Michael Locke McLendon: *The Psychology of Inequality: Rousseau's Amour-Propre*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. Pp. 224.)

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Michael Locke McLendon's insightful book presents Rousseau as "a populist in the best sense of the word," "dedicated to the freedom and dignity of the average person" (160). His Rousseau is a secular Augustinian, criticizing the emerging liberal order of his time for giving free rein to an aristocratic passion: *amour-propre*, self-love or pride, which leads ineluctably to the *libido dominandi*—the passion for domination. This Rousseau "[offends the] sensibilities" of a commercial, meritocratic society, and particularly its winners—which is just why he deserves our attention (2).

McLendon's stated aim is to challenge the trend in scholarship that seeks to revive interest in Rousseau "by minimizing his radicalism and assimilating it into mainstream liberalism," including the work of N. J. H. Dent, Laurence D. Cooper, and Frederick Neuhouser (7). But his book might also be brought into conversation with recent books about populism and meritocracy, from Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* and Andrew Markovits's *Against Meritocracy* to Michael Lind's *The New Class War* and Pankaj Mishra's *Age of Anger*. For McLendon's Rousseau is the first great critic of the talent-based hierarchies liberalism most prides itself on creating. He reminds us that "the true measure of democracy" is not whether it gives all an equal chance in a ruthless scramble for status, but whether it can offer "a dignified life to the ordinary mass of humans" (2, 54).

McLendon argues that *amour-propre* is aristocratic: it is not the desire for recognition, which might be satisfied on egalitarian terms; it is the relentlessly inegalitarian desire to be *first*. Rousseau's systematic critique of this aristocratic passion might seem strangely timed, coming at the moment when the old European aristocracy was breathing its last and the new commercial democracies were being born. For McLendon's Rousseau, however, the real drama of his age was not the replacement of aristocracy by democracy but a clash of rival aristocracies. Feudal aristocracy, which gave primacy to military prowess, was challenged first by courtly aristocracy, which valued refinement, and then, more decisively, by the aristocracy of talent, tenacity, and pluck that dominated the Paris of Rousseau's own age and continues its dominance today (29–39). For all the differences among these successive orders, they each give license to the aristocratic desire to dominate. In the literary meritocracy of the Paris of the philosophes, "the social esteem accorded to intellectual talent and genius [demeaned] the overwhelming mass of ordinary citizens" (38). The souls of the winners in such a hierarchy are dominated by vanity and contempt; the souls of the losers, by envy and self-loathing (41).

The deepest source of Rousseau's analysis of *amour-propre*, McLendon argues, is St. Augustine. Although Rousseau has decisive differences with Augustine on questions such as original sin, and never cities him as a

source for his understanding of *amour-propre*, he "wrote in an Augustinian age," in which the bishop of Hippo's ideas were everywhere discussed (59). The seventeenth century had seen an Augustinian revival, represented most famously in the Jansenism of thinkers such as Blaise Pascal and Pierre Nicole. McLendon sees two threads in the thought of these neo-Augustinians: a pessimism that sees *amour-propre* as rooted in original sin and leading to the *libido dominandi*, and an optimism that draws on Augustine's remarks to the effect that, though *amour-propre* is ultimately sinful, it can be channeled in socially beneficial ways. According to McLendon, the neo-Augustinians choose to highlight the optimistic side of Augustine's analysis of *amour-propre*, a move of decisive significance, which issued ultimately in the famous formula of Bernard Mandeville: Private vices, public benefits (84–92).

Against this optimistic view of the social utility of properly channeled vice, McLendon's Rousseau recovers "Augustine's patented pessimism" (93). He warns the emerging commercial, administrative, and intellectual meritocracy that "a society that relies on vice for its moral psychology should expect the worst" (94). In a distinctive reading of the *Second Discourse*, McLendon shows that Rousseau's polemical target in that essay is the "overvaluation of talent and innate inequalities" (102–3). As an alternative to the aristocratic self-understanding he sees pervading modern commercial society, Rousseau proposes the democratic dispositions of the citizens of his ideal republics and of his Émile, which genuinely "minimize" the self (111–22). In his preference for the public recognition of qualities "people can equally participate in, such as religion and patriotism," McLendon contends that Rousseau has almost no followers: the French Revolutionaries and Marxists who imitate him in so many ways nonetheless assume, with the liberals, the natural alliance between democratic equality and the prerogatives of talent. As a critic of the overprizing of talent, Rousseau is "almost alone on his own island" (105, 111).

The Psychology of Inequality concludes with a chapter on Tocqueville, who learned much from Rousseau's teaching on *amour-propre*. Tocqueville shared Rousseau's Augustinian preoccupation with the *libido dominandi*, and saw—as Rousseau perhaps did not—that it could operate in the souls of the democratic many (162). But McLendon's overall point, here, seems to be to offer a Rousseauan corrective of the Tocquevillean view of liberal democracy, one more focused on the passion for domination that corrupts the souls of the wealthy and powerful, which Tocqueville saw but did not sufficiently emphasize (156).

While that charge seems reasonable, this final chapter is the book's weakest. McLendon never makes a convincing case that a book on "Rousseau's *amour-propre*" should include a chapter on Tocqueville, and his reading of Tocqueville is in places unfair. He speculates that Tocqueville's sympathies with the workers who suffer in the emerging order of industrial capitalism "may be disingenuous," but the only evidence he gives to support that

claim seems to prove the opposite (156). And while McLendon claims that "if history were contingent, [Tocqueville] would work for the restoration of the old regime," Tocqueville explicitly rejects that possibility, not merely because he thought democracy inevitable but because he thought it enjoyed God's favor for its superior justice (159).

McLendon does a similar injustice to Pascal, whom he lumps together with other neo-Augustinians in "embracing the most optimistic strands of thinking in Augustine and making them the mainsprings of their political thought" (84). While Pascal momentarily marvels that vices can be manipulated so as to produce an "image of charity," his overall verdict on *amour-propre* plainly requires its complete renunciation in favor of the anguished search for God. Greater attention to Pascal might also have spared McLendon the error of supposing, with Rousseau, that any political community can "provide" or "ensure" "a dignified life for everyone" (54). For as Pascal teaches, human dignity ultimately resides in the free and dialogic relationship between God and man. To ask the political community to provide us with that dignity is to open the way for the complete political domination of the human soul, about which Augustinians such as Pascal and Tocqueville justly worry. The real danger in Rousseauan populism, from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first, lies in just this tendency to expect too much from politics.

Nonetheless, McLendon's populism "in the best sense of the word" help us see the perils of overvaluing talent and the importance of those genuinely democratic virtues, such as "humanity, courage, and moderation," that can be practiced by everyone (105). McLendon's original lesson from Rousseau is one our meritocratic moment needs to hear.

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Ryan Patrick Hanley: *Our Great Purpose: Adam Smith on Living a Better Life*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. viii, 157.)

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To borrow a term from Adam Smith that our author usefully explicates (74–77), this is a "lovely" book. If nothing else, it constitutes a superb short introduction to the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (hereafter *TMS*), which Smith published seventeen years before the *Wealth of Nations*. In addition to an introduction and an epilogue, Hanley provides twenty-nine chapters, each