one. It is true that since particular societies are always subordinate to those which contain them, the latter ought to be obeyed rather than the former, and the duties of the citizen take precedence over those of the senator, and those of the man over those of the citizen, but unfortunately personal interest is always found in an inverse ratio to duty, and it increases in proportion as the association becomes narrower and the commitment less sacred. This is invincible proof that the most general will is always the most just, and that the voice of the people is the voice of God. (*Discourse on Political Economy*, p.62).

The above quotation is a systematic expression of the fact that for Rousseau the more general the will, the more just it is. Such a moral hierarchy actually which ends up by

God, tells us as to why partiality is always to be subordinated to a more general will according to Rousseau. We could argue one step further that Rousseau's egalitarianism and populism finds its roots in such a metaphysical (or cosmic) hierarchy of values, that the more general is the more just. The point as to why an included element of a set should necessarily be bounded by a higher will is vague, but that is how Rousseau developed his moral and political theory. Besides the generality issue, the issue of why equality is good is taken for granted by Rousseau. Rousseau believes that equality is good and morally binding, and once he puts it so, he uses it in all his arguments taken for granted. We could say that the issue of equality (or egalitarianism) is the basis of all Rousseau's social and political system. He binds his public morality on egalitarianism. He says that this is the pre-requisite of the civic equality, in the sense that only if there is perfect socio-economic equality then the citizens might be autonomous and thus nobody could buy off the others (*Discourse on Political Economy*, p. 72). Rousseau justifies in *Discourse on Political Economy* his strict egalitarianism by arguments such as "protecting the poor against the tyranny of the rich.". Relying on this side of Rousseau, many authors, especially from left, have inferred egalitarian arguments out of Rousseau.

Rousseau's urge for egalitarianism through the General Will (which aims at the public utility) is something that is evident in Rousseau's texts and is acknowledged by every single author. However the point as to how and on what grounds Rousseau justifies the General Will causes a split between different authors. While authors like Skhlar and Arendt argue that compassion and care for other citizens is the basis of Rousseau's egalitarianism, authors like Berlin and Canovan argue that reason is the basis of

Rousseau's urge for egalitarianism. In the next section, I will basically mention these two ways of readings, which form the basis of the two basic readings of Rousseau's General Will, namely the romanticist and rationalist readings which I had mentioned at the Introduction part of my thesis.

1.5. The Romanticist and the Rationalist readings of the General Will

We should admit that Rousseau has both romantic and rationalist inclinations, and both sides of Rousseau have been influential in the history of ideas. Those who take Rousseau as a romanticist especially rests upon Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* and *Discourse on Political Economy*. Throughout the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau longs for a lost innocence— the noble savage who was guided purely by instinct and not corrupted by the materialist and greedy expectations of the society. Rousseau says that uncorrupted savage man is gone forever and we cannot return to its natural state. Therefore we should rest upon a social contract whose main concern is equality and concern for others. Judith Skhlar's way of reading is such a romanticist reading. She says that, according to Rousseau, socio-economic equality is the main principle of a society, which is in sharp contrast with luxury and material self-interest. Skhlar says, this equality is justified on the basis of a generalized pity for the poor and the weak of the society (See Skhlar's article on Rousseau in *Rousseau's Political Writings*) - Relying on this romanticist way of reading Rousseau, we could say that the 'will of all' is taken as something bad by Rousseau, because it is the aggregation of private wills, which implies egoism, inequality and envy; whereas the General Will is taken as good by him, because it is the compassionate common action towards the common good of the whole society). We

should say that this way of reading Rousseau is romanticist in the sense that it refers to emotions such as “pity” when explaining the grounds of “equality” in Rousseau’s writings. This way of reading rests on the fact that Rousseau characterizes compassion as a part of human nature in *Discourse on Inequality*. He characterizes compassion there as a natural instinct (See *Discourse on Inequality*, p. 28).

We should say that Hannah Arendt’s reading of Rousseau’s General Will is also romanticist. She says, like Skhlar that, the idea of a General Will rests on a generalized compassion. She thinks that Rousseau’s General Will is a quest for a strict socio-economic equality, which assumes that personal benefits are necessarily against the public utility (Arendt, 1963: 74). Arendt criticizes such a dichotomy, and argues that private benefits are not necessarily against the public utility. Arendt assumes that repressing all private interests might cause the reducing multiplicity of society into singularity (Arendt, 1963: 74). Actually the authoritarian sides of Rousseau’s General Will is not only mentioned by authors like Arendt who read Rousseau in a romanticist way, but also by authors like Canovan and Berlin who read him in a rationalist way. We should not overlook that, unlike in *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau refers to reason (moral liberty) in *On Social Contract* in order to ground his idea of a social contract. This point is important to differentiate the romanticist and rationalist readings of Rousseau.

In the rationalist way of reading of Rousseau’s General Will, his insistence on ‘moral liberty’ which is the control of desires by reason, is taken as the core of Rousseau’s General Will. We should acknowledge that this rationalist way of reading has been much

influential on Kant's interpretation of Rousseau. Whether Kant did right in reading Rousseau in a rationalist way is another issue but we should admit that the way he read Rousseau has been an influential inspiration for many rationalists. Thus, it is important in terms of the history of ideas to shed light upon the influence of this rationalist reading of Rousseau.

The fact that Rousseau has been interpreted in a rationalist way by some authors does not change the reality that the romanticist way of reading was also very important. However I should say that I confine myself in this dissertation to giving an account of the rationalist reading of Rousseau by authors like Berlin and Canovan, which I am going to elaborate through Chapter 2.

Although the rationalist and romantic readings seem to be much different, we could say that they might be historically reconciled in such a way: Man was born free as a noble savage (*On Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter 1, p.85), but society has both corrupted and denied the possibility of returning to that state of natural liberty. The only way is forward towards a different kind of liberty, namely moral liberty. If so, the General Will might be associated with rationalism implicit in Rousseau's account of moral liberty and not the romanticism implicit in his account of natural liberty.

In the next chapter, I am going to give the rationalist reading of Rousseau by Canovan and substantially by Berlin. I am going to argue that Rousseau's General Will might be taken as an urge towards the society's rational self-mastery. In this regard, I am going to use Berlin's conception of positive freedom to explain how we could possibly read

Rousseau's General Will in a rationalist way. Throughout Chapter 2, I am going to put Rousseau's General Will into its epistemological context on the basis of Berlin's characterization of monism and pluralism, and criticize Rousseau's monism for it might possibly lead to authoritarianism.

CHAPTER II

BERLIN'S READING OF ROUSSEAU'S GENERAL WILL AS A RATIONALIST PROJECT

Since the citizens had but one interest,
the people had but one will.

(Rousseau, *On Social Contract*, p.150)

In this chapter, I am going to argue with reference to Berlin that Rousseau's General Will might be read as a rationalist project. This way of reading rests on the assumption that Rousseau's conception of 'moral liberty' is an urge towards rational self-government. Following this way of reading, Rousseau's insistence on singularity of the General Will might be read as the compulsion of the citizens to follow their reason in public affairs. I am going to discuss such a rationalist reading around Berlin's conceptualization of negative freedom, positive freedom, monism and pluralism. In the next section, I start with the unanimity problem, as to how Rousseau thinks that there should be unanimity in basic political matters.

2.1. The Unanimity Problem

Let us assume that an assembly is processing a law on the abolishment of capital punishment. Can we possibly expect that all the parliamentarians will necessarily converge on the issue and say 'Yes, Reason necessitates that capital punishment is sometimes justified' or 'No, Reason necessitates that capital punishment can never be justified'? Could we assume that

since all parliamentarians share Reason and since they all would like to take a position that represents the common good of the nation, they will necessarily end up reaching a unanimous decision? To this question Rousseau says, 'Yes': All the people in the assembly are supposed to converge on the issue. Because all humans have reason, and as long as their reason is not corrupted or distracted by 'private' concerns they were supposed to recognize the common good. Thus, Rousseau views any sign of dissension from the General Will as a sign of private interest, passion, or irrationality. He assumes that, as long as the people are not misinformed, they will always be righteous and will always be in accordance with the common good.

Rousseau assumes that all individuals should live according to the dictates of public morality, and not desire or irrational impulses. (Rousseau, 1988: 96). According to Rousseau, making and following one's own rules is to be 'morally free' (Rousseau, 1988: 96). For him, deviation from the dictates of public reason is against morality. Thus, he thinks that, if an individual in the assembly deviates from reason and behaves according to his private interests rather than the common good, then he should be forced to be rational and thereby free: "Anyone who refuses to obey the general will shall be forced to do so by the entire body; which means nothing else than he will be forced to be free." (Rousseau, 1988: 95).

The expression “forced to be free” might sound a bit bizarre to us, but that Berlin says this is how Rousseau like many other modernists understood freedom: ‘Only Reason liberates’, or Unreason is unfreedom (Berlin, 1970: 151). With reference to Isaiah Berlin’s famous distinction, to be guided by reason is the rationalistic characterization of positive freedom. Berlin had defined the search for rational autonomy as the search for positive freedom. Rational self-mastery, he says, is equated with moral liberty in the sense that all passions, irrational or whimsical desires are subordinated to the pure dictates of Reason. The possible authoritarian implications of such a disciplining at the individual and the public level will be mentioned in the coming sections with reference to Berlin and Canovan. Now, I would like to problematize the relation between moral liberty and the obligation to unanimity.

2.2. Moral liberty and the urge for ethico-political convergence

Rousseau assumes that since all individuals share the moral duty to be rationally in control of their lives, it is also their duty to come to common terms on basic ethico-political questions. That is why he argued for unanimity in legislative matters:

Two general rules can serve to regulate these proportions: the first is that the more important and serious the decisions, the closer the prevailing opinion should be to unanimity; the second is that the more hastily the matter under consideration must be decided, the smaller the prescribed majority should be; in decisions that must be

reached immediately, a majority of a single vote should suffice. (Rousseau, 1988: 152)

According to Berlin's reading of Rousseau, Rousseau's optimism about how the people in the assembly would arrive at unanimity in legislative matters, had emanated from his belief in the possibility of a Newtonian ethics, that the laws of moral life could be discovered by all citizens adhering to reason alone. We could possibly say that Rousseau shared such a positivistic belief with other Enlightenment thinkers. Indeed, we should admit that Rousseau's influence on Kant is significant in this regard:

Newton first saw an order and lawfulness going in hand with great simplicity, where prior to him disorder and its troublesome partner, multiplicity, were encountered, and ever since the comets run in geometrical paths.

Rousseau first discovered amid the manifold human forms the deeply hidden nature of man, and the secret law by which Providence is justified through his observations. (Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime* [as an excerpt] in *Rousseau's Political Writings*, p.208).

Thus, Kant saw in Rousseau's work a way to ground politics and ethics in a fixed moral reality in spite of the apparent diversity of the world we live in. In the next section, I will further develop the basic assumptions of the Newtonian Ethics (or Newtonian Body Politics) with reference to Enlightenment.

2.3. Enlightenment and the possibility of a Newtonian Body Politics

The Enlightenment thinkers in the 18th century, among whom Rousseau was an important figure, being influenced by the accomplishments of the Newtonian Science, thought that a Newtonian Ethics or a Newtonian Body Politics could be possible in the world of human beings. Reason was the standard belief among the intellectuals of that era, by which they thought all human problems, including the ethical and political ones, could be solved. In Enlightenment philosophy, the individuals were thought to be parts of a greater harmonious, moral universe in which their mere role was thought to be law-abiding (to be rational and moral) subjects without any dissension. Isaiah Berlin (1970: 154) formulates the basic principles of such a Newtonian Ethics (which Kant might have partially inherited from Rousseau) as follows:

first that all men have one true purpose, and one only, that of 'rational self-direction' , second, that the ends of all rational beings must of necessity fit into a single universal, harmonious pattern, which some men may be able to discern more clearly than others; third, that all conflict, and consequently tragedy is due solely to the clash of reason with the irrational or the insufficient rational—the immature and undeveloped elements in life—whether individual or communal, and that such clashes are, in principle, avoidable, and for wholly rational beings impossible; finally, that when all men have been made rational, they will obey the rational laws of their own natures, which are one and the same in them all, and so be at once wholly law-abiding and wholly free.

This lucid and technical unfolding of the principles of Newtonian Ethics by Isaiah Berlin might help to explain why Rousseau was able to argue

that: “Anyone who refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the entire body; this means nothing else than that he will be forced to be free.” (Rousseau, 1988:95).

The content of this famous quotation from Rousseau’s *On Social Contract* is actually criticized by some authors to be authoritarian. It is argued that rationality is figured out by Rousseau in a monistic way which would imply that dissidents in a society are to be taken as irrational and therefore excluded from the decision-making process. This is argued to be the tyranny of Rationality within a society. The next sections will be on Rousseau’s General Will and its monistic and authoritarian implications according to Berlin and Canovan.

2.4. Rousseau’s General Will and the ‘tyranny of Rationality’

When a law is proposed in the assembly of the people, what they are being asked is not precisely whether they approve or reject the proposal, but whether or not it is consistent with the general will that is their own; each expresses his own opinion on this point by casting his vote, and the declaration of the general will is derived from the counting of the votes. When therefore, the opinion contrary to my own prevails, this merely proves that I was mistaken, and that what I considered to be the general will was not so
(Rousseau, *On Social Contract*, p.151)

Although Rousseau is known to be a strongly republican democrat, we should actually elaborate in different ways as to whether Rousseau was really in favor of democratic deliberation or not. First of all, it would be

appropriate to give an outline of Rousseau's rationalistic principles which lie at the heart of his formulation of democracy and the general will. From Berlin's and Canovan's rationalist reading of Rousseau, the following principles might be told to lie at the base of Rousseau's conception of Rousseau's General Will:

- i. Individuals should direct their individual and public lives only after Reason (Only by reason can men become morally free).²
- ii. Reason is universal: It is God's voice for all nations (See Rousseau, 1988: 61).³
- iii. Since Reason is universal, individual differences are irrelevant in making rational laws.
- iv. As long as individuals are in accordance with Reason, they will thus be also in accordance with the General Will.
- v. If anyone is somehow against the General Will, it results from the above principles that he must have been necessarily irrational at some stage (because otherwise he could in no way be at odds with the purely rational General Will of the society).
- vii. Since we are living in a Rationalist, Harmonious Moral Universe, it follows that, one who is against the General Will, is to be taken as being at

² According to Rousseau, making and following one's own rules is 'moral liberty' (See the editors' note in *Rousseau's Political Writings*, p.96). Rousseau says that a society should govern itself by making 'rational' laws. He assumes that a society, which consists of rational individuals at its base, will be a rational society at large, which can rationally govern itself. This is how Rousseau links his solitary 'rational' individuals to 'rational' citizens. Or we could say this is how Rousseau links his rationalist psychological theory to his rationalist social theory.

odds with nothing but directly with the Moral Universe, thus he should necessarily be ‘forced’ to be in harmony with the rationalistic/universal order, which would mean nothing else than that, he will be forced to be “free”.⁴

In the next part, I am going to analyze how Rationality is central to Rousseau’s conception of democracy.

2.4.1. Rationality and Democracy

My interpretation of Rousseau’s political writings is such that, although we could read him from a romanticist point of view, as did authors like Arendt and Skhlar, it is possible that we consistently read him as a rationalist republican. In accordance with his deductive methodology, Rousseau takes reason as something ‘out there’ to be discovered. He is treating reason as if it was the impartial spectator within an assembly, and reduces reason to a simple tool for a mechanical cross-checking after arguments: “...what they are being asked [in the assembly] is not precisely whether they approve or reject the proposal, but whether or not it is consistent with the general will that is their own.” (Rousseau, 1988: 151).

³ Rousseau (1988:61) had said : “...This is invincible proof that the most general will is also always the most just, and that the voice of people is indeed the voice of God”. This quotation clearly implies that Rousseau was a universalist.

⁴ See (Rousseau, 1988: 96) for ‘moral liberty’.

It seems that according to Rousseau, people's suggestions are asked to be mechanically compared with what reason (as if it is something out there) is supposed to dictate to us. From this, it may logically follow however that "...if the general will is, in fact, a rational deduction of the implications of a single common interest, then there must be a right answer, and popular deliberations may *not* be the best guide to it." (Canovan, 1985: 291, italics mine). This is nothing but to acknowledge that, face-to-face deliberations in an assembly which Rousseau suggests, would simply be illusory, since 'reason' would have already made (or is supposed to make) people rational copies of each other, and all individual differences would then be irrelevant and obsolete in influencing the republican deliberations⁵: "Finally, where pure logic is concerned, human plurality is irrelevant" (Canovan, 1985:293).

It seems that Rousseau's democracy is a 'deductive democracy'.⁶ According to him, there are rational principles within each and every individual's mind, and that, every individual only need build his arguments on these *a priori* principles. It seems that, according to

⁵ We should note however that contemporary republican thinkers like Hannah Arendt, respect individual differences and suggest that, individuals should actively take part in the public performances to influence the public compromises: "In opposition to Rousseau's stress on rational [logical] interest issuing in a common will, she [Arendt] explores notions of opinion, judgement, and sheer contingent political compromise that are involved in reaching solutions appropriate to the plural condition of men" (Canovan, 1985: 295). It also seems that Rousseau's conception of General Will totally lacks any possible inter-subjectivity as depicted in Habermas' conception of 'deliberative democracy'.

⁶ I use this term in a sense which would imply contrariness to "deliberativeness".

Rousseau, discussions would be null and void where they clash with reason. For example, someone who would say that socio-economic inequality might be tolerated, would be taken by Rousseau as irrational, and he would have, no right to participate into public deliberations with such an irrational idea. Actually, since judgements about what is rational (just) and what is irrational (unjust) might be open to arbitrary manipulation, we could assume that Rousseau's criterion of reason might possibly end up creating an illiberal society which arbitrarily discriminates between people in terms of those who are rational and those who are irrational.

Rousseau portrays the General Will with organic metaphors. To him, it is a single 'Body': A body which should be directed by pure reason, which necessitates that those parts which dissent from reason should be forced to be in accordance with reason. This implies that some minorities, marginals or eccentrics in the society, which might be seen as being whimsical and thus contrary to reason, can legitimately be forced to be rational (i.e. forced to be free). We could possibly assume that creating such a hierarchy of what is rational (prudent) and what is irrational (whimsical) might lead us to discriminative and authoritarian polities.

2.5. Berlin's conception of positive freedom and its relevance with Rousseau's General Will

According to Berlin (1970: 131-134), positive freedom aims at self-legislation (self-mastery). Unlike negative freedom⁷ which deals with 'How far the government interferes with you', positive freedom deals with 'Who governs you'. To put it another way, positive freedom deals with whether your real self (rational self) governs you or not. That is to say, whether your real, rational, higher self governs and takes control of your lower, passionate, irrational, lower self or not. Positive freedom suggests that you are positively free to the extent that you purify yourself in terms of reason, and eliminate passion, emotion or all sorts of irrationality (Berlin, 1970: 132). In this case, reason (which for Kant is the *inner light* in each and every individual) is the real and true part of the self, whereas the empirical (heteronomous) self is the lower part of the self and that this lower part of the self should be submitted to the reasoning self by disciplining and suppressing all irrational impulses and passions. (As might it be Reason, it is also possible that a certain State, Class or Nation, says Berlin might be regarded as a more real and true subject of attributes

⁷ Berlin says 'negative' freedom is being free from any interference in one's activities. Berlin takes the term as did Locke, Hobbes, Mill or Constant. Berlin favors negative freedom over what he calls as positive freedom. Although I am going to take Berlin's conception of negative freedom as a tool to criticize Rousseau; in Chapter 2, I am going to argue, with reference to Kenny and Rorty that, this term is not neutral in any sense, and is in fact an ideological defense of liberalism which is in fact merely a historical contingency.

than the empirical self, which might possibly lead to authoritarian consequences.

Berlin says that the metaphysics of positive freedom mostly works as the denial of the ordinary experience. It always makes an artificial distinction between the “seen” (surface level) and the “unseen” (deeper levels of reality).⁸ Those who are better able to see the deeper levels of reality (those who can rise above false conscious) are supposed to have the right to rule the ignorant ones (those who are entrapped in false consciousness). These ignorant people are seen by the knowing ones as the “material” to be molded in the course of history. Berlin (1970: 150-151), with reference to this issue, makes the supposed proponent of positive freedom talk in such a way, reflecting him as an artist molding his material:

I may conceive myself as an inspired artist, who mould men into patterns in the light of his unique vision, as painters combine colors or composers sounds; humanity is the raw material upon which I impose my creative will; even though men suffer and die in the process, they are lifted by it to a height to which they could never have risen without my coercive-but creative-violation of their lives. This is the argument used by every dictator, inquisitor, and bully who seeks some moral, or even aesthetic, justification for his conduct. I must do for

⁸ We should note here that Marx’s conception of “false-consciousness” presupposes such a distinction between what is seen but unauthentic and what is not seen but authentic. As a matter of fact, Berlin says authenticity is reflected as if it is an occult entity within us: “[all people] are actually aiming at what in their benighted state they consciously resist, because there exists within them an occult entity their latest rational will, or their ‘true’ purpose and that this entity, although it is believed by all that they overtly feel and do and say, is their ‘real’ self, of which the poor empirical self in space and time may know nothing or little; and that this inner spirit is the only self that deserves to have its wishes taken into account. (Berlin, 1970: 133).

men (or with them) what they cannot do for themselves, and I cannot ask their permission or consent, because they are in no condition to know what is best for them.

Following the metaphor, we could say that the artist-ruler could use all humanity as his material on his way to create a great Nation, a World Ideology or an Eternal Truth. Such an inclination within projects of positive freedom are all to be taken as potentially authoritarian in the sense that it might possibly destroy people's differences for the sake of a 'truer reality'.

2.6. The General Will as positive freedom

Rousseau's General Will might possibly read as a quest towards positive freedom since it aims to construct a purely rational (or just) society which is exempt from all irrational desires and heteronomies. Rousseau's self-government theory and his ideas on 'moral liberty' might be told to reflect a positive conception of freedom: "moral liberty [the freedom to make and follow one's own rules], which alone makes man truly his own master, for impulsion by appetite is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself is liberty." (Rousseau, 1988: 96). According to the rationalist way of reading Rousseau's General Will, this quotation reflects the basis of Rousseau's rationalist psychological theory which lies at the heart of Rousseau's belief in rational citizens, and thus a rational republic. In this regard with reference to the categories of reason and desire, the

General Will simply aims to destroy anything it takes as desire and as irrational.⁹ It is argued however that, since the limits of what is rational and what is irrational is open to manipulation, a society's General Will might turn out to be the worst enemy of idiosyncrasies in a society and turn out to be the basis of a totally illiberal society.

2.7. The General Will as Monism

Rousseau's General Will might be told to be politically monist. Because it assumes that for basic political questions there is one and only one answer, towards which all citizens are supposed to converge, so that they become genuine and 'positively' free citizens. As an example, we could talk of Rousseau's taking socio-economic egalitarianism as the only truth in social policies. He takes this as a moral truth and regards all other alternatives as morally corrupt. We should admit however that, as Berlin would argue, socio-economic egalitarianism is only one choice among many in social policy and it is not the only choice that we could think of. Rousseau however reduces the possibilities to only one and says, for the sake of positive freedom, there should be perfect socio-economic egalitarianism among citizens.

I am going to argue in the next part with reference to Berlin, that the monist attitude of Rousseau in ethico-political matters has its

⁹ Rousseau's authoritarianism most probably emanates from the fact that Rousseau believes "reason" and "desire" to be two distinct and opposing faculties, which, Psycho-analysis has challenged in many respects.

epistemological roots, and stands in contrast to epistemological pluralism. In that part, I am going to explain Berlin's problematization of epistemological monism and epistemological pluralism with reference to their political implications, which I am going to bind to Rousseau's political monism and insistence on a singular will.

2.8. The epistemological Roots of political Monism and Political Pluralism according to Berlin

Berlin says that modern epistemological monism has its roots in the Newtonian view of universe. According to Isaiah Berlin (1970:154), a Newtonian moral universe has the following pre-suppositions [paraphrased by me]:

1. The ethical universe has its constant and ever-lasting 'laws'
2. One law does not clash with another (Thus a virtue can never clash with another virtue).¹⁰ Because in a harmonious universe, no laws could ever clash with others; if they ever did, the universe would perish at once.
3. All tragedy in moral life, as would follow from the above two principles, is due to error or miscalculation.

¹⁰ Social Positivism's ethical theory takes ethical rules, as if they are 'laws'; like those of the universe which are studied by physics, chemistry ,etc...

Such a Newtonian ethical universe assumes that there is *one and only one* solution to a single ethical problem (which finds its best expression actually in Kant's Categorical Imperative), which would imply that those who are in opposition to that single rational solution are necessarily irrational (and thus morally unfree). Berlin (2000:5-6) formulates the metaphysical heart of Modernity's rationalist monism as follows:

that to all true questions , there must be one true answer and one only, all the other answers being false, for otherwise the questions cannot be genuine questions. There must exist a path which leads clear thinkers to the correct answers to these questions, as much in the moral, social and political worlds as in that of the natural sciences, whether it is the same method or not; at once all the correct answers to the deepest moral, social and political questions that occupy (or should occupy) mankind are put together, the result will represent the final solution to all the problems of existence. Of course, we may never attain to these answers: human beings may be too confused by their emotions, or too stupid, or too unlucky, to be able to arrive at them; the answers may be too difficult, the means may be lacking, the techniques too complicated to discover; but however this may be, provided the questions are genuine, the answers must exist. If we do not know, our successors may know; or perhaps wise men in antiquity knew; and if they did not, perhaps Adam in paradise knew; or if he did not, the angels must know; and if even they do not know, God must know—the answers must be there”

This is a perfect explanation of epistemological monism, the idea that, to all true questions, there must be one and only one true answer, all the other answers being false.

Berlin, epistemologically rejects this monism, and say that, in ethical/political life, a single true question might have more than one

answers, all being ‘equally true’ (This epistemological stance corresponds to nothing but value pluralism, that, people might have different and opposing values, all of which we should respect and not interfere).¹¹

We could actually better substantiate the political implications of epistemological monism and epistemological pluralism by a concrete example. Let us assume that a policy-designer in a country is in a situation to provide people with ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’. The question is: Could he possibly provide both? Before making an inquiry into the supposed answers of the two opposing policy-designers, one being epistemologically monist, and the other being epistemologically pluralist, let us outline the basic presuppositions of epistemological monism and epistemological pluralism according to Berlin (1970: 119-172).

2.8.1. Basic Pre-suppositions of Epistemological Monism according to Berlin

- i.** All genuine goods are compatible with each other, by virtue of the fact that we are living in a Newtonian (Kantian) ethical universe, in which all goods are dictated to us by Universal Reason.
- ii.** At a certain point where you are supposed to make a concrete ethical decision, reason alone could tell you the exact rational solution which

¹¹ This value-pluralism has its best expression in Berlin’s notion of negative freedom which defends non-interference in individual preferences.

would include in itself, by virtue of its being rational, all possible goods, and leaving out all evils that could pertain to your decision.¹²

iii. Any evil consequence to come out of an ethical decision, should be taken as a result of the misapplication or non-application of reason (because, the argument follows, if you had genuinely applied the Universal Reason, no evil could ever arise out of your ethical decision, which retrospectively implies that you should turn to the previous steps and do your moral duty as your true reason (Universal Reason) would have dictated to you.

2.8.2. Basic Pre-suppositions of Epistemological Pluralism according to Berlin

i. Genuine goods are not necessarily compatible with each other. Some genuine goods are diametrically opposed to other genuine goods, and hence “tragedy” is unavoidable: Applying Universal Reason can never bring together the diametrically opposed goods under a single choice; thus a trade-off is unavoidable; it has to be eventually your “free choice” to choose either this or that option out of many(Berlin, 1970: 161). This implies: Choose as you like, notwithstanding each and every option’s immanent shortcomings with regard to the other equally valid options. This is to admit that, at a certain point, it is not a matter of Reason to

¹² Berlin (1970: 170) says trade-off is not due to our incapability of being fully rational, but it is due to the nature of the ethical life itself, that some rational goods are opposed to other equally rational goods. This is the ‘tragic’ nature of life itself.

choose this or that option, but a matter of mere choice, and as a matter of fact, neither of the options could ever be evil-free or totally good, since any option you would choose would create its specific merits while creating its own shortcomings at the same time. So this is nothing but to admit, according to Berlin, the tragic side of human choices between incommensurables.¹³ (Berlin, 1970: 161).

2.8.3. About Tragedy: Could we ever provide both liberty and equality simultaneously at their best?

Relying on Berlin's characterization, An 'epistemologically monist' policy designer would assume that, in any country at a certain time within certain conditions, we could figure out by reason what sorts of policies should be implemented to provide the citizens both perfect liberty and perfect equality through a single rational solution.

An 'epistemologically pluralist' policy designer however would assume that liberty and equality are diametrically opposed values, although both valuable in their own terms, and thus both cannot be provided to their full

¹³ To give an example, a student sitting in a class can never be said to have done *the* rational thing, since attending the class might secure its own merits, but makes it impossible for one to be outside with his friends. Rousseau or Kant would say, attending the class is the rational choice and they would deny the specific evils (or losses) inherent in that 'rational' choice. We should admit, following liberals like Isaiah Berlin, that attending a class is attending a class, and it has its own advantages and disadvantages; going out with friends is going out with friends, and it has its own advantages and disadvantages. So to say, there is no 'the rational answer' : There are different answers, different choices, which can not be ultimately arbitrated by reason, but which is to be finalized by 'choices'. Berlin says, whereas Romanticism admits the individual's idiosyncrasies and 'tragic' life, Rationalism takes 'reason' as the ultimate and adequate solver of any problem, and exerts a single answer to everyone as the rational answer, which is actually monist and possibly despotic in character.

extent. Therefore you should either provide people with either more liberty or more equality.¹⁴ There cannot be a rational or moral argumentation on this problem that can ultimately bind every one of us in the same universal manner.¹⁵

Acknowledging that it is a matter of mere choice, an epistemologically pluralist person would definitely respect all possible political articulations having different sorts of emphasis with regard to the question ‘How much liberty, how much equality?’ Whereas an epistemologically monist would simply not respect different moral reasonings on this issue, since only ‘one’ of these reasonings is the true answer to the question at hand, others being all wrong, irrational and immoral.

So we should conclude that epistemological pluralism, that, one question can have not only one rational answer but many, gives way to political

¹⁴ Berlin says liberty and equality are diametrically opposed values, therefore tragedy is unavoidable. Unlike Rationalists who say there is a rational point which satisfies both, Berlin says taking more of one decreases your chance to take more of the other; so you should either take more liberty or more equality at a certain point; both are not possible (Berlin, 1970:161). Berlin here implies that there is no Universal Reason to solve this tragedy. According to him, there are different “choices”, all of which are tragic, yet with different priorities, which we should all respect. Out of this projection of Berlin, it would result that Rousseau’s General Will denies tragedy and plural choices, since it assumes that there is always a single rational solution for a political question. Rousseau’s General Will is monistic in the sense that it does not even figure out a choice problem between socio-economic egalitarianism and more competitiveness on their merits and weaknesses, but simply takes egalitarianism as the rational solution.

¹⁵ which is to say there is no Universal Reason to solve our social problems. Every one has his/her own way of reasoning, which necessarily requires that a society should provide its citizens an atmosphere of ‘political plurality’ in which different moral reasonings can all exist along with each other.

pluralism which takes different policy options as equally respectable. However epistemological monism, that, one question can have one and only one rational answer, gives way to political monism which takes only one possible form of political reasoning as acceptable and takes the others as heretical or unfree and therefore labels them as needing to be ‘forced to be free’, which is an expression of authoritarianism..

In the next section, I am going to criticize Rousseau’s General Will according to the pre-suppositions of political pluralism.

2.9. Rousseau’s General Will in the light of Political Pluralism

Political Pluralism assumes that individuals all have their own choices in life and these choices are incommensurable. We could say that Berlin’s conception of negative freedom which is the result of his value-pluralism have the following implications:

i. Individuals have no metaphysical essence, any human nature, or reason, out of which we could possibly derive what a human being had to need, do or refrain from. Therefore each individual should be left out with his/her own life project without being hindered by others on the basis of any assumed reason or common good¹⁶ (Please see the negative freedom part in Berlin, 1970: 122-131).

¹⁶ A ‘common good’ is always assumed by political thinkers on the assumption that people have a ‘common’ human nature

ii. Universal definitions of reason or truth are problematic in terms of negative freedom in the sense that they imply depravity or irrationality for those who do not fit the existing criteria of truth or rationality. Therefore claims to universal validity should be dismissed, on the basis that the negative liberties of some people might be violated in the name of others' projects of universal truth or universal rationality. This procedurally implies that, negative liberties should be prior to concerns about whether individuals are positively free or not.¹⁷

I believe that these two items above that came out of Berlin's conception of negative freedom can be put in terms of the distinction between the 'private' and the 'public' as such:

- i.** Individual ethos is private and therefore inviolable.
- ii.** An individual is to be taken as an inappropriate unit to become part of a publicly-defined ethos or a publicly-defined General Will,¹⁸ since an individual shares no metaphysical essence or any common political teleology with others. Therefore, if ever one is made part of such a totalizing public body, it is possible that some of his negative liberties

¹⁷ In a liberal state, no supreme authority should assume a job for itself to supervise whether people are "philosophically" free or not. A liberal state is assumed to provide its citizens only 'negative liberties' (such as freedom of property, freedom of speech, freedom of communication, etc.). According to the 'negative' notion of freedom, which is the conventional liberal understanding of freedom, the individuals should be perfectly free to the extent that they do not harm others.

¹⁸ The Newtonian Ethics assumes that individual ethos and public ethos can be merged into a single ethical project, since all individuals will obey the same rational laws and no clash between these laws will ever arise. According to Berlin, Rousseau's General Will is such a belief in the Newtonian Body Politics, where citizens are parts of a harmonious, rational public universe.

might be violated for the sake of the so-called common good. Yet ironically enough, Berlin says, he or she could be told by the society that s/he is forced to nothing but to his/her own freedom.

Berlin assumes, through his notion of negative freedom, that individuals have no human nature or essence that is true for everyone, and thus despises all projects of positive freedom like that of Rousseau's General Will. However it is stated by some authors that Berlin's negative freedom itself implies a human nature and a claim to objectivity. In the next chapter, I am going to give an account of the challenges towards Berlin's critic of Rousseau, and reflect upon whether we have any objective criteria to choose between either monism or pluralism.

CHAPTER III

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS UPON BERLIN AND HIS CRITIC OF ROUSSEAU: MONISM VERSUS PLURALISM

Berlin, like other liberals, thinks that negative freedom is only procedural and says nothing about how individuals should actually live. However negative freedom also has its own genealogy, some authors say, and could be traced back to its historical pre-suppositions about what is the good form of life for people. In the following sections, I will explore the implications of Michael Kenny and Richard Rorty's criticisms on Berlin.

3.1. Kenny's critic of Berlin

Kenny (2000: 1032) says that Berlin's conception of man as reflected in the negative notion of freedom is a paradigmatic continuation of Fichte's 'active, dynamic, imaginative self'. He says, Berlin's affirmation of the romantic ideal is not neutral in any sense. Rather, we should say that Berlin's ideal is an alternative to the rationalistic model of Enlightenment; and being so, it has its own presuppositions about the human nature, that men are freely choosing agents and thus value creators, and therefore should be free in their personal choices (i.e. negative freedom). It is true that the idea of tragic choice is reflected in Berlin's writings as if it is a universal feature of all men in the world for all times. However we should admit that viewing individuals as such is historically contingent, and expecting that all human projects be bound on such a presupposition is

itself historical, ideological and has its own ‘positive’ counterpart (Kenny, 2000: 1031).

Kenny says that Berlin’s position is a committed liberalism. He says this commitment is influenced from the Cold War period and its polarizations : “negative against positive liberty above all, as the normative internalization of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ logic animating the Cold War” (Kenny, 2000: 1037). In this regard, Berlin’s characterization of positive freedom and its possible authoritarian results might be thought to be influenced from Berlin’s overt liberal commitments during the ideological polarizations of the Cold War. Berlin’s characterization of negative freedom and pluralism as *the* good form of life is criticized by different authors, on the basis that Berlin takes his liberal commitments as the ‘truth’, and accordingly the non-liberal and illiberal ones as something being against the ‘truth’ of liberalism (In this regard, Berlin’s critic of Rousseau in a very negative tone for being a non-liberal or an illiberal is to be thought within this objectivist claim to the ‘truth’ of liberalism). Richard Rorty who defines himself as a pragmatist liberal, actually challenges criticizes Berlin’s and other modernist liberals’ claim to the ‘truth’ of the liberal project, and says that liberalism itself is only a historical contingency and should be understood within this historicity. In order to be able to have a critical understanding of Berlin and his critic of

Rousseau, I believe that Rorty's ideas on the contingency of liberalism might be very illuminating.

3.2. Rorty as an 'ironist liberal' and his critic of modernist liberals like Berlin

Rorty as a liberal thinker makes himself distinct from many other liberal thinkers through his anti-foundationalism. He says that all knowledge is true to the extent that it is part of a certain 'language game'.¹⁹ This postmodernist attitude makes him criticize all meta-narratives, liberal and illiberal. As a matter of fact, he severs himself from the modernist liberals by calling them 'metaphysical liberals' and calls himself an 'ironist liberal' (See Rorty, 1989:91).

Rorty's anti-foundationalist methodology provides us with a useful basis to further illuminate of the concepts of the general will, monism, pluralism, negative freedom, positive freedom and contingency. In Rorty's view all concepts are historical constructs and therefore should be understood with reference to their specific metaphors (Rorty, 1989: 23-44). This is in fact a very relativist understanding of history, which is much different from either Rousseau or Berlin whom I am making subjects of my inquiry in this study.

¹⁹ Rorty is of course influenced from Wittgenstein, Lyotard and Derrida in this regard.

Rorty himself explains his own liberalism not by the ‘truth’ of liberalism but with reference to his liberal upbringing and the practical benefits and superiority of liberalism over other systems. So overall, Rorty admits that liberalism, too, is only a ‘language game’ and we should cling to it only for pragmatic concerns.

Rorty’s approach to political thinkers is always relativist. Rorty does not directly refer to Rousseau, but he could possibly say, for example, that Rousseau’s political ideas are discernable only within a ‘Newtonian’ language game, and as long as that language game is in usage, his ideas would stay being fashionable. Or with regard to Berlin, Rorty would say, inferring from what he says about modernist liberals, that Berlin’s liberalism is discernable only within a language game that takes negative freedom as the superior value.

Rorty being aware of such contingencies, totally rejects the universality or objectivity of liberalism and attaches to it only a limited, historical and contextual meaning, yet has a commitment to it for merely, he says, institutionalist and practical benefits that other alternative systems might not provide us. Many people find Rorty’s defense of liberalism quite a weak one, since he doesn’t refer to the objective superiority of liberalism over illiberal projects or of pluralism over monism. However Rorty argues that quest for such ‘objective’ justifications, are reminiscent of metaphysical habits, and post-metaphysical people, Rorty says, do not

need any metaphysical justification for continuing liberal institutions, and that they can rely on merely pragmatist and solidaristic concerns (Rorty, 1989: 87). In the next section, I am going to give an account of Rorty's conception of contingency and irony which lie at the heart of his ironist liberalism.

Rorty, as an anti-foundationalist thinker, rejects all *a priori* universals, such as reason, truth, morality, or human nature, and instead suggests a non-metaphysical and non-essentialist re-definition of liberalism, by virtue of which all identities (individual or social) could be seen as mere contingencies and therefore continuously criticized, redefined and experimented upon.

Rorty says all our individual lives and communities are products of time and space, which is to say that, they are not products of a historical or metaphysical necessity, but are merely "historical contingencies". To view them all in their contingency makes one an ironist, Rorty says.

Rorty (1989: 73) says he shall define an ironist as someone who fulfills three conditions:

- i.** She has radical and has continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies.
- ii.** She realizes that argument phrased in her vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts.
- iii.** In so far as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality

than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal meta-vocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way post appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old.

Rorty is actually here defining ironist as someone being relativist, who is aware that every thing is possible by re-definition:

I call people of this sort ironist because their realization that anything can be made to look good or bad being re-described, and their renunciation of the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies puts them in the position which Sartre called "meta-stable": never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies and thus of their selves.

3.3. The Contingency of Liberalism

Unlike Berlin who took liberalism and value-pluralism as a universal and supra-historical truth, Rorty admitted that liberalism is only a historical and contingent reality and that we should not approach it as a supra-historical narrative. In the 'The Contingency of Community' part of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* Rorty explains this as such:

I should like to replace both religious and philosophical accounts of supra-historical ground or an end of history convergence with a historical narrative about the rise of liberal institutions and customs- the institutions and customs which were designed to diminish cruelty, make possible government by the consent of the governed, and permit as much domination-free communication as possible to take place. Such a narrative would clarify

the conditions in which the idea of truth as correspondence to reality might gradually be replaced by the idea of truth as what comes to be believed in the course of free and open encounters (Rorty, 1991: 68).

Rorty actually differentiates himself from all people who he calls as objectivists. He says objectivists are people who believe that they can explain things, Newtonian-style, with reference to the true nature of things. They take truth as independent of humans and as a something we seek to 'correspond to' in our human. (Rorty, 1991: 21-22). He says we are heirs of such an objectivist tradition

which centers around the assumption that we must step outside our community long enough to examine it in the light of something which transcends it, namely, that which it has in common with every other actual and possible human community. This tradition dreams of an ultimate community which(...) will exhibit a solidarity which is not parochial because it is the expression of an ahistorical human nature. Much of the rhetoric of contemporary intellectual life takes for granted that the goal of scientific inquiry into man is to understand “underlying structures” or culturally invariant factors or biologically determined patterns (Rorty, 1991: 22).²⁰

Being antithetical to this objectivist tradition, Rorty defines himself as “solidarist”, which implies that he does not look for any non-human, objective truth or correspondence to this universal truth in justifying

²⁰ Remember Kant’s words about Rousseau in the light of this reference to objectivism: “Rousseau first discovered amid the manifold human forms the deeply hidden nature of man, and the secret law by which Providence is justified through his observations”. (in *Rousseau’s Political Writings*, p.208).

actions, but finds it sufficient to be a member of a ‘linguistic community’ and produce solutions to problems on a pragmatist basis without reference to any objective truth. Therefore Rorty differentiates himself from what he calls the metaphysical liberals because he views them as objectivists. Rorty as a solidarist (or pragmatist) does not look for any objective reality justification for being a liberal such as reason or human nature. He says he is a liberal for merely solidaristic and pragmatist concerns.

In this regard, we should say that Rorty’s critique applies to Berlin and his objectivist reading of pluralism, that pluralism is a truth, or that the world is in reality a plural one. Rorty rejects such epistemological claims about what the world’s true essence is.

Taking Rorty seriously, it would follow from the argument that Berlin’s critic of Rousseau as being monist is only another appeal to objectivity, and it is only a shifting from a ‘monist’ language game to a ‘pluralist’ language game. All that Berlin is doing is criticizing Rousseau for picking out the wrong understanding of reality. The question is how does Berlin know that he has picked out or represented the true understanding of reality? Indeed how does he know there is some objective reality to be represented in the first place? Therefore Rorty says, he himself drops all claims to moral or epistemological realism and only deals with “pragmatist” questions in order to better the liberal institutions.

We do not need to accept Rorty's anti-foundationalism or his 'ironist liberalism', but his ideas are provocative in the sense that we could view the ideas of either Rousseau or Berlin from a very different angle when we apply his critique of claims to objectivity. Within the general aim of this thesis, we could say that Rousseau's ideas on contingency and irony might give us a better understanding of both Rousseau and Berlin. Since Rousseau's conception of a singular General Will or Berlin's conception of pluralism, might both be called within Rorty's paradigm, as two historical constructs, one being monist, the other being pluralist, among which we actually cannot choose without referring to some objectivity.

Rorty as a pragmatist liberal is a subtle thinker and has his own political commitments. However, here I do not aim to give his own understanding of politics since I just aim here to mention him as a critical liberal thinker who might give us a sense of the contingency of monism or pluralism (Rorty's own position, namely to criticize all objectivist and foundationalist claims as something negative and to replace them with a pragmatist attitude, might also be criticized in some respects as being foundationalist, but here I do not aim to do this critique since it is irrelevant with the general aim of this thesis. However I should briefly state that, it is almost impossible to be purely anti-foundationalist and avoid all sorts of claims to objectivity). In the next section, I am going to

give a general account of monism and pluralism and ask whether we could appeal to either monism or pluralism without any claims to objectivity. I would basically claim that monism (as Rousseau had suggested through a singular General Will) or pluralism (as Berlin had suggested through his liberalism) are two different paradigms, which rely on different political pre-suppositions. In the Conclusion part of my thesis, I will conclude that projects of singularity or plurality are two different historical realities and therefore should be viewed within their very historicity. In the next section, I will ask the question whether we could choose monism or pluralism without any appeal to objectivism.

3.4. Is There a way to choose between monism or pluralism without any appeal to objectivity

It could be argued that pluralism is better than monism because a pluralist society might turn out to be a monist society more easily than a monist society could turn out to be a plural one. Yet, this would be simply because a pluralist political system, would supposedly be more open and would allow for changes more easily than a monist, closed and repressive society. However we should say that this relative ease has nothing to do with the internal value of either monism or pluralism, but is an argument on the likelihood of possible transition from one system to the other. Although we could assume that the likelihood of transition from pluralism to monism by virtue of the public discussions is more likely than the vice versa, still however, one cannot justify why pluralism is a good thing

without presupposing that the easiness of a system to change as it wishes without any external impediments is a good thing. This is to say that, taking pluralism as better than monism just because it allows possible shifts by virtue of the possibility of public discussions which might not exist in a monist system, relies on the presupposition that free discussions without any external hindrances (i.e. negative freedom) is a good thing. There is no problem with such a liberal pre-supposition, but we should admit that it somehow relies on the inherent goodness of free discussion which is mostly envisaged by liberals as one of the important negative liberties of a society. So following a liberal position like J.S. Mill or Isaiah Berlin, one could safely say that pluralism is superior than singularity. However, we should say that, it would be against open-mindedness to argue that pluralism is a supra-historical reality or is a 'truth'. There could be many independent arguments on why discussion, negative freedom and pluralism are superior values than singularity, but we should admit that without relying on some sort of a foundationalism (such as the ultimate value of free discussion) it is impossible to say that a pluralist (or liberal) society with many particular wills ('will of all') is better than a singular General Will. Because we should admit that pluralism and monism have divergent pre-suppositions. Pluralism relies on the pre-supposed goodness of negative freedom and social diversity, while singularism relies on the pre-supposed goodness of the convergence towards the singular ethical life of the society (i.e. positive freedom).

Since the aim of this dissertation is not to give a polemical defense of pluralism against singular world views, I simply have not aimed in my thesis to speculate on why supporting free discussions and diversity in a society could be better in terms of argument than restricting possible interactions among social groups, because I believe that this would be the subject of another thesis. Here, I have confined myself rather to show that Rousseau's political stance as reflected through his conception of a singular General Will, is much different than the positions of liberals like J.S. Mill or Berlin who are in favor of allowing different views in a society to unfold themselves freely and without any hindrances. I believe that one should view both views in their own historicity, and not forget that both views rely on very different social and political pre-suppositions and very different political practices.

3.5. Are we left without a basis for criticizing Rousseau's General Will and its legacy?

If we return back to the starting point of this thesis, we are now left with the following problem: The upshot of our critique of those who seek to ground pluralism or monism in objectivity, is that we seem to be left with no basis upon which to choose between those two alternatives. An anti-objectivist or anti-foundationalist position seems to entail that organizing law and society around a will common all is just as defensible as basing law and society on the multiplicity of often incompatible particular wills.

We should say that monism and pluralism are two irreconcilable approaches. Political monism assumes that ultimate source of political justification is singular, while political pluralism assumes that ultimate source of political justification are many. Both are different beliefs and positions about the world and they are mutually exclusive. One cannot turn out to be monist without giving up pluralism, and similarly one cannot turn out to be pluralist without giving up monism. Which do we choose?

Given this problem, is there a way to criticize the legacy of Rousseau's General Will? One avenue is to argue that pluralism is comparatively better than monism because it leaves open the *possibility* of converging on monism, while monism precludes the *possibility* of arriving at pluralism. Here I mean possible in its strict logical sense. That is not to say that pluralism is a guaranteed procedure for unraveling whether monism or pluralism is objectively true. The argument simply claims that it is possible. Indeed the argument does not hinge on the presupposition that there is objective truth to be discovered. Rather it says that, if it turns out that there is an objective reality, pluralism does not preclude us knowing it, while monism does preclude us from knowing it. In other words, the paradigm in which a monistic world is confined bars us from being aware of any alternatives. We are trapped within its singular world-view.

From this point of view we can criticize Rousseau's general will tradition, not because it is contrary to what is claimed to be true reality by authors like Berlin (namely, objective pluralism), but because it closes the door on questioning itself. It is entirely self-contained (i.e. self-referential) and therefore beyond self-assessment. It excludes the possibility of it knowing that it may be wrong or from confirming (after serious criticism) that it has yet to be disproved. (Note that this is similar to J. S. Mill's defense of pluralism- See his *On Liberty*, chapter 2 - However, Mill implies that pluralism is a reliable discovery method, whereas I am simply arguing that it leaves open the *possibility* of discovery). In a world guided by the dictates of the will common and instilled in all, alternatives (whether critical or not) are beyond its frame of reference. Thus the possibility of recognizing pluralism, should it turn out to be objectively true, is blocked. By contrast pluralism leaves open a possible basis for becoming aware of monism, should it turn out to be objectively true. Here pluralism is defended purely because of its instrumental value (i.e. because it provides for the possibility of discovery) rather than (as Berlin argues) its intrinsic value.

We should be careful, however, for it may be pointed out that there is a form of objectivism at work here. Namely the argument presupposes that leaving open the possibility of discovery is something that we should value (and that because the General Will forecloses the possibility of

discovery it should therefore be rejected as a way to organize law and government). While fully acknowledging that challenge, however, we should also acknowledge that this is a decidedly thin and uncontroversial appeal to objectivity. By thin, I mean that the argument by no means presupposes a precise and detailed understanding of what the good life is in all cases (i.e. the possibility of discovery is valued but what is to be discovered is left open). Secondly, by uncontroversial I mean that, upon careful reflection informed people would be inclined to accept the argument as entirely reasonable. Thus we may suggest, in conclusion, that if the reader accepts this line of argument, then the Rousseauian legacy can indeed be challenged on the grounds that it denies any room for self-criticism and therefore reform.

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