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PROUDHON AND ROUSSEAU *

BY AARON NOLAND

The central rôle of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in XIXth-century European thought has long been recognized by scholars, and hence when Bertrand de Jouvenel, writing after World War II, declared that Rousseau has exercised "the greatest influence on the development of the political beliefs and institutions" in modern Europe¹ and, more recently, when Frank Manuel noted that Rousseau's influence "was all-pervasive in XIXth-century social theory"² both men were simply reaffirming a traditional view. But if there is a consensus concerning the pre-eminence of Rousseau in the last century, there is by no means a similar consensus as to the precise character and nature of Rousseau's impact and influence on the many and diversified streams of XIXth-century political and social thought. The relation of Rousseau to the radical reformist and revolutionary movements, particularly socialism, communism, and anarchism in their many varieties, is a case in point. Here high-level, sweeping, and often contradictory generalizations abound. Repeatedly, throughout the XIXth century, Rousseau was identified as being the "master," "father," or "grandfather" of the socialists and the other radical reformers of the time, while almost all the latter were labeled the "disciples," "sons," or "grandsons" of Rousseau.³ Jules Barbey

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¹"An Essay on Rousseau's Politics," preface to *Du Contrat social* (Geneva, 1947), 15.

²*The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 321.

³Saint-René Taillandier, "L'Athéisme allemand et le socialisme français," *Revue des deux mondes*, XXIV (October 1848), 282; Pierre Leroux, "Aux Politiques," in *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1850), I, 114; Léon Walras, *L'Economie politique et la justice* (Paris, 1860), iv; L.-F. Jéhan, "Psychologie," in *Nouvelle Encyclopédie théologique* (Migne), (Paris, 1855), LII, col. 830; Henri Baudrillart, *Etudes de philosophie morale et d'économie politique* (Paris, 1858), 68; Paul Janet, *Les Origines du socialisme contemporain* (Paris, 1893), 119-120; Maurice Bourguin, *Les Systèmes Socialistes et l'évolution économique* (Paris, 1906), 339-341; René Gillouin, "Le Mysticisme social: Fourier et Proudhon," *La Grande Revue*, CV (Mars-Juin 1921), 57, 59; J. A. R. Marriott, "Editor's Introduction" to *Louis Blanc's Organisation du travail* (Oxford, 1913), xviii; André Lichtenberger, *Le Socialisme au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1915), 128-130; Jules Prudhommeaux, *Icarie et son fondateur* (Paris, 1907), 153, 156n, 325; Albert Schinz, *Etat présent des travaux sur J.-J. Rousseau* (New York, 1941), v; and John Plamenatz, *Man and Society: Political and Social Theory* (New York, 1963), II, 37.

D'Aurevilly, writing in 1858, declared that the lineage was far from being a legitimate one, for all the utopian reformers of the age were "les bâtards du génie de Jean-Jacques."⁴ At the same time these views of Rousseau's influence have repeatedly been denied, as for example when Alfred Cobban asserted that "with one or two exceptions . . . the early socialists were consistently hostile to Rousseau."⁵

To the serious student of XIXth-century social thought, however, the question of Rousseau's influence is not one to be resolved by simple generalizations. To call Rousseau the "master" of socialist and other radical reformers, or, contrarily, to affirm that the latter were "hostile" to him does little to advance our appreciation of the precise relationship that existed between Rousseau's thought and the radical reformers of the time. The receptions accorded Rousseau's ideas by Charles Fourier, Louis Blanc, Etienne Cabet, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, or Constantin Pecqueur—to select a few names at random—differed greatly; and in order to discover just how each of these and other thinkers responded to Rousseau, what aspects of his thought entered into their ideologies and in just what manner Rousseau's teachings were bent to serve the conceits or needs of each thinker, or, as the case may be, what aspects of Rousseau's thought were rejected outright—to discover this one must deal with each thinker as a separate case and not lump them together simply because many shared a common identity as socialist, or anarchist, or communist. This would seem to be simple common sense and self-evident; yet few indeed are the studies that have endeavored to relate Rousseau to the reformist movements of thought in this manner. No attempt will be made in this paper to fill even in a summary manner the lacunae in this field; rather, this paper will examine one case only: Proudhon's confrontation of Rousseau in the terms described above.

Judgments concerning the relation of Rousseau to Proudhon are not lacking. Barbey D'Aurevilly, in his review of one of Proudhon's many books, identified Proudhon as a *philosophe* and called him "the Jean-Jacques of the XIXth century," a man who, like Rousseau himself, dreamed of the total reconstruction of society.⁶ Alfred Fouillée, early in the XXth century, asserted that Proudhon's efforts to work out a system of ethics independent of metaphysical or religious doctrines made him "one of the most important of Rousseau's continuers."⁷ On the other hand Georges Beaulavon, in his classic

⁴ Quoted in Schinz, *Etat présent des travaux sur J.-J. Rousseau*, 23.

⁵ *Rousseau and the Modern State* (London, 1934), 38.

⁶ *Sensations d'art* (Paris, 1886), 4. Also *idem*, *Les Philosophes et les écrivains religieux* (Paris, 1887), 33, 39, 51, 66, 69.

⁷ *L'Idée moderne du droit*, 6th ed. (Paris, 1909), 130. Also Edouard Besson, *La Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon dans ses rapports avec la Franche-Comté* (Besançon, 1878), 19; and Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, II, 57.

edition of *Du Contrat social*, published in 1903, placed Proudhon alongside Benjamin Constant as “the most serious adversary of Rousseau” on the basis of Proudhon’s violent criticism of *Du Contrat social*.⁸ A few years later the Sorbonne sociologist Célestin Bouglé reaffirmed this judgment, declaring that “Rousseau had no worst detractor than Proudhon.”⁹

What did Proudhon himself think of Rousseau? Proudhon was well aware of the presence of Jean-Jacques, and in the vast body of his work—the twenty-six volumes of the complete works, the twelve volumes of the posthumous works, and the fourteen volumes of correspondence—he gives ample evidence of his concern with Rousseau, “whose authority,” he noted in 1851, “has ruled us for almost a century.”¹⁰ Proudhon, in his various writings, cites Rousseau more frequently by far than any other political theorist. Yet it is in vain that one seeks in these writings for any consistent attitude towards Rousseau and his work. On the one hand, Proudhon hailed Rousseau as “the apostle of liberty and equality,” as a “great innovator,” and as an “admirable dialectician.”¹¹ On the title page of his first published work on social questions, *The Utility of the Celebration of Sunday as Regards Hygiene, Morality and Social and Political Relations* (1839), Proudhon quoted a passage from Rousseau’s *Du Contrat social* wherein Rousseau describes the sovereignty of the people in a democratic assembly,¹² and in that same work Proudhon posed the fundamental problem concerning the social order—a problem that was to remain his preoccupation throughout his life—in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau’s own formulation. Rousseau, in *Du Contrat social*, had stated that “The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.”¹³ Proudhon posed the problem as follows: “To find a state of social equality which would not be a repressive

⁸ “Introduction” to *Du Contrat social*, 5th ed. (Paris, 1930), 101n. Cf. Maurice Halbwachs, “Introduction” to *Du Contrat social* (Paris, 1943), 10.

⁹ *La Sociologie de Proudhon* (Paris, 1911), 238.

¹⁰ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1924), 187.

¹¹ *Deuxième Mémoire sur la propriété* (Paris, 1938), 99 (first published in 1841): “Carnet,” no. 8, entry of Oct. 26, 1850, p. 210 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, N.A.F. 14272); *Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère* (Paris, 1923), I, 350.

¹² *De la Célébration du Dimanche* (Paris, 1926), 17: “. . . there must be fixed periodical assemblies which cannot be abrogated or prorogued, so that on the proper day the people is legitimately called together by law, without need of any formal summoning.” *The Social Contract*, translated with Introduction by G. D. H. Cole (London, 1941), 80.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

community (*communauté*), nor a despotism, nor a fragmented or disordered grouping (*ni morcellement, ni anarchie*), but a state characterized by liberty in order and independence in unity.”¹⁴ Moreover, Proudhon more than once, in his rôle as social critic, identified himself with Rousseau,¹⁵ and in a letter, written in August 1843, in which he spoke of his hopes for the future, he declared that while he did not possess Rousseau’s talent, he nevertheless hoped “to exercise no less an influence.”¹⁶

On the other hand, Proudhon again and again assailed Rousseau both as a man and as a thinker in language that was unusually brutal even for an age when polemicists were particularly resourceful in handling invective. Scattered throughout Proudhon’s work are such descriptions of Rousseau as: he is a “rhetorician,” a “charlatan,” a “demagogue,” a “perfidious declaimer,” and a “scoundrel.”¹⁷ In his unpublished *carnets* Proudhon labeled Rousseau a “thief, idler, vagabond, liar, hypocrite”; he was a man “without dignity, impure, unfaithful, and an ingrate.”¹⁸ Elsewhere Rousseau was depicted as possessing a “weak character,” an “impassioned and effeminate spirit,” and a “false judgment.”¹⁹ Writing in 1851, Proudhon, in the course of criticizing Rousseau’s political theory, declared: “Never did a man unite to such a degree intellectual pride, aridity of soul, baseness of tastes, depravity of habits, ingratitude of heart: never did the eloquence of passion, the pretention of sensitiveness, the effrontery

¹⁴ *De la Célébration du Dimanche*, 61. In *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle* (1851), Proudhon posed it as follows: “Trouver une forme de transaction qui, ramenant à l’unité la divergence des intérêts, identifiant le bien particulier et le bien général, effaçant l’inégalité de nature par celle de l’éducation, résolve toutes les contradictions politiques et économiques: où chaque individu soit également et synonymiquement producteur et consommateur, citoyen et prince, administrateur et administré; où sa liberté augmente toujours, sans qu’il ait besoin d’en aliéner jamais rien; où son bien-être s’accroisse indéfiniment, sans qu’il puisse éprouver, du fait de la Société ou de ses concitoyens, aucun préjudice, ni dans sa propriété, ni dans son travail, ni dans son revenu, ni dans ses rapports d’intérêts, d’opinion ou d’affection avec ses semblables” (203). Emphasis in text.

¹⁵ Proudhon, *Appendice à la Célébration du Dimanche, pages retrouvées* (Paris, 1938), 473; written in 1841; *idem*, *La Justice poursuivie par l’Eglise* (Paris, 1946), 195 (first edition, 1858).

¹⁶ Letter to A. M. Pauthier, August 13, 1843, quoted in Edouard Louÿs, “Pierre-Joseph Proudhon et Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” unpublished *thèse* (Bibliothèque de l’Université de Paris [Sorbonne], 1955), 21.

¹⁷ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 195, 194, 192, 190; *idem*, *De la Capacité politique des Classes ouvrières* (Paris, 1924), 211.

¹⁸ “Carnet,” no. 9, entry of July 26, 1851, p. 116 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, N.A.F. 14273); see also *ibid.*, pp. 117–119; “Carnet,” no. 8, entry of Oct. 29, 1850, pp. 216–217; entry of Oct. 12, 1850, p. 239.

¹⁹ Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise* (Paris, 1935), IV, 217.

of paradox arouse such a fever of infatuation.”²⁰ Later Proudhon was to write (1858) that “the Revolution, the Republic, and the people have never had a greater enemy than Jean-Jacques” and that “Rousseau did not understand either philosophy or economics.”²¹ “The time is not far away,” Proudhon wrote (in 1851), “when a quotation from Rousseau will suffice to render a writer suspect.”²²

What is one to make of all this? One may, of course, simply say what every student of Proudhon knows, that Proudhon’s work is full of just such contrary judgments concerning the work of other social thinkers, his predecessors as well as his contemporaries, and that his treatment of Rousseau is an illustration of the contradictory, ambiguous, and paradoxical nature of Proudhon’s writings. There is, indeed, some truth in this evaluation. But it would be wrong to let the matter rest at this point. It is the contention of this paper that an examination of Proudhon’s criticism of Rousseau’s political theory not only will show how one prominent socialist—or anarcho-socialist if you wish—of the XIXth century responded to Rousseau, but also may contribute something to the clarification of a few of the central conceptions of Proudhon’s own social theory, itself so much the subject of continuing controversy.

Parenthetically, it is noteworthy that Proudhon was familiar with only certain works of Rousseau, namely, *Du Contrat social*, *Emile*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Les Confessions*, the *Discours*, and the *Lettre à d’Alembert*. In his own writings Proudhon cites these works and often quotes extensively from some of them, particularly *Du Contrat social* and *Emile*. In his unpublished *cahiers de lectures*, numbering forty-one in all, many pages of notes are devoted to Rousseau, more than to any other political theorist,²³ and in the yet unpublished *carnets* (eleven), too, Proudhon devotes a good deal of attention to Rousseau’s works. There is no evidence, however, in Proudhon’s published or unpublished writings that he read any works of Rousseau other than those listed here. This means, of course, that Proudhon’s knowledge of Rousseau was far from complete. Moreover, it is apparent from Proudhon’s critique of Rousseau that he did not always understand clearly just what Rousseau was trying to say—and this is not very surprising in view of the many difficult Rousseauian texts—and Proudhon’s misreadings or misunderstandings sometimes leave one with the impression that Proudhon was fighting a straw man rather than the citizen of Geneva.

²⁰ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 194.

²¹ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise*, IV, 218.

²² *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 194.

²³ See the description of these *cahiers* in Pierre Hautmann, “Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, sa vie et sa pensée,” unpublished *thèse* (Bibliothèque de l’Université de Paris [Sorbonne], 1961), VII, xxii–xxxvi.

Proudhon initiated his attack on Rousseau's theory by challenging the latter's definition of the social contract, namely that it was a form of association "which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before."²⁴ In Proudhon's view the contract was too narrowly defined, too vague in its terms, to serve as the basis for the structuring of civil society and establishing the rights, obligations, and duties of its constituents. To be sure, Rousseau had given the conditions of the social pact "*as to that which concerns the protection and defense of goods and persons,*" but, Proudhon asserted, Rousseau left far too many essential matters out of account, for he "says not a word" about "the multitude of relations which, whether we like it or not, places man in perpetual association with his fellow man"—and here Proudhon referred specifically to economic relationships, such as "the mode of acquisition and transmission" of products, "labor, exchange, the value and price of products," as well as to education.²⁵ Rousseau, Proudhon affirmed, made no mention in the social contract "of the principles and laws which rule the fortunes of nations and individuals," not a word about labor or the industrial forces, "all of which it is the very object of a social contract to organize." Out of the multitude of relations which the social contract is called upon to define and regulate, Rousseau "saw only political relations," which were, as shall be indicated, of secondary importance to Proudhon. Rousseau simply did not know what economics meant: "His program speaks of political rights only; it does not mention economic rights." Rousseau's social contract could only, in Proudhon's eyes, serve as the basis for "a mutual insurance society for the protection of our persons and property," a society in which economic matters—to Proudhon "really the only matters of importance"—are left "to the chance of birth or speculation." Given its narrow base and limited concerns, this contract, in Proudhon's words "is nothing but the offensive and defensive alliance of those who possess against those who do not possess." Moreover, even within its own limited frame

²⁴ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 14.

²⁵ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 191 (emphasis in text). Proudhon defined the social contract as follows: "Le Contrat social est l'acte suprême par lequel chaque citoyen engage à la société son amour, son intelligence, son travail, ses services, ses produits, ses biens; en retour de l'affection, des idées, travaux, produits, services et biens de ses semblables: la mesure du droit pour chacun étant déterminée toujours par l'importance de son apport, et le recouvrement exigible à fur et à mesure des livraisons. Ainsi, le contrat social doit embrasser l'universalité des citoyens, de leurs intérêts et de leurs rapports.—Si un seul homme était exclu du contrat, si un seul des intérêts sur lesquels les membres de la nation, êtres intelligents, industriels, sensibles, sont appelés à traiter, était omis, le contrat social serait plus ou moins relatif et spécial; il ne serait pas social" (*ibid.*, 188–89).

of reference, Rousseau's contract did not spell out precisely the commitments involved. Addressing Rousseau, Proudhon queried: "Where in your agreement are my rights and my duties? What have I promised to my fellow citizens? What have they promised to me?"²⁶

Proudhon found additional proof for his contention that Rousseau "understood nothing of the social contract"²⁷ in the latter's comments on government. After having posited as a principle that the people alone are the sovereign, that the people can be represented only by themselves, and lastly, that the law should be the expression of the will of all, Rousseau, Proudhon contended, "quietly abandons and discards this principle." This, according to Proudhon, is done by substituting the will of the majority for the "general, collective, indivisible will." Now having done this, Rousseau then discovers, in his own words, that "it is unimaginable that the people should remain continually assembled to devote their time to public affairs,"²⁸ and subsequently he manages, in Proudhon's words, to get back "by way of elections, to the nomination of representatives or proxies, who shall legislate in the name of the people and whose decrees shall have the force of laws. Instead of a direct, personal transaction where his interests are involved, the citizen only has left the power of choosing his rulers by a plurality vote."²⁹ To Proudhon, Rousseau's rejection of pure democracy (that is, the condition in which the whole people rules itself) as impractical and an ideal only—did not Rousseau state that "So perfect a government is not for men"?³⁰—opened the doors to tyranny and the destruction of all liberties.³¹ This possibility is further enhanced by Rousseau's dictum that "if the general will is to be able to express itself . . . there should be no partial society within

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 188–191 *passim*. "Le contrat social doit être librement débattu, individuellement consenti, signé, *manu propria*, par tous ceux qui y participent.—Si la discussion était empêchée, tronquée, escamotée; si le consentement était surpris; si la signature était donnée en blanc, de confiance, sans lecture des articles et explication préambule; ou si même, comme le serment militaire, elle était préjugée et forcée: le contrat social ne serait plus alors qu'une conspiration contre la liberté et le bien-être des individus les plus ignorants, les plus faibles, et les plus nombreux. . ." (*ibid.*, 189.)

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁸ *The Social Contract*, 58.

²⁹ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 192; *La Guerre et la paix* (Paris, 1927), 186n.

³⁰ *The Social Contract*, 59. "He who makes the law knows better than any one else how it should be executed and interpreted. It seems then impossible to have a better constitution than that in which the executive and legislative powers are united. . . . If we take the term in the strict sense, there never has been a real democracy, and there never will be. It is against the natural order for the many to govern and the few to be governed. . . . Were there a people of gods, their government would be democratic" (*ibid.*, 57–59 *passim*).

³¹ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 192.

the State”³²—a statement which Proudhon re-formulated in the following manner: “That in a well-ordered Republic no association or special meeting of citizens can be permitted, because it would be a State within a State, a government within a government”³³—for this ban would reinforce the “republic one and indivisible,” and such a concentration of authority and power would constitute the basis for a tyranny of the most violent sort.³⁴ Freedom, equality, and justice could only be assured, in Proudhon’s view, in a civil society in which a network of associations and private groupings flourished and in which “each individual would be equally and synonymously producer and consumer, citizen and prince, ruler and ruled.”³⁵

Another feature of Rousseau’s *Du Contrat social* which Proudhon rejected was its concern with civil religion. Rousseau’s insistence that “it matters very much to the community that each citizen should have a religion” and that the Sovereign should fix the articles of “a purely civil profession of faith” so as to encourage those “social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject” and would be “incapable of truly loving the laws and justice”—those beliefs along with Rousseau’s affirmation that “All justice comes from God, who is its sole source”³⁶—struck Proudhon as reactionary, dangerous, and absolutely erroneous ideas that must be opposed by every true lover of liberty and justice. Within the compass of this paper, however, it is not possible to do more than give the briefest indications of Proudhon’s position on these matters, matters which he treated at length in a number of books and articles.³⁷ Proudhon, drawing inspiration from one strain of the positivist

³² *The Social Contract*, 26.

³³ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 193.

³⁴ Proudhon, *Contradictions politiques* (Paris, 1952), 236–239; *idem*, *De la Capacité politique des classes ouvrières*, 206–207, 211. “Quel est le principe fondamental de l’ancienne société bourgeoise ou féodale, révolutionnée ou de droit divin? C’est l’*autorité*, soit qu’on fasse venir du ciel ou qu’on la déduise avec Rousseau de la collectivité nationale. Ainsi ont dit à leur tour, ainsi ont fait les communistes. Ils ramènent tout à la souveraineté du peuple, au droit de la collectivité; leur notion du pouvoir ou de l’Etat est absolument la même que celle de leurs anciens maîtres. Que l’Etat soit titré d’empire, de monarchie, de république, de démocratie ou de communauté, c’est évidemment toujours la même chose” (*ibid.*, 113; emphasis in text).

³⁵ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 203; *Contradictions politiques*, 237–239, 245, 251, 276; *Carnets de P.-J. Proudhon*, ed. Pierre Hautmann (Paris, 1961), II, 365.

³⁶ *The Social Contract*, 121, 32.

³⁷ See, for example, Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise* (Paris, 1930), I, 215–334 *passim*; II (Paris, 1931), 182–256; III (Paris, 1932), 334–424; IV, 347–445; *Système des contradictions économiques*, I, 349–398; II, 388–413; *Philosophie du progrès* (Paris, 1946), 74–131.

thought of his day, maintained that the notion that God was the ultimate source of justice and right as well as the belief that religion was the necessary handmaid of government belonged to the childhood period of mankind, and that mankind had outgrown that period in displacing revelation and divine intervention by science and positive law and in displacing God by man as the source of morals and justice.³⁸ Moreover, historically, religion had been “the eternal source” of tyranny and the “highway for authority.”³⁹ As for justice and authority, they were, to Proudhon, “incompatible terms.”⁴⁰ Historically, too, “God and King, Church and State, have ever been the body and soul of reaction (*l'éternelle contre-révolution*).” Proudhon maintained that “the triumph of liberty” lay in separating them and in getting this separation accepted “as a principle.”⁴¹ In reviving the old relationship between religion and government in his study of the social contract, Rousseau, in Proudhon's view, had done the cause of liberty and progress a disservice.⁴²

This examination and enumeration of the specific criticisms which Proudhon made of Rousseau's political theory as set forth in *Du Contrat social* does not in itself, however, give the full measure of Proudhon's case against that theory. The overarching, fundamental reason why Proudhon rejected Rousseau's theory not only in its specifics but in its essential formulation—a reason implicit in the criticisms that have just been examined—must be made explicit at this point. Rousseau's theory was, in Proudhon's view, a metaphysical, artificial, and hence arbitrary construct, which therefore could contribute nothing of value to the problem of establishing a viable civil society characterized by liberty, equality, and justice. Proudhon contended that Rousseau conceived of the principle of order in civil society as an essentially *political* principle. Thus he devoted himself

³⁸ Proudhon, *La Justice poursuivie par l'Eglise*, 185–197; *idem*, *De la Création de l'Ordre dans l'humanité ou Principes d'organisation politique* (Paris, 1927), 37–74, 115–126. “J'entends par Progrès la marche ascensionnelle de l'esprit vers la Science, par les trois époques consécutives de Religion, Philosophie, et Métaphysique ou méthode. . . Religion, Philosophie, Science; la foi, le sophisme et la méthode: tels sont les trois moments de la connaissance, les trois époques de l'éducation du genre humain” (*ibid.*, 39, 43). Cf. n. 37.

³⁹ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 306, 304; *Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de février* (Paris, 1929), 282–283, 343. “Ce que le capital fait sur le travail, et l'Etat sur la liberté, l'Eglise l'opère à son tour sur l'intelligence. Cette trinité de l'absolutisme est fatale, dans la pratique comme dans la philosophie. Pour opprimer efficacement le peuple, il faut l'enchaîner à la fois dans son corps, dans sa volonté, dans sa raison” (*ibid.*, 282); *La Révolution sociale démontrée par le coup d'état du Deux Décembre* (Paris, 1936), 180–188.

⁴⁰ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 310.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 303–310 *passim*

in *Du Contrat social* to the description and analysis of the appropriate institutions and processes of government, for example, sovereignty, voting, legislation, forms of political organization, etc. What Rousseau had failed to understand was that government as such, any government at all, was “illegitimate and powerless” as “a principle of order.”⁴³ Indeed, in itself the very idea of the social contract “excludes that of government,” for what characterized the contract, in Proudhon’s view, was an agreement for equal exchange between contracting parties, “and it is by virtue of this agreement that liberty and well-being increase”; while by the establishment of governmental authority, “both of these necessarily diminish.”⁴⁴

Proudhon maintained that Rousseau had misconstrued the history of the idea of social contract since the XVIth century. He had failed to see that “the revolutionary tradition of the XVIth century gave us the idea of the Social Contract as an *antithesis* to the idea of Government.”⁴⁵ It was the French protestant theologian Pierre Jurieu (1636–1713), the adversary of Bishop Bossuet, who in direct opposition to the notion of the sovereignty of divine right, affirmed, Proudhon says, “the sovereignty of the people, which he [Jurieu] expressed with infinitely more precision, force, and profundity by the words *Social Contract* or *Pact*, in plain contradiction to such conceptions as authority and government. . . .”⁴⁶ Authority and government had always been inextricably bound, for authority was to government “what the thought is to the word, the idea to the fact, and the soul to the body. Authority is government in principle, as government is authority in practice. To abolish either, if it is a real abolition, is to abolish both.”⁴⁷ In Proudhon’s view the social contract posited by Jurieu was *not* an agreement of the citizen with the government, for this would have meant “but the continuation of the same idea.” It was, rather, “an agreement of man with man,” an “essentially reciprocal” pledge “from which must result what we call society.” In this social contract all pretension of men to *govern* one another is

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 178, 182–184. Cf. Proudhon, *La Guerre et la paix*, 186–187; *De la Capacité politique des classes ouvrières*, 216.

⁴⁴ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 187–188. In one of his unpublished *carnets* (no. 9, entry of Dec. 9, 1851, p. 232), Proudhon stated: “Définir le mot *démocratie*, non plus par gouvernement du Peuple, mais par *émancipation progressive du Peuple*. Le jour où le Peuple tous entier sera émancipé, il n’y aura plus de gouvernement” (emphasis in text). Bibliothèque Nationale, N.A.F. 14273.

⁴⁵ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 195 (my emphasis).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 187. On Jurieu, see Roger Lureau, *Les Doctrines Politiques de Jurieu* (Bordeaux, 1904), esp. 1–2, 39–49, 75, 99, 112; Paul Pic, *Les Idées politiques de Jurieu et les grands principes de 89* (Montauban, 1907); and Robert Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps* (Paris, 1950), 121–122.

⁴⁷ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 184.

abdicated entirely.⁴⁸ In Proudhon's account of the history of the idea of the social contract, the XVIIth century, while not comprehending this notion clearly, did reaffirm it. The "great and decisive negation of government" envisioned by Jurieu lay at the heart of Morelly's thought, and the notion would have become explicit in the doctrines of Babeuf if the latter "had known how to reason and deduce his own principles."⁴⁹ Proudhon noted that from the date of the controversy of Jurieu with Bossuet to the publication of Rousseau's *Du Contrat social* almost a century had elapsed, and that when Rousseau's book appeared, "it was *not* to assert the idea, but rather to stifle it."⁵⁰

Thus, in Proudhon's final assessment of the matter, Rousseau really "understands nothing of the social contract," and his book is but "a masterpiece of oratorical jugglery" and "a code of capitalist and mercantilist tyranny" that called for the perpetuation of the proletariat, "the subordination of labor, a dictatorship, and for the Inquisition."⁵¹ Proudhon's indictment of Rousseau did not end, however, with this sweeping condemnation of *Du Contrat social*. Proudhon certainly believed that "the evil that men do lives after them," and therefore, that the powerful influence of Rousseau's political theory on the generations that succeeded his own had to be taken into account in taking the measure of the man. In this respect, Proudhon,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 187. In Proudhon's view the government would be absorbed into the economic organization of the society, and he quoted with approval Henri de Saint-Simon's notion that "The human race has been called upon to live first under governmental and feudal rule. It is destined to pass from governmental or military rule to *administrative* or *industrial* rule, after it has made sufficient progress in the positive sciences and in industry." Proudhon made the following comment on this notion of the negation of government: "La négation de Saint-Simon, . . . n'est pas déduite de l'idée de contrat, que Rousseau et ses sectateurs avaient depuis quatre-vingts ans corrompue et déshonorée:—elle découle d'une autre intuition, tout expérimentale et *a posteriori*, telle qu'elle pouvait convenir à un observateur des faits. Ce que la théorie du contrat, inspiration de la logique providentielle aurait dès le temps de Jurieu fait entrevoir dans l'avenir de la société, à savoir la fin des gouvernements; Saint-Simon, paraissant au plus fort de la mêlée parlementaire, le constate, lui, d'après la loi des évolutions de l'humanité" (*ibid.*, 196–198 *passim*; emphasis in text). Cf. *Philosophie du progrès*, 75.

⁴⁹ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 195. On the history of the idea of the social contract, see Paul L. Léon, "Le Problème du Contrat Social chez Rousseau," *Archives de Philosophie du droit et de sociologie juridique* (5th year, nos. 3–4, 1935), 157–201; Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps*, 207–222; and J. W. Gough, *The Social Contract: A Critical Study of its Development* (Oxford, 1957). Cf. Walter Eckstein, "Rousseau's Theory of Liberty: Otto Vossler's *Rousseaus Freiheitslehre*," *J.H.I.* XXVI (April–June 1965), 291–294.

⁵⁰ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 187 (my emphasis).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 187, 194. See also Proudhon's unpublished "carnet," no. 8, entry of Oct. 26, 1850, pp. 208–211; entry of Oct. 29, 1850, pp. 216–217; entry of Dec. 10, 1850, pp. 275–277.

writing in 1851, ascribed to Rousseau a large measure of the responsibility and blame for the “fruitless disorder” and general confusion that had characterized French life since the French Revolution. In following the inspiration of Rousseau’s teachings, France had indeed paid a terrible price, for “the vogue of Rousseau,” Proudhon affirmed, had “cost France more gold, more blood, and more shame than the detested reign of the famous courtesans” of Louis XV “ever caused her to sacrifice.”⁵²

Given the limits of this paper, only a few highpoints of Proudhon’s anti-Rousseauian brief can be touched on here. Rousseau was the inspiration for the Constitution of 1793, “which promised everything to the people and gave them nothing,” and he was the guiding light for the Jacobins who, in Proudhon’s view, were terrorists, inquisitors, and “the Jesuits of the French Revolution,”⁵³ and particularly the despotic Robespierre, whom Proudhon variously described as “the eternal denouncer, with an empty head and a viper’s tongue,” as “the exterminator,” “the reptile,” and as the “firm disciple of Rousseau”—the man who promoted the centralization of state authority, the destruction of liberty and freedom, and “the return to God by society.”⁵⁴ Moreover, Rousseau served as the inspiration for Jacobin-Socialists like Louis Blanc and Communists like Etienne Cabet.⁵⁵ Finally, casting his net wide, Proudhon declared that Rousseau, being “the father of constitutionalism,” was the fundamental inspiration for most of those reformers and system builders in the XIXth century, whether identified as socialists, democrats, or liberals,

⁵² *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 187, 195.

⁵³ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise*, IV, 155–163 *passim*. “Le jacobinisme est surtout une affection, une maladie, une sorte de peste morale, particulière au tempérament français. . . . Le jacobinisme, par la ferveur même dont il est possédé, par ce zélotisme renouvelé des Juifs qui le caractérise, est donc avant tout dictatorial, inquisitorial, terroriste. Il se soucie peu du droit; il procède volontiers par mesures violentes, exécutions sommaires; c’est ce qu’il appelle gouverner révolutionnairement. La Révolution, pour lui, ce sont les coups de foudre, les razzias, la réquisition, l’emprunt forcé, le maximum, les épurations, la terreur” (*ibid.*, 158–59; emphasis in text). See also Proudhon’s *Napoléon III* (Paris, 1900), 33; and his unpublished “carnet,” no. 9, entry of July 18, 1851, pp. 107, 104–106.

⁵⁴ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 195, 225, 233, 235, 229, 304. Proudhon characterized Robespierre as “cet homme, singe de Rousseau, ami du pouvoir et des prêtres . . . asservi au *Contrat social*” (letter to Jules Michelet, April 11, 1851, in *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon* [Paris, 1875], IV, 362). Cf. Proudhon, *Contradictions politiques*, 211–212n, and his unpublished “carnet,” no. 9, entry of May 24, 1851, p. 80, wherein the “crimes” of Robespierre are listed; also entry of July 18, 1851, pp. 104–105.

⁵⁵ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 221, *idem*, *Les Confessions d’un Révolutionnaire*, 257–267 *passim*; *idem*, *Système des contradictions économiques*, II, 257–259, 266–310 *passim*.

who endeavored to establish a more just order of society on the basis of some political principle or principles and who proposed as ameliorative measures one or another political mechanism, technique, or device—such as the sovereignty of the people, direct legislation and direct government, or universal suffrage.⁵⁶ And like Rousseau himself, none of these individuals, in Proudhon's view, realized that "beneath the governmental machinery, in the shadow of political institutions, out of the sight of statesmen and priests, society is producing its own organism in a slow and silent manner; society is constructing a new order, the expression of its vitality and autonomy, and the negation of the old politics as well as the old religion." They did not see "that for a constitution of political powers should be substituted an organization of economic forces."⁵⁷

One further consideration and this presentation of Proudhon's indictment of Rousseau will be complete. Here a shift of focus is required, for in this matter Proudhon confronted Rousseau more as a moralist than as a political theorist. Although Proudhon had confidence in mankind's future and believed in progress,⁵⁸ he did feel, as did other perceptive social critics of his generation,⁵⁹ quite uneasy, if not outright alarmed, about the state of health of the civilization of the France of his time. He was dismayed, particularly after the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon and the creation of the Second Empire, at the growing corruption and cynicism that permeated the society, and he denounced again and again, with the voice of an Old

⁵⁶ Proudhon, *Mélanges, Articles de journaux, 1848-1852* (Paris, 1869), II, 166; *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 155-337 *passim*; *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon*, IV, letter to Marc Dufraisse, July 20, 1851, 75; letter to A. Madier-Montjau, Feb. 23, 1852, 215; letter to A. Darimon, May 13, 1852, 276; V, letter to X, Sept. 27, 1853, 268-269; letter to A. Madier-Montjau, Jan. 10, 1854, 318; *Carnets de P.-J. Proudhon*, II, 66, 161-162, 163-165, 229, 230, 290, 296-297, 299, 301, 302, 305, 307, 311, 319, 322, 323, 328; Proudhon, *Solution du problème social* (Paris, 1868), 56-57, 58, 60, 62.

⁵⁷ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 300, 240. "Fondre, immerger et faire disparaître le système politique ou gouvernemental dans le système économique, en réduisant, simplifiant, décentralisant, supprimant l'un après l'autre tous les rouages de cette grande machine qui a nom le Gouvernement ou l'Etat" (*ibid.*, 240).

⁵⁸ Proudhon, *Philosophie du progrès*, 29-131 *passim*; *La Révolution sociale*, 217; *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise*, I, 233: "Le Progrès reste donc la loi de notre âme, non pas en ce sens seulement que, par le perfectionnement de nous-mêmes, nous devons approcher sans cesse de l'absolue Justice et de l'idéal; mais en ce sens que l'Humanité se renouvelant et se développant sans fin, comme la création elle-même. . . ." Cf. *ibid.*, 231-234; *De la Création de l'ordre dans l'humanité*, 123, 317, 361. Proudhon, in this work, characterized progress as "la grande loi de l'histoire" (123).

⁵⁹ Cf. Koenraad W. Swart, *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France* (The Hague, 1964).

Testament prophet, the egoism and self-indulgence, the moral indolence and apathy, the emotionalism, irrationality, and sentimentalism that were so widespread as to seem all but universal. In his unpublished *carnet*, on Dec. 29, 1852, Proudhon noted that "Cowardice, corruption, egoism, and hypocrisy, all the base sentiments, the vile passions, and all the perverse ideas—these compose at the present moment the character, soul, and spirit of the nation."⁶⁰ Three years later he wrote that "the epoch is bad, the generation is cowardly—upper class, middle class, and lower class are equally rotten."⁶¹ France was now entering a period of decadence, with its moral sense "chloroformisé."⁶² "During the past ten years," Proudhon wrote in April 1862, "decadence in France has made frightful progress," with corruption, stupidity, venality, and cowardice more entrenched than ever.⁶³ An entire generation was "gangrenée."⁶⁴

Proudhon attributed this decadence, this degeneration of the moral fiber of Frenchmen, to a number of factors, the full examination of which lies beyond the scope of this paper.⁶⁵ One of these factors, of fundamental importance, is, however, relative to our study and merits some consideration. Progress, to Proudhon, meant in essence the successive realization of the immanent ideal of justice in man and in the web of all the relationships into which he entered and which, in sum, constituted the social fabric or the social order. The ever more complete realization of justice—and with it liberty, equality, and fraternity—imposed on mankind the imperious necessity to move increasingly, as the basis for its actions, from instinct to reason, from intuition to reflection, and from spontaneity to deliberate choice. The progress of mankind, moral and other, could be measured by the extent to which reason prevailed over sentiment and ideas over feelings in the conduct of men.⁶⁶ Proudhon put the matter another way

⁶⁰ "Carnet," no. 10, p. 72 (Bibliothèque Nationale, N.A.F. 14274). See also *Carnets de P.-J. Proudhon*, II, 56, 72-73, 322-323, 369.

⁶¹ *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon*, VI, letter to Micaud, Dec. 25, 1855, 286; X, letter to Gustave Chaudey, Oct. 27, 1860, 187-188; XII, letter to Bonnon, May 5, 1862, 70.

⁶² *Ibid.*, X, letter to Charles Beslay, Aug. 26, 1860, 151.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XII, letter to J.-A. Langlois, April 12, 1862, 48; letter to Bonnon, May 5, 1862, 72; letter to Félix Delhasse, May 22, 1862, 109-110; letter to Alfred Madier-Montjau, Sept. 26, 1862, 202.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XII, letter to Gouvenet, May 23, 1862, 112.

⁶⁵ *Philosophie du progrès, passim*, and *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise*, III, 200-247, 481-542.

⁶⁶ Proudhon, *De la Création de l'ordre dans l'humanité*, 271-272, 357-418 *passim*; *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise*, III, 511-512; *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon*, XI, letter to Doctor Clavel, Oct. 26, 1861, 255, 259; Proudhon's unpublished "Carnet," no. 10, entry of Dec. 18, 1853, p. 329; no. 9,

in a discussion of decadence in literature and society. All progress in literature, as in society, was characterized by the preëminence of ideas, which he identified as “the masculine element,” while decadence in both literature and society was characterized by the obscuratization (*l’obscurcissement*) of ideas, by the predominance of passions, or sentiments, or purely literary devices and techniques—all of which he labeled as “the feminine element.” “If in a society or a literature,” Proudhon affirmed, “the feminine element comes to dominate or even to counterbalance the masculine element, there will be a cessation of the forward movement in that society and that literature, and soon decadence.”⁶⁷

Now in Proudhon’s view, the cessation of this forward movement in French society and literature, and with it in the origin of the decadence and moral decay that Proudhon found so evident in the France of his day, began with Rousseau. Rousseau was, in Proudhon’s words, “the first of the *femmelins de l’intelligence* [whose ranks included Lamartine and George Sand], in whom ideas became obscured, passion or affectivity prevailed over reason, and who, despite some qualities that were eminent, even virile, predisposed literature and society towards their decline.”⁶⁸ Long before Pierre Lasserre and Irving Babbitt, Proudhon had portrayed Rousseau as the father of romanticism, taking note of what he took to be Rousseau’s glorification of the state of nature and the noble savage at the expense of modern man and the civil order and his pandering to

entry of Jan. 3, 1852, p. 257. To Proudhon, justice was the “*idée princesse*,” the force which assures the progress of man and society: “La Justice est pour nous l’axe de la société, la raison première et dernière de l’univers.” “L’homme, en vertu de la raison dont il est doué, a la faculté de sentir sa dignité dans la personne de son semblable comme dans sa propre personne, de s’affirmer tout à la fois comme individu et comme espèce. La Justice est le produit de cette faculté: c’est le respect, spontanément éprouvé et réciproquement garanti, de la dignité humaine, en quelque personne et dans quelque circonstance qu’elle se trouve compromise, et à quelque risque que nous expose sa défense. . . . De l’identité de la raison chez tous les hommes, et du sentiment de respect qui les porte à maintenir à tout prix leur dignité mutuelle, résulte l’égalité devant la Justice” (emphasis in text). Justice, to Proudhon, is immanent in man: “La Justice est l’efflorescence de notre âme. . . . La Justice est humaine, tout humaine, rien qu’humaine. . . . La Justice a son siège dans l’humanité, elle est progressive et indéfectible dans l’humanité. . . . La Justice prend différents noms, selon les facultés auxquelles elle s’adresse. Dans l’ordre de la conscience, le plus élevé de tous, elle est la JUSTICE proprement dite, règle de nos droits et de nos devoirs; dans l’ordre de l’intelligence, logique, mathématique, etc., elle est égalité ou équation; dans la sphère de l’imagination, elle a nom idéal, dans la nature, c’est équilibre” (emphasis in text). *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise*, I, 215, 324, 423, 426, 323, 329, 324, 217; also 314–315, 328, 433; III, 345–347, 513–516. ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 216. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, 217.

feelings and sentiments at the expense of reason.⁶⁹ Moreover, Rousseau initiated a direct attack on the moral foundations of society by preparing, in his *Nouvelle Héloïse*, the way for the dissolution of real love and the institution of marriage: “from the publication of this novel dates, in our country, the mollification or enervation of real feelings of the heart, a mollification that must follow closely on the heels of a cold and dismal lack of pudicity (*impudicité*).”⁷⁰ Proudhon did not, in every case, find Rousseau’s provocative evocation of feelings and emotions worthy of condemnation, and he recognized his rôle in preparing the ground for the French Revolution: “He put the flame to the power that during the preceding two centuries French letters had amassed. It is something to have kindled in the souls of men such conflagration. It is in this that the force and the virility of Rousseau consists; but for the rest, he is woman (*femme*).”⁷¹

In view of the many-faceted attack by Proudhon on Rousseau that has just been presented, it would appear that there was little in common between the two men and that the early student of Proudhon’s thought, Aimé Berthod, was apparently quite right when he declared, in 1909, that “It is a matter of fact that neither the moral ideas, religious theories, nor political conceptions of Proudhon derive in any way from Rousseau. Rather, they are the opposite.”⁷² It would, indeed, appear that this is the case, but appearances can be deceiving. Robert Derathé, one of the outstanding contemporary Rousseauian scholars, has remarked that “the big thinkers are themselves inclined to overestimate the originality of their own doctrines and to exaggerate the weaknesses or errors of earlier doctrines,” and he goes on to point out that if these thinkers do recognize willingly their indebtedness to their counterparts of a remote epoch, “they are, in general, unjust concerning their immediate predecessors.”⁷³ Derathé had Rousseau specifically in mind; nevertheless, the observation, there is reason to believe, applies with equal force to Proudhon. Moreover, Proudhon’s rhetoric, with its sarcasm and invective, tends often to divert attention from the beliefs which Proudhon in fact shares with his antagonist of the moment whoever he be, Saint-Simon, Fourier, or Rousseau. That rhetoric underscores differences. Proudhon

⁶⁹ *Si les Traités de 1815 ont cessé d'exister?* (Paris, 1952), 412; *idem*, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise*, IV, 219; *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon*, VII, letter to F. Clerc, January 2, 1857, 194–195; Henri Lagrange’s Introduction to *Les Femmelins* (Paris, 1912), 18–24. On the question of Rousseau and “romanticism,” cf. Robert Derathé, *Le Rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris, 1948), *passim*, esp. 181; Schinz, *Etat présent des travaux sur J.-J. Rousseau*, 30, 63.

⁷⁰ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise*, IV, 218. ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 219.

⁷² “Les Tendances Maîtresses de P.-J. Proudhon,” *La Revue socialiste*, XLIX (1909), 123.

⁷³ Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps*, 62.

did endeavor to affirm his indebtedness to others, as for example when he asserted that his "true masters" were "the Bible, first of all, then Adam Smith, and, finally, Hegel,"⁷⁴ whose works, it may be noted parenthetically, Proudhon knew only secondhand and then rather superficially. But Proudhon was also aware that it was not always possible to be fully cognizant of indebtedness and that the "originality" of a thinker might well be more apparent than real. "I recognize," he once wrote, "that there are very few ideas concerning which a writer can say 'these are my very own.' All that really belongs to us is a certain way of stating them, *un à-propos*, and a relationship that we discover between these ideas and certain others."⁷⁵

In any event, there are some interesting parallels in the stance and views of Rousseau and Proudhon, some that are basic and others that are merely marginal, that should be taken into account before a final judgment is made concerning the relations between the two thinkers. Briefly, Proudhon, like Rousseau, believed that the civil order or society was not an artificial construct, but rather that the possibility of creating a society was inherent in man and that, therefore, a society was a "natural" environment for man. Furthermore, both men held that it was only in a society that the rich potentials of human nature could possibly be realized—that it was only in a community of men that justice could flourish and liberty and equality be assured.⁷⁶ Both men also emphasized the idea of a social contract in the formation of society. Proudhon's basic difference with Rousseau on this point is that he did not think of the contract as a single act or as particularly political in character. Instead he thought in terms of many contracts, indeed of an all but endless multiplication of contracts among specific individuals for specific ends and purposes that would cover the entire spectrum of human desires and aspirations. "The idea of contract," Proudhon wrote in 1851, is "the only moral bond which free and equal beings can accept," and it was the social contract which Proudhon relied upon "to bind together all the members of a nation into one and the same interest."⁷⁷ To Proudhon,

⁷⁴ Quoted in the "Notice sur P.-J. Proudhon," *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon*, I, xxii.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, VII, letter to Tilloy, Sept. 22, 1856, 135.

⁷⁶ Proudhon, *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?* (Paris, 1926), 299–318 *passim*; Proudhon's unpublished "Cours d'économie," *Feuillets* XII, nos. 1–3, XVIII, no. 13, XIII, 12, 15, XV, 59, in Pierre Hautmann, "La Philosophie sociale de P.-J. Proudhon," unpublished *thèse* (Bibliothèque de l'Université de Paris [Sorbonne], 1961), 166–175; also 187–189.

⁷⁷ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 238, 188. In his unpublished "Carnet," no. 9, entry of May 26, 1851, Proudhon wrote: "Le contrat, c'est la pratique de l'Egalité, qui n'est ni dans l'association, ni dans le gouvernement. Le contrat, c'est Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" (pp. 78–79).

the contract was always reciprocal, “freely discussed and individually accepted,” and should always “increase the well-being and liberty of every citizen.” Indeed, society was to him another name for the sum total of these contracts.⁷⁸ Proudhon called the contractual society that he envisioned “mutualism” (*la mutualité*).⁷⁹

Rousseau and Proudhon both posited the sovereignty of the people as basic to a just social order. But to what he called the “artificial” and “abstract” sovereignty of Rousseau—artificial and abstract because it was conceived of only in political terms and manifested through governmental institutions, themselves not an organic expression or extension of a society—Proudhon opposed the “effective sovereignty” of the people, and this sovereignty he anchored in what he characterized as a “natural group.” What did Proudhon mean by the term “natural group”? In a work published posthumously it was defined as follows: “Whenever men together with their wives and children assemble in some one place, link up their dwellings and holdings, develop in their midst diverse industries, create among themselves neighborly feelings and relations, and for better or worse impose upon themselves the conditions of solidarity, they form what I call a natural group. This group then takes on the form of a community or some other political organism, affirming in its unity its independence, a life or movement that is appropriate to itself, and affirms its autonomy.”⁸⁰ In this natural group, as Proudhon envisioned it, “the multitude that is governed would be at the same time the governing multitude; the society would be identical and adequate

⁷⁸ *Idee générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 189, 76, 169, 187.

⁷⁹ Proudhon characterized “mutualism” as follows: “En régime de mutualité, nous sommes tous clients les uns des autres, succursalistes les uns des autres, serviteurs les uns des autres. En cela consiste notre *Solidarité*. . . . Pour qu’il y ait mutualité parfaite, il faut que chaque producteur, en prenant certain engagement vis-à-vis des autres, qui de leur côté s’engagent de la même manière vis-à-vis de lui, conserve sa pleine et entière indépendance d’action, toute sa liberté d’allure, toute sa personnalité d’opération: la mutualité, d’après son étymologie, consistant plutôt dans l’échange des bons offices et des produits que dans le groupement des forces et la communauté des travaux. La Mutualité . . . n’est-elle pas le contrat social par excellence, à la fois politique et économique, synallagmatique et commutatif, qui embrasse à la fois, dans ses termes si simples, l’individu et la famille, la corporation et la cité la vente et l’achat, le crédit, l’assurance, le travail, l’instruction et la propriété; toute profession, toute transaction, toute service, toute garantie. . . . Qu’est-ce que la mutualité, en effet? Une formule de justice . . . en vertu de laquelle les membres de la société, de quelque rang, fortune et condition qu’ils soient, corporations ou individus, familles ou cités, industriels, agriculteurs ou fonctionnaires publics, se promettent et se garantissent réciproquement service pour service, crédit pour crédit, gage pour gage, sûreté pour sûreté, valeur pour valeur, information pour information, bonne foi pour bonne foi, vérité pour vérité, liberté pour liberté, propriété pour propriété” (*Capacité politique des classes ouvrières*, 191, 141–142, 193, 203–204; emphasis in text).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 216, 237.

to the state, the people to the government, as in political economy producers and consumers are the same.”⁸¹ Thus what Proudhon set forth is a state of affairs which satisfies Rousseau’s own specification for the best form of constitution, namely, “that in which the executive and legislative powers are united.”⁸² Proudhon contended that natural groups similar in character and not too removed from one another would have common interests; “and one can conceive that they would understand one another, associate themselves, and by this mutual assurance, form a superior group.” Such groups might be organized on the level of the canton, commune, region, province, or department. These groups would link up, however, “only to guarantee their mutual interests and to develop their resources, never going so far as to abdicate their independence by a sort of immolation of themselves before this new Moloch.” Each of these natural groups being essentially “indestructible organisms,” there would, in Proudhon’s theory, “exist between them a new bond of right (*droit*), a contract of mutuality; but this bond would no more be able to deprive them of their sovereign independence than a member of the community could, in his capacity as citizen, lose his prerogatives as a free man, producer, and proprietor.”⁸³ Thus Proudhon sought to make certain that the sovereignty of the people, which Rousseau held could never be alienated, would indeed never be alienated.

Furthermore, in these natural groups and in combinations of them on different levels, universal suffrage, which was, in the context of the centralized governments of his day, viewed by Proudhon as merely a catchword or gimmick, as “an enormous, mischievous platitude,”⁸⁴ would serve a useful and necessary purpose, for it would express the true wishes and interests of a people dealing in a direct manner with real problems and issues that arose naturally from an organic, not artificial, environment. In the future mutualist social order, as Proudhon envisioned it, universal suffrage would finally come into its own as “the democratic principle *par excellence*.”⁸⁵

Finally, it is important to note that while Proudhon rejected Rousseau’s general will as being a confused and ambiguous notion which, if taken seriously, could lead only to “tyranny” and “despotism,”⁸⁶ none the less Proudhon himself set forth a conception of a

⁸¹ *Contradictions politiques*, 237.

⁸² *The Social Contract*, 58.

⁸³ *Contradictions politiques*, 237–238; also *ibid.*, 239–247.

⁸⁴ Proudhon’s unpublished “Carnet,” no. 8, entry of Oct. 29, 1850, p. 216; also, entry of Dec. 10, 1850, pp. 275–277; *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon*, IV, letter to A. Madier-Montjau, Feb. 23, 1852, 215–216.

⁸⁵ Proudhon, *Les Démocrates assermentés et les réfractaires* (Paris, 1952), 89, 83–88; *Contradictions politiques*, 275–276; *Capacité politique des classes ouvrières*, 278–280.

⁸⁶ *Idée générale de la Révolution au XIX^e siècle*, 192–193.

“collective reason” (or a “general reason” and a “public reason,” as he called it at times) that occupies a position in his theory of society comparable to the general will in Rousseau’s and, moreover, appears to have been modeled on Rousseau’s notion. This collective reason is, in Proudhon’s words, “the guardian of all truth and all justice,”⁸⁷ the source of all “public law and human rights,” and the fount of “our morality and our progress.”⁸⁸ “It is different in quality and superior in power to the sum of all the particular reasons . . . which produce it.”⁸⁹

What, in Proudhon’s view, is specifically the relation between the reason of the individual and the collective reason, in what manner is the latter “different in quality and superior in power” to the former, and what is the organ for its expression in society? Proudhon’s description of the collective reason is somewhat more extensive and explicit than Rousseau’s treatment of the notion of the general will; but like the latter it is not free from difficulties and consequently more than one reading of the relevant texts is possible. This affirmed, the following answers seem appropriate.

Proudhon maintained that in the reason of the individual there are always present beclouding elements introduced by self-interest or particularistic concerns, always a mixture of what Proudhon called “passionate, egotistical, and transcendental elements—in a word absolutist elements.”⁹⁰ Because these absolute elements in human reason seek to grasp the inner nature of things, things in themselves (*l’en soi des choses*)—something the human mind cannot do since it can deal only with “the relations of things” (*les rapports des choses*) or “the reason of things” (*la raison des choses*)—it, the absolute in human reason, is the cause, Proudhon asserted, “of our errors of judgment” and the “source of all the deceptions, illusions, lies . . . superstitions, utopias, frauds, and mystifications of which we are the victims.”⁹¹ Driven by “the tyranny of the absolute,” an “absolutism innate in his being,” man seeks constantly “to raise himself above the law” and “to change the relations between things so as to modify their reality.” Unceasingly the reason of the individual “modifies and tortures the facts” in order to bend them to its own absolutist conceit.⁹²

Now as long as each individual reasoned alone “the tendency of each particular reason towards absolutism encountered neither re-

⁸⁷ Quoted in Bouglé, *La Sociologie de Proudhon*, 234.

⁸⁸ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise*, III, 269, 273.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 268.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 268, 267.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, III, 166, 169, 185, 248; *Système des contradictions économiques*, I, 52–53; *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise*, III, 183; *Mélanges, Articles de journaux*, II, 163–169.

⁹² *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise*, III, 173.

sistance nor check." With the coming into being of social groups and what Proudhon called "collectivities," the absolutisms of disparate individuals confronted one another. "Before a human being like himself, absolute like himself," Proudhon declared, "the absolutism of the individual is drawn up short—or to put it another way, the two absolutes in individual reason destroy one another, leaving as a residue of their respective reasons only pure reason, only the relations of things, *à propos* of which they struggled." For just as only a diamond can make an incision on a diamond, so too "only a free absolute is capable of balancing another free absolute, to neutralize and eliminate it in such a manner that as a consequence of their reciprocal annulment (*leur annulation réciproque*), there remains from the encounter only the objective reality which each one had tended to distort for his own profit." The proverb has it that from the clash of ideas comes illumination: Proudhon modified the proverb in saying that "it is from mutual contradiction that the spirit is purged of all ultra-phenomenal elements; it is the negation that a free absolute makes of its antagonist which produces, in moral sciences, adequate, sufficient ideas, free of all egotistical and transcendental dross—ideas, in a word, that conform to reality and to social reason." The collective reason is the legacy of the resultants of these clashes of absolute reasons which take place within the context of collectivities and social groups. "Opposing absolute to absolute in such a manner as to annul at all points this unintelligible element, and only considering as real and legitimate the product of antagonistic ends, the collective reason arrives at synthetic ideas, very different, often even the inverse, of the conclusions of the *moi individuel*."⁹³ Thus the distinction between the individual's reason and the collective reason is clear: "the former is essentially absolutist, the latter antipathetic to all absolutism," and while the ideas that are the product of individual reason are permeated with absolutes, those of the collective reason are synthetic, objective, and impersonal.⁹⁴

The collective reason achieves this objectivity not at the cost of repressing individual reason: quite the contrary, the collective reason necessarily presupposes the latter, since it is the product of the clash of individual reasons. Much more than did Rousseau in the case of his general will, Proudhon insisted on the need for deliberation among individuals, for the confrontation of contradictory individual reasons. As he put it: "This collective reason, truly practical and juridical, says to us: remain what you are, each of you . . . defend your interests and produce your thought . . . discuss and debate with one another, reserving always the respect that . . . intelligent beings owe one an-

⁹³ *Ibid.*, III, 250, 251, 253; III, 248–262 *passim*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 253, 250–251, 254–256, 270.

other. Reform and reproach yourselves: respect only the decrees of your common reason, whose judgments can only be yours, freed as it is of this absolute." Thus the very impersonality of the collective reason demands, in Proudhon's words, "as a principle, the greatest contradiction; as an organ, the greatest possible multiplicity."⁹⁵ And the organ of the collective reason, in Proudhon's theory, is the social group or the collectivity that unites free individuals⁹⁶ engaged in common pursuits and in the promotion of common interests—varied groups such as the workshop, mine, mill, and farm; schools and academies; organizations of artists and scholars; local, regional, and other kinds of assemblies; and clubs, juries, etc.⁹⁷

In the light of what has been presented in this paper, what judgment can properly be made concerning Proudhon's confrontation with Rousseau? That there would be sharp differences in the views of the two men was to be expected, for, leaving aside the contrasting temperaments and styles of life of these two most individualistic of men, they did, after all, live in eras and circumstances that were remote from one another—not indeed remote in terms of time but surely remote in terms of the changes in life and outlook occasioned by the momentous events, particularly the French Revolution and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, that had taken place in the years between the death of Rousseau and the coming of age of Proudhon. Proudhon's world simply was not Rousseau's. The surprising thing, particularly in view of the vituperation which Proudhon heaped upon Rousseau, is the extent to which the thought of Proudhon parallels that of Rousseau on many fundamental points. Rousseau did leave his mark on Proudhon, notwithstanding the latter's endeavor to exorcise him. Rousseau should properly be included, along with the Bible, Adam Smith, and Saint-Simon, as one of the "masters" of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

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⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 253, 270.

⁹⁶ "L'individualité est pour moi le critérium de l'ordre social. Plus l'individualité est libre, indépendante, initiatrice, dans la société, plus la société est bonne; au contraire, plus l'individualité est subordonnée, absorbée, plus la société est mauvaise. En deux mots, le problème social étant d'accorder la liberté de l'espèce avec la liberté de l'individu; ces deux libertés étant solidaires et inséparables, il en résulte pour moi, que comme nous pouvons beaucoup mieux juger de ce qui gêne l'individu que de ce qui convient à la société, c'est la liberté individuelle qui doit nous servir de drapeau et de règle" (*Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon*, IV, letter to Robin, Oct. 12, 1851, 375; emphasis in text). See also Proudhon, *Système des contradictions économiques*, I, 368.

⁹⁷ Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise*, III, 253, 270; III, 261-269; II, 257-259.