

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Royalist and Rousseauist all the same

November 28, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Proprietors, whoever you are, beware of supporting a false doctrine. Men who have nothing are not your equals.

— Antoine Joseph de Barruel-Beauvert, *Cri de l'honneur et de la vérité aux propriétaires* (1792)

What little we know of Antoine Joseph de Barruel-Beauvert's (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoine_Joseph_Barruel-Beauvert) (it appears his nobiliary particle is disputed) biography presents quite the fascinating picture. Born in 1757, he serves as a militiaman, was an attempted savior of Louis XVI, a royalist newspaper editor after the Thermidorian reaction, then is pursued and hides out over at the house of the co-founder of probably the single most leftist organization of its time in the 1790s (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society_of_the_Friends_of_Truth) alongside Thomas Paine, then becomes a Bonapartist and dies a Bourbon legitimist in 1817, shortly after the (Second) Restoration — after the brief interregnum involving Napoleon's Hundred Days.

But, what really caught my attention is the fact that he is credited as writing the first biography of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in 1789. Not a takedown, either, but one of strong admiration.

How he must have changed his mind.

Except, I don't think he really ever did.

Given the political climate he lived in, he did shift loyalties a lot, much of it presumably out of reasons of survival. This makes it difficult to track down his beliefs, but nevertheless there are some constants throughout his writings over the years.

In the same brief pamphlet from 1792 mentioned here in the beginning in which he tells property-owners that "men who have nothing are not your equals," he further adds that "true citizens are those who have possessions." The rest are merely "proletarians," who are all to prone to follow "passionate clubbists," "men of license," "those who love blind domination," and so forth.

In July 1799, he publishes an incendiary pamphlet of about 80 pages or so entitled La lanterne magique republicaine (<https://archive.org/details/lalanternemagiqu00barr>).

It is a vivid and detailed critical account of the events of the Revolution, with a very consistent literary device. He consistently prefixes his sentences with an exhortation to the reader that he “see”: “Voyez...” For instance:

“See the bloody heads that these antropophages carry at the end of their pikes...”

“See the possessions assigned to archbishoprics, bishoprics, abbeys, priories, simple benefices, congregations, brotherhoods, factories and works of parishes, & c. invaded and dilapidated.”

“See all the convents and lands which are dependent upon them, which have become national property, acquired for free, or without charge, by means of enormous packets of assignats distributed to the revolutionaries, to attach them to this new order of things.”

“See the federalism of Bordeaux, that of Lyons, and the siege of that city, by Chalier, Collot-d’Herbois, Dubois-Crasse, Couthon, & c., Which, after much good ransom, extorted, pillaged, slaughtered most citizens of all sexes and all ages; after having guillotined, drowned, burned, buried alive many others...”

“See the recruitment of three hundred thousand men... the troops divided into 14 army corps, which must fight Germany, Spain, Sardinia and England, allied against the Convention, threatening to revolutionize, to invade the whole globe, since the King of Prussia withdrew from the coalition, in defiance of the Declaration of Pillnitz, and Gustavus, King of Sweden, is assassinated. This forced recruitment; the army, properly so-called revolutionary, which, like a devouring volcano, never ceases to spread its ravages over all French territory: revolutionary committees and tribunals; the popular societies, and the constituted authorities which perfectly support this volcano; innumerable prisons of all kinds; the scaffolds erected on all sides; permanent guillotines; blood running over all the places and intersections; requisitions of men, horses, corn, fodder, etc., ever-increasing impositions; finally, pillage, murder, fires, rapes, the scarcity of necessities; the absolute want of bread...”

Hard-hitting stuff. Not exactly what you’d expect from an admirer of the Rousseauist vision in those times.

Barruel-Beauvert’s last publication, in 1815, was an address to the Chamber of Deputies (<https://books.google.com/books?id=MURZAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover>) under the Restoration.

In it, he makes a passionate case for the lustration of Bonapartist officials and civil servants. The shining lights of French accomplishment to him now, are the playwrights, dramatists, poets and writers of the age of Louis XIV: Bossuet, Fenelon, La Bruyere, Corneille, Racine, Moliere, etc. Voltaire himself probably would not have disagreed. The “Buonapartian tyranny” is said to be “the worst that existed.”

Throne and altar are reaffirmed:

The organs between man and God are prayers, ministers of religion and altars. The organs between the Sovereign and the subjects are the established powers, whose hierarchy reaches the steps of the throne.

The “established powers” in question being the peerage, and more recently, the new representative assembly.

At the end of the address, he shows no leniency: exiles and tortures must be employed against those who the King cannot forgive (as opposed to those men who were merely “lost” in the revolution, he says), and these include: “the assassins of the prisoners, the regicides, and the officers of all ranks, who, having passed through all the sewers of the revolution, had come to purify themselves by a last oath of to be faithful to the legitimate Sovereign, yet who have betrayed him for the monster, usurper and tyrant [Buonaparte], charged with the weight of all his crimes.”

Already by 1807, he had repudiated Rousseau. The *Actes des philosophes, et des republicains* (<https://books.google.com/books?printsec=frontcover&id=0fKetrFP7x8C>) is in many ways a standard anti-philosophe work of the era, but also quite vehement in its passion. Around p.21, he speaks of “Contrat Social by the sophist J.J. Rousseau,” and 10 pages later Barruel-Beauvert really unloads his ammunition on Rousseau’s legacy:

O philosophy! What indemnities did you grant [Rousseau]? Of an egoistic, defiant, gloomy, and jealous character, Jean-Jacques often borrowed opinions favorable to his eyes, which his conscience always refused him. He hated, with all his soul, the religion of the country he inhabited; good morals, which he slandered and preached alternately, without ever practicing them; the noblesse of the high court, whom he sought with a sort of coquetry, and which he maligned ... This philosopher could no longer maintain his perfect hypocrisy, and would neither live nor die obscurely. — Observe, among the many inconsistencies with which his works are filled, the ample plan of education he gives in his *Emile*, and you will see the wife of this carpenter, shaped like him, with his own hands, deserve to be shut up in a borstal, and the husband sent to the galleys.

But on the other hand, he adds quite interestingly that Rousseau is “the worst of all, because he is the [philosophe] whom one distrusts the least.”

Now, come section LXXXVH ~p.210, we get a comment on the encyclopedistes, and his fundamental complaint is regarding their unworthiness and blindness: “They carried their lips to the cup of power; and the vanity of these masters can not suffer the very idea of an indispensable subordination. They have formed a character of stiffness, which does not allow them to recognize the distances, natural and political, of society.” This more so than any well-developed political theory of his own, which is a conventional absolutist perspective of the day.

Alright, now let’s actually see Barruel-Beauvert’s first publication, the aforementioned biography: *Vie de J.J. Rousseau* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=rJc9AAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover>) (1789).

It is a very uneven and haphazard work, to be sure. Various letters are stitched together prior to the biography itself (which starts at p.154), which draws heavily from Rousseau’s own *Confessions* published posthumously in 1782.

Rousseau’s political philosophy is not discussed in any great depth. Nevertheless, the praise heaped on him is substantial. And I do mean substantial:

In talking about politics and government, he becomes the new rival of Lycurgus, of Solon, of Montesquieu: his ideas are as luminous as they are vast, extensive, profound; and we can only admire the legislator, whose justice, benevolence, wisdom, would make the human race happy... As genius applies to everything, it is not doubtful that Jean-Jacques would have been a great minister, an excellent sovereign...

How he ate those words by the time he got to the *Actes* nearly two decades later.

In Letter II at the beginning of the work, Barruel-Beauvert reproduces a letter (presumably his) to a certain comte de Crussol-Montausier, which in any case hints as to his own political philosophy.

He favors freedom of the press, convening the Estates-General and greater equality of taxation. At one point, he mentions the comte d'Antraigues as having published one of the "most reasonable pamphlets" (I beg to differ (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/10/04/old-school-cuckservatism/>)) Barruel-Beauvert is very loyal to the king, in fact he interprets him as being just gleeful for reforms. Notably, he stresses the importance of the "union of three estates" and "the nation [assembled] in body."

He goes on to insert the famous quotation from Rousseau's *Discourse on Political Economy* about the "salutary organ of the will of all," considering it to be a pristine insight, and gives his well wishes that Rousseau "long enjoy the glory he has so well deserved."

"Why should not the laws and customs be the same in all the provinces of the kingdom?," Barruel-Beauvert asks.

Barruel-Beauvert's monarchism, then, was a national monarchism. A monarchism more leaning toward civic equality than to class distinction. We can see why some aspects of Rousseau's thought on representation and the nature of law may have appealed to him, but overall we are still an impasse. I suppose it's time we dive into the source material. Yes, Rousseau himself.

How about, I don't know... Constitutional Project for Corsica (<http://www.constitution.org/jjr/corsica.htm>).

Alright, let's see what democratic babble we find in here:

A taste for agriculture promotes population not only by multiplying the means of human subsistence, but also by giving the body of the nation a temperament and a way of life conducive to an increased birth-rate. In all countries, the inhabitants of the countryside have more children than city-dwellers, partly as a result of the simplicity of rural life, which creates healthier bodies, and partly as a result of its severe working-conditions, which prevent disorder and vice. For, other things being equal, those women who are most chaste, and whose senses have been least inflamed by habits of pleasure, produce more children than others; and it is no less certain that men enervated by debauchery, the inevitable fruit of idleness, are less fit for generation than those who have been made more temperate by an industrious way of life.

...And I get an agrarian patriarchalist manifesto. Damn.

In his Corsican constitutional plan, Rousseau draws a distinction between "feudal nobility" and "political nobility." The first is bad, he says, because it is outside the constitution and sovereignty of the state. The second is fine because the individuals in it comprise a single indivisible body subordinate to the state, "equal by birth in titles, privileges and authority."

"The fundamental law of your new constitution must be equality," Rousseau states.

What he means by equality includes the abolition of money, deliberate cultivation of arid soil to produce a stronger work ethic and reduce idleness, a ban on all foreign trade, avoidance of domestic commerce always where possible, and abolition of pecuniary taxation in favor of forced labor instead:

I derive a third sort of revenue, the best and surest of all, from men themselves, using their labour, their arms and their hearts, rather than their purses, in the service of the fatherland, both for its defence, in the militia, and for its utility, in corvées on public works.

Do not let the word corvee frighten republicans! I know that it is held in abomination in France; but is it so held in Switzerland? The roads there are also built by corvées, and no one complains. The apparent convenience of money payment can delude none but superficial minds; and it is a sure principle that the fewer the intermediaries between need and service, the less onerous the service should be.

Continuous labor leaves no time to become acquainted with the passions.

(In the *Social Contract* itself, he categorically states as a general principle of political economy that “it is better for this excess [surplus product] to be absorbed by the government than dissipated among the individuals.”)

Hm, what about Considerations on the Government of Poland (<http://www.constitution.org/jjr/poland.htm>)?

Well, he does loathe hereditary power, true enough: “Hereditary in the crown and freedom in the nation will always be incompatible.”

Furthermore, he states that the best safeguard to liberty in Poland has been “frequency of the diets, [and] the frequent re-election of the deputies” — rotation and an active legislature as positive goods.

He is an anti-corporatist, for the usual argument that it constitutes an *imperium in imperio*, which leads him to recommend modern vote-by-head:

I say that this is a defect; for the senate, as a particular corporate group within the state, necessarily has corporate interests which are different from those of the nation, and which may even, in certain respects, be contrary to them. But the law, which is only the expression of the general will, is properly a resultant of all the particular interests combined and balanced in proportion to their number; but corporate interests, because of their too great weight, would upset the balance, and ought not, in their collective capacity, to be included in it. Each individual should have a vote; no corporate group of any kind should have one. But if the senate had too much weight in the diet, it would not only bring its interests to bear upon it, but would make them preponderant.

But Rousseau is also intensely nationalistic, it turns out.

This is made quite obvious in Chapter IV, “Education.” Every true republican lives for nothing and sees nothing but the fatherland. National education, moreover, is only proper to free men, which means men who enjoy a collective existence bound by law. “At twenty, a Pole ought not to be a man of any other sort; he ought to be a Pole. I wish that, when he learns to read, he should read about his own land; that at the age of ten he should be familiar with all its products, at twelve with all its provinces, highways, and towns; that at fifteen he should know its whole history, at sixteen all its laws; that in all Poland there should be no great action or famous man of which his heart and memory are not full, and of which he cannot give an account at a moment’s notice.”

All teachers ought to be Poles. Not only that, he suggests that they preferably all be married men. Physical exercise is the most important part of education (healthy bodies breed virtue), and public education must bring rich and poor together. Rousseau further recommends a special system of

scholarships that doubles as a national badge of honor, its recipients receiving the title of *children of the state*.

In Book III, Chapter IX of the *Social Contract*, Rousseau advances a novel at that time theory of the end of political association. Rather than any of the more conventional answers, he locates it in the autarkic stimulation of population growth: “The rest being equal, the government under which, without external aids, without naturalisation or colonies, the citizens increase and multiply most, is beyond question the best. The government under which a people wanes and diminishes is the worst.”

Rousseau’s general schema of sovereignty is also largely absolutist, not radically dissimilar from Filmer’s. Sovereignty cannot alienate itself or submit to another sovereign, and it is indivisible, “for will either is, or is not general; it is the will either of the body of the people, or only of a part of it,” in the first case, he says, being law, and in the second a mere decree.

His main gripes with Filmer are two. First, Rousseau imposes a certainly equality constraint on emanations of sovereignty (lest it be a particular and not general will), but this is not merely because of Rousseau’s democratic sympathies, but also to make sovereignty *more* firmly absolute:

We can see from this that the sovereign power, absolute, sacred and inviolable as it is, does not and cannot exceed the limits of general conventions, and that every man may dispose at will of such goods and liberty as these conventions leave him; so that the Sovereign never has a right to lay more charges on one subject than on another, because, in that case, the question becomes particular, and ceases to be within its competency.

It is this particular-general will distinction that he cites in the *Discourse on Political Economy* also to briefly deal with Filmer. Rousseau rejects the familial model of the state, because according to him a father need only follow his natural inclinations and guard himself from depravity to be a good patriarch, but a magistrate who follows his natural inclinations is immediately a traitor.

So... Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He may have been a democrat, he may have been an egalitarian, but he wasn’t particularly progressive. Not too outrageous that some young reform-minded royalist could have taken a liking to him. There’s even a certain clique in academia, most notably represented by Graeme Garrard, who regard Rousseau as a founder of the Counter-Enlightenment. I don’t know if I’d go that far, but make of it what you will.

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4 thoughts on “Royalist and Rousseauist all the same”

1. Pingback: [Royalist and Rousseauist all the same | Reaction Times](#)

2. [quaslacrimas](#) says:

[November 29, 2017 at 11:54 pm](#)

Good points. I try not to waste too much time defending the Enlightenment (least of all Rousseau) to fellow right-wingers, but Rousseau’s writing doesn’t match the symbolic value his words have acquired. Rousseau was far from thinking the French(!) could ever become a republic. And even if

they were not already too corrupt for political life, his views imply it would have been a *monarchical* republic. Oligarchic governments like the National Assembly only work in states roughly the size of Venice/Holland.

Indeed, he didn't even support the American Revolution.

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Not novel, the link between fecundity and good government was taken for granted from the Renaissance on. Augustus Caesar made a speech to this effect, Livy and Tacitus both think about populousness this way; I think it might have been a trope of classical historiography.

Reply.

3. Vladimir says:

December 1, 2017 at 3:04 am

Rousseau sounds odd to us because ever since the French Revolution (and in England even somewhat before), we've been used to having clear political and ideological focal points of "left" and "right." Practically any proposal for applying or strengthening state power during this period has been coming from someone belonging to a faction that's intuitively recognizable as a leftist or rightist one.

In this regard, from our perspective the 18th century was an odd time, when the power of states and their ability to centralize it grew, but there was no clear sense of what this power would or should ultimately be used for. Hence various Enlightenment authors are all over the map, mixing clearly "leftist" ideas and goals with what now seems like strikingly rightist or even reactionary ones. But this shouldn't be confusing or surprising.

Reply.

4. marcusmontisursinensis says:

December 2, 2017 at 7:20 pm

Considering Rousseau, progressivism extracted the most perverted aspects of his thought, while the many cases where he calls for careful consideration and speaks against over-simplifications remain obscure.

Indeed, does an Ivy League student of political science read Rousseau without extensive comments written by 20th century progressive Ivy League professor? Rousseau's writings are one thing. The authoritative interpretation of those writings by the Progressivist Church Synod is another, and much more important thing, the one that really matters.

His Emile (On education) is a bullshit, and the way he treated his own (bastard) children considering upbringing and education should be a warning sign for everyone.

His work being summed is an analogy of any heresy being poisonous for the salvation of souls. It is enough to negate only one dogma of the Church to be a heretic and pave one's way to hell. Likewise, the several most poisonous of his thoughts came to overwhelm all the rest. The bureaucratic super-state that makes any other individual our enemy and any declares any arising natural authority oppression (which is, something metaphysically evil) is a true godchild of Jean-Jacques.

Reply.

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