

ROUSSEAU AND MODERN ENVIRONMENTALISM

by

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## ABSTRACT

Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau has been analyzed and characterized in many ways, but the relationship between certain aspects of his thought and what can be called eco-philosophy has not been pursued. Rousseau's ideas of man's relationship with nature, his condemnation of bourgeois society, the scientific/mechanistic paradigm and the idea of progress have distinct parallels to the thought of traditional eco-philosophers such as Thoreau, Muir and Leopold. Though Rousseau's thought is decidedly anthropocentric and therefore utilitarian in its ethical content, he did favour a careful stewardship of nature which rejected treating it as a resource to be exploited. Instead, he saw God's handiwork in the natural world and felt a great reverence for it. To facilitate this understanding, he studied botany and took many solitary walks in the wilderness as a means of achieving a greater appreciation of its natural beauty and his place within it. In addition, Rousseau's advocacy of direct democracy and small self-sufficient agrarian communities also reflect modern positions, particularly those of Bookchin, Schumacher and the leaders of the various Green movements. Evidence from his work, thus, will be presented to support the contention that his philosophy has distinct parallels to these modern perspectives. While much of his thought seems hopelessly utopian in the light of modern realities, there is a great deal that is relevant to the environmental problems modern society faces.

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## INTRODUCTION: ROUSSEAU AND THE MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

### Rousseauian Criticism

The 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau is truly 'the man of a thousand faces.' He has been characterized in many ways: an authoritarian, a liberal, a collectivist, an individualist, and even an anarchist. His writings have evoked both high praise and extreme condemnation amongst commentators which leads to the conclusion that he is either one of the world's most misunderstood philosophers or one of its most inconsistent. (This writer prefers the former). According to David Cameron "Rousseauist criticism...has been characterized by continuing fundamental disagreement and wildly conflicting scholarship ever since the 18th century." (Horowitz 1987, 7) Bertrand Russell argued that Rousseau was "the inventor of the political philosophy of pseudo-democratic dictatorships" (Pepper 1984, 205), and Sir Henry Maine attacked him "for establishing a 'collective despot' and for reintroducing, in the Contrat social , 'the old divine right of kings in a new dress.'" (Cassirer 1989, 4) James Miller, although an admirer of Rousseau, summarized the various criticisms of Rousseau thusly:

Prophetic, regressive, unrealistic, a dictator wishing to recast society at will, a stoic clinging to the past, a loser hopelessly tilting at windmills, Rousseau in his own way, at various moments, was all these things, and much more besides.

(Miller, 1984, 204-205)

In contrast French commentator Emile Faguet argued that Rousseau was fundamentally an individualist (Cassirer 1989, 6), as did Henri See who praised Rousseau as a liberal and denied that he wanted to give the state "an absolute and aggressive authority." (Cassirer 1989, 7) Others, however, saw Rousseau's individualism as irresponsible and regarded him as a "philosopher of ruinous disorder." (Cassirer 1989, 4) According to Peter Gay in his lucid introduction to Ernst Cassirer's landmark essay The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau "(m)any thinkers have suffered at the hands of commentators, but few have had to endure as much as Rousseau." (1989, 4) Gay goes on to argue that "the critic who wants to understand Rousseau must transcend political categories and consider his work as a whole." (Horowitz 1987, 9, footnote 21) With this advice in mind, it must be pointed out that it is not the purpose of this paper to wrestle with the various divergent points of view. Instead, what will be offered is a new perspective on Rousseau (a 'new face' as it were): Rousseau the "Environmentalism."

Primarily, it will be argued that aspects of Rousseau's thought parallel certain tenets of modern environmentalism. To accomplish this selections forwarded from his work will be compared with some of central pillars of modern environmental philosophy. Specifically, this paper will focus on three main currents within Rousseau's thought: man's relationship with nature; his criticism of bourgeois society and of progress; and his doctrines related to political organizations. It will be shown that Rousseau not only shares much in common

with the traditional "founding fathers" of modern environmentalism such as Thoreau, Muir and Leopold, but that he also shares much in common with modern points of view as represented by Bookchin, Schumacher, the authors of The Limits to Growth study, and the leaders of the various Green movements. Through this process it will be argued that Rousseau deserves recognition for his influence on modern environmentalism, recognition that is slow in coming.

Indeed, it is puzzling why Rousseau has not be recognized or even acknowledged by modern eco-philosophers. His advocacy of direct democracy has a direct relationship to one of the central pillars of the German Green movement and his striking analysis of bourgeois society and values has distinct parallels to current counter-modern criticism (i.e. Marcuse, and Berman). Nevertheless, rarely is Rousseau cited as an inspiration or even as a reference in the most current works of eco-philosophy. Part of the reason is probably as a result of the difficulty critics have attempting to characterize Rousseau, in general terms. Thus, whenever one discusses Rousseau, a 'war must be waged' against his critics even before one can begin to access what it is he stands for in the specific instance--in this case his eco-philosophical perspective. This makes it difficult to judge him fairly, and one can suspect that perhaps this has discouraged later thinkers from attempting to analyze Rousseau's thought on environmental matters.

Another reason might be that Rousseau's thought has often been equated, rightly or wrongly, with totalitarian forms of government. Eco-anarchists such as Bookchin argue in favour of



social equality and small-scale participatory democracies, much as Rousseau did, but they, generally, do not discuss the question of how to maintain order when different groups or territories find their objectives at cross purposes. For Rousseau, individuals had to give way to whatever the 'general will' of the community insisted upon. Only the Blueprint for Survival seems to have gone so far as to admit that a society based on sound ecological principles would have to enforce its dictates, often harshly, in order to ensure that the integrity of the environment was maintained. One can imagine the conflicts that could spring up if the 'general will' dictated that all forestry operations in British Columbia would have to cease immediately or that only bicycles would be allowed in downtown Vancouver. It would indeed be a sad day if the armed forces were used to quell a rebellion from an area whose predominant population relies on the forest industry to generate wealth.

More likely, however, economic imperatives will continue to outweigh ecological ones. People are not yet ready to accept the idea that living standards in western countries may have to be scaled back to meet environmental concerns, much less ready to 'shut down the economic engines of growth' entirely. This means that it is likely that the condition of the world's environment will continue to deteriorate into the foreseeable future. In other words, if the current emphasis on growth is left unfettered, things from an ecological point of view will get much worse before they get better.

If this should occur, it is indeed ironic that a political system much like Rousseau's may be necessary. Perhaps then ecophilosophers will begin to examine Rousseau's thought in a much more serious manner. One retains hope, however, that the situation will not become so desperate that people will be 'forced to be free' by an all-encompassing authority. One must keep in mind that Rousseau's form of political organization relied on the idea that people would equate the public good with their own private good. In modern society economies run on a competitive individualism which emphasizes private good and merely hopes that the public good is served. In essence the public good is simply an inadvertent by-product. Meanwhile, the evidence continues to mount of the deleterious impact that this line of thinking has on the environment; thus, we now turn to a brief overview of the current crisis.

### The Current Environmental Crisis

There is little doubt that we are witnessing an assault on the environment of the worst magnitude. Industrialization coupled with an unquestioning faith in science, a collective mindset that favours domination of nature rather than careful stewardship of it, and the idea of continuous progress have lead to a situation whereby drastic and fundamental changes in the ways we live and think will be necessary if we are to stop and indeed reverse the damage already done.

In 1977 U.S President Jimmy Carter directed the Council on

Environmental Quality and the Department of State to make a study of the probable changes in the world's population, natural resources, and environment through the end of the century. (Global 2000 Report, 1988, 1) Its conclusions were startling and disturbing. Essentially if present trends continue the report found that "the world in 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, less stable ecologically, and more vulnerable to disruption than the world we live in now." (Global 2000 Report 1988, 1) For one thing, the world's population will be 50 percent higher in the year 2000 than in 1975 with 90 percent of this increase coming in the Third world. Furthermore, despite the fact that economies of the less developed countries are expected to grow faster than those of the industrialized nations, the gap between rich and poor countries will continue to widen. This will lead to "serious long-term declines in the productivity of renewable natural resource systems." (Global 2000 Report, 1988, 40) This will also mean that less arable land will be available, world per capita water supplies will decline by an estimated 35 percent, and prices for the most vital resources will rise over and above inflation. The environment itself will lose important life-supporting capabilities. For example, 40 percent of the forests still remaining in the third world will have been razed, atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide will be almost a third higher than pre-industrial levels, and 15-20 of the earth's total species of plants and animals will be extinct. Essentially, by the year 2000 the planet's 'carrying capacity' will be strained almost beyond its limits.

According to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, "a world population of 10 billion 'is close to (if not above) the maximum that an intensively managed world might hope to support with some degree of comfort and individual choice." (Global 2000 Report, 1988,41) The Global 2000 report estimates that this level will be reached by the year 2030, and this same rate of growth "would produce a population of nearly 30 billion before the end of the 21st century." (Global 2000 Report 1988, 41) But what is perhaps the most chilling conclusion, one that lends credence to the 'Malthusian dilemma' is that

as the world's populations exceed and reduce the land's carrying capacity in widening areas, the trends of the last century or two toward improved health and longer life may come to a halt. Hunger and disease may claim more lives--especially lives of babies and young children.

(Global 2000 Report 1988, 42)

The study concludes with an ominous note that nations, both collectively and individually, must "take bold and imaginative steps toward improved social and economic conditions, reduce fertility, manage our resources more effectively, and protect the environment" (Global 2000 Report 1988, 42) or else the myriad of problems we are currently facing such as desertification, resource and species depletion, over-population, environmental degradation, acid rain, global warming and ozone depletion will only get worse. In fact, given the current lack of commitment on the part of governments and the general apathy of citizens in the western industrialized countries, it may already be too late to make effective long-lasting changes.

## Conflicting Ideologies in the Modern Environmental Movement

Interestingly enough, in much the same way that critics of Rousseau disagree, the modern environmental philosophers, too, are at odds with one another. Undeniably, modern environmentalism is 'a house divided.' Despite the monolithic challenge society faces as a result of man's continued assault on the natural environment, the environmental movement is fragmented into a whole host of perspectives that prescribe different solutions or approaches.

These varying outlooks are reflected in the wide range of environmental groups which include social ecologists, animal rights advocates, conservationists, radical 'ecotopians' and a whole host of single issue special interest groups. This stratification has led to mass confusion in society and consternation amongst the various groups that has rendered the modern environmental movement, by and large, only marginally effective at mobilizing society to halt or reverse those habits and ways of thinking that have led us to where we are today.

This reality is, in part, a reflection of a host of dilemmas society faces that require tough choices, choices between development and preservation; between human beings' interests and those of animals and nature itself; and between present people's needs and the needs of future generations, just to name a few. These choices, thus, require an ethical framework that provides "answers to what is right, good, or obligatory."

(Seligman 1989, 170) According to Clive Seligman, environmental

ethics can be broadly distinguished between utilitarian and deontological theories of normative ethics.

A deontological approach holds that an act is right or wrong "depending on whether ethical rules have been followed, regardless of whether they increase the good consequence." (Seligman 1989, 171) Kant's categorical imperative is perhaps the most famous deontological rule, and with respect to environmental ethics is best reflected in the philosophy of 'deep ecology.' This approach sees man as only one part of the ecosystem and argues that every form of life has an 'intrinsic' or natural right to "freedom from excessive human interference, and to the opportunity to pursue their own definition of happiness." (Nash 1989, 147) This perspective does not place any greater value on the needs of humans within the biosphere than those of the rest of the biosphere's constituents. According to Warwick Fox:

Deep ecology...strives to be non-anthropocentric by viewing humans as just one constituency among others in the biotic community, just one particular strand in the web of life, just one kind of knot in the biospherical knot.

(Alwyn Jones 1987, 43)

Some 'deep ecologists' even extend this argument to include rivers, mountains and other forms of 'non-living' things. As an example of this, in 1981 the group Earth First! gathered at the Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River and unrolled a 300 foot black plastic 'crack' down the concrete wall while at the same time shouting 'Free the Colorado!' "(T)hey left no doubt that their motives had to do with the integrity of natural ecological processes

rather than human recreational interest in those processes."

(Nash 1989, 192)

From a utilitarian perspective, however, protection of the environment is necessary to satisfy a variety of distinctly "human wants, including recreational, aesthetic, convenience, and survival needs...(and)...assumes a dualism between humans and nature."

(Seligman 1989, 172-173) The problem here is that humans do not always act in their own best interests, and this has forced philosophers to conclude that it is likely that "the environment cannot receive adequate protection unless we begin to consider the needs of the environment apart from its usefulness to humans."

(Seligman 1989, 170)

Beyond the question of ethical frameworks, the various perspectives can be further classified into two general groupings: those who are technologically optimistic environmentalists (technocentrics); and those who combine aspects of ecology with certain tenets of romanticism (ecocentrics). (Pepper 1984, 22)

The genesis of technocentric thought can be traced to the Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th century. This revolution is generally regarded to have begun from the time of Copernicus and continued on through the end of the 17th century with the publication of Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy (1687). It challenged the predominance of the medieval concept of "an organic, living, and spiritual universe...by that of the world as a machine...." (Capra 1982, 54) The scientific paradigm, thus, was established and continues to be the "dominant metaphor of the modern era." (Capra 1982, 54)

The establishment of this paradigm came about as result of developments in physics and astronomy exemplified by the work not only of Copernicus and Newton, but also of Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler. While Copernicus was responsible for overthrowing the view that the earth was the centre of the universe, Kepler forwarded revolutionary empirical concepts related to the motion of planets. Galileo, meanwhile, confirmed the Copernican hypothesis and was the first to combine scientific experimentation with the use of mathematical language to formulate the laws of nature that he 'discovered.' He postulated that scientists should "restrict themselves to studying the essential properties of material bodies--shapes numbers and movement--which could be measured and quantified." (Capra 1982, 55) Descriptions such as colour, sound, taste, and the like were summarily dismissed as 'subjective mental projections.' Thus, according to psychiatrist R.D.Laing human experience was exorcised from scientific discussion taking with it "aesthetics and ethical sensibility, values, quality, form, feelings, motives, intentions, soul, consciousness, spirit." (Capra 1982, 55)

This scientific assault on the senses continued into the 17th century with the work of Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes. While Bacon's work in the area of mathematics advocated using the knowledge gained from science to control and dominate nature, Descartes forwarded the view that the "key to the universe was its mathematical structure...." (Capra 1982, 58) No longer did people view nature as an organism, but instead saw it as a perfect machine that functioned to exacting mathematical laws.



Newton's part in this revolution centered on his synthesis of all scientific work that proceeded him. He argued that the universe itself was a unified system operating according to mathematical laws. This perspective, however, has been criticized for overemphasizing the quantitative side of life, while ignoring the qualitative aspects leaving nothing more than a "cold, inert universe made up entirely of dead matter...a world view made for machines, not people." (Rifkin 1989, 37) At any rate, as a result of the scientific revolution a conceptual framework was established which gave a scientific rationale "for the manipulation and exploitation of nature that has become typical of western culture." (Capra 1982, 61)

For technocentric environmentalists, thus, science is not the enemy, but will be mankind's salvation. They staunchly maintain a faith in the ability and efficiency of management to solve any problems by the use of objective analysis and a reliance on the laws of physical science. Technocentrics also "disavow public participation in environmental and other decision-making in favour of accepting as authoritative the advice of (scientific and economic) experts." (Pepper 1984, 29) They also maintain that man is justified in appropriating and manipulating nature for his own ends, as long as 'careful management' practices are employed. For the most part they do not recognize the natural world as anything more than 'fodder for man's cannon.' Their approach does not emphasize the idea that man's spiritual well-being requires interaction with the natural environment, and for the most part they see nature as an object or resource to be

exploited, albeit carefully exploited. Their idea that nature's purpose is to serve mankind, however, assumes an extreme form of dualism between man and nature that is highly debatable.

Furthermore, the unquestioning faith in technological solutions can lead to an irrational belief in the idea of progress and "in the ability of advanced capitalism to maintain itself."

(Pepper 1984, 29) According to Murdy, however, an anthropocentrism that affirms the idea

that mankind is to be valued more highly than other things in nature is not necessarily a problem. The problem lies in our difficulty to distinguish between 'proper ends' which are progressive and promote human values and 'improper ends' which are retrogressive and destructive of human values."

(Seligman 1989, 176)

Ecological environmentalists (ecocentrics), on the other hand, believe in a symbiotic relationship between man and nature. Instead of dominating nature, man is seen as a part of it. For the most part, nature is respected "for its own sake, above and beyond its usefulness or relationship to man." (Pepper 1984, 27) If human beings were eliminated from the biotic community, life on the planet would still have purpose and meaning. Furthermore, while man is not necessary to nature, ecocentrics believe that the reverse is not true, since nature is regarded as "necessary for his emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing in the face of pressures from sophisticated and artificial urban living" (Pepper 1984, 28) (an idea rejected by technocentrics). This point of view has parallels to Rousseau and the Romantic Movement which arose in response to the Scientific Revolution.

It should be noted, however, that ecocentrics are not simply distinguished by their non-scientific philosophical roots. There are also those who base their assumptions on science. Examples include Charles Darwin, Thomas Malthus, and modern scientific ecocentrics such as Paul Ehrlich (Ehrlich 1990, 1) and the various neo-Malthusians. (Mellos 1988, 715) In essence, they believe that man is indeed only part of the biotic community, the primary tenet separating them from technocentrics. They believe that "anything which man does affects the rest of the global system and reverberates through it--eventually back onto him." (Pepper 1984, 28) Accordingly, biological laws such as carrying capacity, population, thermodynamics, and systems behavior were regarded as paramount. The output of scientific ecocentrism includes theories relating to small-scale production, recycling, zero-population growth and low impact technologies. (Pepper 1984, 28) This approach is anthropocentric and recognizes the value of the science; yet, it does not ignore the importance of cultivating a relationship with nature.

It is important to remember that these various classifications are simply descriptive tools at varying levels of abstraction, and that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, it is dangerous to take certain selections of a philosopher's thought and display them as evidence he or she was decidedly ecocentric. As mentioned, Rousseau is difficult to classify on any terms; thus, this thesis will try to avoid placing specific labels on his thought. These distinctions are simply offered as descriptive tools one should keep in mind when accessing

Rousseau's thought. What is hoped is that the selections presented will stand as examples of tendencies in his thought from which the reader can draw his own conclusions. The purposes of this thesis is to encourage further debate on the characterization of Rousseau as an 'environmentalist,' and not to draw definitive conclusions about how to classify Rousseau in terms of modern environmental philosophy.

Finally these contending outlooks are further divided by a variety of issues which have relevance to all perspectives. These issues are often more accessible to the general public and include such questions as the importance of individual freedom versus the common good; the protection of national sovereignty versus the need for global solutions; and the rights of minorities versus those of the majority. (Pepper, 14) At the heart of these debates exists the underlying struggle between our desires for progress and material wealth and those values "connected with social and environmental justice and the non-material, spiritual sides of our nature." (Pepper 1984, 14) These two contrary philosophical outlooks are currently locked in an intense struggle as the western world, in particular, begins to grapple with the legacy of the Industrial Revolution, and begins to question the legitimacy of the idea that the natural world is ours to command and control.

Lending support to this point of view the drafters of the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, concluded that society must begin to recognize that the domination of nature by mankind has not served us well.

They argue that "most renewable resources are part of a complex and interlinked ecosystem, and maximum sustainable yield must be defined after taking into account system-wide effects of exploitation." (OCF 1987, 45) In this way, system-wide harmony is the primary goal:

In essence, sustainable development is a process change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.

(OCF 1987, 46)

Thus, while discerning the importance of an understanding of the individual parts in any system, many have argued for a holistic approach which sees the whole as different from the mere sum of its parts. (Suzuki 1990, xii) "(A)nimals, plants micro-organisms, and inanimate substances are linked through a complex web of interdependencies involving the exchange of matter and energy in continual cycles." (Alwyn Jones 1987, 43) Since the pieces act differently in combination, certain attributes emerge from their interaction that cannot be predetermined. James Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis' which argues that the earth itself is 'alive' is a form of this type of argument. (Lovelock, 1990, 1)

Optimists, in fact, see the current debates over the environment as evidence that there is a new phase of mankind's historic and cultural development unfolding, that civilization is, once again, facing a fundamental transformation in thinking, or what Capra refers to as a 'paradigm shift.' (Capra 1982, 1) The growth and proliferation of the environmental movement may be

further evidence of this shift.

Pessimists, however, see little evidence of a general decline in faith that technological solutions to the environmental crisis will be found. They argue that environmentalists make up only a small yet vocal portion of society that do not reflect general attitudes. They go on to cite the pervasiveness of apathy towards environmental issues on the part of people who are too preoccupied with paying their bills and 'getting ahead.' Pessimists emphasize the hypocrisy of people who believe they are doing their part to stop environmental degradation by refusing to use plastic utensils all the while continuing to drive gas-burning cars. They thus, reject the idea that a fundamental shift in thinking is underway. Instead, they argue that society will only change when the situation becomes so desperate that our very survival as a species is threatened. As mentioned, for most people, this possibility still seems a long way off.

For Rousseau, however, society condemned itself long ago to an uncertain future, a future based on false values and false needs, by adopting a mechanistic/scientific view of the world and by denying 'feeling' in favour of rationalization. He, too, was a pessimist about society's future; thus, he demanded fundamental changes in the way we think, the way we work, and the way we govern ourselves. Much like modern environmentalists, Rousseau wanted to see political systems evolve whereby people could directly participate in government, thereby ensuring, he supposed, that the best decisions for society as a whole would be made. He also advocated that man

cultivate a healthy relationship with nature which he believed, afterall, was God's handiwork. Finally, he argued vociferiously for a return to simple tastes and values, and he rejected the idea of materialistic measures of self-worth.

These concepts will be the primary focus of this paper, and it is to his ideas concerning man's relationship with nature that we now turn.

## CHAPTER TWO: ROUSSEAU AND NATURE

### Introduction

Rousseau's writings on the relationship between man and nature represents one of the focal points of his philosophy. Throughout his life he wrote passionately about the need for man to get back in touch with his true self, to cut through the corrupting influence of society, and to reassess society's emphasis on rationalism represented by the scientific revolution and the tenets of Enlightenment philosophy. Rousseau felt very strongly that that self-realization could be achieved, in part, by communing with nature. Although his regard for nature is anthropocentric, Rousseau steadfastly advocated a careful stewardship that reflected his respect for what he considered God's creation. He felt a profound reverence for nature which he believed was a clear indication of God's presence, and he wrote long eloquent passages about his experiences walking in the woods, climbing mountains, and studying the flora and fauna of the wilderness areas he visited. He seemed to feel closer to God during these periods of solitary contemplation. In fact, he preferred these times alone. In the fifth chapter of his Reveries of a Solitary Walker he pointed out that his long excursions into nature were perhaps the happiest times of his life: (J.H. Mason 1979, 308)

I would slip away and go throw myself alone into a boat that I rowed to the middle of the lake when the water was calm; and there, stretching myself out full-length in the boat, my eyes turned to heaven, I let myself slowly drift back and forth with the water,



sometimes for several hours plunged in a thousand confused, but delightful, reveries which, even without having any well-determined or constant object were in my opinion a hundred times preferable to the sweetest things I have found in what are called the pleasures of life.

(J.H. Mason 1979, 265)

This simple but moving passage reflects much of what Rousseau represented, and has distinct romantic overtones: the solitary individual on a quest for self-discovery emphasizing feeling over rational scientific analysis.

In fact, Rousseau has often been referred to as the 'father of Romanticism' (Masters 1968, 93) particularly for his emphasis on individualism (Harvey 1980, 13), temperate realism and its opposite sentimentalism. (Masters 1968, 93) In essence, Rousseau's emphasis on feeling rather than reason reflected his belief, like so many of his romantic followers, "that the live instincts are more often right than the deadening dictates of social convention." (Featherstone 1978, 174) This is not to say, however, that Rousseau ignored reason in favour of simple feeling, but instead that he believed that "emotions and reason were complementary and it was only in areas where the reason could give no clear guidance that he followed what he termed the 'preuve du sentiment' in matters of conscience." (Harvey 1980, 7) For Rousseau, reason was always 'straight-jacketed' by its reliance on sense experience.

In addition, his efforts to develop "a conception of his authentic self, a true self underlying the 'personae' imposed on him by society" (1980, 14) can also be considered further

evidence of his romantic leanings. According to Samuel Taylor the traditional elements, so oft repeated as to have become stereotypes or cliches, include:

the cult of nature and return to a natural mode of existence, the restoration of the rights of the emotions vis-a-vis the reason, individualism, both as the cult of freedom and as the cult of introspection or 'le moi,' the mountain, lake and rustic community in the novel, the prototype romantic hero: Saint Preux, romantic love in the *Nouveau Heloise* and the rebirth of lyricism in French literature. Some would also add the restoration of the religious spirit.

(1980, 9-10)

Taylor argues that Rousseau was not a cause of romanticism, although certainly "aspects of his writings and character... may...legitimately be regarded as romantic." (1980, 2) In fact, Rousseau never used the term 'romantique' "nor any other single label to characterize his writings." (1980, 3) Accordingly, Taylor argues that it is in Rousseau's "quest for self-awareness that we see his closest approach to the romantic spirit, and it is this fact which makes it profoundly inadequate to attach any label such as pre-romantic to Rousseau." (1980, 17) While recognizing the dangers involved in ascribing tidy labels to philosophical thought (especially when dealing with a thinker as complex and controversial as Rousseau); it can be said that the romantic elements within his thought certainly provided inspiration for later thinkers, many of whom would influence environmental philosophy in the 19th and 20th century.

## Rousseau and the Romantic Spirit

The term 'romantic' can be used in many ways, so many ways in fact that it has almost lost its original flavour (if it ever had one). According to Arthur Lovejoy romanticism was a 'phenomenon' that developed in a 'series of dissimilar waves' or "as a series of seminal literary figures producing organic mutations so profound that they defy common description."

(1980, 3) In essence, the European romantic movement of the 18th and 19th century, while also an artistic and intellectual movement, grew in large part as a reaction against the material changes brought on by the scientific revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism. As cities grew and production processes expanded, there was a growing sense of unease that these processes, rather than leading to a more perfect world order had instead unleashed 'violent natural forces' that had "led to a spiritual alienation of the mass of people from the land and from each other." (Pepper 1984, 76) People were simply regarded as parts in the grand economic machine--"they were objectivized, they and their labour were reduced to the status of a commodity." (1984, 76) As these processes of urbanization and industrialization grew, many people began to perceive them as degrading the environment and being directly responsible for the growth of urban ghettos marked by squalor and deprivation. (1984, 76) "They began to symbolize the failure of the Locke and Hume philosophies that a perfect society could be attained by permitting people to follow in an

enlightened way their self interest." (1984, 76) Thus, Romanticism was a reaction "against the narrowness of the 18th century...against the culture of rationalism and the empiricist and material outlook which it had generated." (Campbell 1987, 181) In essence, Romanticism developed in opposition to the Enlightenment's "excessive faith in reason, or its insufficient faith in faith." (Halsted 1965, viii) For Carl Schmitt the Romantic movement represented "both a process of secularization and a process of subjectification and privatization." (1986, 121) Henri Payne, meanwhile, argued that the movement was marked by "extreme individualism and rebellion against an over-mechanized society and its hierarchies and bureaucracies." (1977, 36) Romanticism was also marked by a deep-seated and "passionate love of nature." (1977, 36) For Arnold Hauser, Romanticism was the expression of a world-view "which no longer believed in absolute values, could no longer believe in any values without thinking of their relativity, their historical limitations...." (Halsted 1965, xv)

According to David Morse, however, Romanticism was problematic:

The cardinal doctrine of Romanticism, the insistence on the autonomy of the individual and the rejection of external laws, injunctions and restraints lead to a repetition of Protestant Angst: the extreme isolation of the individual as he is thrown back on his own resources under the highest law of introspection and self scrutiny. The corollary of the saving of the self is the loneliness and isolation of the self that is saved.

(1981, 172)

Joseph Featherstone went further arguing that

(t)he Romantic cult of sensibility, the noble savage, and children's innocence which Rousseau began led to

egotism, nostalgia, sentimentality, and the other forms of evasion of reality we right attack when we think of the weakheaded side of all the various Romanticisms.

(1978, 177)

Irving Babbitt went so far as to condemn the movement altogether indicting Romantic morality for

its emotionalism, sentimentality, primitivism, anti-intellectualism, self-indulgent individualism, passivity, and repudiation of the reality principle in an undisciplined riot of the imagination--not to mention its carnality and libertinism....

(Lockridge 1989, 15)

Furthermore, Babbitt argued that "(t)he Romantic movement (was) filled with the groans of those who...evaded action and at the same time (became) highly sensitive and highly self-conscious."

(Halsted 1965, 17) According to Samuel Taylor, however, Babbitt's interpretation is "grossly inaccurate, discursive, and biased...." (Harvey 1980, 2) Lockridge, meanwhile, calls Babbitt's conclusions "a clear and distinct misrepresentation of the ethics of Romanticism." (Lockridge 1989, 16) He countered that Romantic theory "assumes that man is naturally good, that man's impulses are trustworthy, that the rational faculty is unreliable to the point of being dangerous or possibly evil."

(Lockridge 1989, 16)

Romanticism, thus, was not simply a philosophy, but was more a mode of feeling. With respect to individualism, romantic thought emphasized the qualitative rather than the quantitative aspects of life as characterized by the Enlightenment. Thus, it stressed "a person's uniqueness or peculiarity, rather than the features which he (or she) shared with all mankind." (Campbell 1987, 183)

Although romantic thinkers agreed with the philosophes of the Enlightenment that individuals had the right of self-determination, "their conception of the self as an essentially divine, and unique 'creative' genius meant that this was largely interpreted as the right to 'self-expression,' or self discovery." (1987, 183) By placing creativity at the center of their thought, Romantics emphasized "the distinctive nature of their own selves." (1987, 183), a preoccupation clearly anticipated and indeed inspired by Rousseau in his Confessions:

I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself. Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike anyone I have ever met: I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different.

(Cohen 1953, 17)

It can be argued that this statement marked one of the first and most forceful descriptions of the romantic ideal. By placing the self at the center of their thought, Romantics emphasized the creative process arguing that it was the "forces of nature within man, the passions and promptings of the id, which came to be regarded as the ultimate source of all thought, feeling and action, the very seat of the imagination." (Campbell 1987, 184) However, while counter-cultural theorists exalt feeling and the imagination in this manner, Rousseau stressed the importance of combining the functions of feeling and reason towards a higher form of intellectual development. It is this synthesis or mediation of reason and feeling that marks one of Rousseau's contributions

to the history of ideas. His ideal of the imagination guided by reason and reinforced by feeling reflects a rational balance in his thought that is often neglected by contemporary critics who focus, perhaps too much, on his contradictions, his pessimism, and his tendency to overstatement. As outlined in Emile, his treatise on natural education, the natural man is "a man of reason whose mind is in the service of a sensibility, a rational thinker who is not afraid to cry." (Featherstone 1978, 177). For Rousseau, man must "understand the general rational design of nature as well as the mazes of the human heart, Rousseau's version of Kant's two sovereign realities, the starry heavens above and the moral law within." (Featherstone 1978, 177) According to Ronald Grimsley at the center of Rousseau's thought "is the firm conviction that happiness and self-realization are always attainable by those who have the wisdom to rise above the false values of corrupt society and to re-affirm their faith in the power of nature." (Grimsley 1983, 185) Indeed, it is his reverence for the natural environment which constitutes one of the most striking elements of his thought.

#### Rousseau and Man's Relationship with the Natural World

For Rousseau everything related to nature, and was based on feelings he "cultivated from the first awakening of his spiritual self-awareness." (Cassirer 1989, 85) One must keep in mind, however, that Rousseau used the term 'nature' in several different ways. It could mean "the physical environment, the living force in the world and in a person, what is original or inherent or

spontaneous, (or) what is manifest and what is potential."  
(Mason 1979, 260) This chapter focuses primarily on the relationship between Rousseau and nature in the sense of the natural world, a relationship marked by his almost mystical sense of direct communion with nature. This approach parallels later thinkers such as Thoreau and Leopold and is reflected today in a variety of approaches to the environment. As Cassirer has suggested these feelings intoxicated him "long after he had become a solitary misanthrope who avoided all intercourse with men." (1989, 85) According to Rousseau:

finding among men neither integrity nor truth, nor any of the feelings...without which all society is but illusion and vanity, I withdrew into myself; and, in living with myself and with nature, I tasted an infinite sweetness in the thought that I was not alone....

(Cassirer 1989, 85-86)

Rousseau, thus, expresses an 'idyllic passion' for a solitary existence within nature. (Bookchin 1989, 153) According to Murray Bookchin, however, this mode of thinking had 'a less innocent side' since it could also lead to a denial of the need for social intercourse and 'a needless opposition between wilderness and civilization.' He argues that Voltaire's criticism that Rousseau was 'an enemy of mankind' was "not entirely an overstatement." (1989, 153)

Nevertheless, Rousseau's lyrical power, at its 'purest in the Nouvelle Heloise, was his ability to "depict all human sentiment and passion as if enveloped in the atmosphere of pure sensitivity to nature." (Cassirer 1989, 86) Instead of being a neutral observer above nature, "he dips into its inner life and



vibrates with its own rhythms. And in this he finds a new source of happiness that can never dry up." (Cassirer 1989, 86) By discovering how we are affected by our natural world, Rousseau hoped to show the benefits of cultivating a healthy relationship with it. This is demonstrated by Rousseau in the first part of the Nouvelle Heloise in which he describes a walk into the mountains of the High Valais:

It was here that I discerned in the purity of the air, the true cause of the change in my mood and of the return of that inner peace that I had lost for so long. This, indeed, is a general feeling common to all men, though not all are aware of it. In the high mountains, where the air is pure and rarefied, we breathe more easily, our bodies feel lighter, our minds more serene, our pleasures less keen, our passions more restrained.

(J.H. Mason 1979, 137-38)

According to Starobinski "(t)he mountain to him was the answer to his hunger for the abolition of the inevitable impediments to vision and communication elsewhere." (Harvey 1980, 10)

In addition to the mystical aspect of Rousseau's relationship with nature there exists a general enjoyment of the world of trees, plants and flowers. In fact, Rousseau became intensely interested in the study of botany. "I know of no study in the world better suited to my natural tastes than that of plants." (J.H. Mason 1979, 262) Rousseau not only studied botany but wrote on it as well, collecting together his observations in his Dictionary of Botanical Terms. Thus, his experiences with nature became marked not only by keen observation but also of experience and participation. "Instead of being overwhelmed by the weight of the universe, he was now overwhelmed by the marvels

of the natural world," (J.H. Mason 1979, 263) and in his final years the euphoria he felt when interacting with nature almost became his only sanctuary from a world he felt had abandoned him. As an example of this, the following is an extract from his Reveries of the Solitary Walker written during his stay on the island of Saint-Pierre:

When the evening approached I went down from the top of the island and happily sat on the shore beside the lake, in some hidden spot. There the sound of the waves and the agitation of the water captivated my senses; they drove every other agitation from my soul and plunged it into delicious reveries; the night often surprised me without my having noticed it; the ebb and flow of the water, with its continuous sound, rising and falling, constantly struck my ears and my eyes; they made up for the internal movements which the reverie had extinguished inside me; they were enough to make me feel my existence with pleasure, without taking the trouble to think. Sometimes some weak and brief reflection was born on the instability of earthly things, the image of which was on the surface of the water. But soon these light impressions were awed in the uniformity of continuous movement which lulled me and held me, without any active help from my soul, to such an extent that, when called by the hour and the signal agreed upon, I could not tear myself away from there without effort.

(J.H. Mason 1979, 265-66)

The sense of communion with nature, this reaffirmation of its cleansing spirit contrasted sharply with the dominant mechanistic paradigm of nature so prevalent during Rousseau's era. According to Cassirer, "Rousseau once again discovered the soul of nature" (Cassirer 1989, 106) thus perhaps becoming the first to enunciate a truly theological ecology, an ecological outlook based on faith rather than straight fact.

This concept of nature's soul was to become central to Rousseau's view of the natural world. In his Profession of Faith

of a Savoyard Vicar Rousseau outlined his belief that, contrary to the materialist view that matter has movement or order of its own, "there must be an independent source of life and intelligence...that is outside of the world and ourselves, namely, God." (J.H. Mason 1979, 210-11) Thus, the order or design he saw in the world was a direct proof of the existence of God. In addition, he argued for the concept of 'first cause,' supporting it by referring to the dictates of his 'inner voice' or conscience:

So the world is not some huge animal which moves of its own accord; its movements are therefore due to some external cause, a cause which I cannot perceive. But the inner voice makes this cause so apparent to me that I cannot watch the course of the sun without imagining a force which drives it, and when the earth revolves I think I see the hand that sets it in motion....

(J.H. Mason 1979, 217)

Thus, he could not fathom the materialist concept "that passive and dead matter can have brought forth living and feeling beings, that blind chance has brought forth intelligent beings, that that which does not think has brought forth thinking beings." (J.H. Mason 1979, 219) Instead he believed that the world was governed by 'a wise and powerful will,' and he saw the 'spectacle of nature' as God's handiwork.

If matter in motion points me to a will, matter in motion according to fixed laws points me to an intelligence; that is the second article of my creed. To act, to compare, to choose, are the operations of an active thinking being; so this being exists. Where do you find him existing, you will say? Not merely in the revolving heavens, nor in the sun which gives us light, nor in myself alone, but in the sheep that grazes, the bird that flies, the stone that falls and the leaf blown by the wind.

(J.H. Mason 1979, 218)

For Rousseau, God's handiwork could be seen everywhere in the natural world.

Essentially Rousseau believed in a natural religion based on our own experiences of the world and ourselves. As mentioned, he argued against revelation, in favour of the concept of the 'spectacle of nature' and a belief in the 'inner voice.' He rejected any religion that relied on Scripture, or miracles, and instead professed a faith that "was not a systematic set of beliefs based on reason, but the realization of the spiritual element in our nature, a matter of experience rather than argument." (J.H. Mason 1979, 211) Thus, he placed his faith squarely towards "a sense of wholeness in oneself and with the natural world," (Mason, 211) a world in which nature's order and its aesthetic qualities clearly revealed the hand of God.

Rousseau also supported the concept of man's stewardship of nature. In the Profession he pointed out that "not only does he tame all the beasts, not only does he control its elements through his industry; but he alone knows how to control it." (J.H. Mason 1979, 220) But he cautions man not to be arrogant about this position of responsibility saying that while "'man is lord of the earth on which he dwells,' he should not be 'puffed up by this thought' but should instead be 'deeply moved by it,' because it was a 'post of honour.'" (J.H. Mason 1979, 220) For Rousseau, the concept of stewardship was a trust that God placed in man's hands, while demanding of him that he rule "it in a way consistent with being responsible to God for his realm." (Pepper 1984, 45)

Rousseau also developed a theory on the hierarchy of life forms which marked perhaps the most 'traditional' element of his philosophy regarding the natural world, much of it 'borrowed' from the great naturalist of his day: George-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon. Buffon's ideas, drawn particularly from his Natural History, would permeate much of Rousseau's work especially in the second Discours. (Starobinski 1988, 323) Rousseau's method in this Discours was similar to Buffon's in that they both "begin by describing an elementary form of existence as exhaustively as possible; they then identify what is due to the subsequent development of higher faculties by comparing the developed with the elementary form." (Starobinski 1988, 323) For Rousseau, there was a great difference between primitive man and the apes. In fact, Rousseau even speculated that some higher forms of apes like orangutans were not apes at all but primitive men, thus he expanded "the limits of mankind." (Starobinski 1988, 327) The second Discours, written a century before Darwin's Origins of the Species, essentially

took a resolutely evolutionary view toward human nature. Two hundred years before students of animal behavior... brought us extensive studies of our primate relatives, Rousseau focused on the behavior of these species as a clue to our own origins. And long before a generation of anthropologists brought back truly careful accounts of preliterate or 'savage' societies, Rousseau insisted that they fully deserved the name 'human.'

(Masters 1968, 95)

Furthermore, Rousseau insisted on the idea of 'natural selection' or 'survival of the fittest' long before Darwin, too. In the second Discours he argued that:

considering (man), in a word, as he must have come from the hands of nature...children bringing into the world the excellent constitution of their fathers and fortifying it with the same training that produced it, thus acquire all the vigor of which the human species is capable. Nature treats them precisely as the law of Sparta treated the children of citizens: it renders strong and robust those who are well constituted and makes all the others perish.

(Masters 1968, 96)

Although Rousseau recognized man as a member of the biotic community, he justified seeing man at the top of the evolutionary scale by arguing that man's ability to reason and his 'freedom to act' separated him from other life forms. This does not necessarily put Rousseau at odds with modern environmentalists, because many of them recognize that human beings play a special role within the biotic community. It is only the 'deep ecologists,' who deny this special role and equate human beings with all other constituents of planet earth. The most important consideration, Rousseau would argue, would be to preserve and respect the integrity of God's handiwork, in other words to act as careful stewards.

According to N.J.H. Dent, Rousseau supported his belief that man was above the animals "because of the scope and ingenuity of his action; because of his industry and practical intelligence; because of his capacity to understand the whole and his own position in that." (1989, 240) For J.C. Greene, however, "by his differentiation of men and animals on the basis of the perfectibility of the former only, Rousseau in effect denied the possibility of organic evolution in the rest of the animal kingdom...." (Horowitz 1987, 54) Asher Horowitz, on the other

hand, denies this interpretation saying that by distinguishing between animals and man Rousseau was merely arguing that the two have different modes of evolution. Horowitz argues that Rousseau is actually silent about evolution in the lower forms of life, but he skillfully intertwines man's 'biological and cultural evolution' suggesting that cultural evolution in man is speeded up by his capacity for perfectibility which animals do not possess; thus the gap between man and animals "is not absolute, even though the differences amount to qualitative ones."  
(1987, 64)

While Rousseau did refer to animals in some of his writings as nothing more than 'ingenious machines,' he does appear that he felt they deserved respect as creatures created by God with purpose and intrinsic value. In the second Discours he pointed out that, as sentient beings, animals should not be mistreated, but if it came down to a choice between man and animal, man was to prevail. (Crocker 1967, 172) In opposition to Descartes, who denied that animals had conscious feeling, Rousseau argued that

as they partake in some measure of our nature in virtue of that sensibility with which they are endowed, we may well imagine they ought likewise to partake of the benefit of the natural law, and that man owes them a certain kind of duty. In fact, it seems that, if I am obliged not to injure any being like myself, it is not so much because he is a reasonable being, as because he is a sensible being; and this quality, by being common to men and beasts, ought to exempt the latter from any unnecessary injuries the former might be able to do them.

(1967, 172)

Tied in with this is Rousseau's belief in pity as an innate tendency in man--"a natural aversion to seeing any other being,

but especially any being like ourselves, suffer or perish."

(1967, 171) One gets the sense that Rousseau believes that unnecessary cruelty to animals may desensitize man to the extent that he may begin to turn on his fellow man. In this respect, Rousseau's regard for other sentient beings may have a certain anthropocentrism that would be considered a utilitarian and therefore false value by some ecocentrics, especially those in favour of animal rights.

In other respects, however, Rousseau "seems to have recognized the strength of the arguments for vegetarianism without actually adopting the practice...." (Singer 1990, 203) In the Emile, his educational treatise, he quotes Plutarch who attacks "the use of animals for food as unnatural, unnecessary, bloody murder:" (1990, 203)

...was it a courage appropriate to men that possessed the first one who brought his mouth to wounded flesh, who used his teeth to break the bones of an expiring animal, who had dead bodies--cadavers--served to him, and swallowed up in his stomach parts which a moment before bleated, lowed, walked, and saw? How could his hand have plunged a knife into the heart of a feeling being? How could his eyes have endured a murder?

(Bloom 1979, 154)

It is not clear, however, how far Rousseau was prepared to extend this position; although, it would not be unrealistic to conclude that only sentient beings, and perhaps only the highly 'developed' ones, would be considered. For Rousseau, hierarchy in the natural order determined the extent to which man owed lower forms of life a duty to recognize their right to exist. However, it appears that Rousseau would have violated this right if it was considered



necessary, although it is likely he would have held a high standard of what exactly would be considered 'necesssary.'

This approach, thus, rejects the egalitarian position taken by modern 'deep ecologists' that every member of the biotic community has intrinsic worth and at least the right to exist. One could argue, of course, that lions do not necessarily think of rights when stalking antelope. According to Roderick Nash non-human forms of life lack "the mental capacity to think of their behavior in terms of right and wrong or to enter into a reciprocal ethical relationship with humans." (1989, 124) At any rate, to extend rights to lower forms of life would require, in the words of Peter Singer, "greater altruism on the part of mankind than any other liberation movement because the beneficiaries could not protest on their own behalf." (Nash 1989, 138) For many, Rousseau included, this ethical boundary ends with sentience.

The essential ingredients, therefore, of Rousseau's philosophical approach to nature include the anthropocentric idea that man benefits from a communion with nature; a recognition of God's handiwork in the natural order and man's duty to respect God's creations; an emphasis on the aesthetic within nature; a practical interest in the study of botany; a belief in a hierarchical order in nature with an emphasis on man's stewardship of it; support for the concept of sentience as the grounds for recognizing certain 'rights' for lower forms of life; and a rejection of the mechanistic view of nature which sees it as 'dead matter' governed by universal mathematical principles.

In summary, Rousseau appears to have favoured a view of nature reflected by modern scientific ecocentrics. He realised that man was a member of the biotic community (not above it), but in recognizing man's stewardship of nature he supported the view that society had to reduce its impact on the natural world by carefully regulating those activities that would be harmful to it.

### CHAPTER THREE: ROUSSEAU, THOREAU AND MODERN ENVIRONMENTALISM

#### Rousseau, Romanticism and the Transcendentalist Connection

Rousseauian ideas would soon form part of the philosophy of romantic thought which would eventually find its way to the United States in the form of Transcendentalism. According to Richard Schneider "(t)ranscendentalism was an American offshoot of European romanticism based mostly on the philosophy of Kant and Hegel as filtered through the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge." (1987, 5) Kant himself recognized the debt he owed to Rousseau in his thought acknowledging that Rousseau's concept of moral instinct made him "the Newton of the moral world" (Temmer 1962, 113); thus, it is not overstatement to argue that Transcendentalism is, at least partially, indebted to Rousseau. Indeed, Norman Foerster argues this point saying that Rousseau, Kant and his successors in German philosophy, the Romantic movement in Germany and England "in large degree supplied both the substance and point of view" (1969, 2) to the American Romantic movement reflected by the Transcendentalists. Mark Temmer supports this contention arguing that since Kant and the German Idealists were deeply indebted to Rousseau there exists "a strong ideological current that leads from Rousseau to Emerson and Thoreau." (1962, 113) Walter Harding, on the other hand, downplays this connection by arguing that "(w)hile it is widely recognized that all the American Transcendentalists derived much of their inspiration from the German Transcendentalists, most of it came second hand through Coleridge and Carlyle." (1980, 97) In support of this

supposition, James McIntosh argues that "(t)he influence of European romantic writers...(was) occasional, not central." (McIntosh 1974, 50) It is contended here, however, that even 'occasional' or 'second hand' inspiration recognizes the idea that there are, at least, connections between Rousseau, the romantics and American Transcendentalists.

The term 'transcendental' was first used by Kant as "a formal response to the skeptical or sensational philosophy of Locke, which insists that the mind contains only that which has been previously experienced by the senses." (Bodily, 205) According to Christopher Bodily, Kant believed that a class of ideas existed which were not derived from sense experience but which instead consisted of "natural intuitions of the mind through which experiences become meaningful...." (1987, 205) These intuitions 'transcended' ordinary forms of understanding gleaned through the senses, and are essentially "a priori fundamental principles or structuring processes of all knowledge." (Angeles 1981, 297)

Transcendentalists believe in the superiority of the intuitive or spiritual over empirical knowledge, and they hold that "there is an ideal, spiritual reality beyond the space-time world of our experience that can be grasped and with which all things are infused." (1981, 297) According to Foerster the central words in their thought include 'intuition,' 'self-reliance,' and 'following one's genius.' (1969, 3) In addition, transcendental thought divided the world into materialists and idealists. This position put the Transcenden-

talists in direct opposition to materialist society and demanded:

an inner strength and self-reliance that was a challenge to maintain. It meant that 'whosoever would be a man must be a nonconformist;' that is, the individual must be willing to act on his or her conscience rather than on the opinions of society whenever the two conflict.

(Schneider 1987, 6)

The Rousseauian flavour in these comments is unmistakable, particularly its emphasis on individual conscience over the opinions of society.

It is Ralph Waldo Emerson who is recognized as the leading proponent of Transcendentalist thought. He "presumed a special knowledge or relationship with nature derived from intuition." (Bodily 1987, 206) Furthermore, he insisted that if "we continue to suppress and ignore the natural intuitions of our mind, to refuse to give these intuitions authority over our experience, then we will be bound to a vulgar, low-lived, and frivolous existence." (Bodily 1987, 206) For Emerson, Transcendentalism was a reaction against "dogmatism, against Puritan Orthodoxy, and against formalism and tradition," (Bodily 1987, 206) and his emphasis on intuition can be compared to Rousseau's concept of a balance between reason and sensibility.

Emerson emphasized mind over matter arguing that "(m)ind is the only reality, of which all other natures are better or worse reflectors. Nature, literature, history, are only subjective phenomena." (Schneider 1987, 203) Emerson focused on the reality of 'soul' alone, and this subjectification and subordination of the natural world is primarily the reason why Emerson is not recognized as an inspiration for modern environmentalism. That

'honour' would go to one of his pupils: Henri David Thoreau.

### Rousseau and Thoreau: A Comparative Analysis

Thoreau has been described as "a child of the Romantic era." (Sneider 1987, 392) According to McIntosh, Thoreau's romantic consciousness is "conditioned by his intellectual inheritance from romanticism,; and...reflects his contemporary awareness as a Transcendentalist..." (1974, 22) He was "continually fascinated by the relation of the poetic mind to the external world. McIntosh sees him as a 'romantic naturalist' because he regarded man's "communication with nature as spiritual, not destructive of human spirit," (1974, 9) and also because he gave "nature the dignity of an independent status." (1974, 53)

Thoreau first came into contact with Emerson as a college student after reading his seminal work Nature during his senior at Harvard. (Schneider 1987, 5) Emerson, thus, became Thoreau's intellectual mentor and he even lived with Emerson and his family for a period of time. Thoreau, however, did not share Emerson's doubt about the existence of the natural world. His belief in the "reality of nature was unshakable..." (Schneider 1987, 7) For Thoreau, "reality consisted in the relation among God, humanity, and nature--a sort of transcendentalist trinity--each with its own integrity and creativity." (Schneider 1987, 7) Thoreau believed that the "ideal was not to be found so much beyond the material world (as Emerson argued) as within and through it." (Schneider 1987, 7) Instead, Thoreau want "to get part way out of his isolated mind and closer to nature, to exist in a border area

between that mind and nature." (McIntosh 1974, 21) and thus facilitate the process of self-discovery.

Thoreau put this process into action in 1845 when Emerson gave him permission to use some of his land at Walden Pond, where Thoreau went to live for two years. There he used an axe to clear a small piece of land and built himself a modest cabin. During this time Thoreau immersed himself in the practical study of nature developing his skills as a botanist much like Rousseau did one hundred years earlier. Both seemed to feel that an appreciation of nature could not be fully developed without a practical working knowledge of its functions. The work he produced during this time, Walden, would represent much of the core of his thought, but it is also chalk full of his practical observations. According to Bodily, his two years at Walden Pond was "an attempt at pragmatic discovery, at confronting life, experiencing and experimenting, working to increase life's present meaning." (1987, 212) Thoreau would subsequently write of his reasons for going into the woods in an essay titled "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For:"

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.... I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.

(Anderson 1973, 168)

One of the primary purposes of Walden, thus, was to show that people were capable of living in nature and that the experience would be spiritually enlightening. Although Thoreau recognized mankind's separation from nature he still wanted to experience

a feeling of being 'at home' in it: (McIntosh 1974, 51)

We need the tonic of wildness--to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground.... We can never have enough of Nature...(and at Walden Pond I was)...affected as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made me.

(Shanley 1971, 317-18)

Although there is no evidence to suggest Thoreau ever read Rousseau directly, Thoreau's identification of God with nature and his reverent respect for nature clearly harken back to Rousseau. In the essay "The Ascent of Saddleback" Thoreau again hints at the concept of divine handiwork in nature by describing the beginning of his walk with the observation that "(i)t seemed a road for the pilgrim to enter upon who would climb to the gates of heaven." (Anderson 1973, 123) According to Nash, Thoreau's Transcendentalist background led him to believe

in an 'Oversoul' or godlike moral force that permeated everything in nature. Using intuition rather than reason and science, humans could transcend physical appearances and perceive 'the currents of the Universal Being.' binding the world together.

(Nash 1989, 36)

Commentators, however, have argued that Thoreau's descriptions of nature are not necessarily theological in connotation so much as 'mental and celestial,' in other words a "romantic, not a Christian, revelation." (McIntosh 1974, 163)

Another parallel to Rousseau can be found in Thoreau's love of solitary walks as a means of reverie. In his essay



"The Wild," Thoreau describes the benefits of this form of interaction with nature: "I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least... sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements." (Anderson 1973, 135) Indeed, Thoreau pities those who cannot or do not enjoy walking through the woods as he does saying "I think they they deserve some credit for not having all committed suicide long ago." (Anderson 1973, 135) Like Rousseau, Thoreau used these walks for solitary contemplation, as a means of breaking through the barriers separating man from nature and preventing him from discovering his true self. In essence, he sought a kind of unity or oneness with nature and, like Rousseau, Thoreau made the principle "'Know thyself" the sine qua non of the truth of (his) words." (Temmer 1962, 112)

According to William Wolf, thus, there were two major components to Thoreau's ecological philosophy: "(1) a mystical sense of the oneness of all life through reciprocal inter-relationships, and (2) a sensitivity toward all of nature, organic and inorganic, and a desire for fellowship with all things." (1974, 147) Like Rousseau, he acknowledges that man is a part of the natural world and he expresses a desire for direct communion with it, to become "wholly involved in nature...(even though)...our thoughts tend to separate us from nature." (McIntosh 1974, 249-50)

In addition, Thoreau argued that "nature feels, sympathizes, is sentient, and that as the result of her kindness the relation between man and nature is one of intimate friendship." (McIntosh

1974, 24) In the chapter "Solitude" from Walden this sense that nature itself is alive and that man is intimately connected with it is made clear:

All Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?

(Shanley 1971, 138)

Thus, his philosophy revealed a rejection of the earth as a dead, inert mass, but instead reflected a belief that "it is a body, has a spirit, is organic and fluid to the influence of its spirit." (Nash 1989, 37) The natural world, thus, is described as an integrated community of which man was a part. For Thoreau, there was no hierarchy or discrimination in nature. "What we call wildness...is a civilization other than our own.... The woods... were not tenantless, but choke-full of honest spirits as good as myself any day." (Nash 1989, 37)

Furthermore, according to Paul de Man, "Saddleback" can be compared to the twenty-third letter of Rousseau's Nouvelle Heloise where "the poet-protagonist tells of his feelings of transcendence, freedom, and peace in the high mountains...." (Paul de Man 1984, 13) The following example from "Saddleback," which describe Thoreau's observations and feelings upon reaching the summit of the mountain, clearly parallel Rousseau:

As the light increased, I discovered around me an ocean of mist, which by chance reached up exactly to the base of the tower, and shut out every vestige of the earth, while I was left floating on this fragment of the wreck of a world, on my carved plank, in cloudland; a situation which required no aid from the imagination to render it

impressive.

(Anderson 1973, 127)

The 'spectacle of nature,' thus, is exalted by Thoreau and provides him with a mystical sense of peace and sympathetic friendship with the natural world that could not be achieved within the bosom of society:

All around beneath me was spread for a hundred miles on every side, as far as the eye could reach, an undulating country of clouds, answering in the varied swell of its surface to the terrestrial world it veiled. It was such a country as we might see in dreams, with all the delights of paradise.

(Anderson 1973, 127)

Obviously, Thoreau emphatically rejected the idea of man's domination of nature, instead leaning towards a kind of stewardship that was the least intrusive. In this respect, Thoreau seems to have gone further than Rousseau. The environmental ethic that Thoreau advocated argued that all lifeforms are worthy of respect, regardless of their value to humans. He argued that "(e)very creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees." (Nash 1989, 37) It would seem that Thoreau went much further than Rousseau in applying the concept of sentience as a means of divining certain rights to lower forms of life. While Rousseau argued that animals should not be 'unnecessarily' harmed and that to do so would denigrate man, Thoreau seems to be saying that all members of the biotic community had an intrinsic right to life.

Thus, he rejected human domination of nature, going so far as to imply that humans degraded nature by their very presence.

As mentioned, Thoreau recognized that nature had intrinsic value, an 'independent status.' He denied the concept of hierarchy and argued that believing that one could possess nature was actually counter-productive. According to McIntosh:

...(T)he desire for a total possession of nature by the separated mind leads to a selfish and dangerous distortion of the observed world and a reduction of this source of their being, a way of killing a god they need. Therefore, they (should) try to conceive the imagination as reconciled to nature, not as controlling it or wholly transforming it; and they seek an imaginative balance between mind and nature.

(1974, 53)

In fact, it could be argued that this balance between mind and nature echoes Rousseau's call for a reconciliation between reason and feeling and between man and nature itself. For Thoreau, this synthesis of reason and feeling went beyond simply obeying the instincts of one's temperament, but instead involved subjecting these instincts to the scrutiny of man's innate capacity for reflection. Ultimately, Thoreau was convinced that the man/nature relationship of his time had become strained by man's desire for dominion over nature. He rejected the materialist, as well as the utilitarian conceptions of his time, and by doing so guaranteed himself immortality as a inspiration to later environmentalists.

#### Rousseau and John Muir

Another major figure of the 19th century who would become a major influence of modern environmentalism was John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club (1892). Similar to Thoreau, Muir believed

that nature existed first and foremost for itself and for its creator. Everything had value. But Muir went even further by promoting a radically egalitarian form of ecocentrism. For example, he placed absolute value on every part of the natural world asking such extreme questions as "would not the world suffer...by the banishment of a single weed." (Nash 1989, 39)

Muir agreed with earlier romantic thinkers that the "basis of respect for nature was to recognize it as part of the created community to which humans also belonged." (1989, 39) He strongly felt that God's presence was everywhere, not only in animals but in plants and rocks as well. He also denied the concept of hierarchy within the natural order asking the question: "Why should man value himself as more than a small part of one great unit of creation." (1989, 39)

In part, Muir was inspired by the scientific ecocentrism of Darwin whose "evolutionary explanation of the proliferation of life on earth undermined dualistic philosophies...(which argued for)...hierarchy, dominion...(and the)...expectation that the rest of nature existed to serve one precocious primate." (1989, 42) Thus, for Muir the concept of evolution "was an enormously humbling idea, suggesting that every creature on the planet had a right to exist--or at least the right to struggle to exist--equal to that of every other creature." (1989, 43)

In this sense, Muir went beyond the concept of stewardship advocated by Rousseau who, as stated, saw man as being ordained by God to manage the world in an 'environmentally-friendly' way. Muir also expressed, in similar fashion to Rousseau, the view that

communion with nature was a spiritually uplifting experience.

According to Murray Bookchin, Muir

found in wilderness a spiritually reviving form of communion with nonhuman life; one that presumably awakened deep-seated human longings and instincts. This view goes back to...Rousseau' idyllic passion for a solitary way of life amidst natural beauty.

(1989, 152-153)

For Muir "(n)ature was his church, the place where he perceived and worshipped God, and from that standpoint protection of nature became a holy war." (Nash 1989, 41) Like Rousseau, thus, Muir seemed to forward an anthropocentric view that preserving nature benefited man by cleansing his spirit of the evils of an exploitative social order. In his defence, however, Nash argues that Muir's later emphasis on the benefits of nature for people was designed to "camouflage his radical egalitarianism in more acceptable rhetoric." (Nash 1989, 41) This was done in order to convince those in political power of the necessity of passing legislation designed to preserve natural wilderness areas such as Yosemite National Park and the High Sierra in his home state of California.

In fact, Muir clashed vigorously with managerial conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot who opposed 'wilderness for wilderness-sake' preservationists like Muir. For Pinchot:

The first great fact about conservation...is that it stands for development.... Conservation does mean provision for the future but it means also and first of all the recognition of the right of the present generation to the fullest necessary use of all the resources with which this country is so abundantly blessed.

(Pepper 1984, 82)

This highly utilitarian concept of nature, however, enraged Muir who "held nothing back when it came to attacking people who would destroy the wilderness." (Nash 1989, 41) His was a "manichaen world of black and white, good and evil, vying for the American environment," (Nash 1989, 41) and he fervently believed that his opponents, Pinchot included, were not simply wrong but morally bankrupt. For Muir, the best "human economic activity...was nearly invisible." (Paehlke 1989, 17) In similar fashion to both Thoreau and Rousseau, he admired the native peoples of North America who "walk softly and hurt the landscape hardly more than the birds or squirrels, and their brush and bark huts last hardly longer than those of woodrats." (Paehlke 1989, 17) In essence, Muir felt that "humans had no right to alter the natural surrounding in ways nature could not restore within a short period of time." (Paehlke 1989, 17) Thus, Muir's approach mirrors that of Thoreau, but goes much further than Rousseau. While Rousseau supported stewardship and essentially regarded communion with nature as beneficial to man, Muir denied hierarchy in nature and supported the idea of the nature's intrinsic worth regardless of its utility to man. Like Rousseau, however, Muir equated the natural world with the presence of God and regarded human activity that degraded this world as a sacrilege. Muir's orientation, thus, gave "the preservation crusade a certain moral intensity" (Nash 1989, 41) that would be adopted by the radical environmentalists of later generations, leading one to conclude that it is Muir who may truly be the father of modern environmentalism (particularly 'deep ecology').

## Rousseau and Aldo Leopold

Before going on to discuss some modern perspectives and their relationship with romanticism, we need to touch on one philosopher whose "intelligent blending of ecology and ethics" (Paehlke 1989, 18) has direct parallels to Rousseau and the romantic movement: Aldo Leopold. In doing so, we must keep in mind Rousseau's general approach to nature: his anthropocentrism, his sense of duty to nature, his faith in the concept of benign stewardship, his emphasis on the study of botany, and his mystical quasi-religious reverence for God's handiwork.

There is little doubt that Aldo Leopold represents one of the major influences in the evolution of environmental ethics. J. Baird Callicott referred to Leopold as "the father or founding genius of recent environmental ethics." (Nash 1989, 63) In his highly provocative book A Sand County Almanac (1949) he enunciated the idea of the interdependence of the biotic community that we have already discussed. For Leopold, man had to change his role from that of a conqueror of nature to simply that of a member of the land-community, a community he believed was, in fact, an organism or living reality. (Paehlke 1989, 18) He argued that "(w)e abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." (Nash 1989, 69) He believed that since man alone has the power to affect nature, we also have the power to destroy ourselves. Thus, we have a responsibility to establish what he referred to as the 'land



ethic' which rejects the idea that we are sustained by industry and economy, but are instead sustained, "as are all living things, by the land. We are but one part of an interactive global ecosystem, and we injure the land in any way at our own peril." (Paehlke 1989, 18) Thus, the 'land ethic' argues that "(a) thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." (Leopold 1987, 224-25) This simple statement marked the core of Leopold's philosophical approach.

Leopold, himself an ecologist who worked as a manager of national forests in New Mexico and Arizona, skillfully combined science and sentiment, much like Rousseau. His earlier writings, in particular, revealed a Rousseauian flavour by taking an instrumental view of the land ethic arguing that it was simply prudent of man to treat nature with an ethical regard since it was the land that sustained him. According to Nash, Leopold recognized that expressing utilitarian considerations in his philosophy would win more adherents in political circles than if he took a more antagonistic approach (similar to Muir). (1989, 63) He realized that "philosophy and religion (had) not yet heard...(of)...the extension of social conscience from people to land." (Callicott 1987, 83) Yet in the concluding section of the Almanac he took the final step from anthropocentrism to a more radically ecocentric approach that argued in favour of the "intrinsic rights to existence of nonhuman life forms and of life communities or ecosystems." (1987, 81) Specifically, he affirmed that man had obligations to the

land "over and above those dictated by self-interest, obligations grounded on the recognition that humans and the other components of nature are ecological equals." (1987, 81) Finally, in order that this ethic be recognized and adhered to, Leopold argued for " a complete restructuring of basic... priorities and behavior, and a radical redefinition of progress." (1987, 84) Leopold's land ethic, thus, forwarded the view that "the earth was...an organism possessing a certain kind and degree of life." (1987, 78) This concept would later be affirmed in the 'Gaia hypothesis' of James Lovelock who argues that the earth is alive. (Lovelock 1990, 3-14)

For Rousseau, the idea that the land itself was alive and had certain rights, in and of itself, was completely foreign. As mentioned, his philosophy was more of an 'eco-theology' centering on the duty of man to respect God's natural order and to act as a benign steward. Rousseau would have been more in line with Leopold's earlier writings that argued in favour of a respectful relationship with nature that was spiritually uplifting for man, and thus anthropocentric in its sentiments. However, Leopold's ecophilosophy, as it developed, did reveal an outrage at simple utilitarian considerations, particularly those based on economics that was characteristic of Rousseau and the romantic movement. For Leopold, the destruction of land was wrong "in the same sense that abuse of another human being was wrong." (Callicott 1987, 79) Rousseau, however, did not go this far, despite his reverence for the natural world (possibly because in Rousseau's time untouched wilderness was still abundant). In addition, the

concept of extending rights to certain classes of people was still in its infancy; thus, the idea of extending rights to the land would not have even been considered. Rousseau did believe, however, that sentient beings deserved some form of consideration, even though man's interests may have to take precedence.

Perhaps, though, the most distinct parallel between Rousseau and Leopold was that they both shared what Callicott has called a 'land aesthetic.' As mentioned, Leopold argued that actions were right if they tended to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community and were wrong if they tended otherwise (emphasis added). Rousseau, too, spoke of the joy and reverence he felt for the 'wildness' of the natural order. His Reveries and the Nouvelle Heloise are full of descriptive passages (examples previously quoted) alluding to the majestic beauty of nature in its pristine state. Both Rousseau and Leopold were naturalists--Leopold was a trained ecologist and Rousseau was a self-taught botanist--thus, both based their appreciation of the aesthetics of the land on knowledgeable grounds. In his third letter to Malesherbes, Rousseau describes a walk in the forest of Montmorency:

There nature seemed to unfold before my eyes an ever-new magnificence. The gold of the broom and the purple of the heather struck my eyes with a richness that moved my heart. Majestic trees covered me with their shade, delicate shrubs surrounded me; the astonishing variety of herbs and flowers which I trod underfoot kept my mind continually altering between observation and admiration.

(J.H. Mason 1979, 261)

For Leopold, too, appreciation of the natural beauty of the land depended on one's own knowledge of things such as ecology, history, geology, and even paleontology, which helped form a refined appreciation not only of what one saw but what the relation of that vision was to the whole of nature and natural history. "What one experiences is as much a product of how one thinks as it is the condition of one's senses and the specific content of one's environment" (Callicott 1987, 164)--the 'land aesthetic.'

Similarly, Rousseau discusses his feelings about the study of plants during one particular walk:

The constant similarity, and at the same time extraordinary variety, which plants possess, only affects those who have some knowledge of them. (Those who do not have this knowledge) have only a stupid and monotonous admiration, when they look on these treasures of nature. They see nothing in detail, they do not even know what they ought to look at. Nor are they aware of the whole, because they have no idea of the relations and combinations which overwhelm with their marvels the mind of the observer.

(J.H. Mason 1979, 164)

In addition, the 'land aesthetic' involved all the senses: smell, taste, hearing and touch, as well as sight. According to Callicott, this combination enhanced one's sense of aesthetics and led one to find beauty in wild nature as well as the scenic or picturesque. For Leopold, "(t)he land aesthetic enable us to mine the hidden riches of the ordinary; it ennobles the commonplace; it brings natural beauty literally home from the hills." (1987, 168) In this sense it fosters an appreciation of "the river bottoms, fallow fields, bogs, and ponds on the

back forty." (1987, 168) This importance of the 'land aesthetic' becomes clear when it is linked with the ethics of environmentalism. While ethics imply limitations on actions which may be undesirable, environmental aesthetics deals with the beauty of the natural environment; therefore, it is an attraction and not a duty. "Duty is demanding--often something to shirk; beauty is seductive--something to love and cherish." (1987, 158) Hence, Leopold believed that to "'cultivate in the public...a refined taste in natural objects' is vital to enlightened democratic land-use issues." (1987, 158) Rousseau undoubtedly would have agreed.

In summary, Leopold's "most singular achievement was his intelligent blending of ecology and ethics. He saw the land itself as an organism, a living reality." (Paehlke 1989, 18) Recognizing that man alone had the power to destroy 'nature-as-a-whole,' he "went on to develop a rich ethical basis for the preservation of nature" (Paehlke 1989, 18) and used scientific observation to discover "the extent to which humanity was a part of nature." (Paehlke 1989, 18) His work would prove to be one of the greatest influences on modern environmentalism, particularly that branch of the movement which ascribes intrinsic value to nature separate from man's utilitarian considerations.

#### Rousseau, Romanticism and the Modern Environmental Movement

According to Robert Paehlke, modern environmentalism "might be said to have begun in 1960 with the publication of Rachel Carson's profoundly important book, Silent Spring." (1989, 21)

This book blended scientific, political and moral arguments building on the work of Leopold "and became the hallmark of popular environmentalism." (Paehlke 1989, 28)

Essentially the book was written to "inform the public about the unrestricted proliferation of chemical pesticides in the environment...(and emphasized)...the necessity of linking scientific knowledge and political action." (Paehlke 1989, 28) Carson "galvanized public interest in pollution by popularizing an understanding informed by toxicology, ecology, and epidemiology--the three sciences of pollution." (Paehlke 1989, 29) Her work confirmed what earlier philosophers could only speculate about in abstract terms: the interrelatedness of all members of the biosphere. By utilizing her scientific background she presented an argument based on four key natural processes: bioaccumulation (the buildup of toxic substances in food chains); natural resistance (lower order species shrug off toxins that higher order species cannot resist); natural dispersion (toxins are dispersed throughout the biosphere); and, the biochemical interaction of toxic substances (toxin combinations creating more lethal forms of pollution). (Paehlke 1989, 31-32)

As a result of Carson's groundbreaking, yet controversial work modern environmentalists have been able to develop the concept of interdependence by recognizing, rather than denying, the value of scientific observation. In much the same way that Rousseau, Thoreau, and Leopold insisted that a full appreciation of nature requires practical knowledge of its interworkings, most modern environmentalists, like Carson, have come to recognize

the need to support their philosophical contentions with practical evidence deduced from observation. This emphasis on science, however, has meant that, by in large, romantic concepts relating to a quasi-mystical relationship with nature are generally downplayed or rejected by modern environmentalists.

In addition, as mentioned, the modern environmental movement is not represented by a distinct set of principles. Some groups recognize the role science plays in providing solid evidentiary backing to claims about man's impact on the natural world, while others condemn science as the rationale behind the man's exploitation of the environment. The latter insist on "fundamental changes in the values, attitudes and behavior of individuals and social institutions...." (Pepper 1984, 28)

As a result, modern environmentalism appears to be highly diffused, and indeed has "distinctive and opposite political wings." (Pepper 1984, 213). 'Conservative' ecocentrics favour limits to growth and the concept of 'lifeboat ethics' relying on conservation and careful stewardship, while 'liberal ecocentrics insist on fundamental changes in society's attitude to the environment and demand rights for all constituents of the biosphere (some even include mountains, rivers, and forests) regardless of the impact this approach might have on humans. Essentially, some base their positions on ethical utilitarianism while others are decidedly deontological in their outlook ('deep ecologists'). Furthermore, it should be pointed out that even within certain ecocentric groups "there are deep ambiguities and contradictions." (Pepper 1984, 213)

In this sense, thus, Rousseau is hard to categorize. In some respects his philosophy might be identified as 'conservative', while in other respects he reveals a rather decidedly 'liberal' form of ecocentrism. In summary, his philosophy argued that sentient beings are worthy of consideration if not actual rights; that environmental integrity is necessary for man's spiritual well-being, that man has a duty to respect God's creation, and that there is a necessity, indeed an obligation to be careful stewards. Rousseau, thus, emphasized man's unique role within the biosphere, a concept many radical or 'liberal' ecocentric environmentalists, for example, would deny. For them, man has a "moral obligation towards nature 'not simply for the pleasure of man, but as a biotic right.'" (Pepper 1984, 27) 'Liberal' ecocentrics, however, do agree with Rousseau in terms of his advocacy of decentralized, small-scale democratic communities of which more will be said in Chapter Five, but his emphasis on nature as a conduit for self-discovery is generally ignored except by a very narrow part of the modern environmental movement that emphasizes mystical aspects of environmental philosophy. To repeat, modern environmentalists, particularly ecocentrics, tend to de-emphasize utilitarian considerations that argue nature is good for man's soul. As mentioned, they instead focus on respecting nature for its own sake, above and beyond its usefulness to man.

There is one modern ecophilosopher who deserves mention for the parallels between his thought and Rousseau's regarding the question of hierarchy, sentience, and animal rights:



Murray Bookchin. Like Rousseau, Bookchin recognized the 'special' role humans play within the ecosystem. He argues that human beings possess the 'capacity to think conceptually' and to 'feel a deep empathy for the world of life,' and it is because of this quality that he believes it is "possible for humanity...to reverse the devastation it has inflicted on the biosphere." (1990, 186-187) He argues that "humanity's vast capacities to alter...nature are themselves a product of natural evolution--not of a deity or the result of some sort of cosmic perversity." (1990,42) He insists that environmentalists must recognize the indisputable fact that "all the non-human life forms that exist today are, like it or not, to some degree in human custody, and whether they are preserved in their wildlife depends largely on human attitudes and behavior." (1990, 43) Bookchin, like Rousseau, recognized the idea of stewardship.

For these reasons Bookchin condemns those in the ecological movement who equate human worth to that of lower forms of life (sometimes including mountains and rivers). He argues that such thinking "degrades the entire project of a meaningful ecological ethics." (1990, 46) It fails to recognize the uniqueness of humans within the biosphere and our ability to attribute moral worth to non-humans. He argues that there is no "hierarchy, domination, class structure, nor State in the natural world other than projections that the socially conditioned human mind extends into non-human biological relationships." (1990, 184)

What Bookchin fears is that if an ethic based on biospheric egalitarianism were accepted, then mankind would not have an

ethical basis, given the logic, for eliminating malaria or yellow-fever mosquitos. Furthermore, if society begins making exceptions, it would descend into the trap of relativistic ethics in which one person's protected species is another's expendable element. Thus, to talk in terms of biospheric rights is to introduce decidedly human concepts into a non-human world that does not, indeed cannot, appreciate or even recognize such consideration. Bookchin, of course, strongly supports the idea of stewardship by advocating the establishment of an 'ecological society' in which man is in balance with nature, but, like Rousseau, he is not willing to extend rights to individuals members of the natural world.

With respect to Rousseau's position regarding man's relationship to the natural world, it is argued that his concepts are decidedly traditional, a factor which may account for the lack of scholarly work on Rousseau in this area. It is his condemnation of the idea of progress, his criticisms of man within society, and his advocacy of participatory democratic forms of government which are much more provocative and, therefore, relevant to modern environmental thought. The next chapter will discuss the first two issues, while the latter concept will be presented in the chapter following afterwards.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ROUSSEAU, PROGRESS AND MODERN ENVIRONMENTALISM

We cannot resist 'progress' but, on the other hand, we must not simply surrender to it. We must guide it and, in full independence, designate its goal.

(Rousseau as quoted in Cassirer 1989, 105)

### Introduction

Modern environmentalism may be 'a house divided' but there is one underlying concept that all environmentalists, even technocentrics, seem to share: the idea that growth must be limited so as to preserve the integrity of the biosphere. No matter what 'political' approach is adopted, modern environmentalism, in general, "questions whether expansion beyond a reasonable level is a net benefit at all regardless of how those benefits are distributed." (Paehlke 1989, 7) In fact, E.J. Mishan is convinced that "further growth within highly developed economies will probably do more harm than good." (Paehlke 1989, 251) In contrast, Barry Commoner argues that further economic growth is possible as long as "more effective technological choices are made along the way." (Paehlke 1989, 251)

Inextricably linked to the idea of progress is society's reliance on the scientific paradigm which regards the natural world as a resource to be exploited. This idea had its roots in the mechanistic view of the world first advanced by the philosophers of the Enlightenment already discussed. The scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, thus, laid the basis for a

world view that glorified, and continues to glorify the concept of continuous progress and material wealth. Since economic expansion depends "on advances in scientific and technological knowledge, the control and manipulation of nature is given full legitimacy." (Jones 1987, 19) Furthermore, technological development actually creates new needs and the system maintains itself by making people associate the 'good life' with "an ever increasing supply of the goods and services produced by the institutions of society." (Jones 1987, 31) Thus, society's standard of living is defined in material terms making consumption an end, "rather than a means, and ties consumers not just to their possessions, but more particularly to the virtually unconscious adoption of the ideology of consumerism." (Jones 1987, 32)

Rousseau, thus, is quite clearly a central figure for the debate on progress and the values it has spawned. He rejected the idea of unregulated progress arguing that history has unfolded in such a way as to reveal "a process of decline, a decay of morals, civic virtue, naturalness, community." (Featherstone 1978, 182) Rousseau's passionate yearning for solitude, his search for his true self, and his deification of the natural world discussed in the last chapter are directly related to his sense of alienation from society. According to Saunders, Rousseau "rebelled against the rules, conventions and artifices of a stilted and pompous society whose atmosphere choked and poisoned him." (Halsted 1965, 2)

Rousseau was the first great countermodern intellectual...(to argue that)...(p)eople's sense of themselves and their sense of values were social creations, products of the 'empire of opinion,' not the promptings of their own nature and their own impulses.

(Featherstone 1978, 167-9)

He believed that society itself created false needs and desires and "that conscious thought and action must offset the imbalances of modernity by restoring a proper balance between nature and human nature." (1978, 171)

According to Judith Sklar, Rousseau offered "two possible and quite distinct utopian alternatives for moderns to behold-- and possibly act upon." (Featherstone 1978, 185) The first utopia

rested on an ideal of individual autonomy and it stresses the need for a countercultural education, private family life, and countermodern institutions to protect the individual from the modern world's empire of opinion, error, oppression, inequality, and greed ( La Nouvelle Heloise , Emile )

(Featherstone 1978, 185)

The second utopia was

civic, political and collective: it is to be found in works like Contrat social and its underlying image is that of the city-state, where the individual finds unity by merging himself with the civic unit--later the nation, the party, the movement.

(Featherstone 1978, 185)

This chapter will focus primarily on Rousseau's concepts regarding the first of Sklar's two alternatives.

### Rousseau, Human Nature and the Fall of Man

The first work that revealed Rousseau's contempt or the direction society had taken was the Discours sur les sciences et

les arts. According to F.C. Green it was in this work that Rousseau first "set out to prove on historical evidence that cultural progress always results in a corresponding decline in morality." (Green 1950, 7) From the first Discours Rousseau argues that "our souls have been corrupted in proportion to the advancement of our sciences and arts toward perfection." (Masters 1968, 101) He would go on to develop this idea further in the Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inegalite in which he proclaims that, after the epoch of 'savage society' "all subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps towards perfection of the individual and in fact towards the decrepitude of the species." (Masters 1968, 102)

Roger Masters has called the first Discours "the one which speaks most directly to the crises of our time...." (1968, 443) According to Green, it was here that Rousseau expressed his deep concern that "the cult of intellectual progress (was) incompatible with man's true nature, and he feared that it would ultimately destroy what is specifically human in our species." (1950, 3)

Rousseau went on to argue that "culture rots the moral fabric of a nation and makes its political decay inevitable" (1950, 8) by glorifying those in the arts and sciences who worship "luxury, social inequality, servility, and that urbanity which counterfeits virtue." (1950, 8) Rousseau felt that the arts and sciences encouraged the pursuit of luxury, creating false needs. According to Masters

(w)hatever the causal process involved, an objective consideration of our own era confirms Rousseau's claim that the pursuit of luxury and wealth based on scientific and technical progress coincides with grave social and moral problems.

(Masters 1968, 441)

Rousseau felt that the idea of freedom and citizenship had been lost and that the only standards were financial and commercial--standards devoid of morals. As Masters puts it:

Given the unquestioned acceptance of the pursuit of wealth and material well-being in modern industrial society, Rousseau's insistent challenge commands attention: 'what will become of virtue when one must get rich at any price?

(1968, 440)

One of Rousseau's primary aims, thus, was to encourage people to see through society's artificial social mores and get back in touch with their true selves. In order to accomplish this, he wrote, much as Hobbes and Locke had done before him, about the the idea of a natural state of man. In the first Discours he wrote that

...before art had fashioned our manners and taught our passions to speak an affected language, our mores were rustic but natural, and differences in behavior heralded, at first glance, differences of character. At base, human nature was no better, but men found their safety in the ease with which they saw through each other, and that advantage, which we no longer value, spared them many vices.

(Cress 1987, 4)

This ability to 'see through each other' or transparency is what Jean Starobinski believes Rousseau was emphasizing as being obstructed by manmade artifices of civilization that blurred the distinction between appearance and reality. "Unwittingly

and against our will we are embroiled in evil. Illusion does not merely cloud our understanding; it veils the truth, distorts all our actions, and perverts our lives." (Starobinski 1988,

4-5) For Rousseau:

(o)ne no longer dares to seem what one really is; and in this perpetual constraint, the men who make up this herb we call society will, if placed in the same circumstances, do all the same things unless stronger motives deter them. Thus no one will ever really know those with whom he is dealing. Hence in order to know one's friend, it would be necessary to wait for critical occasions, that is, to wait until it is too late, since it is for these very occasions that it would have been essential to know him. What a retinue of vices must attend this incertitude! No more sincere friendships, no more real esteem, no more well-founded confidence. Suspensions, offences, fears, coldness, reserve, hatred, betrayal will unceasingly hide under that uniform and deceitful veil of politeness, under that much vaunted urbanity that we owe to the enlightenment of our century.

(Cress 1987, 4-5)

For Rousseau, man had been happy when his inventive powers were balanced with his innate desires. Society, on the other hand, promoted false desires through scientific progress which destroyed this "inner harmony or equilibrium by multiplying our artificial needs." (Green 1950, 19) Thus, Rousseau argued that instead of fostering men's pride in his scientific progress we ought to teach him to be prouder still of

'the more precious faculties which...make man really sociable and kind, which make him prize order, justice and innocence above all other goods.

(Green 1950, 19)

Essentially, Rousseau argued against historical development in favour of timeless human nature. He believed that the only way to restore man's natural goodness was to revolt against the



social conventions of his day.

Rousseau would go on to develop these arguments in the second Discours refining his view that man was naturally good and had only become corrupted as a result of his entrance into society. In order to do this, Rousseau constructed a hypothetical state of nature and used this construct to speculate on what were the natural, or elementary tendencies of man. In his version of the traditional 'state of nature' Rousseau agreed with Hobbes on one essential point: "primitive man was a creature of feeling and sensitivity to whom rational moral principles are quite unknown." (Grimsley 1973, 26)

In the state of nature man was essentially driven by two principles prior to the development of reason: "one of them interests us deeply in our own preservation and welfare, the other inspires us with a natural aversion to seeing any other being... suffer or perish." (Crocker 1967, 171) From these two assumptions Rousseau concluded that man was naturally good. It has been argued, however, that Rousseau should have included a third principle of nature "consisting of such impulses as aggression, acquisitiveness, jealousy, sensuality" (R.D. Miller 1983, 1) following what Schiller called the 'crude aspect' of man's nature. Rousseau, however, attributes these traits to civilization, implying that human beings, through society, have been forced to act "in a manner that is not in accordance with their own nature." (1983, 3) Thus, "(i)nstead of attempting to derive modern aggression and oppression from their supposed roots in a primitive state of nature...(Rousseau argued that)...

we must learn to detect the source of decay in civilization itself." (1983, 2) According to Rousseau, previous thinkers like Hobbes and Locke had confused characteristics of social man with those of man in the state of nature, specifically that "they were over-hasty in concluding that man is naturally cruel." (1983, 2)

This conclusion led Rousseau to be highly critical of the depths to which man had fallen as a result of his move from the mythical state of nature into society. He felt that man's life in the state of nature was characterized by independence, indifference, and a healthy concern with self-preservation, limited to the fulfillment of basic needs--a condition he referred to as 'amour de soi.' However, according to R.D. Miller in order for Rousseau to support his thesis that there was no such thing as a crude element in human nature he had to assume that man's existence was solitary, that he did not experience love, and that he had no possessions. The solitary life Rousseau depicted in the state of nature was necessary to prove that man was not innately aggressive, but by including the motivation to self-preservation Rousseau was forced to admit, albeit inadvertently, that aggression was present in the state of nature, "though he pleads that cases of aggression were not always sanguinary." (1983, 5)

Critics of Rousseau, however, have maintained that his descriptions of the state of nature in the Discours sur l'inegalite simply "sang the praises of the noble savage." (Hinsley 1963, 46) Voltaire, in fact, wrote to Rousseau saying:

(n)ever has so much talent been used to want to make us into animals; you make one want to walk on all fours.... However, as it is more than sixty years since I lost the habit, I feel unfortunately that it will be impossible for me to regain it....

(J.H. Mason 1979, 68)

In response Rousseau wrote back denying Voltaire's allegation arguing: "I do not aspire to re-establish us in our animality, although I greatly regret, for my part, the little that I have lost...." (J.H. Mason 1979, 69)

For Rousseau, what forced man to leave his solitary existence in the state of nature was related to his goodness-- his innate desire for perfectibility:

He does not tarry in his original condition but strives beyond it; he is not content with the range and kind of existence which are the original gifts of nature nor does he stop until he has devised for himself a new form of existence that is his own.

(Cassirer 1989, 105)

Unfortunately, by renouncing nature's guidance, man also gives up "nature's protection and all the benefits it had originally conferred upon him." (Cassirer 1989, 105) This move exposes man to all the evils of society that Rousseau believed were created by an unequal distribution of the fruits of man's labour. This led to the poor becoming dependent on the rich for their existence creating a state of perpetual conflict. "The ambition of the principled men induced them to take advantage of these circumstances to perpetuate the hitherto temporary offices in their families...." (Crocker 1967, 238) Rousseau argued, thus, that government was instituted by the rich as a form of 'pro-

tection' for the poor while at the same time safeguarding their possessions:

By pursuing the progress of inequality in these different revolutions...the establishment of laws and of the right of property was the first term of it; the institution of magistrates the second; and the third and last the changing of legal into arbitrary power....

(Crocker 1967, 238)

Social inequality, thus, was established for the benefit of the privileged classes and mankind was forever condemned to permanent strife. What Rousseau favoured was a form of social organization (to be discussed in chapter five) in which the differences between rich and poor simply reflected their natural physical and mental capacities which he hoped would deter social inequality. While Rousseau was correct in distinguishing between natural inequality and social inequality, according to R.D. Miller he was "mistaken in thinking that social or conventional inequality (differences of privilege, wealth, honour, and power) does not arise from human nature." (1983, 4) Thus, it is important to keep in mind that Rousseau's natural man was a theoretical construct on which he based his conclusion that man was naturally good. How far we are ready to agree with him may be more a matter of sentiment than reason.

For Rousseau, once man entered society "a division within man's soul (was created) resulting from man's bodily and spiritual dependence on other men which ruptures his original unity or wholeness." (Bloom 1984, 4) This he referred to as 'amour propre.' In the state of nature 'amour de soi' or self-

preservation was natural, while 'amour propre' or self-esteem only exists in society. It was illustrated by a "certain low human type which Rousseau was the first to isolate and name: the bourgeois. " (1984, 4) This type of individual places his own good ahead of all else and is primarily concerned with self-preservation; thus, he exploits others all the while relying on them. "(H)e is the man who, when dealing with others, thinks only of himself, and on the other hand, in his understanding of himself, thinks only of others." (1984, 5)

For Rousseau, social inequality which fostered 'amour propre' was a necessary evil if mankind were ever to perfect itself. While he "deplored the advent of political society...the opinion from which he never wavered...was that political society was the 'moralizing agent' as well as the degrading force in men's lives." (Hinsley 1963, 46) Rousseau regarded as 'evil' things such as desires for prestige, appearances, and the possession of material goods. "Evil is veil and obfuscation, it is mask, it is intimately bound up with fiction, and it would not exist if man had not the dangerous freedom to deny, by means of artifice, what is given by nature." (Starobinski 1988, 21) Thus, he felt that man could find "his salvation by turning inward." (Starobinski 1988, 20) Man's inner natural state could be resurrected since it was permanent and endured beneath the surface, despite the movement of history.

This innate drive for moral development, or perfectibility, was man's primary driving force. Despite the negatives of society Rousseau believed that it was in society that man's

"faculties are exercised and developed; his ideas are expanded; his feelings are ennobled; his whole soul is exalted...."

(Crocker 1967, 22) In the state of nature man was unable to achieve this higher moral development; thus, despite its defects, Rousseau regarded society as a necessary development, and he certainly never advocated a return to man's natural state despite Voltaire's comments to the contrary.

(Man in the state of nature is non-social, amoral, and makes no use of his reasoning powers...(but) he possesses an undeveloped capacity for morality and reason which is brought into action as a result of life in society.

(Cobban 1934, 62)

In order to facilitate this process Rousseau set out to devise a natural form of education, which he believed would counteract the negative influences of society, or at least protect the individual from them as he struggled to survive. This system was outlined in the Emile, a system that would create citizens guided by 'amour de soi' which would bring them back to their true natural state. This would ensure that they would not see themselves in opposition to society, but instead would identify their good with the common good of all. According to Kant, thus, Rousseau attempted the noble goal of reconciling "nature with history, man's selfish nature with the demands of civil society, hence inclination with duty." (Bloom 1979, 3)

Rousseau's purpose was not simply an exercise in socialization leading to the creation of productive citizens. If this was the only goal of education, then it would only serve to reproduce the social system with all of its blemishes. In other

words, if society was corrupt, the education system would be corrupt, as well. This is exactly the situation Rousseau believed was in force in the political orders of his time.

(N)ature has made man with a propensity to morality, but man had made defective environments which have corrupted him in principle. What we have made we can remake once we recognize the defects in our institutions.

(Cook 1975, 110)

As mentioned, this was exactly the purpose of the educational system Rousseau devised in the Emile --to produce citizens that were effectively shielded from the negative influences of society. In order to do this, however, Rousseau recognized that more than simply changing the system of education would be necessary; thus, he attached to the Emile another work designed to fulfill this purpose--the Contrat social which outlined a different form of political organization designed to complement the education system he advocated. This argument will be discussed in the next chapter.

As should be quite evident from the forgoing discussion, Rousseau felt extremely alienated from the society of his time leading many to conclude that he was a misanthrope. This criticism was strenuously denied by Rousseau who felt that it was society that had abandoned him, not the other way around: "I would have loved men in spite of themselves. Only by ceasing to be humane, have they been able to slip away from my affection." (J.H. Mason 1979, 306) According to Harvey, however, there was "little doubt that Rousseau's revolt against the mores of his generation was founded in (his) youthful failure to adapt."

(1980, 14) Nevertheless, as his thought progressed it became clear that he felt very strongly that mankind had lost its soul--it sense of true identity. For Harvey, Rousseau's alienation "from the 'mores' of his day and his personal alienation were the conditions for his moves to discover a new identity, an authentic self" (1980, 14) and that the first book of the Confessions "could have been written as a case-study of alienation...." (1980, 223)

Society, according to Rousseau, had unfortunately created barriers to discovery of the true self and had created false needs/desires which he reviled. To be sure, his own life experiences (the hostile response he received upon publication of the Contrat social is a prime example) contributed to his sense of alienation. In fact, towards the end of his life he began to suspect 'phantom conspiracies' amongst 'former' friends and society in general which contributed to his alleged misanthropy. As stated, however, Rousseau always maintained that while society, such as it was, corrupted man, it also was necessary for man to reach his full potential as an independent, self-regulating being. Progress, thus, had to be carefully guided by a people governed, not by artificial social mores, but by their own individual consciences that emphasized feelings tempered by reason.

According to Featherstone, Rousseau was the "first major thinker to argue that the pace of change and the psychological consequences of modern dividedness are enemies to inner peace and psychic wholeness." (Masters., 185) In summary, Rousseau argued that the way society had evolved was characterized by



individuals who sensed their own self-worth by comparing themselves to others with an emphasis on appearance, manner, and material possessions. This attitude only served to set individuals against each other in a competitive spiral which produced winners and losers. Social inequality, thus, was perpetuated and aggravated as individuals scurried to collect as much as they possibly could, regardless of the consequences to others. This sentiment is clearly present in the following passage from the Nouvelle Heloise:

This atmosphere--of agitation and turbulence, psychic dizziness and drunkenness, expansion of experiential possibilities and destruction of moral boundaries and personal bonds, self-enlargement and self-derangement, phantoms in the street and in the soul--is the atmosphere in which modern sensibility is born.

(Berman 1988, 17)

What Rousseau criticized was the way that "change, inequality, the division of labour in an unequal society, and the pathology of the restless imagination...eroded the possibility of either decent family life or civic participation." (Masters 1968, 183)

Combined with a dominant scientific/mechanistic paradigm that encouraged the exploitation of the natural world, Rousseau's bourgeois society had no reason to consider the accumulation of wealth and the promotion of modernization problematic. Of course, in Rousseau's time wilderness was abundant. It is only now that we are beginning to realize the downside to this type of mindset. In essence, we have an environment that is steadily and quickly losing its capacity to support a materialist society based on continued progress. For Rousseau, thus, the solution was to "set up a middle landscape, halfway between savage nature

and a corrupt and overrefined society, to modernize in some realms and to protect others from the extremes of modernization."

(Masters 1968, 186) It can be argued that this approach has direct parallels to modern environmental philosophy that advocates sustainable development.

### Thoreau and Modernity

Like Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau's approach to modernization and its effects was one of skepticism, even downright hostility. According to Nash, Thoreau was one of the first Americans "to perceive inexhaustibility as a myth," (Nash 1989, 36) an idea that was antithetical to the frontier spirit unfolding on the continent as people pushed ever further westward. The idea of inexhaustibility was particularly appealing in the United States of the 19th century since the nation had been born out of a revolutionary spirit that ennobled the concepts of individualism and self-reliance. Thoreau, however, decried the intrusion of mankind into the untouched wilderness:

I love Nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. There a different kind of right prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, I could not stretch myself, I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this. None of the joys she supplies is subject to his rules and definitions. What he touches he taints. In thought he moralizes. One would think that no free, joyful labour was possible to him.

(Thoreau quoted in Allen 1962, 445)

For Thoreau, like Rousseau before him, individuals were far too narrowly concerned with their own appearances and material wealth, and he had little faith "of ever getting anything quite simple and honest done in this world by the help of men." (Moller 1980, 3) Furthermore, he questioned "the effectiveness of 'mere pity' and of the little 'charities' practised by complacent people, in which he suggests that much of our 'sympathy' is mere self-indulgence." (Moller 1980, 9) This idea parallels Rousseau's argument that 'pity' was natural to man but that in feeling 'pity' man is comforted by the knowledge of his own moral worthiness.

In similar fashion to Rousseau, there is strong evidence to support the allegation that Thoreau was decidedly misanthropic. Essentially, Thoreau argued that "society is always diseased, and the best is the sickest." (Moller 1980, 2) He agreed with Rousseau that society and social mores degraded the individual spirit. This sentiment is prevalent throughout Thoreau's work such as this passage from Book IV of his Journals:

What men call social virtues, good fellowship, is commonly but the virtue of pigs in a litter, which lie close together to keep each other warm. It brings men together in crowds and mobs in barrooms and elsewhere, but it does not deserve the name of virtue.

(Thoreau as quoted in Moller 1980, 12)

Furthermore, he stated that even after having lived over thirty years on the planet he had "yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from (his) seniors...(and that)...the commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring." (Moller 1980, 2) He argued that

"in the street and in society I am almost invariably cheap and dissipated, my life is unspeakably mean...I wish to forget...all mean, narrow, trivial men." (Moller 1980, 4) This feeling echoes Rousseau who argued that 'bourgeois man' emphasized his own narrow concerns, regardless of the impact on society and is far too preoccupied with appearance. In similar fashion, Thoreau noted that "the mass of men, just like savages strive always after the outside, the clothes and finery of civilized life, the blue beads and tinsel and centre tables." (1980, 5)

Thoreau, thus, attacked what he believed was social man's infuriating superficiality. He believed that "the vast majority of men...live on the surface; they are interest in the transient and fleeting; they are like driftwood in the flood...." (Moller, 1980, 3) Essentially, he argued that "we think that that is which appears to be" (Anderson 1973, 171) much like Rousseau pointed out that we tend to see ourselves through the eyes of others, that to bourgeois society appearance is the reality.

In addition, Thoreau likened man to insects:

Such is man, toiling, heaving, struggling ant-like to shoulder some stray unappropriated crumb and deposit it in his granery; then runs out, complacent, gazes heavenward, earthward...there seen of men, world-seen, deed-delivered, vanishes into all-grasping night.

(Thoreau as quoted in Moller 1980, 2)

In Walden, in particular, Thoreau questions this seemingly neverending struggle to achieve material security in decidedly Rousseauian fashion:

Why if men are free are they so enslaved? Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his

peck of dirt? Why should they begin 'digging their graves as so as they are born?'

(Thoreau as quoted in Houde 1980, 193)

According to Carl Houde, Thoreau recommends a decidedly Rousseauian solution to this dilemma: "a flight out of society to a state of nature. In the woods motion can be kept to an essential minimum, 'cut' and 'shaved close' 'reduced to its lowest terms' and thus can be made meaningful." (Thoreau from Houde 1980, 193) For Thoreau, society could only be redeemed if it were willing to simplify the complexities of social interaction. He asked: "why should we live with such a hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry." (Thoreau as quoted in Anderson 1973, 169) In his essay "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" Thoreau declared: "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail." (Thoreau from Anderson 1973, 168) In this way we are not preoccupied with trivialities. According to Thoreau: "When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality." (Thoreau from Anderson 1973, 171)

The primary problem that Thoreau believed had soiled man's integrity was the idea that "people have turned...necessaries into luxuries...and have thus unnecessarily complicated their lives." (Schneider 1987, 56) He favoured an ascetic approach

which argued that all that was necessary was food, shelter, clothing, and fuel. Thus, he believed that clothing had become more 'fashion than necessity;' that housing was too ornate; that man needed only a simple diet for health and strength; and, that the rich used so much fuel that they "are not simply kept comfortably warm, but unnaturally hot...." (1987, 56-57)

Rather than emphasizing such dubious material gains, Thoreau urged his readers to consider aiming for true spiritual progress: "'Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.'" (1987, 58) According to Schneider, thus, Thoreau believed that "the most practical view of life is the most spiritual. The problem of living is to see reality accurately, both physically and spiritually." (1987, 58) In order to accomplish this, Thoreau argued in favour of a simple life, one that is in direct communion with nature and rejects the imposition of a society based on appearances and material wealth. The message of Walden, in particular, is that happiness, virtue and salvation can be achieved if one lives in a simple fashion and strives for self-improvement through earnest hard work within a framework that emphasizes the denial of frivolous desires in favour of basic needs and spiritual self-awareness.

Both Rousseau and Thoreau recognized that mankind had begun to emphasize material wealth as the benchmark for self-worth; that the institutions of society helped create and perpetuate false needs and desires; that the direction society had taken by emphasizing material over spiritual concerns degraded mankind; and that only by simplifying ones life and fostering a healthy

relationship with the natural world could mankind hope for spiritual rebirth.

Essentially, both men denied that "a state devolved to the pursuit of individual happiness conceived of in hedonistic 'consumer' terms could ever realize...social virtue and public happiness." (Harvey 1980, 203) However, while Rousseau condemned society in general for having taken the wrong turn far back in the distant past, Thoreau's criticisms seem to be directed at specific institutions, "or specific human foibles and not necessarily at mankind generally." (Moller 1980, 7) Some examples include "the timidity and hypocrisy of the Church, politicians, the press, and lecture committees which...are surely legitimate objects of indictment and satire." (Moller 1980, 7) However, according to Moller, in many instances "Thoreau seems to be gratuitously...attacking, or dismissing, the whole of mankind" (1980, 7) in favour of nature. For Thoreau, it would seem that "you cannot have a deep sympathy with both man and Nature." (1980, 6)

Thoreau's arguments, for the most part however, fell on deaf ears since the dominant feeling in the America of the 19th century emphasized expansion, modernization and the accumulation of wealth. At that time the idea of inexhaustibility was unquestioned; thus, people felt little need, nor desire, to simplify their existence, to conserve, or to search for the spiritual within nature.

Developments over the past thirty years, however, suggest that there is indeed a maximum carrying capacity for the planet and that Thoreau was correct in concluding that inexhaustibility

is a myth. Today, across the spectrum of environmental movements, the idea of progress is brought into question as well as the mentality of rampant consumerism and wealth accumulation. Thus, we now turn to an examination of modern thought in this regard that parallels that of Rousseau: the critique of progress and materialist individualism.

### Rousseau, Modern Environmentalism and the Critique of Progress

Perhaps the best way to introduce this section would be to outline some of modern environmentalism's central value assertions, particularly those related to Rousseau. Using the list created by Robert Paehlke those principles would include:

1. An appreciation of all life forms and a view that the complexities of the ecological web of life are politically salient. (conservation)
2. A sense of humility regarding the human species in relation to other species and to the global ecosystem.
3. An aesthetic appreciation for season, setting, climate, and natural materials.
4. A revulsion toward waste in the face of human need (in more extreme forms, this may appear as asceticism).
5. A love of simplicity, although this does not include rejection of technology or 'modernity.'
6. A measurement of esteem, including self-esteem and social merit, in terms of such nonmaterial values as skill, artistry, effort, or integrity.
7. An attraction to autonomy and self-management in human endeavors and, generally, an inclination to more democratic and participatory political processes and administrative structures.
8. Some preference for political and/or population decentralization.

(1989, 144-5)



The first three concepts have already been discussed, while the last two will be covered in the next chapter. For the moment, we are interested in the environmental movement's revulsion of rampant consumerism fueled by the creation of false needs, its emphasis on simplicity, and its rejection of material measures of personal success. In addition, we are concerned with ecocentric arguments for steady-state economics, for wealth distribution, and for a limited forms of development that mandate safeguarding environmental integrity.

As mentioned, Rousseau condemned the scientific/mechanistic paradigm which insisted on man's right to exploit nature and which encouraged the creation of false needs. He also argued, as did Thoreau, for a much greater degree of simplicity in our lives. He also favoured egalitarian principles which would reduce the inequity between rich and poor to a great extent. Finally, Rousseau admonished society for creating citizens who use material wealth and appearance as benchmarks for self-worth. He, too, believed that man needed to measure success, not in terms of wealth, but in terms of nonmaterial values such as justice, honesty, innocence, virtue, creativity and integrity. According to Paehlke, these values may be incorporated in a "Post-Materialist" future in which personal growth is regarded as more important than material possessions and "involves an greater emphasis on self-expression and the quality of life." (1989, 173)

Perhaps the one major area in which Rousseau's thought parallels certain forms of modern environmental thought is his

insistence that society corrupted man and that it had to be completely reformed along the lines of the political system he advocated in the Contrat social. While modern environmentalists generally do not come out and specifically argue that society corrupts man's true nature, they do insist that, in a sense, man is trapped by his own institutions which encourage exploitation of the environment as a by-product of our materialist consumption-oriented values. According to Brian Tokar "industrial systems have bound people to an entangling web of dependencies totally outside their own control." (1987, 80)

For Murray Bookchin this unhealthy state of affairs necessitates the wholesale replacement of "civilization's 'institutional and ethical framework" (Nash 1989, 165) in order to overcome the problems of exploitation and inequality. Bookchin was perhaps the first modern environmental philosopher to argue, much like Rousseau, that "the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human." (Nash 1989, 164)

Instead, Bookchin advocates a form of 'social ecology' emphasizing the need for a non-hierarchical and diverse society "as the prerequisite to an ecologically harmonious man-nature relationship." (Pepper 1984, 202) This position has been described as ecoanarchism. (1984, 202) Essentially, he stressed "the equal value of every part of the community and the necessity of maximizing individual freedom so that every component could fulfill its potential." (Nash 1989, 164) He believed that such a community would "approximate a [normal] ecosystem; it would be

diversified, balanced and harmonious." (1989, 164)

What Bookchin opposes is the extremism within the environmental movement that argues

either humanity must yield to a religious, and more recently, 'ecological' humility to the dicta of 'natural law' and take its abject place side by side with the lowly ant on which it 'arrogantly treads,' or it must 'conquer' nature with its technological and rational astuteness...."

(Bookchin 1990, 99)

Bookchin instead argues that we must emphasize development, not change, and strive towards the realization of an 'ecological society' that balances both man's interests and those of the biosphere. This, of course, would require a radical restructuring of our ethics to move away from materialistic goals towards more environment-centered value system. That this can be accomplished, at the very least, debatable.

Another philosopher, not generally recognized as an environmentalist, who has criticized the materialistic values of modern culture is Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse argued that modern capitalist society "reduced both nature and people to raw materials with strictly utilitarian value." (Nash 1989, 166)

Thus he created the idea of "One-dimensional men:"

The masses have no egos, no ids, their souls are devoid of inner tension or dynamism: their ideas, their needs, 'even their dreams' are 'not their own'; their inner lives are 'totally enslaved,' programmed to produce exactly those desires that the social system can satisfy and no more. The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobiles, hi-fi sets, split-level homes, kitchen equipment....

(Marcuse as quoted in Berman 1988, 28-29)

Much like Rousseau, Marcuse condemned society for creating citizens that identify themselves and their own self-worth through their possessions. For Marcuse, 'consumer' man existed in a state of anarchic competition for resources that are becoming more and more scarce, and that the environment could not be protected unless there were a revolution against these economic and political traditions. (Nash 1989, 11) In essence, Marcuse argued in favour of a new relationship between man and nature' that would lead to the reduction of man's impact on the natural world. Marcuse argued "that everything existed first and foremost for its own sake" (Nash 1989, 166) and he advocated liberating nature by rejecting the hierarchical, exploitative values and institutions of modern capitalist society. He regarded nature as another oppressed minority "deserving a place in the sun of the American liberal tradition." (Nash 1989, 212)

Over the past 30 or so years numerous volumes have been produced that document the deterioration of the environment. In general these varied studies have concluded that the primary dynamics of the problem are centered on "chronic imbalances in population/resource ratios...ecologically damaging technology... (and)...wasteful consumption patterns." (Pepper 1984, 3) According to Pepper, the principle ideas for modern environmentalism can be found in three landmark publications: The Limits to Growth (sponsored by the Club of Rome), Blueprint for Survival, and Small is Beautiful. (Pepper 1984, 22)

Using a computer to simulate the planetary economic and resource future, The Limits to Growth study, sponsored by the

Club of Rome, concluded that 'in the not-so-distant future' humanity would "face a series of integrated crises...of over-population, pollution, nonrenewable resource depletion, capital stock maintenance, and/or food shortage." (Paehlke 1989, 50) In brief, the earth was reaching its carrying capacity and it concluded that "industrial society was both undesirable in the excess it had attained and unsustainable in anything like its present form." (Paehlke 1989, 53) In addition, it advocated a redistribution of wealth in order to eliminate the gross economic disparities between rich and poor both domestically and on the international stage. Although the Limits study has its critics it did influence the debate over continued economic expansion.

Despite its anthropocentric flavour, however, the study's main theme emphasized a steady-state world economy essentially discarding the idea of continued growth. Limits, thus, would question the idea of sustainable development advocated by the recently published Bruntland Commission report Our Common Future. One could argue, thus, that the idea of a 'stabilized world model' parallels those environmental philosophies advocating a balance between man and nature. Leopold's 'land ethic', Bookchin's 'ecological society' or Rousseau's rejection of bourgeois values and his concept of wholeness or unity with nature come to mind. It must be remembered, however, that Rousseau's ethic was not primarily based on a concern for environmental degradation, in and of itself, but on the negative affects on man himself of treating the natural world as something to be 'defeated.' Owing

to the romantic elements within his thought, Rousseau is decidedly preoccupied with individual self-discovery and spiritual growth rather than any altruistic concerns for the environment, per se.

The second major influence on modern environmentalism was The Blueprint for Survival. This study posited a model of a future British society based on sound ecological principles. It laid down "fundamental goals in which human activity should involve minimum ecological disruption and the maximum conservation of energy and materials." (Pepper 1984, 24) In addition, while material standards would be dropped, education would be used to reorient values systems "to place spiritual and emotional aspects of life in high esteem." (Pepper 1984, 24) The study further advocated de-centralization, an emphasis on 'less deleterious technology', and a 'rejection of impersonal large-scale production techniques. The study also favoured a society based on small communities--another Rousseauian concept to be discussed in the next chapter. The ecotopia envisioned by the Blueprint rejected the scientific/mechanistic paradigm that encouraged nature's exploitation and instead, like Rousseau, sought a balance between man and the natural world. The starting point for this reorientation represents another Rousseauian concept, that of restructuring the education system.

E.F. Schumacher's Small is Beautiful, meanwhile, echoed previous works that called for a change in society's value structures. Schumacher advocated emphasizing what he called "Buddhist economics" which rejected materialistic values that encourage

exploitation of the environment:

Buddhist economics must be very different from the economicis of modern materialism, since the Buddhist sees the essence of civilization not in a multiplication of wants but in the purification of human character. Character, at the same time, is formed primarily by a man's work. And work, properly conducted in conditions of human dignity and freedom, pleases those who do it and equally their products. Consumption is less important than creative activity, and conspicuous consumption is openly offensive.

(Paehlke 1989, 173)

Thus, the basis for judging oneself "is bound up more and more with personal dignity, restraint and real personal achievement. Grandiosity and price are no longer a measure of uniqueness and beauty." (Paehlke 1989, 174) In similar fashion to Rousseau, Schumacher attempted to "expose the nature and deficiencies of the current philosophies which govern our relationship with nature." (Pepper 1984, 25) Though he did not go so far as Rousseau, who concluding society corrupted man, he did argue that "values shape economics...and he drove us towards a solution to the environmental 'crisis' which hinged upon the need for a changed value system in the West." (Pepper 1984, 25) Schumacher believed the system's goal was not to maximize profits but to foster happy, productive citizens. By emphasizing the values of 'Buddhist economics,' he mirrored Rousseau's call for a move away from the material towards the spiritual whereby people identify themselves not with their material wealth but with their dedication to concepts such as justice, creativity and integrity.

The preceeding arguments are presented as just a sampling of the modern environmental literature that has a Rousseauian

colouring: the idea of modern capitalist society's corrupting influence on individuals; its denigration of spiritual goals and its emphasis on materialistic competition; modern society's preoccupation with appearance; its disregard for environmental integrity; and ultimately the need for a complete restructuring of capitalist society's core values. How this restructuring could be accomplished is a question of central importance. For Rousseau, the only way to break down the deleterious effects of selfish materialism was through education and a restructuring of the institutions of political organization. The following chapter, thus, presents Rousseau's views on participatory democracy, decentralization and the concept of small communities which will be compared to contemporary political environmentalism, with particular reference to 'green' philosophy and Green party politics.



## CHAPTER FIVE: ROUSSEAU AND THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

### Introduction

It seems almost a cliché to say that Rousseau's political philosophy is fraught with contradictions. Critics throughout history have debated his political thought, but there has been little agreement on how to classify and interpret its distinctive features. While James Miller sees Rousseau as 'the great Democrat of the 18th century, Talmon has equated his philosophy with totalitarianism. (J. Miller 1984, 165) Similar to Talmon, Benjamin Constant "saw in Rousseau's egalitarianism nothing but an equality of mistreatment." (Horowitz 1987, 13) Marshall Berman, however, argued that Rousseau was "a radical individualist, struggling with the problem of authenticity." (Horowitz 1987, 26) Horowitz, meanwhile, equivocates on the question by asserting that Rousseau "is neither straightforwardly an individualist nor a collectivist." (1987, 8) He argues that Rousseau is actually both a liberal and a totalitarian "corresponding to two human types: citizens and men, social beings and autonomous individuals." (1987, 15) In the end, however, Horowitz believes that Rousseau's solution to society's problems, the concept of the 'general will,' is "a denial of self-hood in submission to a totalitarian authority." (1987, 26)

Whichever interpretation one chooses to emphasize, it is likely that it will be wrong in some respects, because Rousseau is a philosopher whose political themes defy categorization. There are, however, outstanding features to his thought which

are unmistakable, features that have a direct bearing on any discussion of environmental philosophy.

### Rousseau, Democracy and the 'General Will'

The core of Rousseau's political philosophy is found in his seminal work: the Contrat social, although certain facets of this area of his thought can be found throughout his writings-- particularly Emile, Considerations sur le gouvernement de Pologne, and Projet de Constitution pour la Corse. In the Contrat social Rousseau advocated a form of social organization in which all men were considered equal under the law, and it was assumed by Rousseau that if all citizens were educated as outlined in Emile his system would be the most perfect form of social organization--a system which would regard the law as outlined by his idea of the 'general will' as sacred. According to Rousseau: "it is to the law alone that men owe justice and freedom; it is this (beneficial) organ of the will of all which re-establishes natural equality among men in the legal order." (Cassirer 1989, 58) But in order to institute such a system, individuals had to submit to the unbending rule of law dictated by the 'general will' which was determined through a process of voting in which each member indicates his preference for recommended laws drawn up by elected legislators. This 'general will' presupposes, however, "a deliberate attitude of mind and a firm determination to seek the common good." (Grimley 1973, 103)

According to Cassirer, the 'general will' was not simply an atomistic aggregate of individual wills, but was instead supposed

to include an ethical underpinning which served as the basis for the decisions made as reflected in the law. For Rousseau, the law was not regarded as an external bond forcing individuals to conform, but was, instead, the constituent principle behind particular wills that confirmed and justified them spiritually. "It wishes to rule subjects only inasmuch as, in its every act, it also makes and educates them into citizens." (Cassirer 1989, 63) Rousseau was primarily concerned with promoting "the dignity of man and with the means of securing and realizing it" (Cassirer 1989, 71) through the application of the law. For Rousseau, thus, dignity could only be secured under a system in which special privileges for specific individuals or classes were eradicated by ensuring the equality of all citizens before the law. (Cassirer 1989, 59) Rousseau believed that the law was not an opponent to freedom, but was its only true guarantor.

The 'general will' was intended to distinguish between the "responsible social attitude of the citizen concerned with the common good and the particular will of the individual who seeks merely his own advantage." (Grimsley 1973, 103) As should be clear, this concept flies in the face of modern capitalism's emphasis on the free market, material wealth, and individual choice.

In order to foster the 'general will' Rousseau insisted that there be no discussion before the voting process, so that each citizen was protected from the influence of other people. Thus, the primary purpose of the voting process was

to obtain the total participation and the total commitment of all to the general will, and thus to achieve a unanimous, cooperative society in which individuals will think of themselves as part of the whole rather than as self-centered units.

(Crocker 1967, xix)

By this submission, each member of society was guaranteed never again to be subject to the particular will of any one individual or group. Thus, Rousseau advocated a society in which citizens were each economically equal (relative to natural abilities) and independent. "Ideally, there should be a situation where 'no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another and none so poor as to be forced to sell himself.'" (Pateman 1970, 22-23) The vital requirement, thus, was that each individual had his own property, because this gave him security and independence that was necessary to ensure political equality and independence. (1970, 23) According to Alfred Cobban the Contrat social was an "attempt to put into political terms the concept of freedom in society." (Cobban 1934, 61) Freedom and equality were, thus, reconciled for Rousseau in a community marked by effective participation for all members, a community Rousseau felt was the most natural of social orders and one that allowed the greatest form of freedom for man to perfect himself. Clearly, this goal is one shared by modern environmentalists, particularly those calling for greater participation by the public in the job of governing as a means of reversing the dangerous trends that threaten the integrity, indeed the very survival, of the planet.

Central to the concept of direct democracy are two main thrusts: effective participation and the decentralization of

authority. Specifically, direct democracy eliminates representatives; therefore, it is a self-governing form of political organization in which all citizens assemble together to vote on the pressing issues of the day. Examples might include the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian soviets of 1905, Hungary in 1956, and the traditional New England town meeting. One could argue, however, that to be truly effective direct democracy could only work in very small communities that are self-supporting. It is not surprising, thus, that it has been described by some as the "most obscure current of modern democratic practice." (J. Miller 1984, 205)

It has been argued that it was Rousseau who popularized the concept of direct democracy in the Contrat social. According to Miller "no one before him had been so obviously driven by an overriding vision of direct self-rule by an entire people." (J. Miller 1984, 142) The Contrat social, thus, emphasized the concept of the inalienable sovereignty of the people. As a result, Rousseau was a staunch opponent of the idea of representative democracy which he concluded was a sham. He felt quite strongly that any law that had not been authorized by the people directly was not a reflection of the general will. "Every law which the people in person have not ratified is invalid, it is not a law," he argued. (Crocker 1967, 99) In fact, he criticized representative democracy as it was practiced in England by saying that "(t)he English nation thinks that it is free, but is greatly mistaken, for it is so only during the election of members of Parliament; as soon as they are elected,

it is enslaved and counts for nothing." (1967, 99)

Rousseau's faith in the idea of direct participation was not entirely based on his rejection of representative democracy. He also believed in direct democracy's positive benefits for people. He felt that "only through law-making could their horizons be broadened, their capacity for virtue developed." (J. Miller 1984, 143) He argued that "(p)articipation broadens the mind. It makes you see the other person's point of view. It makes you understand the value of compromise and tolerance." (Held 1986, 142) He also believed that by allowing the citizens of the state to actively participate in the making of laws they would be effectively protected against the resurgence of any form of despotism. He felt that participation would "increase the value of his freedom to the individual by enabling him to be (and remain) his own master." (Pateman 1970, 26) In other words, it would be extremely difficult for anyone to win support for a return to a less participatory form of government.

In addition, Rousseau felt that participation would foster a sense of community in which individuals would come to identify the public good with their own. Thus, the participatory process is educative as individuals learn to feel "little or no conflict between the demands of the public and private spheres." (Pateman 1970, 25) In essence, "(i)mbued with a greater sense of community, the individual may begin to consider interests that transcend his crude personal advantage." (R. Mason 1982, 39) Also, "(i)f you have helped to make a decision yourself...you may feel better even if it was a worse decision." (Held 1986, 142) This has been

borne out by modern social scientists who have discovered that "enforcement is facilitated by participation in the decision-making process." (R. Mason 1982, 38) In fact, Rousseau believed that by the effective comprehensive participation of all members of society the common good of all would always be realized--his conception of the 'general will'. He believed that

given any matter to be decided by a group or community, there is always one (and only one) just decision, one decision in the common interest, which they would all recognize for such, if they had the relevant information and reasoned correctly.

(Plamenatz 1973, 96)

Rousseau was given the opportunity to apply these ideas to a real setting when he received a request from the leaders of the island of Corsica to draw up a new constitution. While the work was not completed, Projet de Constitution pour la Corse provides a practical example of how Rousseau believed direct democracy could work.

First, Rousseau argued that it was crucial that the island remain agrarian, limit the growth of industry, and avoid introducing commerce. "Commerce and luxury went together and the results of both were disastrous. They promoted self-interest in the individual and inequality in society." (J.H. Mason 1979, 268) Second, with respect to industry, Rousseau felt that the island's mineral resources had to be carefully managed so as not to be overexploited. In addition, industries had to be

carefully sited, away from good agricultural land and away from any centres of population: only that (would) keep them in balance with agriculture and

prevent the imbalances that otherwise arises, to the harm of the latter.

(J.H. Mason 1979, 268)

Rousseau did not want to keep the island poor, necessarily, but wanted to ensure that the freedom of all citizens would be maintained. "Everyone should make a living and no one should grow rich; that is the fundamental principle of the prosperity of the nation...." (J.H. Mason 1979, 271)

Third, Rousseau advocated that the state own the property and resources and that each individual share in the common property in proportion to his input. (J.H. Mason 1979, 273) This concept would have later parallels to what Pepper describes as ecosocialist thought, although Rousseau stipulated that no property already owned was to be expropriated. He said that "(n)o law can despoil any private citizen of any part of his property; the law can merely prevent him from acquiring more...." (J.H. Mason 1979, 273) Indeed, he argued that his idea was not to do away with private property "absolutely...but to confine it within the narrowest limits; to give it a measure, a rule, a rein which will contain, direct and subjugate it, and keep it ever subordinate to the public good." (J.H. Mason 1979, 273)

Corsica was somewhat unique, however, in being a small island cut off from the direct influence of other communities. In Considerations sur le gouvernement de Pologne Rousseau offered the idea of a federal structure that would unite the various regions under one central government. Clearly, Rousseau realized that he was creating a potential conflict between the particular



wills of the provinces and the general will of the nation. What he feared was that the inalienable sovereignty of the people would be undermined since authority would have to be delegated to representatives of the regions whenever the central government was convened. There was the potential, thus, that the concept of direct democracy would fall apart the larger and more ethnically diverse the country was. Practically speaking, however, Rousseau felt quite strongly that Poland had to reduce her frontiers in order to maintain control. His solution, thus, was to combine "the outward strength of a great nation with the easy discipline and the good order of a small State...." (Vaughan 1962, 385) His solution was a confederation. He conditioned this proposal, however, by urging that "if there must be 'partial societies' there should be 'as many as possible' which are as equal...as possible." (Dent 1988, 227) Rousseau felt that it was possible, though not ideal, for a confederal structure to be reconciled with the 'general will' as long as size and numbers were stressed.

Rousseau's ideal society governed by the 'general will' has inspired a great deal of useful debate regarding the ways in which self-centered growth, as epitomized by the capitalist system, can be overcome facilitating a move to a more ecologically-minded socio-economic system. Rousseau's concept of the 'general will,' however, assumes a society with values that already equate private interests with public ones. It must be remembered that Rousseau believed this could only come about as a result of fundamental changes in society's value structures, which would primarily be fostered through education (Emile). At

any rate, Rousseau insisted on small, self-contained, primarily agrarian states for his system to be most effective. Needless to say, this type of socio-political structure is unlikely in today's highly complex, predominantly urban society. In addition, it is doubtful "that many people would wish to live in such a society, even if they could." (Resnick 1990, 105) Nevertheless, the aspiration to greater political participation remains a reality in many modern polities that cannot be denied.

Essentially Rousseau's political philosophy provides a grand unified theory of political organization which many modern environmentalists have supported in varying degrees. His idea of the 'general will' has distinct collectivist overtones, especially in the context of 'forcing men to be free' if they disagree with its dictates. There are indications, however, in his writings that he believed that societies governed by the 'general will' would have few laws and would meet to create new laws infrequently. In this sense, one might argue that he and Thoreau would have been in agreement, that a harmonious society would require few laws and that only the people themselves have a right to legislate. Thoreau, however, seems to have been a dedicated anarchist, and therefore any parallels between his thought and Rousseau's in this regard is tenuous.

### Thoreau, the State and Civil Disobedience

As mentioned, Thoreau philosophy has decidedly anarchistic overtones and, thus, differs in many respects from the approach Rousseau took. Thoreau argued that "government is best which

governs least...(and that)...government is at best but an expedient." (Thomas 1966, 224) With respect to voting, Thoreau said:

I cast my vote, perchance, as I think right; but I am not vitally concerned that right should prevail. I am willing to leave it to the majority. Its obligation, therefore, never exceeds that of expediency.

(Thoreau as quoted in Thomas 1966, 228)

For Thoreau, the majority held on to power, not because they were right or even fair, but "because they are physically the stronger." (Thomas 1966, 225) He forcefully argued against people resigning themselves to the actions of legislators, and insisted that "we should be men first, and subjects afterwards." (Thomas 1966, 225) According to Thoreau, God gave us a conscience; therefore, it would be wrong to turn that conscience over to a legislator. Therefore, if an individual perceives a law as 'unjust,' Thoreau believed it was that person's duty to disobey the law. He felt that "under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison." (Thomas 1966, 233) Of course, the idea of 'injustice' can become highly subjective.

Rousseau would likely have had none of this, because under the 'general will' there could be no unjust laws in terms of what is right for a properly constituted community as a whole. In addition, Rousseau argued that "only the greatest dangers can outweigh that of changing the public order, and the sacred power of the laws should never be interfered with except when the safety of the country is at stake." (Crocker 1967, 130) One could argue, of course, that environmental catastrophe constitutes

a danger to the safety of the country.

In fairness to Thoreau, it seems likely that he recognized the compact theory of political organization which insists that once a group of people have consented to a form of government, they should obey its dictates. He said that the authority of government is still an "impure one: to be strictly just it must have the sanction and consent of the governed. It can have no pure right over any person and property but what I concede to it." (Thomas 1966, 242-3) Thus, it is likely that Thoreau would not have agreed that an individual can consent to be governed, obtain the benefits of society but refuse to pay the costs (i.e. obedience to duly constituted laws). He seems to focus primarily on laws that a reasonable person with all available facts would agree were unjust.

It should be clear from the preceeding that Thoreau would have supported the concept of civil disobedience with regard to protecting the environment; thus, he likely would have been sympathetic to both the ends and means of modern environmental radicals. Rousseau, on the other hand, would have attacked the problem of environmental degradation by insisting that legislation that sanctioned exploiting nature did not reflect the general will but the particular will of particular classes within society. In other words, if the 'general will' is applied to an 'ecological society' then it is fair to say that the it would reflect optimum choices for the biosphere as a whole. Thoreau, meanwhile, would have simply argued that anti-ecological legislation was unjust, and that people could not simply ignore

such exploitation. In fact, his arguments can be seen as lending support to what the radical environmentalists would later call 'ecological sabotage.' (Nash 1989, 166)

### Rousseau, Participation and Modern Ecophilosophy

As previously mentioned, the modern ecophilosopher with distinct parallels to Rousseauian thought and a writer often identified with anarchistic thought is Bookchin. His 'social ecology' emphasizes the problems associated with large, complex industrial societies. He argues that:

Ordinary people find it impossible to participate in a nation: they can belong to it but it never belongs to them. The size of the nation-state renders active citizenship impossible...and it turn politics...into a form of statecraft in which the citizen is increasingly disempowered by authoritarian executive agencies, their legislative minions, and an all-encompassing bureaucracy.

(Bookchin 1987, 27-28)

Instead, Bookchin favours a form of social organization that emphasizes "a non-hierarchical society (that) is based on complementarity rather than rivalry...(with)...modes of knowing which are participatory and emancipatory." (Bookchin, 1987, 75) According to Bookchin, the form of political organization he envisions is

scaled to human dimensions, is tailored to the ecosystem in which it is located, and (will) open a new, decentralized, self-managed public realm for new forms of selfhood as well as directly democratic forms of self-management.

(Bookchin 1987, 75-6)

The parallels to Rousseau in this vision are self-evident. In the preceeding chapter, we discussed The Blueprint for

Survival which professed to outline a program for an ecologically balanced future society--ecotopia. In terms of its political recommendations, the report focused on the twin ideals of decentralization and smallness of scale, two distinctly Rousseauian concepts. Among its fundamental goals were minimal ecological disruption, conservation of energy and resources, extensive recycling, and an emphasis on organic farming techniques.

Central to the Blueprint was the idea of small communities, which it was believed would allow people to become directly involved and therefore give them a distinct influence on a, by-in-large, localized government. "Small communities would also, it was thought, have a minimal adverse impact on the 'natural' ecosystem." (Pepper 1984, 25) According to Pepper, the emphasis was on ecological rather than specifically humanitarian concerns. Although social justice was a consideration, there remained the question of just how restrictive of individual liberty such a society would be in order to 'maintain the iron laws of ecology.' (1984, 25) By prohibiting a wide variety of practices, the Blueprint came dangerously close to advocating an "ethics of repression and totalitarian control." (Pepper 1984, 206) This aspect becomes particularly ominous considering the Blueprint's contention that

the transition to its ideal society will 'impose a heavy burden on our moral courage; and will 'require great restraint.' Legislation and the operation of the police forces and the courts will be necessary to reinforce this restraint.

(Pepper 1984, 207)

This aspect of the Blueprint is reminiscent of one of Rousseau's contentions that citizens who are not following the general will may be forced through the participatory process into socially responsible actions to ensure everyone's freedom, or in other words 'to be forced to be free.' Given the looming crisis in the environment we are facing, such a social ordering may not be as far-fetched as one might think.

Perhaps, though, the groups that most epitomizes the political strain within the modern environmental movement are the various Green parties, in particular the German Greens. For the Greens, like Thoreau and John Muir before them, "the protection of nature (is) intimately intertwined with social activism and a critique of industrial society." (Tokar 1987, 40)

#### Rousseau and German Green Party Politics

According to Kim Holmes, the German Greens are the heirs of to the German romantic tradition which began at the end of the 18th century as a revolt against the French Enlightenment. (Clemens 1983, 15) As mentioned, this romantic tradition "celebrated the uniqueness of the individual...and it promised freedom from constraint and the exaltation of passion as the ideals of a new type of personal sensitivity." (Clemens 1983, 15) It rejected the tenets of western liberalism "and the emerging capitalist system which underpinned it." (Clemens 1983, 16) To romantic sensibilities,

liberalism was not only the spiritual foundation of modern decadence, it was also the foremost political expression of the materialism and scientific

rationalism which they believed was eating away at the soul of German culture.

(Clemens 1983, 16)

Thus, in rejecting the idea of progress, there was a sense in the German romantic movement that materialist civilization had reached its end.

According to some, the tradition that most resembles the political style of the Greens is anarchism, because it regards the state as inherently coercive and, therefore, is an institution to be opposed by organized small grass roots units grouped together for a common purpose. (Clemens 1983, 17) This common purpose was to present a united front against liberalism's emphasis on "laissez-faire individualism and the competitive spirit of capitalism...." (Clemens 1983, 18) In order to effect this opposition, they put their faith in collective organization...." (Clemens 1983, 18) Holmes argues that it was these 'collectivist anarchists' such as Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin who were the founders of the concept of direct democracy organized at the grass roots level. (Clemens 1983, 18) It is contended in this thesis, however, that it was Rousseau, and not the 'collectivist anarchists' who originally popularized the idea of participatory democratic forms.

The modern movement, thus, reflects this German romantic tradition and is described by Clay Clemons as including a rejection of

the complex realities of modern life, above all, technological progress; the related themes of cultural despair, with its contempt for 'unaesthetic' industrial society and parliamentary institutions; the anarchist



contempt for state authority; and the utopian socialist emphasis on collectivism instead of individualism.

(Clemons 1983, vii)

Essentially, German Greens attribute society's ills to "the 'growth imperative'; consumerism, and the technological impulse, as well as the allegedly oligarchical control over all institutions." (Clemons 1983, ix)

The modern Green movement in Germany originated in the late 1960s out of "the radically anticapitalist, anti-parliamentary activism of the...student movement" (Clemons 1983, vii) and developed through the 1970s as a response to what they perceived were the exploitative and alienative effects of 'super-complex capitalist industrial society.' The primary supporters of the early movement, thus, were disaffected young people and students who were dissatisfied by their position in society, as well as "members of rural communities who...felt threatened by ambitious hypertechnological projects." (Papadakis 1984, 2) According to Rudolph Bahro, Greens reacted to what he describes as the "markedly self-destructive, outwardly murderous and inwardly suicidal character of our industrial civilization." (Bahro 1986, 11) They also opposed the dominant political paradigm of the post-war period, "which centers around economic and security issues...(and) is characterized by the predominance of representative forms of decision-making...." (Kolinsky 1989, 21)

The Greens, thus, were interested in searching for a new form of community, a community which would emphasize "social and self-actualization needs...participation at the workplace and in

political decision-making, freedom of expression, a beautiful environment, and the appreciation of creativity." (Kolinsky 1989, 20) Furthermore, they supported a form of ecological politics which opposed nuclear power, favoured a redistribution of global wealth, demanded an end to the arms race and a guarantee of some form of political autonomy for the grass roots. (Kolinsky 1989, 21-22)

At their foundation congress in 1980, the Green party developed a political platform that emphasized four basic principles: ecology, social goals, grassroots democracy, and non-violence. In general terms, they supported the notion that production would be on a 'smaller' more manageable decentralized scale, and that the "introduction of new technology would be democratically administered and monitored carefully to ensure compatibility with the environment...." (Kolinsky 1989, 62-3) According to Bahro, the Greens wanted "to get away from centralized, bureaucratic social administration and build up self-administered social services on a community basis." (Bahro 1986, 38) Direct democracy and de-centralization of authority were seen as crucial necessities in order to counter-act "the increasing monopolization of economic power...(as well as)...the growing bureacratization and centralization of government." (Bahro 1986, 41)

According to Spretnak and Capra, the first pillar of the German Greens, ecology, reflects a concept previously discussed: "an understanding that we are part of nature, not above it, and that all our massive structure of commerce--and life itself--

ultimately depend on wise respectful interaction with our biosphere." (Capra 1986, 29) As mentioned, while Rousseau favoured the idea of hierarchy, he also recognized the interconnectedness of all life, and it is clear he would have agreed with the Greens in the sense that we must be careful stewards of the natural world.

The second pillar, that of social responsibility, focuses on "social justice and an assurance that the poor and the working class will not get hurt by programs to restructure the economy and our consumer society ecologically." (Capra 1986, 35) Rousseau, too, argued that in creating a society governed by the 'general will' the disparities between rich and poor would have to be, for the most part eliminated, and that the state would own most of the country's assets although he did indicate in Corsica that personal property already in someone's possession would not be taken away.

The third pillar, that of grass roots democracy, has been the primary focus of this chapter and is, to reiterate, an emphasis on decentralized, direct democracy. It gives priority to decisions made at the local level and, thus, encourages the devolution of administrative powers to "de-centralized, manageable grass roots units." (Capra 1986, 37) As a result, the Greens advocated "simplifying administrative units with a greater share of government revenues going to states, regions, counties, towns and neighbourhoods." (Capra 1986, 48)

The Greens also preferred party voting take place at large

assemblies where individuals would have easy access to party officials, and they favoured the idea of consensus. (Langwuth 1986, 75) The problem with the consensus approach, however, is that it can become an "instrument of extortion directed against the majority...(and)...in many cases it leads to compromises not reflective of the majority view." (Langwuth 1986, 75) In addition, Greens rejected the notion of hierarchical structures within the party whereby party brass become entrenched in positions of power. Instead, they put into practice the idea of electing steering committees, usually with staggered terms of less than two years. The problem with this form of office rotation is that "in a complicated democracy demanding specialization, politicians need time to learn and to gain experience and an understanding of detail...(in order to ensure)...responsible action." (Langwuth 1986, 73)

At any rate, the twin ideals of de-centralization and direct democracy, as we have seen, have distinct parallels in Rousseau's thought. There is also a distinctly Rousseauian colouring to the Greens sense of alienation from modern industrial society.

According to Bahro:

The psychological dimension of the problem of individuality in super-complex industrial society must be made completely clear. The different spheres of life--work, education, housing, recreation--are so separated from one another, almost all activities are so depersonalized and even private ties stripped of so many necessities, that the alienation of one person from another threatens to become the general fate. We find a loss of emotional connection even in the intimate contacts of the nuclear family, this last residue of the original community.

(Papadakis 1984, 23)

According to Elim Papadakis, the greatest concern among Greens in modern industrial society, thus, "is the fear of isolation and loss of personal and collective identity." (Papadakis 1984, 25) Much like Rousseau, they sensed the necessity for completely re-structuring modern society's value system so that 'fundamental needs would no longer be perverted by consumer society' and instead of materialism there would be an emphasis on creativity. (Papadakis 1984, 53) Essentially, they envisioned a society where "people live in harmony with nature and decision-making processes have been simplified and decentralized, and people are provided with goods on the basis of their needs." (Papadakis 1984, 55)

While it might be too much to expect a blueprint for an alternative society, the primary criticism of the Greens has been that they do not have a comprehensive alternative to the current political institutions and structures. In part, this is because they may be striving for irreconcilable aims and simply cannot agree amongst themselves on how to carry out this restructuring. According to Papadakis the Greens are, at the same time, trying

to introduce grass-roots democracy into a parliamentary system; to combat certain aspects of economic growth whilst seeking to satisfy most material and social needs; to uphold the idea of the charisma of the group and the community, whilst still being influenced by an individualist culture and forms of protest and action.

(Papadakis 1984, 61)

This might be a result of the fact that the Greens are a wildly 'heterogenous movement' and according to Clemons are 'hopelessly

utopian' in their outlook. (Clemons, ix) As Papadakis argues, they may be "trapped by an excessive emphasis on a utopian view of how to solve social and environmental problems...(based on)... an abstract analysis of society (that fails to recognize the need for)...tangible alternatives." (Papadakis, 61) Ironically, the same criticism can be levelled at Rousseau.

## CONCLUSIONS

Without a doubt the various prescriptions outlined in this thesis emphasize social reforms and institutional changes that seem unattainable given the inherent difficulties involved in re-structuring society, not to mention the resistance of those interest groups and social classes who benefit most from the current system. According to Ensenberger, while the various groups debate about the 'correct' form this restructuring must take, they have failed to recognize "that there has been a fundamental quantum leap in the environmental threats which are posed by modern industrialization." (Pepper 1984, 203) He argues that it is becoming quite clear that "any possible future belongs to the realm of necessity and not that of freedom, and that every political theory and practice...(will be)... confronted not with the problem of abundance but survival." (Pepper 1984, 203)

Clearly, with so many perspectives on the environment, it will take time to achieve a working synthesis of ideas. It is entirely plausible that such a synthesis will include greater political participation and decentralization of authority. Just how likely it is that direct democratic forms will be instituted and how effectively it would function is, of course, questionable. According to Resnick "given the size and scale of modern-nation states...we must...accept the inevitability of representation." (Resnick 1990, 37) Furthermore, in terms of decision-making the he argues that "we must not expect too much

good from human nature, for without some overriding order we may end up, not with a model public sphere, but with the chaos of a Lebanon, i.e. a 'Hobbesian state of nature.'" (Resnick 1990, 37)

Nevertheless, many groups have advocated greater participation as a means of instituting changes that will protect the environment from further degradation. They believe that participation will foster a sense of efficacy about dealing with environmental problems, and thus mobilize a more effective and enthusiastic fighting force. Greater participation might also reduce intolerance between competing interests and foster a greater desire for compromise (although in some sense the situation is so serious that half-hearted measures would be counterproductive).

The second major political component of many contemporary environmental perspectives, decentralization of authority, is also problematic. This bucolic view of society, as reflected in the work of Schumacher and Bookchin, among others, sounds wonderful in theory, but may be dangerous in practice. In fact, it has been argued that it is "not only politically risky but environmentally unsound." (Paehlke 1989, 245) In contrast, it has been argued that if the planet is soon to be inhabited by ten billion people we may have to "accept and even welcome increases in both urban density and the proportion of population resident in urban areas." (Paehlke 1989, 246) According to Paehlke such problems as the 'greenhouse effect' and acid rain may actually be aggravated by population dispersion. High density urban cores are actually more energy efficient, and ensure that what



remaining tracts of wilderness still remain will not be exploited to set up new communities. (1989, 246)

The major problem, thus, is the difficulty (indeed 'impossibility') of increasing participation, redistributing wealth and decentralizing authority while at the same time ensuring environmental protection. Clearly decentralization of authority can create environmental 'ghettos' in less wealthy regions where it might be necessary to sacrifice the environment in order to maintain the economy. Clearly, many environmental problems simply cannot be solved at the local level but require coordinated national policies and international agreements. Imagine the difficulty involved in reaching a comprehensive acid rain agreement when to do so requires agreement from thousands of independent-minded communities.

The problem environmentalists face is finding a effective process for instituting the necessary changes, without creating more problems than they solve. Meanwhile, the divisions within the environmental movement will continue to mean that measures designed to protect nature will continue to be incremental and half-hearted. True change will only occur when the crisis reaches a stage whereby we simply have no other choice but to 'put the brakes on the engines of growth.' Until we really begin to question the sanity of continued economic expansion and the ideology of consumerism, we will continue to live in the shadow of a growing environmental catastrophe. And it will be our children who suffer the consequences of our avarice.

For Rousseau, the question of inexhaustibility never entered his mind. After all, in his time the natural world seemed abundant, and with the discovery of new continents nature appeared endless. Nevertheless, since Rousseau believed nature was a reflection of God's handiwork, he argued that we had a duty to God to take care of it. As a philosopher who would later inspire Romantic writers, however, Rousseau was primarily concerned with the search for self-awareness, a balance between reason and feeling that would ensure happiness; therefore, he was undoubtedly anthropocentric, a quality that has probably contributed to his being ignored by modern eco-philosophers. But Rousseau did initiate discussions on such concepts as hierarchy or the 'chain of being' later adopted by Darwin, and insisted that sentient beings never be unnecessarily harmed. Furthermore, he argued against eating meat (although he did not practice vegetarianism himself), and he dedicated himself to the study of botany as a means of better understanding the world of nature.

In addition, Rousseau's desire to escape from a social world he despised has distinct parallels to environmentalism, since most modern environmental groups, too, have argued against capitalism's emphasis on materialist values. Similarly, Rousseau argued that the false needs created by a society dominated by the scientific/mechanistic paradigm degraded individuals. Appearance became the reality. He argued that the only standards modern society exalted were financial and commercial. Wealth and material well-being were the only measures of success that modern society would accept. In this respect, it is forwarded that Rousseau remains relevant to the modern era. Just as Schumacher argued

for what he called 'Buddhist economics' Rousseau believed society had to be re-educated so that values such as honesty, justice, innocence, integrity and virtue would be regarded as the most important. In this regard, agreeing or disagreeing with Rousseau depends on whether one is an optimist or a pessimist regarding man's true nature. Expecting society to effect a wholesale change in its thinking, however, is utopian, to say the least. More likely, a 'new age' or new way of thinking will emerge only after the world has suffered through a sustained period of environmental catastrophes that force society to rethink its core values.

Rousseau, of course, had a solution to all these problems, but it is a decidedly unsatisfactory one, which is another reason why he has been ignored by modern environmentalists. As discussed, although he was a champion of participatory democracy, he also advocated a political system without representatives nor political parties. All members voted independently of each other guided by the underlying principle of the 'general will' which represented the responsible social attitude individuals were supposed to possess. If any person disagreed or tried to affect his own particular will, he or she was 'forced to be free.' This latter concept undoubtedly unnerves those in the environmental movement demanding less political authority from the central government; although, it does seem to have been advocated by the authors of the Blueprint for Survival.

Rousseau's ideal state, thus, was small, agrarian, effectively self-sufficient, and isolated. Resources were collectively owned by the people through the government and

protected from 'over-exploitation'; thus, subsistence was the operative word. This utopian state seems impossible in today's highly competitive interdependent world (although Castro's Cuba may be forced to go in this direction if support from the Soviet Union dries up). The trend, instead, is towards greater interdependence, not less. Also, the idea of returning to a kind of 'pre-industrial' society dominated by bucolic small communities operating at a subsistence level and 'enforcing' cooperation between all members of the community is simply a 'fantasy' given the complexities and competing interests within modern society.

The purpose of this thesis has been to establish a connection between aspects of Rousseau's thought and selected currents within modern environmentalism. The study was not meant to be comprehensive, but simply an analysis of general trends in the hopes that it will generate further analysis and discussion. In conclusion, it is forwarded that Rousseau, for the most part ignored by modern ecophilosophers, has a decidedly environmentalist strain running throughout his writings. While modern environmentalist theorists tend to cite Thoreau, Muir or Leopold as inspiration, it is contended here that Rousseau, too, deserves recognition, regardless of his anthropocentric leanings. The adoption of Rousseauian concepts related to the man/nature relationship, his critique of modernism and bourgeois culture, and his emphasis on direct democracy, decentralization and small communities all have direct parallels in modern environmental philosophy. Although he did not live to experience the explosion of the Industrial Revolution, in many

respects Rousseau's criticisms of the way mankind has evolved remain relevant today and perhaps represent a warning that we ignore at our peril.

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