

# Zeal without Fanaticism: Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the Religion of the Citizen

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**Abstract:** Jean-Jacques Rousseau is well known for his love of the ancients. His use of examples from Sparta and republican Rome emphasized what he found lacking in modern times. This article attempts to establish how Rousseau's views on the ancients are related to his religious-political thought, particularly as it relates to his description of citizen religion in the last chapter of the *Social Contract*. While Rousseau admired many aspects of citizen religion, he rejects it for two reasons: reasons of humanity in the *Geneva Manuscript* and reasons of self-interest in the *Social Contract*. This article attempts to understand how the two can be reconciled through the view of citizen religion's contribution to patriotism and fanaticism.

## Introduction

At the end of the *Social Contract*,<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau describes two types of religion “considered in relation to society”: “the Religion of man and that of

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<sup>1</sup>References to Rousseau are, first, to section numbers and pages in the English translation, then to the French edition. The English translations used are those of Victor Gourevitch, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), hereafter *EPW*; Victor Gourevitch, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), hereafter *LPW*; and Roger Masters and Christopher Kelly, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, 12 vols. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990–2006), hereafter *CW*. The French edition is *Œuvres complètes*, 5 vols., ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–1995). For frequently cited works, *E* = *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979) / *OC* 4; *DSA* = *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts, or First Discourse*, in *EPW* / *OC* 3; *DOI* = *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men, or Second Discourse*, in *EPW* / *OC* 3; *Mountain* = *Letters Written from the Mountain*, in *CW* 9 / *OC* 3; *Poland* =

the Citizen.”<sup>2</sup> The former is described as “without Temples, without altars, without Rites, limited to the purely internal cult of the Supreme God, and the eternal duties of morality.”<sup>3</sup> Unlike the religion of man, the religion of the citizen, as its name suggests, fulfills the purpose of religion as it relates to the state. The religion of the citizen is argued to be Rousseau’s ideal, and there is good reason for this.<sup>4</sup> Rousseau praises the religion of the citizen because “it combines divine worship and love of the laws, and in making the fatherland the object of the Citizens’ worship it teaches them that to serve the State is to serve its tutelary God.”<sup>5</sup> The followers of the religion of the citizen fear breaking civil laws, not only because of fear of civil punishment, but because doing so would “be impious.” The religion of the citizen is also politically useful on the battlefield where citizens must be willing to risk their lives for their country. To die defending the fatherland “is to be a

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*Considerations on the Government of Poland*, in LPW / OC 3; SC = *Of the Social Contract*, in LPW / OC 3; GM = *Geneva Manuscript*, in CW 4 / OC 3; Beaumont = *Letter to Beaumont*, in CW 9 / OC 4; PF = *Political Fragments*, in CW 4 / OC 3; DPE = *Discourse on Political Economy*, in LPW / OC 3; LA = *Letter to M. d’Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960) / OC 5; *Reveries* = *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, trans. Russell Goulbourne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) / OC 1; SW = *State of War*, in LPW / OC 3; *Heroic Virtue* = *Discourse on the Virtue Most Necessary for a Hero*, in CW 4 / OC 2; FR = “Allegorical Fragment on Revelation,” in CW 4 / OC 4.

<sup>2</sup>SC IV.8, 146/464. The religion of the citizen should be distinguished from the civil religion presented at the end of the *Social Contract*, the civil profession of faith. The former describes a religion that superintends completely both religion and the laws; the latter, which is still in service to the state, allows for more religious freedom (SC IV.8 150/467–68). While Rousseau’s analysis of the religion of the citizen does have consequences for how we can understand the civil profession of faith, which are touched on briefly in the conclusion, this article’s primary focus is the religion of the citizen.

<sup>3</sup>SC IV.8, 146/464. There is, of course, a third type of religion described in “On Civil Religion,” the religion of the priest which Rousseau describes as “so manifestly bad that it is a waste of time to amuse oneself demonstrating that it is” (SC IV.8, 147/464).

<sup>4</sup>See Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), where she describes the Spartan and the Roman as citizens of Rousseau’s “utopias,” rather than of a state modern man could achieve. “Sparta and Rome were, however, not merely private daydreams for Rousseau. They had social functions. Negatively they served as swords with which to smite contemporaries. Positively he drew from them an image of the perfectly socialized man, the citizen whose entire life is absorbed by his social role. In its turn, this picture of an integrated existence could not illuminate the distress of actual men, who had never known the patriotic life” (13).

<sup>5</sup>SC IV.8, 147/464–65.

martyr."<sup>6</sup> With political life as its sole concern, the religion of the citizen appears to succeed at promoting the ideal citizen and state.

Despite his praise of the ancients and the religion of the citizen, Rousseau severely qualifies the usefulness of this religion. He concludes:

it is bad in that being founded on error and lies it deceives men, makes them credulous and superstitious, and drowns the true cult of the divinity in a vain ceremonial. It is furthermore bad when, becoming exclusive and tyrannical, it makes a people bloodthirsty and intolerant; so that it breathes only murder and massacre, and believes it performs a holy deed in killing whoever does not accept its Gods. This places such a people in a natural state of war with all others, which is most prejudicial to its own security.<sup>7</sup>

The condemnation of the religion of the citizen is taken further in the *Geneva Manuscript* (ca. 1756).<sup>8</sup> Although his description of religion of the citizen, its benefits, and disadvantages is mostly the same, Rousseau is significantly harsher in the original unpublished version, referring to these citizens as "fanatics," a word that does not appear in the civil religion chapter in the *Social Contract* (1762). Moreover, Rousseau, in *Geneva*, reveals a greater concern for humanity.<sup>9</sup> Whether his treatment of the religion of the citizen in the original version is consistent with the second is an open question.<sup>10</sup> But Rousseau's criticism should at least create some doubt about whether the ancient system is truly Rousseau's political ideal, or whether it is only preferable when compared with the moderns.

Rousseau's criticisms of the religion of the citizen seem incongruent because he usually expresses admiration for the ancients. "The ancient politicians forever spoke of morals and virtue; ours speak only of commerce and of money," he notes in the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*.<sup>11</sup> Later, in his remarks on Poland, he compares the Greeks and moderns, writing that the public performances and competitions of the former were "constantly

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>SC IV.8, 147/465.

<sup>8</sup>The *Geneva Manuscript* is not simply a draft and was initially meant for publication, but Rousseau eventually decided the argument needed to be rewritten. See B. Bachofen, B. Bernardi, and G. Olivio, eds., *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Du contract social, ou Essai sur la forme de la république (Manuscrit de Genève)* (Paris: Vrin, 2012), 14–19.

<sup>9</sup>GM III, 119/338.

<sup>10</sup>The question of consistency is a serious one for Rousseau, who is frequently characterized as a paradoxical thinker. This article relies on arguments that have been made previously in defense of Rousseau's ultimate consistency. See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 254–55; Arthur Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 5–6; Roger D. Masters, "On Reading Rousseau," *Studies in Romanticism* 10, no. 4 (1971): 247–59.

<sup>11</sup>DSA II, 18/19.

kindling in [the Greeks] emulation and glory, brought their courage and their virtues to that pitch of energy of which nothing now gives us any idea and which the moderns are not even capable of believing."<sup>12</sup> Rousseau rarely lacked praise for the Spartans and republican Romans for their virtue and their absolute devotion to the state.

It is important to keep in mind Rousseau's intended use of the ancients. While he sincerely praises the Spartans and Romans and uses them as examples to make plain the degeneracy of the moderns, he does not usually encourage a complete return to the ancient institutions of Sparta or Rome.<sup>13</sup> Even while praising the ancients, he does at times express dissatisfaction with them. When praising them in the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, he describes the education of Spartans as "in truth monstrous in its perfection."<sup>14</sup> In a fragment on Sparta, he writes that "if I honor Lacedaemonia, I honor the truth even more," and that their "crimes horrify us."<sup>15</sup> Rousseau may admire the virtues and even the vices of the ancients, but he usually rejects a complete return to the ancient system.

Scholars generally agree Rousseau thought a shared religion to be necessary for politics. As Timothy O'Hagan puts it, "some kind of shared religion is essential to provide ideological cohesion and counter the centrifugal forces of the individual modern order."<sup>16</sup> Where they differ is on the "kind of shared religion." For example, scholars disagree on whether his theological-political thought is conservative or revolutionary. Ronald Grimsley argues that Rousseau is a traditionalist and "emerges as a defender of the ultra-conservative religious standpoint."<sup>17</sup> Lee Ward argues the opposite. He claims Rousseau is much closer to the philosophes than he was willing to let on. Rousseau has much more in common "with the secularizing tendencies of the Enlightenment," and by "rediscovering [his] relationship to the Enlightenment" it is possible to

<sup>12</sup>*Poland II*, 182/958.

<sup>13</sup>When Rousseau encourages the "republican dances" at the end of *Letter to d'Alembert*, he writes that he has "never cited [Sparta] enough as the example that we ought to follow," but that "whatever esteem I have for my fellow citizens, I know too well how far it is from them to the Lacedaemonians; and I propose for them only the Spartan institutions of which they are not yet incapable" (*LA*, 133–34/122).

<sup>14</sup>*DSA II*, 22n/24n (emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup>*Political Fragments*, 64–65/545–46. Of course, Rousseau adds that Spartan virtues horrify as well. What Rousseau criticizes in modernity is not that moderns condemn the ancients, but the basis of that condemnation. According to Rousseau, the moderns do not recoil from the ancients out of any real humanity, but out of cowardice. "As for you, modern peoples, you have no slaves, but you yourselves are slaves; you pay for their freedom with your own. Well you may boast of this preference; I find in it more cowardice than humanity" (*SC III.15*, 115/431).

<sup>16</sup>Timothy O'Hagan, *Rousseau* (London: Routledge, 1999), 221.

<sup>17</sup>Ronald Grimsley, *Rousseau and the Religious Quest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 80.

observe the “underlying thread uniting his classically inspired public entertainments for Geneva and the revolutionary Festivals of Reason in Year II.”<sup>18</sup> There is further disagreement on how much government control the use of religion requires. For Lester Crocker, religion is just another way that Rousseau harms individual freedom in service to the all-encompassing state.<sup>19</sup> Helena Rosenblatt argues the complete opposite. Rousseau intends to secularize the state in the service of individual freedom: “Rousseau’s argument in his chapter on civil religion was thus much more about *laicizing* the state than it was about coercing belief.”<sup>20</sup>

What I hope in this article to contribute to the scholarship is to make clear that absolute state control of religion, as seen in the religion of the citizen, is not the shared religion Rousseau thinks ideal for the legitimate state. Religion requires ties to the state, but Rousseau considered the religion of the citizen to be more damaging than salutary. That is, while it has qualities that are useful, its other qualities undermine the ends of the state. This article will explore why. It will argue that the religion of the citizen, in most circumstances, leads not to longevity but to tyranny. Rousseau’s argument rejecting the religion of the citizen in the *Geneva Manuscript* can be theoretically compatible with the argument rejecting the religion of the citizen out of self-interest and state preservation in the *Social Contract*. Finally, I will show that one vice of the religion of the citizen—its fanaticism—is never a requirement of the healthy state.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Lee Ward, “Civil Religion, Civic Republicanism, and Enlightenment in Rousseau,” in *On Civil Republicanism: Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, ed. Geoffrey Kellow and Neven Leddy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 264. See also Lee Ward, *Modern Democracy and the Theological-Political Problem in Spinoza, Rousseau, and Jefferson* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>19</sup>Lester Crocker, *Rousseau’s “Social Contract”: An Interpretive Essay* (Cleveland: Case Western University Press, 1968), 182.

<sup>20</sup>Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749–1762* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 261. See also Rosenblatt, “On the Intellectual Sources of *Laïcité*: Rousseau, Constant, and the Debates about a National Religion,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2007): 1–18. See also Christopher Brooke, who argues Rousseau allows even more individual freedom towards religion than John Locke, in “‘Locke en particulier les a traitées exactement dans les mêmes principes que moi’: Revisiting the Relationship between Locke and Rousseau,” in *Locke’s Political Liberty: Readings and Misreadings*, ed. Christophe Miquieu and Mason Chamie (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2009), 69–82.

<sup>21</sup>Zev Trachtenberg argues that while there are differences between the role of fanaticism in the *Geneva Manuscript* and the *Social Contract*, Rousseau ultimately shows his preference for the civic fanatic in *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (Trachtenberg, “Civic Fanaticism and the Dynamics of Pity,” in *Rousseau and l’Infâme: Religion, Toleration, and Fanaticism in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Ourida Mostefai and John T. Scott (New York: Rodopi, 2009), 214.

## Serious Reasons: Why the State Requires Religion

In the *Geneva Manuscript*, Rousseau writes, "As soon as men live in society they must have a Religion that keeps them there. A people have never subsisted nor ever will subsist without Religion, and if they were not given one, it would make one itself or soon be destroyed."<sup>22</sup> The state requires religion to aid in its creation and preservation.

Foundings of states require religion because it leads individuals to see their particular interests in the common good, allowing for acceptance of the laws and the state's creation. A founder who tries to reason with the people will be unable to make himself understood. An individual "appreciating no other scheme of government than that which bears directly on its particular interest has difficulty perceiving the advantages he is supposed to derive from the constant privations required by good laws."<sup>23</sup> The solution is for the "fathers of nations to resort to the intervention of heaven," he writes, "and to honor the Gods with their own wisdom, so that peoples, subject to the laws of the State as to those of nature, and recognizing the same power in the formation of man and in that of the city, freely obey the yoke of public felicity, and bear it with docility."<sup>24</sup> His favored examples are Lycurgus, Numa, and Moses. These men used religious institutions to create citizens with a common character, encouraging patriotism. Describing these three founders, Rousseau writes, "All of them sought bonds that might attach the Citizens to the fatherland and to one another, and they found them in distinctive practices, in religious ceremonies which by their very nature were always exclusive and national."<sup>25</sup>

Religion also provides another important aid to the state, the afterlife. "In every state that can require its members to sacrifice their lives, anyone who does not believe in the afterlife is necessarily a coward or a madman."<sup>26</sup> Religion calms the fears of those who may be called to die for the state, allowing for its preservation.<sup>27</sup> This, however, is only one of the advantages the afterlife provides to the state. In the *Emile*, Rousseau suggests belief in punishment in the afterlife may be an important deterrent for tyrants. Regarding the Persian myth of the bridge of Poul-Serrho, Rousseau asks, "If one took this idea from the Persians by persuading them that there is no Poul-Serrho or any place like it where the oppressed wreak vengeance on their tyrants after death, is it not clear that this would put the latter very much at their ease, and would deliver them from the care of placating these

<sup>22</sup>GM III, 117/336.

<sup>23</sup>SC II.7, 71/383. See also DOI II, 181/186.

<sup>24</sup>SC II.7, 71/383.

<sup>25</sup>Poland II, 181/958.

<sup>26</sup>GM III, 117/336.

<sup>27</sup>See SC IV.8, 150n/468n.

unfortunates?"<sup>28</sup> It further provides hope for the just in a world where the wicked seem to get ahead. If there were no afterlife where they were rewarded and the wicked punished, there would be no reason for them to behave with justice in this life.<sup>29</sup>

It is for these reasons that Rousseau declares that "it is important for the State not to be without Religion, and it is important for serious reasons." However, he adds that it "would be still better to have none at all than to have a barbarous and persecuting one that, tyrannizing the Laws themselves, would thwart the duties of the Citizen."<sup>30</sup> Though the religion of the citizen, at least initially, appears to satisfactorily fulfill the requirements of religion and the state, it proves ultimately destructive of the main aim of the state: its preservation.

### **Error, Deception, Superstition, and Vain Ceremony**

Rousseau's criticism of the religion of the citizen can be divided into two categories. The first set of criticisms is there from the very start. From the beginning, the religion of the citizen is "founded on error and lies" and "deceives men, making them credulous and superstitious, and drowns the true cult of the divinity in a vain ceremonial."<sup>31</sup> The second sort of vices, though not initially a part of the religion of the citizen, are the necessary consequence of the first. "It is furthermore bad when, becoming exclusive and tyrannical, it makes a people bloodthirsty and intolerant; so that it breathes only murder and massacre, and believes it performs a holy deed in killing whoever does not accept its Gods."<sup>32</sup> This section will address the first category of criticism.

At first this negative evaluation of the religion of the citizen can seem at odds with other recommendations Rousseau makes for the legitimate state: deception by the legislator is necessary to the founding of that state, and ceremony is a necessary part of maintaining citizen identity. Because of these contradictions, it could be that Rousseau is being disingenuous when he concedes that these aspects are bad. But I argue that these criticisms of the religion of the citizen may be compatible with Rousseau's earlier recommendations in the *Social Contract*.

#### ***Error and Lies***

There is a seeming contradiction between the role of the legislator and Rousseau's criticism of the religion of the citizen. The legislator's use of

<sup>28</sup>E IV, 314n/634n.

<sup>29</sup>E IV, 282/589.

<sup>30</sup>*Mountain I*, 148/705.

<sup>31</sup>SC IV.8, 147/465.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

religion in the founding of a state suggests that deception can be wise and salutary. Because people are unable to understand beyond their “particular interest,” the legislator, when founding a state, uses the gods to persuade others to accept “good laws.”<sup>33</sup> But the religion of the citizen, in being “founded on error and lies,” is described as “bad” for deceiving men. And while the religion of the citizen promotes obedience to the law, it also promotes superstition and vain ceremony. In this way, it would seem to fall under the false uses of religion Rousseau describes unfavorably in his chapter on the legislator. “Any man,” he writes, “can carve tablets of stone, bribe an oracle, feign secret dealings with some divinity, train a bird to speak in his ear, or find other crude ways to impress the people.”<sup>34</sup> The differences between the wise use of religious deception in the chapter on the legislator and the error and lies of the religion of the citizen may be more about the proper use and abuse of religion. In other words, using religion is easy, but using religion *well* is difficult and rare.

The difficulty, according to Rousseau, is that using religion well requires wisdom. Comparing the legislator with hucksters, Rousseau writes that “empty tricks form a passing bond, only wisdom can make it lasting.”<sup>35</sup> The best criterion for determining whether institutions are wise is duration. It is noteworthy that while Rousseau praises Numa and Lycurgus for their use of religion, within this chapter he does not use them as examples of longevity. This is not to say that their institutions are not wise, but only that theirs might not be best according to the standard Rousseau sets forth. Instead he praises two monotheistic religions for having the wisdom to last: “Jewish Law which still endures” and “Ishmael’s child [Islam] which has ruled half the world for ten centuries.”<sup>36</sup> In comparison, in *Political Economy*, he praises Rome for following Numa’s institutions for five hundred years.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup>SC II.7, 70–71/383.

<sup>34</sup>SC II.7, 71/384.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. See also Christopher Kelly on Rousseau’s legislator: “The multitude may well be the slave of its senses when the legislator finds it, but a reliance on miracles is too likely to leave it in this condition, that is, ready to be the dupe of the first impostor to appear with a talking bird. Talking birds are much more common than talking gods. The use of miracles is like the use of force in that only the most recent application is effective. The legislator requires a more enduring effect if he wishes to preserve his institutions” (Kelly, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One’s Life to Truth* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003], 65).

<sup>36</sup>SC II.7, 71–72/384. See also Jonathan D. Marks, “Rousseau’s Use of the Jewish Example,” in *Review of Politics* 72, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 463–81.

<sup>37</sup>DPE, 22/262. To be clear Rousseau still considered this a significant accomplishment, but mainly in that the Romans were able to last so long without public education. Rousseau marvels that “[it] is most remarkable that the Romans were able to do without it; but Rome was for five hundred years a continual miracle which the world should not hope to see again. The Romans’ virtue, born of the

Neither Jewish law nor Islam is a religion of the citizen in the way he describes in the chapter on civil religion. For example, the Jews did not give up their God when conquered, as was standard practice.<sup>38</sup> The religion of the citizen is usually described as a means to an end, in which religion leads to the state, but the reverse is true for Jewish law and Islam. Comparing different systems of legislation, Rousseau writes, “there is within each People some cause which orders these maxims in a particular manner and makes its legislation suited to itself alone. Thus formerly the Hebrews and recently the Arabs had religion as their principal object, the Athenians letters, Carthage and Tyre commerce, Rhodes seafaring, Sparta war, and Rome virtue.”<sup>39</sup> For the Hebrews and Muslims, as opposed to the religion of the citizen, law leads to religion, not the other way around. Rousseau seems to be suggesting that religion may become so instrumental that truth and rationality are compromised. In this case, it is neither wise, nor does it lead to the long-lasting law Rousseau praises.

The religion of the citizen, in being purely instrumental, does not seem to have the wisdom to endure for more than a short period of time. Although using religion in a way that involves lies and trickery may be useful for politics, its usefulness is only temporary. For example, when describing the Roman curia, Rousseau lists the conditions to be met before the curia assembled. One condition was the use of auguries that “held in check a proud and restless people and, when necessary, tempered the ardor of the seditious Tribunes.”<sup>40</sup> But the latter, he adds, could always find ways to overcome this restraint. Moreover, this “crude way to impress the people” eventually became useless, because although the people believed it, the government did not. Finally, Rousseau writes, “ambition eluded everything.”<sup>41</sup> When Rousseau writes that the religion of the citizen contains “error and lies,” he is most likely suggesting that, like the trickery of false religions, it is very likely to hold people together for a short period of time, but will quickly diminish or be used by those who want to satisfy their ambition.

### *Credulous and Superstitious*

The religion of the citizen also leads to superstition.<sup>42</sup> Superstition, Rousseau writes in the *Emile*, originates in “ignorance of the things which surround us

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horror of tyranny and the crimes of tyrants, and by the innate love of the fatherland, turned all their homes into so many schools of citizens” (ibid.).

<sup>38</sup>SC IV.8, 143–44/461.

<sup>39</sup>SC II.11, 79/393.

<sup>40</sup>SC IV.4, 132/449.

<sup>41</sup>SC IV.4, 136/453.

<sup>42</sup>In most references to superstition, Rousseau discusses it in a Christian context. It seems it is an error that goes along with religion whether pagan or Christian.

and what is going on about us."<sup>43</sup> This ignorance leads to fear.<sup>44</sup> The religion of the citizen therefore keeps men in ignorance. Yet superstition, according to Rousseau, is not an inherent or a necessary part of religion. In *Letters Written from the Mountain*, he writes that instead of attacking the "true principles of Religion," he attacks "cruel superstition."<sup>45</sup> Rousseau claims that he "distinguish[es] with so much care" religion from superstition and asserts that nothing is more dangerous to true religion than "defenders of superstition."<sup>46</sup>

Defenders of superstition defend it "because that is how Peoples are led." But this is distinct from religion, which supports the state through patriotism and civic virtue. Superstition, on the other hand, is "how [people] are led to their doom." Accordingly, it is in the interest of tyrants alone.<sup>47</sup> Rousseau describes superstition as "their most terrible weapon and that in itself is the greatest harm it has ever done."<sup>48</sup> From this, Rousseau derives a litany of superstition's crimes. Rather than lead people to accept wise laws, it "brutalizes the simple," rather than use wisdom, "it persecutes the wise," and rather than lead to freedom, "it puts Nations in chains."<sup>49</sup> If the standard for legitimate authority is to ensure that people are as free as they were before, then superstition, in leading to tyranny, destroys the possibility of legitimate authority.<sup>50</sup>

### *Vain Ceremony*

Like the criticism of the lies of citizen religion, Rousseau's criticism of vain ceremony also seems strange. When it comes to citizenship, Rousseau emphasizes the role of ceremonies in leading to friendship and common identity among citizens. Ceremonies are what he praises Moses for in *Government of Poland*: "To keep his people from being absorbed by foreign peoples, he gave it morals and practices which could not be blended with those of other nations; he weighed it down with distinctive rites and ceremonies."<sup>51</sup> He advises the Polish to do the same if they wish to maintain their distinction among Europeans. "These practices," he tells them, "even if they are

<sup>43</sup>E II, 134/382.

<sup>44</sup>See Plutarch, "Superstition," in *Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 2:165–66. See also Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 64.

<sup>45</sup>*Mountain* I, 140/695.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 140–41/695.

<sup>47</sup>See also Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 101. Bayle disputes the argument that superstition is in the interest of tyrants.

<sup>48</sup>*Mountain* I, 140/695.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup>See SC I.6, 49–50/360.

<sup>51</sup>*Poland* II, 180/956.

indifferent, even if they are in some respects bad, provided they are not essentially so, will have the advantage of making the Poles fond of their country and give them a natural revulsion to mingling with foreigners.”<sup>52</sup> If Rousseau typically finds shared ceremony an important aspect of citizenship, there is a question as to why it is a problem in the religion of the citizen.

The problem Rousseau finds in “vain ceremony” has less to do with the role of ceremony in citizenship than with the role of ceremony in religion. Rousseau thinks ceremony is not an inherent part of religion but is a necessary part of patriotism.<sup>53</sup> When he encourages certain ceremonies to promote patriotism, they have no necessary connection to religion. For example, Rousseau encourages the Poles to have their own distinctive ceremonies, ceremonies that have nothing to do with religion. He praises the Poles for their “distinctive mode of dress” and tells them to “let not the King, nor the Senators, nor any public figure ever wear any but the national dress, and let no Pole dare show himself at court dressed in the French fashion.”<sup>54</sup> Even the distinctive rites and ceremonies that Rousseau praises in the ancients do not have an absolutely necessary connection to religion. These ancient legislators “kept the Citizens frequently assembled in exercises which increased their pride and self-esteem together with their vigor and strength, in spectacles which ... remind[ed] them of the history of their ancestors, their misfortunes, their virtues, their victories.”<sup>55</sup> Rousseau thinks patriotism could be separated from religion without doing much harm to the patriotism necessary for the state.

Moreover, it could be that not all ceremonies, particularly when connected to religion, lead to the ends Rousseau intends them for. The consequences of superstition can lead to gruesome outcomes. As we turn to Rousseau’s criticisms of the bloodthirst and cruelty of citizen religion, it appears that these ceremonies, especially when connected to religion, harm rather than help.

### Bloodthirst, Intolerance, Murder, and Massacre

Turning now to the second category of criticism of the religion of the citizen, Rousseau writes it is “furthermore bad” when it becomes “exclusive and tyrannical.”<sup>56</sup> This is a curious qualification to give for the destructive characteristics of citizen religion. Exclusion and intolerance, especially regarding foreigners, are not vices for Rousseau. One of the purposes of the religion of the citizen is to *promote* exclusivity because exclusivity sustains love of one’s own laws and patriotism. Intolerance, moreover, would not only be a necessary consequence of the state’s exclusivity, but would enforce and

<sup>52</sup>Poland III, 185/965.

<sup>53</sup>SC IV.8, 146/464.

<sup>54</sup>Poland III, 185–86/962.

<sup>55</sup>Poland II, 181/958.

<sup>56</sup>SC IV.8, 147/465.

maintain it. While exclusivity is a good thing for Rousseau, it could be that when combined with tyranny—a problem to which the religion of the citizen is highly susceptible—it inevitably leads to these more damaging consequences.

Heinrich Meier dismisses these characteristics of the religion of the citizen as an instance of Rousseau “draw[ing] upon all rhetorical registers.”<sup>57</sup> Such a “spectacular statement of its work of devastation,” he argues, “stands in conspicuous contrast” to earlier descriptions of ancient religion.<sup>58</sup> His reasoning is that Rousseau describes ancient gods as “not jealous” and as beings who “divided the empire of the world among themselves.”<sup>59</sup> He explains that the jealous god is found only among monotheistic ancient Hebrews.<sup>60</sup> Ronald Beiner describes the difference between pagan and monotheistic religion in similar terms. Monotheism is either “conquering and proselytizing (Islam),” or “simply conquering, or genocidal (Judaism).” He argues that for Rousseau, paganism is a “benign theocracy,” or a fairly tolerant national religion,” particularly in the case of Rome.<sup>61</sup> Beiner and Meier use Rousseau’s description of the massacre of the Canaanites by the Jews to suggest that he is only referring to monotheistic religions of the citizen when he criticizes the religion of the citizen for its intolerance and bloodthirst.

<sup>57</sup>Heinrich Meier, *Political Philosophy and the Challenge of Revealed Religion*, trans. Robert Berman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 175.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 175n115.

<sup>59</sup>SC IV.8, 143/460–61. Rousseau offers an unflattering view of ancient gods in his *Moral Letters*: “Ancient Paganism engendered abominable Gods that one would have punished here below as scoundrels and who offered as the picture of the supreme happiness only heinous crimes to commit and passions to satisfy. But vice, cloaked in sacred authority, descended in vain from the eternal abode; nature repulsed it from the heart of humans. One celebrated Jupiter’s debauchery but one admired Xenocrates’ temperance, the chaste Lucretia worshipped the lewd Venus, the intrepid Roman made sacrifices to fear, the great Cato was esteemed more just than providence; the immortal voice of virtue, stronger than that of the gods themselves, made itself respected on earth, and seemed to relegate crime to Heaven along with the guilty ones” (195/1107–8).

<sup>60</sup>Meier, *Political Philosophy and the Challenge of Revealed Religion*, 176n116. Rousseau refers to the Hebrews who “did ... regard as naught the Gods of the Canaanites, proscribed peoples, doomed to destruction, and whose stronghold they were to occupy” (SC, IV.8, 143/461). Rousseau does write in *Beaumont*, “The Jews were born enemies of all other Peoples, and they began their establishment by destroying seven nations according to the express order they had received to do so,” but this characteristic does not seem to apply to the Jews alone. He writes, “I neither say nor think there is no good Religion on earth. But I do say, and it is only too true, that there is none among those that are or have been dominant that has not cruelly wounded humanity. All parties have tormented their brothers, all have offered to God sacrifices of human blood” (54–55/970).

<sup>61</sup>Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 74–75.

But this is overstated.<sup>62</sup> Rousseau's criticisms are compatible with his earlier descriptions of both pagan and monotheistic religions of the citizen.

Beginning with intolerance, both Meier and Beiner are correct that pagan religions of the citizen would treat the idea of proselytization with indifference, particularly as compared with Christianity, unless they conquered another nation. In that way, it is accurate to say that the religion of the citizen was tolerant. There were no "wars of Religion," and because of this, Rousseau describes the ancients as having "mutual tolerance" in the *Geneva Manuscript*.<sup>63</sup> But it would be wrong to conclude that pagan religion of the citizen could never cause intolerance in the same way that a monotheistic religion of the citizen would. While different religions might peacefully coexist when they are not within the same borders, this changed when one was conquered. For example, the Babylonians' and Syrians' persecution of the Jews, whose religious practice they "regarded as a rebellion against the victor," is consistent with Rousseau's critical assessment of the religion of the citizen.<sup>64</sup>

Rousseau's example of ancient toleration is from one nation, in this case Rome, conquering another. When Rousseau writes that the Romans "let the people of Tarentum keep their irate Gods," they are tolerant only because "they regarded those Gods as subject to their own and forced to pay them homage."<sup>65</sup> In "State of War" he describes it as political shrewdness. "Leave their angry Gods to the Tarentines, Fabius said when he was invited to carry off to Rome the statues and paintings.... So true it is that a clever conqueror sometimes harms the vanquished more by what he leaves them than by what he takes from them."<sup>66</sup> Toleration, it seems, for the ancients only comes after empire. Given Rousseau's rejection of empire, it is doubtful that the Roman system of toleration would be his ideal.

Both Meier and Beiner equate the more violent tendencies of the religion of the citizen with monotheistic religions. But Rousseau associates bloodthirst with all citizen religions.<sup>67</sup> Prior to his criticism, he writes that the religion of the citizen "regards everything outside the single Nation which adheres to it as infidel, alien, barbarous; it extends the rights and duties of man

<sup>62</sup>Beiner later writes, "Pre-Christian theocracy is, in its pagan versions, war mongering and bloodthirsty, and in its Jewish version, intolerant and imperialistic," granting that pagan religions were not so "benign." However, this still does not necessarily mean that the outcomes of pagan "toleration" were much different in consequence from Jewish imperialism.

<sup>63</sup>GM III, 119/338.

<sup>64</sup>SC IV.8, 143–44/461.

<sup>65</sup>SC IV.8, 144/461–62.

<sup>66</sup>SW, 172/1901–2.

<sup>67</sup>Rousseau's criticism of citizen religion in the *Social Contract* is not the only place where he suggests that the ancients could be prone to excessive violence. See also *E* IV, 313n/634n. He praises the humanity of Christianity, compared with ancient religion, for having "made these governments less sanguinary themselves. This is proved by actually comparing them to ancient governments."

only as far as its altars."<sup>68</sup> An implication of regarding everything outside one's borders as almost inhuman would be an increase in the willingness to use violence, whereas a recognition of common humanity would presumably make a person less inclined to use violence. But, once again, Rousseau's concern about "blood thirst" and "murder" appears to contradict his recommendations regarding the treatment of foreigners.

Usually Rousseau lacks reservations about the mistreatment of foreigners. He states in the *Emile* that "every particular society, when it is narrow and unified, is estranged from the all-encompassing society. Every patriot is harsh to foreigners. They are only men. They are nothing in his eyes."<sup>69</sup> And while he concedes that the poor treatment of foreigners "is a drawback," he concludes that it is "not compelling."<sup>70</sup> He makes similar recommendations to the Polish. "Give a different bent to the Poles' passions," he advises, "and you will give their souls a national physiognomy which will set them apart from all other peoples, which will keep them from merging, from feeling at ease, from inter-marrying with them."<sup>71</sup> The point is to establish friendship among citizens.<sup>72</sup> Being "humane" to foreigners only seems to be an obstacle to this endeavor.

But in other places Rousseau does reject cruel treatment of foreigners, even when done out of a noble sentiment like patriotism. He writes in his *Discourse on the Virtue Most Necessary for a Hero* that "some, intoxicated with love for the fatherland, have found nothing to be illegitimate in its service and have not hesitated to use for its benefit odious means which their generous souls could never have resolved to use for their own."<sup>73</sup> The religion of the citizen increases love of fatherland and fellow citizens, and could exacerbate impulses to murder and to harm noncitizens. About the ancient treatment of foreigners, Rousseau writes,

it was long believed ... that it was permissible to rob, pillage, and mistreat foreigners, and especially barbarians, until they were reduced to slavery. This led to a questioning of strangers, without offending them, as to whether they were Brigands or Pirates, because this trade, far from being ignominious, was then considered honorable. The first Heroes,

<sup>68</sup>SC IV.8, 146/466.

<sup>69</sup>E I, 39/248–49.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>*Poland* III, 184/960.

<sup>72</sup>See *Poland* III, 185/962: "These practices, even if they are indifferent, even if they are in some respects bad, provided they are not essentially so, will still have the advantage of making the Poles fond of their country and give them a natural revulsion to mingling with foreigners." See also E I, 39/249: "The essential thing is to be good to the people with whom one lives. Abroad, the Spartan was ambitious, avaricious, iniquitous. But disinterestedness, equity, and concord reigned within his walls."

<sup>73</sup>*Heroic Virtue*, 8/1270–71. For an analysis of this work, see Kelly, *Rousseau as Author*, 82–115. He notes that "Rousseau did not submit the discourse, and it was first published (without his permission) in 1768. Even prior to this, however, he had planned to publish it in the definitive edition of his works" (83).

like Hercules and Theseus, who made war on Brigands, nonetheless engaged in brigandage themselves, and the Greeks often used the term peace treaties for treaties made between peoples who were not at war. The words foreigners and enemies were long synonymous for several ancient peoples, even among the Latins.<sup>74</sup>

That is, enmity with foreigners was the norm and peace the exception. Rousseau writes in his *Geneva Manuscript* that this attitude was so pervasive that even after Christianity “generalized” the “healthy ideas of natural right and the brotherhood of all men,” the influence of the ancient system could still be seen in laws. “And even the ancient acts of violence, not only against declared enemies but also against anyone who was not a subject of the Empire, can still be found authorized in many respects in the Laws of Justinian, so that the humanity of Romans extended no further than their domination.”<sup>75</sup> While Rousseau promotes separateness from foreigners, he thinks there is a limit to how badly one should treat them.

Moreover, the religion of the citizen could also lead to bloodthirst and the massacre of fellow citizens. Early in the civil religion chapter, Rousseau criticizes modern “erudition” for thinking all the different gods of the ancients could be the same, “as if chimerical Beings bearing different names could have anything in common!”<sup>76</sup> Two of the gods he lists are Moloch and Baal, both infamous for blood lust. His vivid description of religion in “Fragment of Revelation” features many of ancient religion’s more infamous religious sacrifices, from the practice of sacrificing infants in Carthage to the burying alive of vow-breaking Vestal Virgins in Rome. “Now tender infants were thrown into flames from cedar wood, now grown men were immolated through the falsehoods of a decrepit old man, while groaning denatured Fathers plunged the knife into the bosom of their own daughters. Young people in elegant and pompous adornment that still enhance their beauty were buried alive for having listened to the voice of nature.”<sup>77</sup> Even though this work is not published, it suggests the bloodshed and murder Rousseau might have had in mind when he criticized the religion of the citizen. What Rousseau describes here is not the “gentle sentiment” of patriotism of the *Political Economy*, but superstitious massacre, which he considers a crime against justice.<sup>78</sup>

## Consequences

### *Humanity and Self-Preservation*

One significant difference between the *Social Contract* and the *Geneva Manuscript* is the emphasis on humanity in the latter. While both contain

<sup>74</sup>GM I.2, 81/287.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>SC IV.8, 143/460.

<sup>77</sup>FR, 170/1050.

<sup>78</sup>DPE, 16/255.

almost identical descriptions of the religion of the citizen, in the original version, Rousseau rejects the religion of the citizen in defense of humanity. That is, he suggests that particular societies might owe something to the universal society. Because the religion of the citizen can be bloodthirsty and intolerant, he concludes that “it is not permissible to strengthen the bond of a particular society at the expense of the rest of the human race.”<sup>79</sup> He returns to this theme a few paragraphs later and more forcefully adds that “if pagan superstition, despite this mutual tolerance and in the midst of culture and a thousand virtues, engendered so many cruelties, I do not see how it is possible to separate those very cruelties from that very zeal, and to reconcile the rights of a national religion with those of humanity.”<sup>80</sup>

But this would seem to contradict the reason Rousseau gives for rejecting the religion of the citizen in the *Social Contract*. There, Rousseau does not reject citizen religion on the basis of humanity; concern for humanity is absent. Rather, Rousseau argues that it threatens the preservation of the state. He concludes the paragraph by stating that it “places such a people in a natural state of war with all others, which is most prejudicial to its own security.”<sup>81</sup> The religion of the citizen, it seems, threatens the whole purpose of the state. Because the *Geneva Manuscript* was not published, it is necessary to determine whether his argument in defense of humanity is consistent with his argument in the *Social Contract*, where he rejects the religion of the citizen for more utilitarian reasons.

The contradiction in these two works reflects a tension in Rousseau’s work as a whole, between his tendency to favor a strong, patriotic state and his concern for the rights of humanity.<sup>82</sup> For example, in the *Discourse on Inequality* (1754) the purely conventional distinction of societies and states here seems to do more harm than good. He describes the outcome of the division of peoples into different societies: “From it arose the National Wars, Battles, murders, reprisals that make Nature tremble and that shock reason, and all those horrible prejudices that rank among the virtues the honor of spilling human blood.”<sup>83</sup> These wars are against the natural inclinations of man, not only to preserve himself (as a naturally “timorous” being), but against his natural “pity.”<sup>84</sup> And while man in society is almost a different being from man in nature, “the state of society which constrains all our

<sup>79</sup>GM III, 118/337.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 119/338.

<sup>81</sup>SC IV.8, 147/465.

<sup>82</sup>For a more in-depth analysis of this tension see Matthew Mendham, “Cosmopolitanism versus Patriotism,” in *The Rousseauian Mind*, ed. Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly (London: Routledge, 2019), 319–30.

<sup>83</sup>DOI II, 174/178–79.

<sup>84</sup>SW, 166/601; DOI I, 152–54/154–58.

natural inclinations can ... not annihilate them."<sup>85</sup> Humanity, at least as understood by Rousseau, seems to suggest the ability to recognize that man should not kill or harm man for any reason other than self-preservation—a problem that an increase in prejudice and xenophobia created by the religion of the citizen would indeed seem to exacerbate.<sup>86</sup> And indeed, within the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau praises those “few great Cosmopolitan Souls who cross the imaginary boundaries that separate Peoples and, following the example of the sovereign being that created them, embrace the whole of Mankind in their benevolence.”<sup>87</sup>

But in other places, Rousseau does not seem to show much consideration for humanity, except in order to disparage the concern for it. In the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750), he criticizes those who “smile disdainfully at such old-fashioned words as Fatherland and Religion.”<sup>88</sup> Typically, he thinks the concern for humanity is an excuse to treat one’s fellow citizens terribly. For example, in the *Emile* (1762), he advises that one should “distrust those cosmopolitans who go to great length in their books to discover duties they do not deign to fulfill around them.”<sup>89</sup> Those who make arguments in defense of the rights of humanity do not defend the rights of fellow citizens. They can love others in the abstract, because it does not necessarily lead to any action. He cynically declares that “a philosopher loves the Tartars so as to be spared having to love his neighbors.”<sup>90</sup>

The promotion of humanity, according to Rousseau, discourages patriotism. Friendship, common identity, and love of laws are necessary if the state is to preserve itself. The rights of humanity seem ultimately irreconcilable with these aims. In *Letters Written from the Mountain*, Rousseau writes that they are “incompatible in their energy, and especially among an entire people.” One cannot be a patriot and a lover of humanity at the same time. “The Legislator who wants them both will get neither one nor the other. This compatibility has never been seen and never will be, because it is contrary to nature, because one cannot give the passion two aims.”<sup>91</sup> Encouraging patriotism alone remains the best way to encourage humane action at least among citizens, while the promotion of humanity only results in inhumanity not only among citizens, but among all peoples too.

<sup>85</sup>SW, 164/611. See SC II.11, 80/393, where Rousseau describes “nature” as ultimately “invincible.”

<sup>86</sup>DOI II, 154/156; SW, 166/602.

<sup>87</sup>DOI II, 174/178.

<sup>88</sup>DSA II, 17/19.

<sup>89</sup>E I, 39/249. Of course, in this same work, Emile tells Sophie he will always prefer the “rights of humanity” over her, showing that the tension between humanity and patriotic interest can be seen in the same work (V, 441/812–13).

<sup>90</sup>E I, 39/249.

<sup>91</sup>*Mountain* I, 149n/706n.

But in this same work, Rousseau brings these two ends, humanity and state interest, together. He writes that the sovereign oversees “the part of Religion that deals with morality, that is to say justice, the public good, obedience to the natural and positive Laws, the social virtues and all the duties of man and Citizen.”<sup>92</sup> That is, government has oversight over religion not only as it pertains to the interests of the state, but also as it pertains to humanity. It could be that there is a difference in encouraging the duties of man and love of humanity. In encouraging the duties of the citizen, the sovereign should avoid encouraging duties that harm humanity. Religion of the citizen, as described in both *Social Contract* and *Geneva Manuscript*, harms the duties of both. Rousseau confirms the argument in both these works when he writes that religions of the citizen “are useful to the State as parts of its constitution.... But they are harmful to the human Race and even to the State in another sense.”<sup>93</sup> If this is true, there remains a question as to how this works practically, particularly given how negatively Rousseau thinks citizens should treat foreigners. Even if it is ideal that the interests of the state and the rights of humanity are both respected, this ideal seems to be impossible.

Rousseau addresses this problem in one of his first political writings, *Political Economy* (1755). Even here, where he is at his most republican, he establishes the humane sentiments he later includes in the *Geneva Manuscript* and *Letters Written from the Mountain*. Rousseau ranks the duties man owes to different societies by reference to the latter’s size. The general rule he provides is that “particular societies are always subordinate to those that contain them.”<sup>94</sup> It is thoroughly possible that “a given deliberation may be advantageous to the small community, and most pernicious to the large one.”<sup>95</sup> Ideally, he writes, the “duties of the citizen take precedence over those of the senator, and those of man over those of the citizen.”<sup>96</sup> But Rousseau has moderate expectations. He knows men will hardly, if ever, do anything out of a concern for humanity. Even though the duties of man should take precedence over the duties of citizens, “unfortunately personal interest is always inversely proportional to duty, and increases in direct proportion as the association grows narrower and the commitment less sacred.”<sup>97</sup> Rousseau never criticizes men for their inclination to act on

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 140/694–95.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>DPE, 7/246. To be clear, this does not mean that Rousseau thinks there is a general will of all humanity; this is something he argues against in the *Geneva Manuscript*, directly against Diderot. See GM I.2, 78/283–84.

<sup>95</sup>DPE, 7/246.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>DPE, 8/246.

closer interests, because he knows that it is their nature. Most people cannot comprehend humanity as it is too abstract.<sup>98</sup>

These reasons could be why Rousseau drops the *Geneva Manuscript's* humanitarian argument for the *Social Contract's* utilitarian one. He does not drop his rejection of the religion of the citizen on the basis of humanity. Rather, he knows that motives of self-interest and self-preservation persuade more effectively than motives of humanity. Thus, he uses personal interest, the "preservation of the state," in service of more "humane" ends.

In order to understand how that could be true, it is necessary to once again return to the purposes of the social contract and state. Rousseau writes that the social contract is formed when the "primitive state can no longer subsist, and humankind would perish if it did not change its way of being."<sup>99</sup> Later he writes that the "surest sign" a people is prospering is not their wealth, but "their number and their population."<sup>100</sup> When people are free they are more likely to have children and this increase in population suggests satisfaction with their government, whereas in a tyranny, they will be less likely to increase the population.

The religion of the citizen threatens life in that it can lead to excessive violence, against both its own citizens and those outside the state. But while this may seem a clear threat to humanity's preservation, the problems with the religion of the citizen go deeper than bloodshed alone. Rousseau warns throughout the *Social Contract* that peace alone should not be the end of the state. Rather than being good for citizens, he usually describes it as harmful. "Life is also tranquil in dungeons. Is that enough to feel well in them?" Peace is no guarantee of well-being. "The Greeks imprisoned in Cyclops's cave lived there tranquilly, while awaiting their turn to be devoured."<sup>101</sup> Later he writes that the occasional outbreak of violence is good for a people.<sup>102</sup> "Riots, civil wars, greatly alarm chiefs, but they do not cause the true miseries of peoples.... Their real prosperities or calamities arise from their permanent state."<sup>103</sup> And it is the constant state of war, which

<sup>98</sup>"Every general idea is purely intellectual; if the imagination is at all involved, the idea becomes particular. Try to outline the image of a tree in general to yourself, you will never succeed; in spite of yourself it will have to be seen as small or large, bare or leafy, light or dark, and if you could see in it only what there is in every tree, the image would no longer resemble a tree" (*DOI I*, 148/150). See also *GM I.2*, 80/286–87: "since the art of generalizing ideas in this way is one of the most difficult and belated exercises of human understanding, will the average man ever be capable of deriving his rules of conduct from this manner of reasoning?"

<sup>99</sup>SC I.6, 49/360.

<sup>100</sup>SC III.9, 105/420.

<sup>101</sup>SC I. 4, 45/355–56.

<sup>102</sup>See also SC III.9, 105n/420n: "A little agitation energizes souls, and what causes the species truly to prosper is not so much peace as freedom."

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.* Rousseau cites history and Machiavelli in support of this argument: "When the bickerings of the Great caused turmoil in the Kingdom of France, and the cardinal

Rousseau thinks the religion of the citizen encourages, that harms the ends of both preservation of the state and humanity.

The two arguments in the *Geneva Manuscript* and the *Social Contract* can be made compatible in this way: the religion of the citizen through its encouragement of bloodthirst, cruelty, murder, and massacre is particularly amenable to conquest and empire. Even though Rousseau writes that the gods divided the world among themselves, all the ancient examples he gives in the chapter “On Civil Religion” in the *Social Contract* involve one state conquering another. Almost immediately he associates the religion of the citizen with conquering peoples and expanding borders: “there was no other way to convert a people than to enslave it, nor were there any other missionaries than conquerors, and since the obligation to change their cult was the law of the vanquished, it was necessary to be victorious before talking about such a change.”<sup>104</sup> While the gods of citizen religion were not jealous, the people certainly could be.

When states are satisfied with their borders, it is better both for the state and for humanity. Conquering creates more problems for citizens than they might initially realize. He writes that “nothing is more downtrodden or as miserable as conquering peoples.”<sup>105</sup> But what makes conquering people miserable is not excessive bloodshed. Rousseau focuses instead on the relation between conquering and expenses: “An appetite for conquests is one of the most perceptible and dangerous causes for such an increase in public needs and expenditures.”<sup>106</sup> The more expensive the government becomes, the more taxes government imposes.<sup>107</sup> These new taxes threaten citizens by threatening their livelihood. When the taxes increase so much as to create a tax over bread, it threatens the very existence of citizens.<sup>108</sup> Excessive taxes “work as directly as possible at depopulating the country; and hence at ruining it in the long run.... For there is no worse scarcity for a nation than a scarcity of men.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, Rousseau concludes that that government

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Coadjutor attended Parliament with a dagger in his pocket, it did not keep the French people from living happy and numerous in honest and free well-being. Formerly Greece flourished amidst the most cruel wars; blood flowed freely, yet the entire country was full of men. It seemed, says Machiavelli, that our Republic grew all the more powerful for being in the midst of murders, proscriptions, civil wars; the virtue of its citizens, their morals their independence, did more to reinforce it, than all its dissensions had done to weaken it.” See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 1.4–6, 16–23. For a differing view, see Lionel McKenzie, “Rousseau’s Debate with Machiavelli in the *Social Contract*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43, no. 2 (1983): 209–28. McKenzie argues that Rousseau rejects Machiavelli’s argument about conflict (see 221–22).

<sup>104</sup>SC IV.8, 144/461–62.

<sup>105</sup>DPE, 28/268.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

<sup>107</sup>DPE, 28–29/268–69.

<sup>108</sup>DPE, 35/275.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

“under which the Citizens, without resort to external means, without naturalizations, without colonies, populate and multiply, is without fail the best: That under which a people dwindles and wastes away is the worst.”<sup>110</sup> That is, the state that can grow without becoming an empire and incurring its detrimental increase in taxes is the best.

Rousseau grants that initially conquests can occur because of necessity, as was the case with Rome.<sup>111</sup> He writes in the *Social Contract* that “all peoples have a kind of centrifugal force by which they constantly act against one another and tend to enlarge themselves at their neighbors’ expense.”<sup>112</sup> The religion of the citizen, however, through its propensity for violence, can exacerbate this “centrifugal force” by promoting the passions to benefit themselves at their neighbor’s expense.<sup>113</sup> The motives for conquering are not often apparent. Its ends are never what the citizens might think they are. Rousseau explains that the conqueror’s “genuine motive is not so much the apparent desire to aggrandize the nation as the hidden desire to increase the chiefs’ domestic authority with the help of an increase in troops and under cover of the distraction which the objects of war cause in the minds of citizens.”<sup>114</sup> This, in turn, might lead to a “permanent state,” that of empire, which is unlikely to lead to freedom.

### *Fanaticism and Patriotism*

Rousseau’s rejection of the religion of the citizen has other notable consequences which are not included in the *Social Contract*. In the *Geneva Manuscript*, Rousseau specifically associates fanaticism and the religion of the citizen; the *Social Contract* only refers to its outcomes. Zev Trachtenberg that argues Rousseau drops fanaticism from the latter because it remains “essential to political life” and that his “ideal citizen remains the civic fanatic.”<sup>115</sup> There is general agreement that Rousseau requires fanaticism in order to have patriotic citizens.<sup>116</sup> Removing the religion of the citizen removes fanaticism, and therefore, so the argument goes, removes patriotism.

<sup>110</sup>SC III.9, 105/420.

<sup>111</sup>*Poland* XII, 233/1013.

<sup>112</sup>SC II. 9, 75/388.

<sup>113</sup>SW, 175/607: “Land, money, men, all the spoils one can appropriate, thus become the principal objects of mutual hostilities. As this base greed insensibly changes [men’s] ideas of things, war finally degenerates into brigandage, and having begun as enemies and warriors, they gradually become tyrants and thieves.”

<sup>114</sup>DPE, 28/268. See also DOI II, 174/179.

<sup>115</sup>Trachtenberg, “Civic Fanaticism and the Dynamics of Pity,” 213–14.

<sup>116</sup>See also Christopher Kelly, “Pious Cruelty: Rousseau on Voltaire’s *Mahomet*,” in Mostefai and Scott, *Rousseau and l’Infâme*. Like Trachtenberg, Kelly argues that “when well directed [fanaticism] is the indispensable basis for genuine devotion to a community, just as it is destructive when it is not well directed” (184).

Trachtenberg cites the *Emile* in support of his argument. In a footnote directed to the philosophes, Rousseau appears to praise fanaticism. Responding to Pierre Bayle's "incontestable" argument "that fanaticism is more pernicious than atheism," he writes that Bayle failed to mention a characteristic of fanaticism "which is no less true ... that fanaticism, although sanguinary and cruel, is nevertheless a grand and strong passion which elevates the heart of man, makes him despise death, and gives him a prodigious energy that need only be better directed to produce the most sublime virtues."<sup>117</sup> Trachtenberg argues that fanaticism only needs to be "better directed" in order to show that Rousseau thinks fanaticism is salutary when it promotes appropriate ends, such as patriotism and the state. While Rousseau praises fanaticism here in preference to the indifference and self-interest of atheism, it is a stretch to say he is giving a general endorsement of fanaticism.<sup>118</sup>

It is important to remember that Rousseau agrees with Bayle's argument that fanaticism is "sanguinary and cruel." In characterizing fanaticism as violent, Rousseau also agrees with Voltaire, who equates fanaticism with violence and death. The enthusiastic, Voltaire explains, "takes dreams for realities and his fancies for prophecies." The fanatic "supports his madness with murder."<sup>119</sup> Rousseau maintains this characterization of fanaticism in his other writings. Whether in the Christian world ("The abominable doctrines are those that lead to crime and murder, and make fanatics") or in the ancient (he describes religion of the citizen as "engender[ing] so many cruelties"), fanaticism is a destructive passion.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, in contributing to intellectual error, Rousseau associates it with "all the pettinesses that characterize the ordinary person." He includes in his list of "pettinesses" both fanaticism and cruelty, vices he describes as having their "source in weakness of the soul."<sup>121</sup> It is fanaticism's cruelty and its basis in error, none of which Rousseau ever denies, that makes it dangerous to the state.

Moreover, Rousseau also views fanaticism as a short-lived passion. Patriotism, which Trachtenberg describes as a type of civic fanaticism, is intended to be a long-term passion in support of the state. But "fanaticism is a crisis state that cannot last forever."<sup>122</sup> That is, whether patriotic or religious, fanaticism is to be avoided. Rousseau adds, "It has its fits that are more or less long, more or less frequent, and it also has its respites, during

<sup>117</sup>E IV, 312n/632n.

<sup>118</sup>The Savoyard Vicar advises to stay away from both fanaticism and philosophy: "Proud philosophy leads to freethinking as blind devoutness leads to fanaticism. Avoid these extremes" (E IV, 313/633–34).

<sup>119</sup>Voltaire, "Fanaticism," in *Philosophical Dictionary*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 267.

<sup>120</sup>Beaumont, 66/985.

<sup>121</sup>Heroic Virtue, 10/1273.

<sup>122</sup>Beaumont, 56/972.

which people are composed. Returning to themselves at those times, people are completely surprised to see themselves fettered by so many absurdities."<sup>123</sup> Instead of being useful, fanaticism leaves a people encumbered with an excessive number of laws and rules they are unable to follow.

What, then, could Rousseau possibly mean when he writes that fanaticism only needs to be "better directed"? It cannot mean that Rousseau would wish fanaticism be maintained for civic purposes. Based on his characterization of fanaticism this seems impossible. What may be the case is that fanaticism can be directed, not towards what Trachtenberg describes as a "mitigated fanaticism," but instead, a passion closely associated with it. Rousseau consistently makes clear the need for passion in politics. For example, the state requires patriotic citizens who love their country. But even patriotism encouraged to "its highest pitch," as Rousseau recommends for the Poles, is never described as fanaticism. Rather, it is "patriotic zeal" that will protect the Polish from the Russians.<sup>124</sup> What Rousseau could mean by the better direction of fanaticism is the maintaining of its underlying passion, zeal.

Rousseau does distinguish between fanaticism (*fanatisme*) and zeal (*zèle*). While fanaticism is violent and cruel, zeal can be salutary.<sup>125</sup> The difference between the two is the place of reason in each. Fanaticism is completely without reason. Rousseau wants passion in the state, but not thoughtless passion. In *Discourse on the Virtue Most Necessary for the Hero*, he writes the "purest soul can lose its way even on the path of goodness if mind and reason do not guide it, and all virtues are corrupted without the collaboration of wisdom."<sup>126</sup> Virtues should be guided by reason. Without it, they turn into their extremes and into vice: "Firmness easily degenerates into obstinacy, gentleness into weakness, zeal into fanaticism, valor into ferocity."<sup>127</sup> All the negative aspects of religion of the citizen culminate in the thoughtlessness fanaticism requires. Not only does it keep the citizen in error, but it keeps him in fear, through superstition. Unable to reason, even about his own interest, he becomes fanatical and bloodthirsty or vulnerable to tyranny.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>*Poland III*, 183/960.

<sup>125</sup>In French usage, *zèle* has been understood to denote true and false versions of zeal, which helps to explain why it is sometimes used synonymously with fanaticism. In its beneficial version, or "true zeal," it is typically strongly religious in orientation, but also can be used in service of a person or cause. When I claim that Rousseau prefers zeal to fanaticism, I am arguing that he desires a true zeal. False zeal is usually associated with fanaticism. See Alain Rey, *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, s.v. "zèle." This division between true and false zeal can also be seen in prominent Christian thinkers; see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 28 art. 4.

<sup>126</sup>*Heroic Virtue*, 7/1269.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid. Rousseau also distinguishes between zeal and fanaticism in *Mountain*, when he describes the proselytes of the profession of faith of the Savoyard Vicar as having "zeal without fanaticism" (I, 142/697).

That Rousseau wants to avoid the cruelty and fanaticism of citizen religion becomes clear in his advice to Poland. For example, citizens in the ancient world associated the word “foreigner” with the word “enemy.” Though Rousseau encourages the Poles to be both patriotic and wary of foreigners, he does not encourage them to reach this level of civic fanaticism. Even when a Pole becomes king through Russian interference in their elections, Rousseau cautions them against executing the king. He presents them with two alternatives: “Either have his head cut off as he deserves; or without regard to his first election which is null and void, have him elected anew with other *Pacta conventa* by which you will make him renounce [the authority of] appointment to high offices.”<sup>128</sup> He recommends the second option because it is “not only more humane, but also the wiser.”<sup>129</sup> Rousseau does seem to think that citizens are able to be patriotic without fanaticism and its accompanying dangers. He encourages them to be citizens, while respecting humanity.

### Conclusion: The Civil Profession of Faith, a Solution?

The problems of the religion of the citizen should lead scholars to question whether this is the system Rousseau eventually plans to return to (Meier) or regrettably rejects (Beiner), and whether his ideal state requires the fanatic citizen (Trachtenberg).

As this analysis has shown, the failures of the religion of the citizen threaten both state and humanity. Internally, the religion restricts believers to a thoughtless fanaticism through its deception. It maintains this deception by encouraging superstitious belief. Because they are kept in ignorance, citizens are more likely to be swayed by tyranny. They are in the perfect condition for a tyrant to turn their zeal into fanaticism. Externally, it maintains a constant state of war and encourages empire (as well as harm of fellow citizens) owing to its increased inclination to violence and cruelty. The state requires passionate citizens for its preservation. But the religion of the citizen creates fanatics, as opposed to zealous citizens. When Rousseau rejects the religion of the citizen, he rejects not only the ancient system as a whole, but also the type of fanatical citizen that it creates.

Rousseau concludes his discussion of the religion of the citizen in the *Geneva Manuscript* by declaring: “It is better ... to bind the citizens to the state by weaker and gentler ties, and to have neither heroes nor fanatics.”<sup>130</sup>

<sup>128</sup>Poland XV, 258/1039. This difference between Rousseau and the ancients is striking. In the ancient world, treason was considered the worst crime. Here Rousseau only has it “punished” by renouncing his election. See Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2003), 130.

<sup>129</sup>Poland XV, 258/1039.

<sup>130</sup>GM III, 119/338.

Despite its accompanying problems, the state still requires religion to connect citizens to the state and to each other. But as Rousseau writes in the *Social Contract*, that religion cannot “exceed the bounds of public utility”—a fault of the religion of the citizen. It turns out that less may be required to be a good citizen than the all-encompassing religion of the citizen. As Rousseau describes the civil profession of faith, it is this civil religion which contains the “sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be either a good Citizen or a loyal subject.”<sup>131</sup> The “weaker and gentler ties” to the state are the belief in “provident Deity, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social Contract and the Laws.”<sup>132</sup> There is only one negative dogma: “intolerance.”

But does this constitute a possible solution to the problems of fanaticism in the religion of the citizen with the need the state has for religion?<sup>133</sup> Religion of the citizen fulfills the need for religion insofar as it combines love of the laws, patriotism, and the gods. But as Rousseau shows, absolute government control over religion eventually undermines the state, hindering religion’s usefulness. It could be that an increase in individual religious freedom, as seen in the civil profession of faith, as opposed to absolute control by the sovereign seen in the religion of the citizen, is more likely to satisfy the most important aim of the state, its preservation. For example, if the sovereign’s oversight is limited to questions of morality, it could lead to a tempering of both superstition and fanaticism. Recognizing the sanctity of the laws and enforcing toleration may lead to zeal, whereas the inclusion of vain ceremony to those laws and encouraging xenophobia may lead to fanaticism. Rousseau describes the benefits of the civil profession of faith in the *Geneva Manuscript*: “The state will have its cult and will not be the enemy of anyone else’s. With

<sup>131</sup>SC IV.8, 150/468.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 150–51/468.

<sup>133</sup>The scholarship is fairly divided on this question. For example, Beiner describes the civil profession of faith solution as a “paradox,” because it is not a return to the ancient republican citizenship Rousseau admires. See *Civil Religion*, 16. Hilail Gildin questions whether civil religion can exist alongside various other religions (*Rousseau’s “Social Contract”: The Design of the Argument* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983], 187). Others see Rousseau’s solution as allowing for religious freedom and pluralism. See Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 261: “Rousseau’s argument in his chapter on civil religion was thus much more about *laicizing* the state than it was about coercing belief.” See also Christopher Bertram, “Toleration and Pluralism in Rousseau’s Civil Religion,” in Mostefai and Scott, *Rousseau and l’Infâme*, 142: “Rousseau is prepared to accept religious pluralism as an unavoidable feature both of modern life and of a legitimate state. He implicitly concedes there that it is entirely normal, and in any case unalterable, for citizens to subscribe to rival and incompatible faiths, that there should be at least, Protestants and Catholics, Muslims and Jews.” I do not seek in this article to answer this question conclusively, but to provide an analysis of Rousseau on religion of the citizen, and of the place citizen religion occupies in his politico-religious thought.

divine and human laws being always united on the same object, the most pious theists will also be the most zealous citizens.”<sup>134</sup> In that way, it is possible that a civil religion with minimal dogma, such as the civil profession of faith, encourages a salutary zeal while preventing destructive fanaticism, truly combining “what right permits with what interest prescribes, so that justice and utility not be disjoined.”<sup>135</sup>

<sup>134</sup>GM III, 122/342.

<sup>135</sup>SC I 41/351.