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Kill ‘nature’ in order to save it: The Rousseauian dichotomy and ecological theory*

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Abstract

This study seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s thought and ecological theory by foregrounding the concept of alienation as the central axis around which his philosophy turns. While much of the ecological literature emphasizes Rousseau’s moral reverence for nature—manifest in his opposition to instrumental rationality, his emphasis on pity, and his advocacy of a land ethic—such interpretations often isolate his moral writings from the broader context of his political and economic philosophy. In doing so, they risk overlooking the inherent paradoxes embedded in Rousseau’s work. By tracing the transition from natural to political alienation, this study argues that Rousseau’s remedy to humanity’s estrangement from nature involves an even deeper alienation—one that is formal, intentional, and institutionalized. This second alienation may indeed enable the reconstitution of freedom or virtue, but only at the cost of severing the organic bond between humankind and the natural world. Consequently, Rousseau presents a profound and unresolved tension between the moral necessity of unity with nature and the political imperatives of civic life.

Key words: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ecological theory, alienation, nature.

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1. Introduction

For the students of social sciences, the name Jean-Jacques Rousseau might suggest anything but an uncomplicated thinker. Not only have his thoughts been associated with diverse modern political ideologies ranging from totalitarianism (Nisbet, 1943; Talmon, 1960; Berlin, 2002; Arendt, 2006) to republicanism (Pettit, 2013; de Dijn, 2015; Bellamy, 2016), but also, he has been labeled as one of the first critiques of the Enlightenment (Cassirer, 1954) despite his prominent position within that tradition. Without doubt, all these contradictory interpretations originate from the richness of his ideas. Hence, it is no surprise that Rousseau's work has been a major source for researchers tackling our contemporary impediments in various disciplines.

In that respect, ecological theory is no exception. As a flourishing field, ecological theory has engaged with Rousseau's writings in a meticulous manner since the early 1990s. Although the initial examples, such as LaFreniere (1991), Bate (1991), and Singer (1991), mainly focus on the French philosopher's impact upon the modern environmental thought, recent studies turn their attention to Rousseau himself in search of a grounded ecological theory. If one considers the centrality of nature both as a living physical entity and as the moral essence of humankind in Rousseau, the reason behind the increasing number of studies in ecological theory becomes clear. In fact, his observations on the damaging effects humans have on nature are quite striking. As Lane (2014: 134-135) aptly demonstrates, Rousseau in *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* addresses the connection between large-scale agriculture and the destruction of forests (1992: 49), criticizes the efforts for "chasms filled, mountains razed, land cleared, lakes dug, swamps drained" (1992: 74, note: 7), and cautions us against the "epidemic illnesses engendered by the bad air" (1992: 76, note: 7). Similarly, in *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (2000a: 64-65) and *Botanical Writings* (2000b: 250-252), he opposes the idea the that nature is nothing but a physical resource in the service of humanity. Undoubtedly, Rousseau's almost prophetic warnings not only give him an indispensable place in the history of ecological thought, but as Deneys-Tunney argues, his problematization of the relationship between humankind and nature makes him "the founder of ecological thinking" (2016: 62).

Nevertheless, reading Rousseau from an ecological theory perspective is not without problems. As an Enlightenment thinker who was adamantly critical of his contemporaries' thoughts and existing social values, Rousseau's philosophy is an intricately woven web of political, moral, and economic ideas. Therefore, more often than not, his teachings have been labelled as "ambiguous, or even paradoxical, or self-contradictory character" (Salkever, 1977: 204). However, as Shklar (1969) points out, this seemingly enigmatic corpus of Rousseau's writings rather originates

from a very coherent view based on the ineliminable conflict between man and citizen. Thus, while his moral philosophy applies to both, his political and economic teachings are solely concerned with the latter. This, in return, puts any effort to engage with Rousseau from an ecological perspective in a tricky position. As Trachtenberg (2019: 489) argues, ecological theory suggests a normative position based on "moral evaluations of how people interact with their surroundings". This fundamental perspective becomes very clear in the majority of ecological studies analyzing Rousseau. Drawing exclusively on his moral philosophy, these analyses focus on how Rousseau depicted the relationship between man and nature around the themes of the latter's protection, authenticity, and unity. While such studies enrich our understanding of Rousseau, they inevitably fall short of providing insights with regard to the political and economic dimensions of his philosophy and thus remain limited in explaining both the fundamental dichotomy underlying his thought and its political repercussions concerning our current ecological crisis.

This study argues that alienation is the central notion defining Rousseau's teaching and its inherent dichotomy. In his writings, alienation appears first as the estrangement of humans from their own natural selves (caused by the transformation of *amour de soi* to *amour-propre*) and then, consequently, to their physical environment. Constrained by this irreversible process, humanity not only lost its innate connection with nature but also risks enslaving itself under tyrannical regimes. Thus, Rousseau's philosophy is dedicated to finding a solution to this conundrum. For him, overcoming the initial alienation requires a second and a more radical one achieved via the social contract: "Total alienation of each associate, with all his rights, to the community" (Rousseau, 1994: 138). Through this clause, Rousseau realizes the proper transition from man to citizen. However, he simultaneously creates an unresolvable dichotomy. On the one hand, already alienated twice, the citizens' relationship to nature can no longer constitute a substantive essence. Nature's protection becomes only possible by a formal attitude regulated by the body politic, unless man could return to his original state of being a "solitary walker". In other words, humanity needs to abandon its nature in order to prevent the hazardous impacts of civilization on the environment, as well as to guarantee the establishment of political freedom. On the other hand, this leaves man at odds with his moral necessity to be in unity with nature. While the first line of argument is elaborated in Rousseau's political writings, the second is presented in his literary works. As a result, ecological theory is in fact faced with two Rousseaus: one that proposes only a formal relationship with nature insofar as citizens' political and economic association is an inevitability, and another that perceives man's realization as possible only through the proper fostering of his nature as well as his environment as a moral necessity. The majority of studies in ecological theory focus

on the second Rousseau, leaving the first one unquestioned and thus providing only half of the picture.

In the following pages, this study will first review how the ecological theory literature perceives the relationship between man and nature in Rousseau's philosophy. Then, it will elaborate on the notion of alienation, its 'natural' emergence, and Rousseau's political intervention to this problem. Finally, it will conclude by proposing that, despite the centrality of nature as a physical entity, the French philosopher's dichotomic solution remains trapped in an anthropocentric perspective.

2. Rousseau's nature as a moral domain

Embracing various strands within its field, ecological theory is certainly a diverse discipline that cannot be summarized with broad generalizations. However, a moral outlook in the problematization of the human-nature relationship is common to all its branches. As Ploof points out, the idea that "the environmental crisis is a moral problem in need of a moral solution" (2023: 308) is becoming a dominant view within the field. According to this line of argument, Ploof continues, the current ecological crisis is the direct result of anthropocentric hubris stemming from the separation between humankind and nature, which perceives the latter as being in service to the former. Seen as a combination of resources, nature is not only exterior to humanity, but also inferior since it lacks any rational order. The moral solution, then, is only possible by balancing the wrongdoings of hubris with a cultivated humility (Ploof, 2023: 308).

When reading Rousseau from an ecological point of view, one does not need to look far to find arguments supporting this position. In fact, as Vanderheiden (2002) demonstrates, four morally grounded approaches that emphasize the value of nature can be deduced from his writings. The first approach pertains to humans' obligation to avoid unnecessarily harming animals. Based on Boonin-Vail's (1993) analysis of the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, this line of argument locates Rousseau as an early potential defender of vegetarianism. Albeit provocative, the importance of such a view lies not in its inference but in its reasoning. According to Boonin-Vail, Rousseau's emphasis on the sentiment of pity, which defines the nature of humankind as morally good, necessarily extends to the suffering of animals, thus attributing a moral duty for their protection (1993: 78-79). In this picture, the Rousseauian notion of pity not only directs human actions as a moral compass; instead, the non-human environment becomes an integral part of humankind, based on the shared value of being sentient beings. As a result, Boonin-Vail argues that in Rousseau, protecting nature is less of a negative duty dictated by reason than a moral awareness necessary for humankind to subsist (1993: 82).

The second approach that Vanderheiden proposes arises from the question of private property. Renowned for his radical criticism of unlimited private property, Rousseau is clearly distinguished from his contemporaries. In fact, for the French philosopher, the very first act of appropriating the commons into private property is the beginning of inequality, which steadily worsens human conditions and causes all the miseries of modern society. In that sense, Vanderheiden correctly points out the economic injustice stemming from "illegal usurpation" of land into private property (2002: 178). However, according to him, Rousseau's rejection of the emergence of private property is not only based on the inevitable economic inequality that it initiates. To Vanderheiden, Rousseau is as much concerned with developing a land ethic as he is with the problem of inequality. Land acquisition has two more crucial impacts that harm persons in a non-economic manner. The first concerns deformation of communal values: "The land provides food and shelter, but also for less tangible goods, such as the social solidarity that comes from managing communal resources as well as personal independence that is denied when one relies upon another to meet basic needs" (Vanderheiden: 2002: 178). Thus, the unlimited appropriation of land results in the loss of a sense of justice. The second impact, however, is specific to the preservation of sustainable resource use. Rousseau's solution to the emergence of private property in the form of land appropriation is not to eliminate it, but to bring limitations so that "all have access to it in order to meet basic needs, but none can claim unjustly large shares to their own" (Vanderheiden: 2002: 179). This suggests that the land ethics that Rousseau proposes take into account preventive measures for the degradation of natural resources, while also guaranteeing intergenerational egalitarianism.

Clearly, the first two approaches that Vanderheiden introduces focus on the relationship between humankind and nature, where the latter is understood as a living organism whose existence is undeniably entwined with the former. Hence, the underlying morality addresses humans' duty to recognize nature as an integral part of their physical life, and hence protect it. In contrast to this, the remaining two approaches address nature as an abstract entity, which has an intrinsic value independent of humanity. Pitted against the Enlightenment's ideas of progress and instrumental rationality, these positions are grounded in the aesthetic and non-instrumental aspects of nature. Accordingly, the third approach is based upon Rousseau's later writings, such as *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* or *Botanical Writings,* in which he addresses nature as a source of profound aesthetic beauty as well as a source of spiritual remedy (Vanderheiden, 2002: 180). This aspect of Rousseau's writing has been an inspiring source for the Romantic Movement and nineteenth-century American transcendentalists, such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir. As compellingly demonstrated by LaFreniere's study, Rousseau's appreciation of nature in his late works found its reflections in "the pre-

environmentalism of Europe and America" (1991: 58). Concentrating on the corroding effect of progress, these schools of thought not only relied on Rousseau's arguments to develop a criticism of rising "modern industrial/technological society" of urban life (Lafreniere: 1991:46), but also proposed a return to pastoral nature and its tranquility and simplicity. However, the acute contrast portrayed between urban and pastoral lives was not just a description. For both the Romantics and the transcendentalists, preferring a life in direct relationship with nature suggested a "deeper sensibility and a higher morality" since it represented "the ultimate source of moral virtue beneath the facades and masks of a dehumanizing culture" (Lafreniere: 1991:57).

Aside from nature's inherent aesthetic value, Vanderheiden suggests a fourth moral ground available in Rousseau's writings. This final approach highlights the non-instrumental and holistic role of nature in his philosophy. For the Enlightenment tradition, the view that nature should serve humanity's needs is justified on the grounds of the lack of a rational system shaping nature's conduct. Following from this idea, as one could observe most succinctly in Locke's philosophy, nature is conceived not only as instrumental to human necessities, but also as a force that requires man's mastery over. Rousseau's position, however, is the exact opposite. Human reason's capacity to transform nature into an object of scientific research with endless categories and labels to arrive at a systematic agenda of how to rule it prevents us from "truly seeing nature as it is, apart from the conventions of human understanding" (Vanderheiden, 2002: 185). Not everything caused by natural forces serves human purposes. On the contrary, they might frequently appear to be destructive to human life, as in the case of disasters. Nonetheless, in the face of such events, inexplicable to human reason, Rousseau suggests the moral value of sacrifice for the greater good of "an entire ecosystem, or food chain that requires death in order to support life" (Vanderheiden, 2002: 187). Calling this "the order of nature", this moral position concludes that "humans comprise only a part of a larger circle of life, in respect of which they have no special status" (Vanderheiden, 2002: 186).

The four approaches that Vanderheiden presents are surely very convincing in the way they position Rousseau's philosophy vis-à-vis a moral ground concerning the human-nature relationship. His concern for the protection of non-human life, both in the case of animals and in his efforts to outline a land ethic, and his praise of nature from an aesthetic and non-instrumental perspective surely locates him "as a seminal pre-environmental thinker as well as the 'spiritual father' of the Green Movement" (Schneider, 1978, as cited in LaFreniere, 1991: 42). However, as much plausible as to make use of Rousseau's moral philosophy to elaborate on his views on nature, taken by themselves none of approaches suggests how the French

philosopher resolved, if he ever did, the problematic relationship between man and nature. For this, one needs to return to his political and economic philosophy.

3. Natural alienation in Rousseau

As Lane and Clark (2006:66) suggest, Rousseau's analysis of humankind's degradation from a peaceful, harmonious life with nature to the current state of being a master over nature and himself is not the first example of a "decline narrative". Rather, such narratives equating what is natural with the original or with the pure have been circulating since the times of polytheistic religions. In that respect, what distinguishes Rousseau's account of "humanity's fall" is his political philosophy, which, albeit critical of it, originates from the Enlightenment tradition. Thus, he begins his analysis of the nature of humankind with sine qua non elements of the tradition he belongs to: all humans are born free and equal. As a result, his depiction of the state of nature is built upon these two foundational assumptions. He declares that "man is born free" (Rousseau, 1994: 131) and "inequality is barely perceptible on the state of nature and that its influence there is almost null" (Rousseau, 1992: 42).

However, this is not to claim that Rousseau's state of nature is merely another version of the state of nature envisioned by other Enlightenment thinkers. In fact, if anything, it is the other way around. Rousseau (1992: 35; also 86-90, note: 10) harshly criticizes his predecessors, especially Hobbes and Locke, for not "carrying themselves back beyond the centuries of society" and associating the state of nature with all the perils of a corrupt civil society. It is true that they got one thing right: man is distinguished from the rest of nature by this freedom. "The former chooses or rejects by instinct, and the latter by an act of freedom" (Rousseau, 1992: 25). In this free state of being, Rousseau's savage man lives an isolated, independent, and peaceful life thanks to his self-sufficient nature, which requires no possessions. Hence, the savage cares neither for other human beings nor animals, since there exists no immediate threat that would endanger the savage's life. His is a life of contentment in unity with nature.

Rousseau attributes two more distinct qualities to his savage. The first is the faculty of self-perfection, which he considers to be "the source of all man's misfortunes" (1992: 26), and the second is pity, which "inspires all men with natural goodness" (1992: 37). Although self-perfection and pity do not necessarily negate each other, in Rousseau's narration of humanity's fall, the two certainly act as contradictory forces. As the capacity for perfectibility transforms itself into the idea of progress, human beings' perception of nature also changes from seeing the inherent value of all living creatures to a utility-driven approach.

According to Rousseau, these three distinct qualities of the savage present him with a simple love of one's own immediate living (*amour de soi*). Roughly translated as love of oneself, *amour de soi,* is a natural sentiment that dictates all living creatures to preserve their lives, and also "directed in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue" (1992: 91-92, note: 12). By defining *amour de soi* as the dominant sentiment of human beings in the state of nature, Rousseau arrive at a full circle. Nature in its origin is self-sufficient, harmonious, and good, leaving no reason for any attempt to willfully change it.

However, nothing in nature is static. Thus, the cause for change originates from the dynamics inherent to nature, unlike the hypothetical transformation led by man's reason in Hobbes' or Locke's writings. Rousseau's portrayal of the initial sources of the change in nature is hasty and brief. Presumably, due to an increase in the human population, difficulties in natural conditions accumulate. Consequently, humankind's intervention in nature becomes more intense, as they become more skillful in inventing and utilizing tools for their survival, and more importantly, as they begin forming communities. It is at this stage, which Trachtenberg (2019: 488) refers to as "Nature 1.2", that humanity's feelings of superiority over the rest of nature emerge. In fact, what is taking place is much more crucial. For Rousseau, it is in this critical moment that the original moral sentiment of *amour de soi* leaves its place to the birth of *amour-propre*. In contrast to *amour de soi*, this new sentiment consists of situating oneself in relation to others. In an endless cycle of comparison, as Todorov explains "it leads to hatred of others and discontent oneself" (2001:8). The judgment of one's superiority (or inferiority), the need to rank the living creatures of nature according to their abilities, is the work of *amour-propre*, or vanity, and it constitutes the first step in human beings' alienation from nature. The fact that Rousseau depicts humankind's alienation from nature as a natural process makes this outcome both ironic and irreversible.

What follows the emergence of *amour-propre* is the gradual increase in humankind's alienation from all its natural qualities, except for the faculty of self-perfection. As humanity's reign over its surroundings increases, Rousseau anticipates the discovery of agriculture and metallurgy, resulting in a new form of social organization based on the division of labor. The new society clearly requires each member's collaborative effort, which steadily replaces humankind's original independent and self-sufficient existence with an interdependent one. By now, humanity not only destroyed the conditions that allowed it to be naturally free, but also established a culture in which *amour-propre* is fully functional in designing social hierarchies. The natural or physical inequalities, whose existence Rousseau readily accepts at the beginning of *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, become the criteria for distinguishing the members of society from one another. This inevitably leads to weakening, if not loss of, the sentiment of pity, which does not

discriminate among any living being. However, the biggest and the worst of humankind's misfortune took place with the invention of private property: "The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the founder of the civil society" (Rousseau, 1992: 43; emphasis in original). With the advent of private property, Rousseau argues, the moral equality of all humankind is forever destroyed. The initial alienation of humanity from nature, which was caused by natural dynamics, reaches its conclusion here. At the end of *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Rousseau authoritatively states that the current society is not only founded upon unjust conventions enslaving humanity, but it is also unnatural. To overcome this, his proposition is a second, but this time an artificial alienation.

4. Political alienation in Rousseau

Despite the numerous and even contradictory interpretations of Rousseau in the literature, there is one point on which all scholars agree: the narrative of humanity's fall from its natural condition is neither a call for a return nor a pessimistic conclusion concerning its future damnation. It is true that "the return to simplicity and happiness of the state of nature is barred to us, but the path of *freedom* lies open; it can and must be taken" (Cassier, 1954: 54; emphasis in original). Thus, if the natural alienation of humanity from nature is Rousseau's diagnosis, the political alienation that he proposes is the remedy.

Nevertheless, the proposed remedy is far from simple. To begin with, Rousseau reminds us that the alienation of human beings from nature leaves us with not one, but two problems. On the one hand, with the development of collaborative forms of production, such as agriculture and metallurgy, we have a form of society, albeit lacking in its political and moral values. The natural independence of humankind is now replaced by an interdependent relationship regulated by none other than *amour-propre*. On the other hand, the degenerating impact of vanity is not limited to social relationships. The loss of *amour de soi* also implies a tainted relationship of man to himself. Estranged from both nature and fellow species, man can no longer return to the unity and harmony that he once had. Hence, he now constitutes an autonomous entity. As Todorov (2001:13) puts it, though foreign to Rousseau's terminology, this entity's name is the individual. In other words, the solution to alienation from nature requires a twofold intervention: one for the making of "the citizen" and another for "the man".

For the careful readers of Rousseau, however, this is not the full prognosis. The citizen and the man are not two ideal units that complement each other. Nor do they coincide. Instead, Rousseau conceives them as two alternatives: "Forced to combat nature or the social institutions, one must choose between making a man or

a citizen, for one cannot make them both at the same time" (Rousseau, 1979: 39). Even though the two solutions appear to be incompatible, since their interests are not same, the cure that Rousseau offers for both options is the same: a second alienation. Humankind needs to alienate itself from its current nature, dominated by vanity. While for the first role of the man, Rousseau's method is to follow a carefully planned curriculum of education provided in an artificially constructed manner, as found in *Emile*, the second role of the citizen, he devises *The Social Contract*. Despite serving different purposes, common to both is the idea that humankind needs to transform itself, once more. Without a doubt, this time, the process is no longer natural but requires an intentional act. Failing to do so would result in perpetuating the catastrophic consequences of the initial natural alienation, which "gave fetters to the weak, and new forces to the rich, destroyed natural freedom for all time, established forever the law of property and inequality, changed a clever usurpation into an irrevocable right, and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjected the whole human race to work, servitude, and misery" (Rousseau, 1992: 54).

Whether it involves the education of the man to restore his unity with nature or the formation of a civil society to protect natural freedom and equality, both of Rousseau's solutions are political in nature to the extent that they pertain to the realization of democracy (Bloom, 1978: 138). In the first form of alienation, the reader witnesses the education of young Emile designed in a way to construct his *amour-propre* parallel to the principles of *amour de soi*. To achieve this almost impossible goal, Emile's life is built on a great artifice that would contain him by restricting his imagination, molding his desires, and channeling his *amour-propre*: "One must use a great deal of art to prevent social man from being totally artificial" (Rousseau, 1979: 317). Thus, Emile, unbeknownst to him, is kept isolated and never introduced to the conventional values of the outside world.

Ultimately, the construction of Emile's sense of himself depends upon his alienation from his surroundings. The outcome of this fictional curriculum, according to Rousseau, bears its fruits. The young man is neither cruel nor does he cause great harm, despite living for himself more than anyone else. His selfishness is not degenerative, as it is balanced by the sentiment of pity. Rousseau achieves establishing a peaceful life for Emile in unity with his nature through an external intervention. However, he insists that Emile is not "denatured" as "the citizen" (Rousseau, 1979: 40). Although the term "denature" might appear confusing, according to Horowitz (1987: 215), the difference between the terms alienation and denaturalization is best understood if the latter is contextualized as objectification. For Horowitz, the difference between alienation and objectification lies in their intensity. Emile's alienation from his vanity is an ongoing process, rather than a decisive moment in which man becomes conscious of his nature as the germ of all

wrongdoings and willfully transforms it. Keeping in mind that the proposed education in *Emile* primarily aims at the making of the man, and not the collective being of society, the goal is limited to preventing vanity from becoming the dominant sentiment shaping the young child's world.

However, this is clearly not the case for the rehabilitation of society, where *amour-propre* is not only fully developed but also determines the relationships among its members. Hence, Rousseau's suggestion for the making of the citizen is more uncompromising since it involves its members' active objectification of themselves. The fundamental premise of the social contract is to regain the lost state of freedom and equality of all. For Rousseau, its realization requires an act of alienation made without reservation by "each person giving himself, whole and entire" (1994: 138). This model is based on the ideal model of the Spartan citizen, who sees himself only as a part of the whole and thus willing to give himself for the whole because otherwise he is nothing. The formation of the *republic* or *body politic* (Rousseau, 1994: 139; emphasis in original) under the guidance of the general will signifies an artificial unity between humankind and his fellow species. However, it is clear that the citizen of the republic is no longer a natural man. "Good institutions are those that best know how to denature man, to take his absolute existence from him in order to give him a relative one and transport the I into the common unity, with the result that each individuals believe himself no longer one but a part of the unity and no longer feels except within the whole" (Rousseau, 1979: 40).

In sharp contrast to *Emile*, which aims to rehabilitate *amour-propre* closer to *amour de soi* by enabling alienation of the former, the *Social Contract* in fact utilizes vanity by taking it to its extreme. This time, Rousseau's goal is not to weaken humankind's obsessions and concern for comparing himself with others. On the contrary, he thinks that taken to its limits, *amour-propre* could actually serve to unify individuals within the identity of citizenship. For that to happen, the individual needs to see himself only in terms of what others think of his citizenship. However, this is a delicate task that necessitates teaching man to overlook himself and to perceive his existence as meaningful only as a part of the whole. Thus, it is no surprise when Rousseau (1994: 141) declares that "whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body; which means only that he will be forced to be free".

Ultimately, Rousseau's political intervention fosters a formal unity among humankind by channeling individual vanity into the larger body of the republic. This allows the citizen to avoid all conflicts between private passions and public obligations. Virtuous citizens identify completely with their political community by subsuming their self-interest to the common good. With this, Rousseau's second remedy comes to a conclusion. Having outlined his options, the French philosopher

makes clear that without a process of alienation, humankind cannot achieve a form of unity with its nature. In other words, Rousseau sees no other way than killing our nature (*amour-propre*), in order to save it.

5. Conclusion

This study has argued that any attempt to reconcile Rousseau's philosophy with ecological theory must consider the profound and unresolved dichotomy at the heart of his thought—the dichotomy structured around the concept of alienation. While ecological theory often draws upon Rousseau's moral writings to highlight his appreciation for nature as both a living entity and a source of moral orientation, such readings often shed light only on half the story. The widespread tendency in ecological literature to emphasize Rousseau's reveries on the aesthetic and spiritual value of nature, his early defense of sentient beings, and his critique of private property and modern industrial society undoubtedly positions him as a seminal precursor to contemporary environmentalism. Indeed, as this study has shown, the four moral approaches outlined by Vanderheiden (2002), ranging from the protection of non-human life to the non-instrumental appreciation of nature, demonstrate the enduring relevance of Rousseau's moral philosophy for contemporary ecological discourse.

Yet, these interpretations often remain insulated from the broader framework of Rousseau's political and economic thought, which is equally central to his conception of the human-nature relationship. By isolating the "moral Rousseau" from the "political Rousseau", ecological theory risks ignoring the very tensions that make his philosophy so compelling. This study has sought to address this oversight by situating Rousseau's thought within the dual trajectory of natural and political alienation. Rousseau's diagnosis of humanity's fall, where the original harmony between humankind and nature is gradually eroded by the emergence of *amour-propre*, private property, and interdependent social arrangements, presents alienation as a natural and irreversible process. Importantly, this alienation is not merely psychological or ethical, but structural: a consequence of the fundamental shift from a solitary, self-sufficient existence governed by *amour de soi* to a socially mediated identity shaped by vanity, comparison, and institutional inequality.

To respond to this condition, Rousseau devises a second, artificial form of alienation that he views as redemptive. As elaborated, this takes the form of two distinct interventions: the pedagogical project in *Emile* and the political formation described in *The Social Contract*. In the former, Rousseau seeks to reconstruct the moral man by carefully molding the child's development in a way that curbs the corrupting influence of *amour-propre* while preserving the virtues of *amour de soi*. However, this return to a form of natural moral unity is made possible only through

an elaborate artifice, a paradox that underscores the impossibility of returning to nature without simultaneously transforming it. In the latter, Rousseau turns to the figure of the citizen, whose freedom is realized not through the isolated upbringing of Emile but through total alienation to the general will. Here, the solution is even more radical: by objectifying himself as a part of the collective body, the individual ceases to exist in his natural form and becomes a denatured political subject. The body politic, while capable of generating formal freedom and equality, necessarily breaks the ontological continuity between humankind and the natural world.

This dual structure of alienation, both educational and political, as well as individual and collective, reveals that a dichotomy haunts Rousseau's ecological insight. On one side, nature is the origin and moral compass of humanity; on the other, it is something that must be transcended, even abandoned, to ensure the viability of political life. This tension results in a bifurcation within Rousseau's oeuvre, where the literary and moral texts advocate for an intrinsic, almost spiritual unity with nature, while the political writings demand its instrumentalization for the sake of social cohesion. Consequently, ecological theorists who rely solely on Rousseau's moral writings without acknowledging the constraints and demands of his political framework risk presenting an idealized and ultimately incomplete image.

The final point concerns the anthropocentric limits of Rousseau's ecological vision. Despite his profound sensitivity to nature's degradation and early recognition of intergenerational justice, Rousseau's framework remains centered on human emancipation, whether in the form of personal virtue or political freedom. Nature, while morally and aesthetically valued, is ultimately subordinated to the needs and transformations of humankind. Even in his most passionate defenses of nature, Rousseau's goal is not to articulate a non-anthropocentric ethic, but rather to restore a lost human wholeness through nature's mediation. Thus, although his thought opens valuable avenues for ecological reflection, it also underscores the limitations of framing environmental concerns solely within the domain of human morality and politics. In this regard, his legacy for ecological theory is both foundational and fraught, inviting a deeper engagement not only with his reverence for nature but also with the political dilemmas that reverence entails.

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Özet

‘Doğayı’ kurtarmak için onu öldür: Rousseaucu ikilem ve ekolojik kuram

Bu çalışma, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’nun düşüncesi ile ekolojik kuram arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi, felsefesinin etrafında döndüğü eksen olan yabancılaşma kavramını öne çıkararak çözümlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ekoloji literatürünün büyük bir kısmı, Rousseau’nun araçsal akılcılığa karşı çıkışı, merhamet vurgusu ve toprak etiğine verdiği destek gibi unsurlarda kendini gösteren doğaya yönelik ahlaki saygısını ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Ancak bu tür yorumlar, onun ahlaki yazılarını çoğu zaman siyasi ve ekonomik felsefesinin daha geniş bağlamından yalıtarak ele alır. Bu durum, Rousseau’nun düşüncesine içkin olan paradoksların gözden kaçırılması riskini doğurmaktadır. Bu çalışma, doğal yabancılaşmadan siyasal yabancılaşmaya geçiş sürecini takip ederek, Rousseau’nun insanlığın doğadan kopuşuna yönelik çözümünün aslında daha derin bir yabancılaşmayı (biçimsel, kasıtlı ve kurumsallaşmış) içerdiğini öne sürmektedir. Her ne kadar bu ikinci yabancılaşma özgürlük ya da erdemin yeniden inşasını mümkün kılsa da bunu ancak insanlık ile doğa arasındaki organik bağın koparılması pahasına gerçekleştirir. Sonuç olarak, Rousseau doğa ile ahlaki bir birlik kurma gerekliliği ile vatandaşlık yaşamının siyasal zorunlulukları arasında derin ve çözümlenmemiş bir gerilim ortaya koyar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ekolojik kuram, yabancılaşma, doğa.