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Book Review

Geneviève Rousselière: *Sharing Freedom: Republicanism and Exclusion in Revolutionary France*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. Pp. x, 256.)

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In "Of the Original Contract" David Hume remarks that, while the Athenian republic was the most "extensive democracy that we read of in history," it excluded more than 90 percent of those subject to the law from participation.[1] Republics are not known, historically, for being inclusive. And yet, the republican thought of the French evolution stands synonymous, for many, with equality. Geneviève Rousselière, in this excellent book, argues that in order to understand some of the paradoxes inherent in French republicanism, we need to study its historical roots. Central to her argument is the claim that French revolutionaries did not invent an entirely new kind of republicanism, but rather, they put together various sources and influences and attempted to apply the result to their particular circumstances, on a large scale and during a state of emergency. This effort led to paradoxes that remain very much present in republican politics.

The first three chapters investigate the intellectual history of French revolutionary republicanism, tracing its origins (in Athens and Rome, Machiavelli, and seventeenth-century England) through its eighteenth-century influences in Montesquieu and Rousseau. What is original about Rousselière's account is that she takes seriously Rousseau's contribution to the possibility of large-scale republicanism, based on a reading of book 4 of *Of the Social Contract*. Chapter 3 gives an account of the evolution of republicanism during the Revolution, starting with those who embraced it early because they had been brought up on a diet of classical republican texts (Manon Roland, Camille Desmoulins, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the Robert/Keralio couple, and the Condorcet/Grouchy one), and then moving on to Robespierre, who first succeeded in applying it to the entire nation.

The historical mishmash that was French revolutionary republicanism, in particular the appeal to two different traditions to define liberty, as non-domination (neo-Roman) and as self-government (neo-Athenian), created two paradoxes. The first is the paradox of Republican Emancipation: republicanism seems to call for universal freedom from domination and yet, if self-

[1]David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1985), 473.

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government is also a condition for freedom, this excludes anybody who is not currently capable of governing themselves, that is, anyone who has not been educated in the ways of politics or simply reasoning, and anyone who has hitherto lived under the domination of another. This leads to the conclusion that only those who are already free (i.e. not dominated) can be emancipated.

Chapter 5, "The Paradox of National Universalism," discusses the second paradox. Republicanism citizenship is by its nature universal—it is not dependent on cultural allegiances. But the sort of republicanism defended during the Revolution requires a sovereign nation, and belonging to a nation requires allegiance to a particular culture or sets of cultures. This requirement had some clearly contradictory consequences: at the same time as the French government handed out French citizenship to foreigners (some of whom, like Paine, did not speak French), the French language was unified (under what was spoken in the North, i.e., Paris) and teachers were sent out to schools throughout the country to ensure that children were not taught in any variants of the selected language.

The consequences of the first paradox, discussed in chapter 4, are more spectacular, as they led to the exclusion from the rights of citizenship of a large part of the population, including all women, all the enslaved people of the French colonies, as well as free Black individuals. Rousselière sets out what the (possible and actual) responses to this paradox were. The first is simply elitism: following Sieyès, this meant accepting that not everyone could actively participate in government. To do so required education and leisure. This meant that most of the Third Estate (whom Sieyès defended so well in his article "What is the Third Estate") and all women are excluded from active citizenship. They are to be passive citizens, benefitting from the republic, but not participating in it. The enslaved are not even considered passive citizens, but free Black men (not women) might be.

The second solution, progressivism, is exemplified in Condorcet's attitude to slavery. The enslaved are not, while they are enslaved, capable of self-government. But if emancipation happens slowly, they can progressively be reintegrated into free society, as laborers, and become possible candidates for passive citizenship (after a few generations). The third (and only palatable) option, radicalism, requires the immediate emancipation of everyone. This was the position that Olympe de Gouges defended as far as slavery was concerned. She shared Robespierre's view that human beings were naturally virtuous and thought that, because the enslaved were closer to nature than their masters, they were more virtuous. Rousselière does not consider Gouges's position, perhaps because she does not think of her as a republican (173). Although like many revolutionaries Gouges started off as a royalist, she soon became a republican and died defending the republic against what she saw as Robespierre's abuses. So, her response to the emancipation paradox (though in many ways still problematic) is worth taking seriously.

The section on Sophie de Grouchy's republicanism is particularly interesting, as it suggests that there was an opening for a more inclusive and feminist

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road to emancipation: Grouchy appeals to economic and educational reforms. One cannot but be dependent if one is too poor to care for oneself and one's children. A better distribution of resources, one which avoids extreme inequality, is thus needed for republican emancipation. Grouchy does not call for economic equality. Her position is much closer to that of Ingrid Robeyns's limitarianism, namely, that everyone should have enough; no one should have a surplus so large that it sets them apart from the rest of humanity.

The paradoxical nature of French revolutionaries' attempts at creating a republic has not, of course, previously gone unnoticed. But often this is seen as a mere failure to follow through on their principles or a blind spot regarding the humanity of anyone who is not part of the small group of leaders: an "unreflective obliviousness" (142). Rousselière shows the problem to be greater than that. Had the French revolutionaries been entirely true to their principles at all times, they would probably still have floundered, because they embraced principles from different historical sources, and these simply didn't fit together. Freedom cannot be, at the same time and in equal proportions, a state of non-domination and the capacity for self-government. And it is not possible to be at the same time a cosmopolitan (a political universalist) and a nationalist. The French revolutionaries did not have time to refine or reconcile their principles. The same cannot be said, however, of the current French republicans, and, in the introduction and conclusion, Rousselière makes a convincing case that the paradoxes in French politics remain, in particular when it comes to the treatment of disadvantaged minorities and famously in the "affaire du foulard," the attempt to exclude young women who wear a headscarf from state schools.

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