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ROUSSEAU

Champion and Critic of the Transformation of the Family

Two Paradoxes in Rousseau's Philosophy of the Family

Both Burke and Wollstonecraft remarked on the paradoxical character of Rousseau's thought and its power to amuse, captivate, and even corrupt its audience. In 1787, Wollstonecraft read Rousseau with such avid pleasure that she exclaimed in a letter to her sister Everina that she was "now reading Rousseau's *Emile*, and love his paradoxes."¹ Later, she confessed to Gilbert Imlay that she had always been "half in love" with Rousseau, despite her vehement disagreement with his patriarchal principles concerning sex roles.² While admitting that Rousseau is "sometimes moral, and moral in a very sublime strain," Burke warned that one should not be "more than transiently amused with (Rousseau's) paradoxical morality" because "the *general spirit and tendency* of his works is mischievous; and the more mischievous for this mixture." Burke concluded that Rousseau, and his followers, "make even virtue a pander to vice" with their impish manipulation of paradox to convolute our received understandings of morality.³

That both Burke and Wollstonecraft responded to Rousseau's use of paradox with paradoxical declarations of their simultaneous attraction to, and revulsion from, his writings and their power to alter the minds and characters of his readers is in itself a tribute to the "method" in his rhetorical "madness." To the present day, readers of Rousseau have continued to acknowledge the way that he used paradox to cleverly,

and seductively, advance his arguments. As commentators as divergent as Mira Morgenstern (1996) and Arthur Melzer (1990) note, Rousseau uses paradox to advance seemingly contradictory proposals or viewpoints both within and across texts that he then reveals to be more apparent than real, either through a gradual series of qualifications to his initial, often extreme and conflicting statements, or by indicating the substantive overlap between his ostensibly disconnected pieces of writing.⁴ This method of argument renders Rousseau notoriously difficult to interpret, but it also makes him one of the most playful thinkers—in both the creative and the destructive sense—in the Western tradition. Rousseau uses paradox to build competing cases, tear them down, and then lead the reader, through the rubble as it were, to an entirely unexpected conclusion.

Rousseau's philosophy of the family, the place of women and men within it, and its relationship to the state, are some of the most notoriously paradoxical aspects of his social and political thought, and have yielded some equally famous criticisms of his work. Burke wryly noted that the "fate" of Rousseau's "paradoxes" concerning the family and the state was self-destruction: although Burke partly blamed Rousseau's novel *Julie* and its celebration of romantic love outside marriage for the familial and social upheaval that propelled France into its revolution in 1789, he also pointed out that such "philosophic gallantry" could not provide a stable foundation for the new republic and family forms that it had helped usher into existence.⁵ Wollstonecraft forcefully argued that Rousseau often let "truth" give way "to a favorite paradox," as when he defended the "absurdity" that female infants and toddlers were naturally predisposed to certain supposedly feminine traits such as vanity and coquetry "even before an improper education" deformed their characters and limited their potential contributions to the family, society, and the state at large.⁶

In this way, Burke highlighted the apparent tension between Rousseau's theory of the family and his theory of republican government, and Wollstonecraft indicated the problematic, differential treatment of girls and women in his broader, and seemingly enlightened and egalitarian, educational and political philosophy. Two central paradoxes in Rousseau's philosophy of the family and the state, which echo Burke and Wollstonecraft's critical concerns, continue to puzzle his readers to the present day. First, why does Rousseau defend an ideal of the family in works such as *Julie* and *Emile* that seems to stand at the margins of political society, while he constructs a robust theory of popular sover-

eighty in his vision of the ideal modern republic in the *Social Contract*? Second, why does Rousseau advocate certain dramatic changes in the practice of family life, especially regarding children's health and education and women's understanding of their social and political influence, while he fears other changes in family life that might threaten the maintenance of its sex roles and its patriarchal structure?

Rousseau's Philosophical Puzzle

The answer to these questions lies in the systematic interpretation of Rousseau's major political works that were published or composed between 1755 and 1765.⁷ The *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, the *Letter to the Republic of Geneva*, the *Discourse on Political Economy*, the *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre*, *Julie*, *Emile*, the *Social Contract*, the unpublished and fragmentary sequel to *Emile*, *Emile and Sophie, or Solitary Beings*, and the unpublished and incomplete *Constitutional Project for Corsica* should be seen as interlocking pieces of a philosophical puzzle.⁸ During the composition of these substantively overlapping works, Rousseau struggled most directly with the problem of what the proper relationship between the family and the state should be. A brief look at the context of the composition of these works sets the stage for understanding their philosophical interconnection.

In 1755, Rousseau published his most philosophically important work to date, the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, which came to be known as the *Second Discourse*. He inserted the *Letter to the Republic of Geneva* at the beginning of it, as a kind of preface to the longer treatise. The same year, he published his *Discourse on Political Economy* in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*; it was one of his last acts of cooperation with the Parisian *philosophes*—led by Voltaire—who mocked the apparent “primitivism” of his *Second Discourse* as a rejection of their more “enlightened” conception of civilization and its progress. Partly in response to his estrangement from the *philosophes*, Rousseau composed and published *Julie*, *Emile* and the *Social Contract* almost simultaneously during his retreat from Parisian city life at the Hermitage, in the woods of Montmorency, France, between 1756 and 1762.⁹ In the midst of the runaway popular success of his romantic novel *Julie* across mainland Europe and Great Britain, Rousseau was faced with the “banning or confiscation” of *Emile* and the *Social Contract* in Paris, the burning of these works in his native Geneva, and the beginning of nearly two decades of both state-sanctioned and self-imposed exile, in which he ran from enemies who

were both real and imagined.¹⁰ In this personal and political crucible of 1762–1763, Rousseau composed *Emile and Sophie*; he considered it one of his favorite writings and retrieved it from his publisher in 1768 to continue work on it, although he neither finished the fragment nor returned it for publication.¹¹ Through its tragic yet realistic account of the dissolution of its protagonists' marriage and family life, the fragment answers many questions left untouched at the end of *Emile*, and renders the tale of Emile and Sophie parallel to its companion love stories, the ill-fated romance of Julie and St. Preux, and the less than perfect marriage of Julie and Wolmar. In the midst of his enduring persecution for his writings, and at the behest of a Corsican soldier, Rousseau began to compose the *Constitutional Project for Corsica* in 1765 to advise this nation on how to implement his theory of republicanism, yet he ultimately abandoned the project as a result of the failure of the island's republican revolution, and his own itinerant life in exile.¹²

The four major political works published between 1755 and 1758—the *Letter to the Republic of Geneva*, the *Second Discourse*, the *Discourse on Political Economy*, and *Letter to d'Alembert*—together function as a kind of prolegomena that provides the philosophical foundation for the five major political works published or composed between 1761 and 1765, *Julie*, *Emile*, the *Social Contract*, *Emile and Sophie*, and *Corsica*. The latter five works contain three tales—the tragic romance of Julie and her circle of lovers, family, and friends in the rural Vaud region of Switzerland during the 1730s and 1740s, the story of the education, courtship, marriage, and eventual separation of Emile and Sophie in mid-eighteenth century provincial France and urban Paris, and a philosophical and pragmatic account of how a republic, or a legitimate state founded on the sovereignty of the people, might come into existence in the modern world—that might at first seem unrelated, but at closer examination can be read as a philosophical trilogy. *Julie* ends with a reference to the educational philosophy of *Emile*, and *Emile* ends with a reference to the political philosophy of the *Social Contract*. *Emile and Sophie* likewise begins where *Emile* ended, with a discussion of the marriage of its protagonists.¹³ The *Social Contract*, in turn, establishes Rousseau's theory of republicanism and provocatively names Corsica as the nation in mid-eighteenth century Europe best suited for its implementation, paving the way for his actual constitutional proposal for this country. Structurally, these works line up like links in a chain: *Julie* leads to *Emile*, *Emile* leads both to the *Social Contract* and *Emile and Sophie*, and the *Social Contract* leads to *Corsica*.

The First Paradox

The first aforementioned paradox reveals itself most prominently in his major political works from the early 1760s. Rousseau seems to construct ideal families, in *Julie* and *Emile*, which conspicuously occupy a place on the margins of society, in the rural countryside, far from the corruption of cities and seemingly dislocated from the business of politics. In *Emile and Sophie*, he appears to reinforce the incompatibility of his ideal family with city life by showing the destruction of Emile and Sophie's marriage and family when they move from the isolation of the country to the urban environs of Paris. On the other hand, Rousseau constructs an ideal republic in the *Social Contract* that carves a space for political activity that seems distant from, and even opposed to, the demands of the family, requires direct political participation on the part of the (adult male) citizens, who serve as legislators in the state's popular assembly and as members of the state's militia rather than relying on the services of legislative representatives and a standing army, and keeps women and children at home, in roles different from the adult male world of formal citizenship. In response to the apparent conflict between these texts, scholars have either argued that Rousseau believed the family and the state had irreconcilable purposes, or that his theory of the relationship between the family and the state is internally inconsistent.

In the first school of interpretation, Judith Shklar (1969) argues that there is an irreconcilable opposition between Rousseau's utopian ideal of the family and his utopian ideal of the republican state, and Allan Bloom (1979) and Arthur Melzer (1990) suggest that Rousseau's ideal of the family is meant to be a moral retreat from the corruption of modern governments that probably never will put his republican theory into practice.¹⁴ In the second school of interpretation, critics such as Susan Okin (1979) and Carole Pateman (1988, 1989) argue that Rousseau's defense of the patriarchal family and women's exclusion from formal citizenship contradicts the remainder of his egalitarian political theory, especially as found in the *Social Contract's* theory of popular sovereignty.¹⁵

Scholarship by Joel Schwartz (1984), Penny Weiss (1993), Mira Morgenstern (1996), Nicole Fermon (1997), Lori Jo Marso (1999), and Elizabeth Rose Wingrove (2000) has sought to close the divide that many interpreters have drawn between the family and the state in Rousseau's political theory.¹⁶ Schwartz and Weiss each argue, in distinctive ways, that Rousseau's theory of the family is not inconsistent

with, or opposed to, his theory of the state; rather, the family plays an important tutelary role in the formation of good (male) citizens insofar as women, the empresses of the domestic realm, teach men how to channel their selfish (and often sexual) passions toward the service of the common good.¹⁷ Fermon builds on this view, and adds that Rousseau envisions his ideal of a rural, self-sufficient agricultural family as the basis of his vision of the ideal republican state. Wingrove emphasizes, on the other hand, how culturally constructed rituals or “performances” of sexuality and its dynamic of domination and submission serve to reinforce the paradoxical relationship between citizen and subject, ruler and ruled in Rousseau’s ideal republic. In yet another line of argument, Morgenstern and Marso argue that, for Rousseau, the family, and especially the “subversive” women within it, should ideally be the agents for the transformation of society and politics into arenas for the realization of human authenticity, or at least reveal a path toward this goal.

Continuing in this vein, I argue that Rousseau understands his theory of the ideal family and his theory of the ideal state to be interrelated, not discontinuous. Yet this chapter places special emphasis on the significance of the textual and philosophical intersections between *Julie*, *Emile*, the *Social Contract*, *Emile and Sophie*, and *Corsica* for Rousseau’s theory of the relationship between the rural family and the republican state, a topic neglected by previous scholars.¹⁸ When they are interpreted as substantively interrelated and overlapping texts, these five works provide an overarching model of how the rural family (if properly ordered) serves as the first and fundamental venue for moral, social, and political formation—the most open, expansive, and even vital kind of political participation for the vast majority of the people—within Rousseau’s ideal republic. Nevertheless, these works together contribute to the realistic concession that this ideal is difficult to implement and maintain.

Rural Republicanism

I use the term “rural republicanism” to capture the underlying synthesis between Rousseau’s ideals of the rural family and the republican state. The term is broad enough to signify the complex, and interdependent, bundle of geographic, demographic, economic, structural, and cultural qualities that Rousseau understands as constitutive of his ideal state and the predominantly non-urban, agricultural or fishing families that would compose it at the grassroots level. Building on the theories set forth in the *Social Contract*, Rousseau himself used the term “rural system”

(*le système rustique*) to describe the optimal set of features for founding an independent democratic republic on the island of Corsica.¹⁹ Thus, although Rousseau himself did not use the term “rural republicanism” to describe his theory of the proper relationship between the rural family and the republican state, it clearly resonates with his own philosophical vocabulary, and conveys the important connection between rural ways of life and republicanism in his political thought.

In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau argues that only a state with a specific set of rural characteristics can possess, practice, and preserve a legitimate, or republican, government in the modern world.²⁰ By a state with a legitimate or republican government he means a state founded on a sovereign popular legislative assembly that then establishes by law a particular form of government (monarchical, aristocratic, democratic, or mixed) that consists of magistrates drawn from the body of the people who, in this role, can only administer and propose, but not make, the laws. The adult men of his ideal republic would be both citizens (law-makers) and subjects (law-abiders), and thus practitioners of an authentic form of political self-governance, which stands in stark contrast to the mere subjecthood of the people who inhabit the illegitimate states of Europe.

After dramatically redefining the meaning, and relationship between, popular sovereignty and government, and subjecthood and citizenship, for his ideal of modern republicanism, Rousseau cites Corsica as the “one country left in Europe” capable of receiving the “legislation” necessary to build a state with a legitimate government.²¹ While some readers have simply taken this suggestion as preposterous, and evidence of Rousseau’s self-defeating utopianism, the surprising example of the small island of Corsica is better understood as Rousseau’s attempt to jolt his readers into concretizing the lofty theory of popular sovereignty outlined in Book I of the *Social Contract*, and push them into consideration of the harder, pragmatic question of how and where his theory might be put into practice. Moreover, it is important to note that Rousseau only says that Corsica, at the time he is writing, is the last candidate “in Europe” for the legislation necessary for authentic republicanism, not that late eighteenth-century Corsica is the only nation in the world suited for legitimate government. He never excludes the possibility that other candidates might exist in other parts of the world or might emerge in the future in Europe or elsewhere. Indeed, the bulk of the *Social Contract* (Books II, III, and IV) is devoted to outlining the particular geographic, demographic, economic, structural, and cultural qualities that are necessary for establishing and

executing an enduring republic. Rousseau's consistent attention to the question of how to implement his "rural system" (as in his 1765 *Constitutional Project for Corsica*) makes clear that he believes that his ideal state is worthy, and capable, of establishment—but only in extremely limited, and difficult to secure, circumstances.

As for the best possible geographic locations for his ideal state, Rousseau outlines two possibilities: on a remote, protected shoreline, or on a mountainous territory with "rich plains and fertile slopes."²² In either of these locations, his ideal state would have a population that is neither too small nor too large to support an economically self-sufficient society, proportional to the available land, and evenly distributed as much as possible through villages and towns, rather than condensed in urban areas. On a remote and protected shoreline, his ideal state would have a self-sufficient fishing economy without the need, temptation, or ambition to engage in international commerce on the seas. In a mountainous territory, his ideal state would have a self-sufficient agricultural economy based on the cultivation of its limited fertile land and the gathering of the "natural produce" of its woods and pastures; it, too, would avoid unnecessary international commercial activity that would bring corrosive luxuries into its small communities and families.²³ Out of these two possibilities, Rousseau leans toward the mountainous state as more preferable. He worries that a fishing community would eventually veer toward the corruption of a naval empire. Even in the case of the island of Corsica, he proposes that it develop a self-sufficient agricultural economy, rather than depend on commerce via the sea.²⁴

Building on the philosophy of history contained in the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau consistently steers a course between the extremes of savagery and civilization in his portraits of the ideal state and the families that should compose it. He neither wants to settle for the survivalist stance of the savage, nor accept the decadent luxury of the bourgeois. Instead, he supports a moderate form of human society, which is close to nature yet not subjugated by it, and community-oriented yet not enslaved to the trappings of the arts, sciences, and unnecessary commerce. Rural mountainous peoples enjoy the conditions best suited for this moderate form of human society. In the *Social Contract*, he advises mountainous peoples to build on their strengths to preserve their happy and virtuous way of life: "Devote all your efforts to agriculture, which increases the population, and drive out the arts which would only depopulate the country completely by concentrating in just a few points of its territory the few inhabitants it does have."²⁵ It is in such mountainous

regions—like the Alps in his homeland of Switzerland—that Rousseau believes the circumstances are most ripe for implementing his theory of rural republicanism, but not without a set of obstacles to achieving this end. As he acknowledges in the *Social Contract*, “It is true that it is difficult to find all of these conditions together. This is one reason why one sees so few well-constituted States.”²⁶ Furthermore, at the end of *Corsica*, Rousseau admits that a healthy, rural state will eventually destroy itself through an overgrowth of its population: “When a country becomes overpopulated, it will be necessary to employ the excess population in industry and the arts in order to draw from abroad those things that so numerous a people requires for its subsistence. Then, little by little, the vices inseparable from these establishments will also arise and, gradually corrupting the nation in its tastes and principles, will alter and at last destroy the government.”²⁷ Ironically, the measure of a state’s well-being—its population—is ultimately the cause of its demise. Once a republic loses its rural character, it loses everything.

For these reasons, Rousseau’s ideal republican state is best understood as a “rural republic” that may contain a relatively small city or a geographically dispersed set of small cities like his home, the republican city-state of Geneva, or Corsica’s centrally located, austere, and mountainous Corte, but should mainly, or entirely, consist of small, rural villages and towns like the ones found in the Valais and Vaud regions of Switzerland that he celebrates on the pages of *Julie*.²⁸ There will be many families who occupy the rural villages at the geographic margins of Rousseau’s ideal political society, yet fulfill the most central social and political role. Rousseau’s fundamental distinction between the functions of the sovereign popular assembly of adult male citizens and the elected or lawfully appointed magistrates of the government enables social and political formation within the family to be understood as the first and fundamental form of political participation. The sovereign assembly will meet infrequently to make political, civil, and criminal law if *moeurs* or moral codes—the most important form of law that is fostered largely by the family—are strong. In the meantime, the elected or lawfully appointed magistrates who constitute the government will do the daily business of administering the extant laws, leaving the door open for the remainder of the people to focus on the governance of their families and the inculcation of *moeurs* within them. Since the necessity of law-making by the assembly is rare if the nation’s *moeurs* are healthy and robust, since the magistrates orchestrate the daily governance of the republic, and since women and children do not engage in the activities

of formal citizenship and government administration, everyday political participation for the majority of the population does not revolve around administering or making the law. The rural family, and the roles that men, women, and children play within it, offer a fresh avenue for political participation in Rousseau's new vision of republicanism. Rousseau imagines his ideal, rural, agricultural family as the primary training-ground for the development and practice of the moral codes, and the attendant moral, social, and civic virtues, necessary for the smooth and stable operation of his ideal, independent, rural republic.

The male heads of these rural families, though citizen-legislators and members of the militia, may not be intimately involved in the daily administration of the republic like their magistrates, but they play a vital political role as the leaders of the "small fatherlands," or families, that cultivate the moral, social, and civic virtues in new generations of citizens.²⁹ The wives and mothers who govern the daily activities of the rural household, and take primary responsibility for the upbringing and education of the children, do not participate in the politics of the republic through membership in the legislative assembly or the militia, but they likewise play a vital political role through the cultivation and preservation of the moral, social, and civic virtues of both their husbands and the next generation.

While he pragmatically concedes that urban families may exist in a republic with a small capital city, or a dispersed set of small cities, Rousseau prefers republics primarily or exclusively populated by rural families. Rural families are ultimately more apt than urban families at the moral education of republican citizens because they stand apart from the artistic, commercial, and industrial excesses of civilization. Moreover, these rural family havens better preserve their moral purity through their distance from the unnatural diversions of city life, such as the theaters, salons, and other mixed social gatherings (and opportunities for adultery) that Rousseau denounces in *Julie* and *Emile and Sophie*, as well as in his earlier works *Letter to the Republic of Geneva* and *Letter to d'Alembert*. The vigor of Rousseau's ideal republic depends largely on the warmth, strength, and vitality of rural families that respect the power of nature, yet achieve a modest form of economic and social independence amid it. Urban families, on the other hand, are more prone to corruption and thus are potentially detrimental to the health of the state if they are not properly structured.

Rousseau argues that his ideal republican family, both rural and urban, must imitate its ancient models in Sparta and Rome with a patri-

archal structure and a strict system of sex-role differentiation. By maintaining a division between the social roles of men and women as much as possible, the urban republican family can withstand the vices endemic to city life—such as the sexual corruption and competition fostered by social gatherings attended by both sexes—that the rural family largely sidesteps as a result of its countryside isolation. Yet the rural republican family must also be vigilant in its maintenance of a patriarchal structure and sex-role differentiation because moral corruption and conflict between the sexes are not endemic to cities alone for Rousseau, but to all human communities, no matter how big or small, since our collective fall from grace when humanity passed into civilization.

The Second Paradox

The problem of moral corrosion and sexual corruption within marriage and the family, and his attempt to address it through the defense of a strict, patriarchal system of sex-role differentiation for urban and rural families alike, points to the second paradox of Rousseau's philosophy of the family. Why is Rousseau a defender of a sex-rolled, patriarchal structure for the family, yet an advocate for dramatic changes in family life that empowered women and children within it? The explanation for this apparent contradiction lies in the assessment of the pivotal intersections between theory and practice in Rousseau's writings on the family. Rousseau defined his ideal of the republican family in critical dialogue with the bourgeois and aristocratic families of his time, and actually changed the way the family was conceived and practiced through the publication of his influential books *Emile* and *Julie*.

Rousseau's contemporaries, including Burke and Wollstonecraft, recognized him as the most creative and provocative theorist of the family and its role in moral and political life. Rousseau's *Julie* and *Emile* are philosophical treatises on family organization and childhood education as much as they are novels. These works exercised incalculable influence on both the theory and the practice of family life in the eighteenth century. Historians generally acknowledge that Rousseau's ideas inspired, throughout Europe and America from the late eighteenth century onward, the spread of breast-feeding among mothers, the valorization of mothers as the educators of citizens, the increased attention to the health, exercise, and early education of children, and the rise of the ideal of childhood as a precious time of freedom, innocence, and play that paved the way for the development of independent yet virtuous adults.³⁰

Both a visionary and a traditionalist, Rousseau was highly critical of a number of other changes he perceived in family life during his time. From early on in his writing career, Rousseau expressed fear about the destruction of the patriarchal, sex-ruled structure of the family in his homeland, Geneva. Rousseau believed that the husband ought to be the legally and socially recognized head of the family, as was general practice at the time. He moreover affirmed that men, not women, should be citizens. Like his philosophical predecessor John Locke, however, Rousseau questioned the validity of Robert Filmer's defense of patriarchy and argued that a husband should not exercise tyrannical force over his wife or children.³¹ Although he viewed absolute patriarchal power as illegitimate, Rousseau still argued that the family should practice a system of sex-role differentiation, so that males and females engaged in distinct occupations based on the socially useful and stabilizing qualities and abilities of their respective sexes. He contended that men should bridge the realms of family, civil society and the state, while women should remain within the bounds of the family as much as possible, where they enjoyed a distinct form of power as the "empresses" of the domestic realm.³²

Rousseau's ideal of the republican family defined itself against the bourgeois and aristocratic families of the time, especially with regard to women's role in the moral and civic education of children.³³ Rousseau desired the destruction of the family in its late eighteenth-century aristocratic and bourgeois forms, since they promoted devotion to self-interest rather than the common good. The aristocratic family pitted its members against one another in a selfish quest to acquire a piece of the family estate, and, to this end, often sacrificed its daughters on the altar of arranged marriage. Rather than offering a sound alternative to the aristocratic family, the bourgeois family enslaved its members to domestic materialism and consumer culture and blinded them to the duties of politics. In contrast to these existing historical models, Rousseau wanted the family to serve as a kind of schoolhouse for virtuous men and women who would be willing to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the good of the whole community. Rousseau promoted an alternative vision of family life that served as the moral and social basis of his new vision of republican politics. For Rousseau, the family is the educational space that turns selfish children into virtuous male citizens and female educators of citizens. According to Rousseau, love of family is the first step toward the transcendence of self-love and the realization of love of neighbor, fellow citizen, and the republic itself, for men and women alike.

Following the lead of Wollstonecraft, contemporary feminist critics such as Susan Okin (1979) and Carole Pateman (1988) have argued that Rousseau's view of the proper social roles of women contradicts the remainder of his egalitarian political theory, especially as found in the *Social Contract's* conception of popular sovereignty.³⁴ Rousseau's defense of the patriarchal, sex-ruled family is certainly not consistent with the egalitarian goals of modern democracy that emerged as a result of the American and French Revolutions. Yet it is important to understand Rousseau's apology for the patriarchal, sex-ruled family within the philosophical framework of his own unique philosophy of history contained in the *Second Discourse*.³⁵ Perhaps his most important premise is the human propensity toward competition and conflict (especially between the sexes and for the attention of the opposite sex) once they have passed from the state of nature into civilization. Rousseau argues that human beings, once they enter society, are pitted against one another in a competition for the attention of the opposite sex, or in a selfish quest to control their love interests once they capture them. He concludes that the resultant battle of the sexes—in which women, due to their insatiable sexuality, have the upper hand—can only be pacified by the maintenance of a patriarchal, sex-ruled structure for the family and society at large. Rousseau's philosophical premises in the *Second Discourse* are subject to all kinds of criticism, moral and empirical, but they nonetheless serve as the foundation of his logically consistent (though morally and politically questionable) theoretical defense of a family with sex-role differentiation and a patriarchal structure. Like Wollstonecraft and her students, I question the validity of Rousseau's loaded assumption that a transition from a state of nature to human society has rendered a war between the sexes an inevitable part of human experience that can only be tempered by the maintenance of patriarchy and sex-role differentiation. This chapter's main task, however, is to provide an accurate reading of Rousseau's own understanding of the ideal relationship between the family and the republican state, which lays the foundation for the comparative study of his thought with Burke and Wollstonecraft, and the normative assessment of the value of his theories in the light of their perceptive criticisms of him.

Theory and Practice

The tragic outcomes of the love stories of *Julie* and *Emile and Sophie*, and the realistic concession of the difficulty of establishing and preserving rural republicanism found in the *Social Contract* and *Corsica*,

reveal Rousseau's preoccupation with the severe difficulty of putting his ideal family and state into proper practice. He is especially concerned with the corruption of the rural family, the moral foundation of his ideal state, due to its fundamental incompatibility with, and exposure to, the burgeoning culture of the Enlightenment, or the eventual inevitability of population overgrowth and the rise of a wealthy, land-owning class. In *Letter to the Republic of Geneva*, *Letter to d'Alembert*, *Julie*, and *Corsica*, he laments that the Swiss family, in both its rural and urban forms, is crumbling—or may have already been irretrievably corrupted—under the pressure of modernization. He dreads that sex-role differentiation, the purifying influence of the wilderness, the civilizing force of feminine manners, the ancient moral virtues of rural family and community life, and the respect for certain beneficial social hierarchies tempered by a belief in fundamental human equality, all face certain extinction in the face of the march of Western technology, commerce, industry, art, science, and philosophy. Rousseau fears that the families of the rural Swiss countryside, and the urban families of the republic of Geneva, will share the same fate as their classical republican counterparts in ancient Sparta and republican Rome, whose downfall he mourns as well. Yet Rousseau is not a “utopian” thinker, as Shklar (1969) claimed, who creates familial and political ideals fundamentally incompatible with each other and history itself.³⁶ He is better understood as a political theorist who seeks to combine philosophical idealism with historical realism by admitting the limitations he perceives for putting his philosophical ideals into social and political practice. Through the publication of the “trilogy” of *Julie*, *Emile*, and the *Social Contract*, Rousseau shared with the public his ideal model of the relationship between the rural family and the republican state that he hoped would have some impact on human moral, social, and political practice, despite its conflict with the culture of the Enlightenment and its innate tendency toward decay.

The running tension between theory and practice in Rousseau's political thought accounts for the apparent contradictions in his theory of the relationship between the ideal family and the ideal state. On a purely theoretical level, Rousseau's conceptions of the family and the state are compatible and interdependent. Yet when one considers—alongside Rousseau—the complex array of circumstances it would take to put this theory into practice in the modern world, a real tension arises between the possibility of bringing his ideal family and ideal state

together in a unified way. The difficulty of ever realizing this goal is perhaps the reason why Rousseau separated his most prominent treatments of the family, in *Emile* and *Julie*, from his classic meditation on the state, in the *Social Contract*. Yet by providing important textual and philosophical links between these texts, Rousseau keeps open the door to contemplating the moral and political desirability of reconciling the ends of the family and the state in a symbiotic whole, no matter whether the ideal can be fully achieved in reality.

The Role of the Family in Rousseau's Rural Republic

By examining the bulk of Rousseau's major political writings through the rubric of rural republicanism, one better understands his paradoxical role as both champion and critic of the transformation of the family. Rousseau founds his ideal of the rural republic on a new vision of the family as the primary forum for socialization, civic education, and republican political participation in the most holistic sense. Rousseau's ideal of the republican family retains certain structural qualities of eighteenth-century European peasant, bourgeois, and aristocratic families, such as a patriarchal structure and sex-role differentiation. Yet it also incorporates new approaches to the practices of childcare and education, as well as a new conception of women's social and political empowerment through their roles as the primary inculcators of manners, mores, and civic virtues in children and society at large. Rousseau offered a new model of family life—distinct from the existing historical and philosophical models—that became wildly popular and influential in the wake of the success of his twin romantic philosophical novels, *Julie* and *Emile*. In the core of this chapter, I reconstruct Rousseau's overarching theory of the proper relationship between the ideal family and the ideal republican state in his major political works published or composed between 1755 and 1765. First, I examine the four works from the late 1750s that together function as a kind of philosophical prolegomena that sets forth the basic terms, concepts, and arguments that Rousseau uses to build his conception of rural republicanism. Second, I explore the fascinating textual and philosophical intersections between the five works from the early 1760s that together constitute, and illustrate the limitations of, Rousseau's ideal of rural republicanism.

Public versus Domestic Education
in the *Discourse on Political Economy*

The *Discourse on Political Economy* holds the key for understanding Rousseau's paradoxical view of the relationship between the family and the state. Rousseau begins the essay by carefully distinguishing between the structure, governance, and purposes of the family and the state. Yet he ends by suggesting that the family, though distinct from the state, has a fundamental role in politics. The moral education it provides for its children serves as the surest and most practical foundation for civic virtue, especially a sense of patriotic duty, in the modern republican state. A close examination of the arguments of the treatise reveals the compatibility of these two positions that initially appear contradictory.

At the beginning of the discourse, Rousseau discusses the origins of the term "economy." He states that it was first used to describe the domestic economy of the family, and was "subsequently extended to the government of the large family which is the state."³⁷ In this line, Rousseau seems to be comfortable with comparing the family and the state, at least at a metaphorical level. Rousseau moves on, however, to dispute those who blur the line between the goals and the governance of the family and the state. He concludes that "since the state and the family have nothing in common but their chiefs' obligation to make each happy, the same rules of conduct could not apply to both."³⁸

Although at this point it seems that Rousseau has drawn a strict divide between the family and the state, it becomes clear that he has done so more rhetorically than substantively. In the very next line, he reveals the intention behind his initial separation of the family and the state. He confides, "It seemed to me that these few lines would suffice to overthrow the odious system which Sir Filmer tried to establish in a work entitled *Patriarcha*."³⁹ Rousseau rejects Filmer's equation of the structure, function, and legitimacy of the patriarchal family with the patriarchal state, on the grounds that the distinct social entities of the family and the state cannot be successfully governed in the exact same way, and that absolute patriarchal power is illegitimate under any circumstances, thus its use in the family is no justification for its use in the state and vice versa. He then aligns himself with the thought of the "first book" of Aristotle's *Politics* by distinguishing between the entities of the family and the state and their forms of governance, while designating the family as the moral and economic foundation of the state.⁴⁰ By appealing to this distinction between the family and the state, Rousseau separates

his work from simple patriarchalism, yet establishes the family as a discrete social entity that nonetheless serves as the moral and economic foundation for his neorepublicanism.

Rousseau's careful distinction between the private realm of the family and the public realm of the republic provides for the protection of the distinct identity of the family against the potentially overweening power of the state. The family should remain distinct from the state while serving as its moral and economic foundation. Governed by love and a moderate form of patriarchal authority, the family seeks to cultivate the natural, domestic affections and shape them, through habit and discipline, into moral and civic virtues that regulate the behavior of its members. In this vital role, the family cannot easily be replaced, especially since state-organized, or public, education is unlikely to work in the modern world as it once worked in ancient Crete.

The clear line Rousseau draws between the family and the state also provides for the protection of the distinct identity of the state against the potentially corrosive influence of the family. Governed by universal laws reflective of the general will, the republican state seeks to serve the common good of the people who act as its sovereign. If the state were governed like a family, it would fail to complete its express purpose: to serve its citizens according to the general will or common good. If it were governed by partial passions and love of particular individuals, as in family life, it would be rife with factions and unable to serve the common good. If a patriarch ruled the state, as in the family, the state would not be a republic, or a legitimate government, since Rousseau only recognizes governments ruled by a sovereign popular assembly as legitimate.

After distinguishing between the internal dynamics of the family and the state, Rousseau argues that the family and the state are nevertheless bound together in a pivotal political relationship. He contends that the health of a republic mainly depends on the education of its citizens: "The fatherland cannot endure without freedom, nor freedom without virtue, nor virtue without citizens; you will have everything if you form citizens; if you do not, you will have nothing but nasty slaves, beginning with the chiefs of the state."⁴¹ He furthermore argues that the formation of citizens must first take place within the family, for "It is from the first moment of life that one must learn to deserve to live; and since one shares in the rights of citizens from birth, the instant of our birth ought to when we begin to exercise our duties. Since there are laws for maturity, there should be laws for childhood that teach obedience to others."⁴²

Anticipating the argument of *Emile*, Rousseau defends the ideal of private, family-based education against public, state-organized education for the purpose of instilling civic virtue, especially patriotism, in future citizens. He describes the ancient practice of public education only to discard it as a formerly honorable, but presently impractical, method of educating the denizens and citizens of a modern republic. He contends that private, family-based education is more practical given the larger size of modern republics. Only three ancient peoples succeeded in practicing public education—Lacedaemonia, Crete, and Persia—because they maintained a relatively small size. Private, family-based education, on the other hand, succeeded in producing legions of virtuous citizens for the vast empire of Rome.

Moreover, public education as it was practiced by these ancient peoples supplanted the moral authority, affectionate pull, and educative role of the family, turned the state into a kind of parent, and thus violated the conceptual divide between the family and the state that he establishes at the beginning of the essay. Hence, Rousseau argues that the best way to produce patriotic and virtuous citizens is to protect and preserve the private family as the training-ground in which these virtues are fostered and taught. Like Burke, who views the family and other small social units as “little platoons” in which people are trained to channel their natural affections for other human beings into the practice of moral and civic virtues, Rousseau posits that patriotism and sympathy dissipate over space, and best develop and flourish in close quarters: “Interest and commiseration must in some way be constricted and compressed to be activated. Now since this inclination in us can be useful only to those with whom we have to live, it is good that that (the sentiment of) humanity, concentrated among fellow-citizens, acquire in them added force through the habit of seeing one another, and the common interest that unites them.”⁴³ Rousseau concludes that the private education found within the “concentrated” space of the family is the most effective method to instill patriotism and other civic virtues, since “we readily want what the people we love want.”⁴⁴

Although he castigates ancient Rome for its excessive size, moral corruption, and abuse of patriarchal power within the family, he implies that modern republics should follow the example of Rome in one important regard. If public education in the classical style is not possible in the modern world, then the best option for modern republics is to rely heavily on private education within the home. By turning “all their homes into so many schools of citizens,” the denizens and citizens of

modern republics could emulate Rome and rely on the authority and discipline of family patriarchs to help instill the virtues that will foster patriotism and commitment to the common good within the state.⁴⁵

The *Second Discourse* on the Origins of
Patriarchy and Sex-Role Differentiation

To understand why Rousseau thinks the family must possess a patriarchal, sex-roled structure in order to instill virtue and prevent the spread of moral corruption, one must return to his account of the transition from the state of nature to society as set forth in the *Second Discourse*. Rousseau argues that man in the “state of nature” (or life before organized society and government) is solitary, peaceful, and minimally social. Humans are more akin to animals in Rousseau’s state of nature. They are not the social animals that dwell in Locke’s state of nature, or the proto-Darwinistic animals of Hobbes’s state of nature, but solitary, peaceful animals who simply prefer their own company to anyone else’s. Rousseau complains about thinkers like Locke who, when reasoning about the state of nature, “intrude into it ideas taken from society,” including our ideas of family life:

They always see the family gathered in one and the same dwelling, with its members maintaining among themselves a union as intimate and permanent as exists among us, where so many common interests unite them. But the fact of the matter is that in that primitive state, since nobody had houses or huts or property of any kind, each one bedded down in some random spot and often only for one night. Males and females came together fortuitously as a result of chance encounters, occasion and desire . . . (and) they left each other with the same nonchalance.⁴⁶

Before the introduction of homes and property, the family exists in a primitive, transient manner in Rousseau’s state of nature. Procreation is a random act between strangers, marriage is nonexistent, and child rearing is a solitary and short-lived endeavor undertaken solely by mothers without the aid of the undoubtedly forgotten father: “The mother at first nursed her children for her own need; then, with habit having endeared them to her, she later nourished them for their own need. Once they had the strength to look for their food, they did not hesitate to leave the mother herself. And since there was practically no other way of finding one another than not to lose sight of one another, they were soon at the point of not even recognizing one another.”⁴⁷ The radical individuality

of the Rousseauian state of nature is illustrated by the lack of a lasting emotional bond between mother and child. The primitive mothers of the state of nature stand diametrically opposed to their counterparts in Rousseau's ideal republican society. Rousseau's republican mothers devote their married lives to the care and education of their children in the domestic sphere of the family. On the other hand, the relationship between the primitive mother and child exists only as long as the child's survival depends on the mother—which, in Rousseau's estimation, is only as long as it takes the child to wander off into the wilderness alone to find its own food.

In Rousseau's state of nature, the difference in physical strength between the sexes is irrelevant, because humans are asocial creatures. Their independence and antisociability lend an air of equality to men and women in the state of nature because they do not interact enough to render their physical inequalities pertinent. Yet once human beings make the transition to society from the state of nature, the difference in physical strength becomes relevant. The shift from the state of nature to society takes place in several stages, all of which involve the development of closer family relationships and stronger social bonds. The instinct of pity brings primitive nomads together in loose, unorganized groups that come together only to help each other in matters of survival. The instinct of individuals to compare themselves to others and compete with one another (in Rousseau's terms, *amour-propre*) propels the invention of private property within these nomadic groups; they ultimately split into families with the introduction of private property, particularly in the form of huts and houses.

Rousseau sardonically proclaims, "The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society."⁴⁸ He then explains that it is the development of huts that was the "first revolution" that "formed the distinction between families and which introduced a kind of property, whence perhaps there already arose many quarrels and fights."⁴⁹ The building of homes does not only spur conflict, but also the first stirrings of love and family life as we know it: "The first developments of the heart were the effect of a new situation that united the husbands and wives, fathers and children in one common habitation. The habit of living together gave rise to the sweetest sentiments known to men: conjugal love and paternal love. Each family became a little society all the better united because mutual attachment and liberty were its only bonds;