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The Primacy of Pity: Reconceiving Ethical Experience and Education in Rousseau

Introduction

Like Plato (1997), Rousseau (1974; 1987) saw the society of his time as being corrupt but, unlike Plato, he did not see this as a reason to disengage from it. This is not only because he considered the public practice of virtue as fundamental to living a just life but also because for him man is inextricably connected to (and contaminated by) his society. His project in *Emile* and the *Social Contract* conceived of man and politics ahistorically; disconnected from contingent societal influence and prejudice. In doing so, he created what many would take as a template for educational and political reform and revolution. The main thrust of Rousseau's attacks are directed at perceived contemporary delusions of political, religious or scientific predicates for reason, as well as what he considers to be the unvirtuous self-interest of individuals. For him it is unjustifiable to separate oneself from one's own reason and opinions by falling under the dominion of someone else's or, alternatively, to selfishly dislocate one's reason from temporality by forgetting the part society has played in protecting one's life and liberty. In this sense, Rousseau is both a critic and defender of society. Social justice is realized immanently by fulfilling one's obligations to do good for one's society as, for him, there is no merit in goodness unless it is directed towards others. These arguments are based on the principle of equality under the law and the primacy of the good (or 'good conscience,' as explored in Kodelja, 2015) in determinations of social action. This paper argues that while Rousseau uses reason to rid political and educational thought of prejudice, ironically, reason itself becomes a motivating bias. It is as if he becomes afraid of not justifying himself and leaving anything unexplained by reason, perhaps so he cannot be taken as a supporter of a form of natural law. This is why he asserts the necessity of being strong enough to feel pity in *Emile*. If we do not feel strong enough then pity is not rational. This paper will argue that a conception of ethics which rationalises in this way can be socially, politically and educationally corrosive. If we reason away our ability to act for another person because we do not feel sufficiently strong (personally, economically, militarily, and so on) then the question of when we are strong enough might halt and suspend our ability to act ethically at all. For Rousseau, there are only three things he does not reason away apart from

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reason itself: self-interest, the good, and, at least until *Emile*, pity. This paper argues that it is precisely Rousseau's original formulation of pity in the Second Discourse that is able to provide the extra-rational conception of ethics that his political and educational philosophy lacks when limited to a reading of the *Social Contract* and *Emile*. To make this argument this paper returns to and quotes generously from Rousseau's original texts, working with the assumption that a close reading of the concept of pity and other concepts concomitant with asserting the usefulness of its primacy is worth more than a location and critique of all the readings of Rousseau which have not done so.

Quite contrary to those older (Dewey 1916) (Hirsch 1988) (Darling 1994) and more contemporary (White 2008) (McEwan 2011) (Peckover 2012) authors who, in a wide variety of ways, read Rousseau primarily as a proclaimer of a particular educational or political ideology, when read together, *Emile* and the *Social Contract* (both published in the same year) present a striking argument for the embrace of historically contingent citizenship and the rejection of a perceived individual liberty outside of citizenship. The first and yet perhaps, most telling clue, when taking into account some of the ironic aspersions of the texts (particularly *Emile*) is the author's assertion of his Genevan citizenship on the frontispiece of both: 'Par J.J. Rousseau, Citoyen de Geneve.' This line of argumentation is frequently ignored when *Emile* is taken more as an instructional educational text; the historical context of which is explored luminously by Bernadette Baker (2001). Far from suggesting a preferred method of education *Emile* seems rather to be clearing the ground for the 'substitution' of individual liberty for civil liberty, as outlined in the *Social Contract*. However, this is not to suggest Rousseau would not consider a more 'natural' education with more careful substitutions or a government following as closely as possible the principles of the *Social Contract* as better if they were contingently possible but he is under no illusion as to the difficulty of realising this contingency, for himself or for others. Neither is the political or educational logic he is presenting perceived by him to be possible without the substitution of natural man, precisely because he does not believe it possible to know what natural man was. Instead he perceives first two then one condition of experience that all humans share (not all share the experience of the good, a relation to which is somewhat supernatural for Rousseau): the desire for self- preservation and well-being (which maintains its significance for him) and a predisposition to pity (which is introduced in the Second Discourse and then reduced to the logic of self-interest in *Emile*). It is on the non-contingent desire for self-preservation and

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well-being that Rousseau builds his historically contingent political and educational ideas in *Emile* and the *Social Contract*, while disposing of his pre-rational conception of pity from the Second Discourse. It is this latter concept that this paper seeks to recover and, in doing so, restore a sense of the primacy of pity to the discourse of ethical experience and education in Rousseau.

This paper will first outline Rousseau's argument in support of the non-contingent primacy of pity in the Second Discourse. Second, it will contrast this reading to that which is given in *Émile,* where the strength of reason overpowers the primacy of pity. Finally, it will conclude by showing how these existential predicates can be aligned in a far from superficial way with Derrida's conceptions of immunity and auto-immunity (2001; 2005), where, in *Emile,* Rousseau attempts to immunize pity against its formerly auto-immune character by rationalizing it and putting it under the logic of self-interest rather than as interruptive of that self-interest. Immunity here means protecting something against an outside force, which would in this case be the effect of an unrational pity on the subject or the state. However, if a subject of state is somewhat auto-immune, that would mean it was less fixed and self-certain and therefore less closed off against the effect of an 'outside.' An auto-immune subject is a subject which is immune to a fixed conception of itself, which, I argue, is a predicate for remaining educable. An auto-immune state is a state which is immune to a fixed conception of itself, which is already predicated to a certain extent *within* democratic states but sometimes less in relation to other states. A subject or state could not survive without an amount of immunity, fixity or self-certainty, because it would not know what it was and what it was not. However, without a trace of auto-immunity, the subject or state would not be changeable or *educable* in terms of its relation to an outside that might be something it would wish to protect because of the primacy of an ethical relation of pity rather than the primacy of a reasoned relation of pity. The political implications of Rousseau's inability to think pity before or without reason after the Second Discourse can be partly associated with the problem of what Roberto Esposito (2010, 51) calls Rousseau's 'metaphysics of solitude':

> The constitutively aporetic character of Rousseauean communitarianism lies precisely in such a question, that is, how can this kind of unity enter into contact with the other? How is it possible to derive a philosophy of community from a metaphysics of solitude? Can the absoluteness of the individual closed in on his own existence be

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> "placed in common," and what kind of community would result? Unlike those who see in Rousseau a complementary relation between "*solitude et communaute,*" it seems to me that such an antinomy can't be resolved.

However, the antimony is perhaps resolvable by returning to the Rousseau of the Second Discourse who identified the primacy of pity with the intention of not subjecting it to reason. It is perhaps the case that without the assertion of pity's primacy Esposito (2010, 52) would be correct in assuming that Rousseau's political thought leads towards a form of totalitarianism where the 'many are reduced to the one.' In fact, this might also be possible if the logic Rousseau (1987, 194) applies to the political body were applied to the individual body in a different way to how he analogises them when he writes, 'The body politic, like the human body, begins to die from the very moment of its birth, and carries within itself the causes of its destruction,' understanding this analogy as being reflective of rationality instead of physicality allows a consideration of it in terms of what Derrida (2001, 80) called the 'general logic of auto-immunisation.' That is to say, subjects and states are *always already* auto-immune but the assertion of the primacy of rationality papers over this fact. Derrida even argues that Rousseau's body politic contains within it an auto-immunity partly due to its direction by and subjection to the general will. For him, Rousseau's political body 'protects itself against self-protection' (Derrida 2001, 80) by remaining subject to the sovereign people. If his individual body could incorporate a similar auto-immunity as his political body then it would not suffer from the absolute immunity of totalitarianism that Esposito suggests it might. The totality of reason might then sometimes be able to be overcome or interrupted by the primacy of an unreasoned pity.

The Primacy of Pity

Rousseau *does not* theorise the idea of pity outside of reason in any depth. While neither of Rousseau's explicitly political or educational texts include an 'unreasoned' theory of pity, their foundation is based a regard for all humans equality and their liberty, which is a sentiment potentially complicit with the concept of 'inspiration' he opposes to 'reason' in the famous section on 'The Creed of the Savoyard Priest' (1974). In this section, as in footnote 9 of the Second Discourse (1987, 94), where he outlines his commitment to social

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responsibility, Rousseau writes of the supernatural. The difference between the two texts lies in the footnote explaining a personal supernatural occurrence which has inspired Rousseau towards the good by way of social action, while the dialogue between 'reason' and 'inspiration' is critical of preaching from what Rousseau calls a 'supernatural' experience. For Rousseau a supernatural revelation is singular, and, as it is not developed from reason, we cannot expect others to believe it as right or relevant to them. Neither pity (as it is presented in the Second Discourse) or inspiration are teachable because their experience influences rather than falls subject to reason. In the Second Discourse Rousseau argues against exactly that which he seems to do in *Emile*:

> Leaving aside therefore all the scientific books which teach us only to see men as they have made themselves, and meditating on the first and most simple operations of the human soul, I believe I perceive in it two principles that are prior to reason, of which one makes us ardently interested in our well-being and our self-preservation, and the other inspires in us a natural repugnance to seeing any sentient being, especially our fellow man, perish or suffer. It is from the conjunction and combination that our mind is in a position to make regarding these two principles, without the need for introducing that of sociability that all the rules of natural right appear to me to flow; rules which reason is later forced to re-establish on other foundations, when, by its successive developments, it has succeeded in smothering nature. (1987, 35)

Not only is pity a primary operation of the 'human soul' and 'prior to reason', it is one of the two foundations of 'natural right' and not reducible to a simple 'sociability'. The insistence on the possibility of reason 'smothering nature' is therefore strangely prophetic even if the smothering process already seems to be beginning slightly later in the same text, where Rousseau defines pity:

> Pity is what carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering. Pity is what, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws, more, and virtue, with the advantage that no one is tempted to disobey its sweet voice. Pity is what will prevent every robust savage from robbing a weak child or an infirm old man of his hard-earned subsistence, if he himself expects to be able to find his own someplace else. Instead of the sublime maxim of reasoned justice, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, pity inspires all men with another maxim of natural goodness,

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> much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the preceding one: *Do what is good for you with as little harm as possible to others*. In a word, it is in this natural sentiment, rather than in subtle arguments, that one must search for the cause of the repugnance at doing evil that every man would experience, even independently of the maxims of education. Although it might be appropriate for Socrates and minds of his stature to acquire virtue through reason, the human race would long ago have ceased to exist, if its preservation had depended solely on the reasonings of its members. (1987, 55)

The maxim, 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' turns pity inward rather than outward and one's own reason becomes the standard against which ethical action is considered. If this is the case then the maxim is precisely *not* sublime and *not* independent of the maxims of education: the reasoning of the 'sublime maxim' is itself educational: it teaches you how to behave. And yet, Rousseau (1987, 54) clearly does not think he is 'smothering' this 'natural sentiment' by reducing it to this maxim, even though, 'Reason is what engenders egocentrism, and reflection strengthens it. Reason is what turns man in upon himself. Reason is what separates him from all that troubles him and afflicts him.' His experience of pity is, perhaps despite itself, egocentric because the standard ratio for the epistemologically defined truth of another's suffering is one's own. There is no room for reflection on what one might call *unimaginable* suffering. Despite this, in the Second Discourse, there still seems to be a conflict between defining pity as 'prior to reason' and yet at the same time presenting an extremely reasonable pity, which only reflects on the other in terms of oneself.

In Book II of *Emile* Rousseau seems to resolve this conflict by removing the primacy of pity but maintaining that of self-interest. Where in the Second Discourse both self-interest and pity were prior to reason, in *Emile* pity (and justice) become subject to the reason of self-interest. Justice presents itself as a form of inverted self-interest which, as Rousseau argues, has repercussions for how we might consider a just education:

> Our first duties are to ourselves; our first feelings are centred on self; all our instincts are at first directed to our own preservation and our own welfare. Thus the first notion of justice springs not from what we owe to others, but from what is due to us. Here is another error in popular methods of education. If you talk to children of their duties,

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> and not of their rights, you are beginning at the wrong end, and telling them what they cannot understand, what cannot be of any interest to them. (1974, 61)

Justice is justified on the basis of what is 'due to us'; it is primarily about what *I* not *we* deserve. Justice is not provoked directly by experiencing the suffering other but rather determined by our ability to relate that suffering to the reasonable potential for our own suffering. In this way we reason our way to pity and duty. This is why the teacher in *Emile* explains to his pupil that he has a duty to his 'fellow-countrymen' only because they 'protected him' in his childhood (Rousseau, 1974, 438). Would we then feel pity for those who suffer from an affliction we cannot associate ourselves with? How would we respond to those who suffer for a reason we consider unreasonable? What if others claim or might seem to require rights we would not?

In Book IV of *Emile* Rousseau extends the definition of pity he had outlined in the Second Discourse:

> So pity is born, the first relative sentiment which touches the human heart according to the order of nature. To become sensitive and pitiful the child must first know that he has fellow-creatures which suffer as he has suffered, who feel the pains he has felt, and others, which he can form some idea of, being capable of feeling them himself. Indeed, how can we let ourselves be stirred by pity unless we go beyond ourselves, and identify ourselves with the suffering animal, by leaving, so to speak, our own nature and taking his. We only suffer in so far as we suppose he suffers; the suffering is not ours but his. So no one becomes sensitive till his imagination is aroused and begins to carry him outside himself. (1974, 184)

Pity and justice here require us to use our imaginations to go 'outside ourselves' so as to 'identify ourselves' with the sufferer. In this way we go outside ourselves only to be able to take full purchase of the outside we imagine. There is no beyond the beyond we can imagine; there is no reason for suffering outside the suffering we can reason. Rousseau follows this with three maxims relating to pity, all of which fall subject to his extremely reasonable imagination. The first is that, 'It is not in human nature to put ourselves in the place of those who are happier than ourselves, but only in the place of those who can claim our pity' (1974, 184). There are therefore those who can and can't 'claim our pity' but even those who can

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must be substituted for us. We put ourselves in their 'place', not experience their suffering instead of them but to imagine their suffering in terms of our reason. This reduction of pity to reason is further extended with the second maxim which states that, 'We never pity another's woes unless we know we may suffer in a like manner ourselves' (1974, 184). We must 'know' rather than imagine that we might be able to 'suffer in a like manner' because their suffering can only be justified in terms of our own. The third and final maxim dictates that, 'The pity we feel for others is proportionate, not to the amount of the evil, but to the feelings we attribute to the sufferers' (1974, 184). Again, the logic of attribution rather than imagination takes precedence. The imagination only seems to carry us 'outside ourselves' so that we may 'put ourselves' in their place to find out if we 'know' we may suffer in a 'like manner', working out the proportion of pity deserved in terms of 'feelings we attribute' to them. This is how Rousseau thinks that we may reason ourselves towards extending the deserved amount of pity.

The Strength of Reason

It is possible to argue that Rousseau's reticence towards locating pity before reason in *Emile* is to do with the relationship between strength (an equal correlation between the power of ones faculties and one's desires) and pity:

> For his own part, [Emile] has all he wants within his reach. How should he be dependent on any one when he is self-sufficing and free from prejudice? Strong arms, good health, moderation, few needs, together with the means to satisfy those needs, are his. He has been brought up in complete liberty and servitude is the greatest ill he understands. He pities these miserable kings, the slaves of all who obey them; he pities all these false prophets fettered by their empty fame; he pities these rich fools, martyrs to their own pomp; he pities these ostentatious voluptuaries, who spend their life in deadly dullness that they may seem to enjoy its pleasures. He would pity the very foe that harmed him, for he would discern the wretchedness beneath his cloak of spite. He would say to himself, "This man has yielded to his desire to hurt me, and this need of his places him at my mercy." (Rousseau, 1974, 206)

One must be strong enough to feel pity. So perhaps it is not so much that Rousseau reduces pity to rationality in *Emile* but rather than he does not see pity as relevant to the child until

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they are strong enough to feel it. But of course, the child must then rationalise how much pity they are capable of in terms of how relatively strong they reason themselves to be. At the beginning of Book II, Rousseau outlines the relationship between the development of strength and its relation to individuality and moral being. Strength, for Rousseau, is what allows both identity and ethical relation and is one of the main themes of the Book (1974, 208-209). The association between the 'progress of strength' and the development of oneself as a 'moral being' is with reference to the development of sufficient knowledge. It is when one *knows* ones strength that consciousness of oneself is achievable. That is to say, when one rationalises *one's own* strength rather than anything that can be externally afforded. With the consciousness of that strength comes not only moral liberty but liberty more generally. It is only ever privation of one's strengths that can be called a privation of freedom.

This 'strength' is compared to 'weakness' by Rousseau to better determine what it is and is not. He asks (1974, 212) that we 'measure the radius of our sphere and stay in the centre'; that we do not extend our pride or desires beyond our strength:

> When it is said that man is weak, what is meant? This word weak indicates a relation, a relation obtaining within the being to which one applies it. He whose strength surpasses his needs, be he an insect or a worm, is a strong being. He who needs surpass his strength, be he an elephant or a lion, be he a conqueror or a hero, be he a God, is a weak being. The rebellious Angel who misapprehended his nature was weaker than the happy mortal who lives in peace according to his nature. Man is very strong when he is contented with being what he is; he is very weak when he wants to raise himself above humanity. Therefore, do not fancy that in extending your faculties you extend your strength. On the contrary, you diminish your strength if your pride is extended farther than it. Let us measure the radius of our sphere and stay in the center like the insect in the middle of his web; we shall always be sufficient unto ourselves; and we shall not have to complain of our weakness, for we shall never feel it.

Strength thereby seems related to self-awareness and understanding; a rational appreciation of oneself as one is rather than as one desires to be. To know and to live with one's strengths is not only the key to liberty but also to happiness. However, this being 'sufficient unto ourselves' does not imply a separation from others but rather a relation which is based on

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strength rather than weakness: 'Your freedom and your power extend only as far as your natural strength, and not beyond. All the rest is only slavery, illusion and deception' (1974, 214). The relationship that Rousseau elsewhere explores between the individual and society, or one's place in the 'chain of being', is complicit in the relationship between strength and weakness. His sights are set on a society of strong individuals, or, more specifically, individuals who *know their strengths*. To know one's strength and to abide in it is to be free and to keep others free:

> The only one who does his own will is he who, in order to do it, has no need to put another's arms at the end of his own; from which it follows that the first of all good is not authority but freedom. The truly free man wants only what he can do and does what he pleases. That is my fundamental maxim. It need only be applied to childhood for all the rules of education to flow from it. Society has made man weaker not only in taking from him the right he had over his own strength but, above all, in making his strength insufficient for him. (Rousseau 1974, 215)

Rousseau's argument is that society has supplemented man's strengths and thereby taken away the possibility for their development. But this argument is more nuanced than it first seems. Society, just as Rousseau's educator is, should be there to facilitate rather than supplement the individual's development and utilisation of their strengths. Losing control over one's life is the road to unhappiness as well as 'slavery, illusion and deception'.

Rousseau (1974, 222) argues that reason 'is the bridle of strength, and the child does not need this bridle.' Suggesting that for the child the 'true need, natural need, must be carefully distinguished from the need which stems from nascent whim or from the need which comes only from the superabundance of life of which I have spoken' (1974, 217). This careful balancing act of the facilitation of the child's strengths involves keeping themselves free and also others free from them. This is so that they are able to develop their own strengths and not be subject to the slavery that comes from an 'unnatural' dependence on society. There is no mention here of others' dependence on them. It is significant that Rousseau sees no problem in being dependent on others for one's *needs*, so long as they are rational needs rather than wants. Knowing the limits of one's strengths is also to know when one requires the strengths of others. It is on this basis that society should interact. The key

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words that Rousseau excises from a child's lexicon are indicative of a need for an awareness and understanding of the utility of one's strengths.

> I have already said that your child ought to get a thing not because he asks for it but because he needs it, and do a thing not out of obedience but only out of necessity. Thus the words *obey* and *command* will be proscribed from his lexicon, and even more so *duty* and *obligation*. But *strength, necessity, impotence,* and *constraint* should play a great role in it. Before the age of reason one cannot have any idea of moral beings or of social relations. (1974, 221)

To learn one's impotence in certain circumstances is itself a strength; to know where one fails is to know the limits of one's strengths. A responsiveness to the particularly of one's faculties allows the direction of desires accordingly. For Rousseau it is not acceptable for desire to exceed the power of the faculties as it leads to unhappiness (Rousseau 1974, 211). This limitation of desires to the strength of our faculties does not diminish the power of an individual at all but rather utilises the power that they *are able to reason that they have*, rather than focusing on something beyond it. In this sense desire for Rousseau is required to be somewhat 'embodied', or at least always considered through one's particular mental and physical capabilities. As such, pity must exist at the mercy of the strength of reason or a reasoned strength.

Pity as Auto-Immunity

It is only in Rousseau's notion of the 'supernatural' that there is something that *comes* from outside and influences and directs reason itself, rather than something outside that must be subjected to reason. However, in *Emile* (1974, 264) he makes clear that these 'supernatural lessons' can or should be taught as they are not reasonable. In note 9 of the Second Discourse Rousseau (1987, 94) attacks those who feel that they should retreat from society to nature and instead posits his own inspiration for engaging with what he considers to be the betterment of society:

> As for men like me, whose passions have forever destroyed their original simplicity, who can no longer feed on grass and acorns, nor get by without laws and chiefs; those

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> who were honoured in their first father with supernatural lessons; those who will see, in the intention of giving human actions from the beginning a morality they would not have acquired for a long time, the reason for a precept indifferent in itself and inexplicable in any other system; those, in a word, who are convinced that the divine voice called the entire human race to the enlightenment and the happiness of celestial intelligences; all those latter ones will attempt, through the exercise of virtues they oblige themselves to practice while learning to know them, to merit the eternal reward that they ought to expect for them.

The 'morality they would not have acquired for a long time' learnt through 'supernatural lessons' which inspire the 'exercise of virtues' meriting an 'eternal reward' posits a notion of the good beyond reasonable comprehension. And yet, they are merely prescriptive of 'a morality they would not have acquired for a long time' rather than a morality which would absolutely be beyond reason. This is despite the fact that they *already* come from beyond reason. The implication seems to be that reason would have got or will get there in the end anyway. On the one hand Rousseau is openly admitting that something beyond his reason is the inspiration for his action, on the other he only seems able to accept that inspiration if he judges it to be where reason would have taken him anyway. In doing so he shuts down any notion of a transcendental good in the same way that he shut down the experience of 'pity before reason.'

This 'shutting down' might also be conceived in terms of a form of immunisation: immunising the self and its reason against any outside influence; against any outside altogether. Derrida (2001, 80) introduces the concept of immunity and what he calls 'a sort of general logic of auto-immunization' in 'Faith and Knowledge', writing that:

> The immunitary reaction protects the "indemnity" of the body proper in producing anti-bodies against foreign antigens. As for the process of auto-immunization, which interests us particularly here, it consists for a living organism, as is well known and in short, of protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system.

The antibody produced to protect the body against 'foreign antigens' in Rousseau's case might well be that of reason itself. Interestingly the body protected is itself a *body of reason*

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directed by self-interest towards the good which would (finally) be for the good of a rational self-interest. What Rousseau's 'body' lacks is the auto-immunity necessary to protect 'itself against its self-protection.' It is self-enclosed in reason and immunised against anything that cannot be subjugated to that reason. In *Rogues* Derrida (2005, 152) makes clear that 'autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil', rather:

> It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and *who* comes – which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event.

Distinct from this, Rousseau's concept of pity is defined precisely by its calculability; its calculation of the proportion of pity afforded based on what is reasonably attributable in terms of one's own experience. There is no exposure to the other but rather a putting oneself, or more specifically, one's reason, in the place of the other. As least this the picture of pity outlined in *Emile*, the primacy afforded to it in the Second Discourse immunised against by the now primary primacy of self-interest and its legitimised and self-legitimating reason. Because Rousseau, via 'supernatural lessons', already conceived of moral ends beyond reason - which nonetheless end up being for him absolutely reasonable - Rousseau has no need for anything else to arrive. Self-interested reason has already arrived to justify itself and therefore everything else must therefore be justified on its terms.

Conclusion

To assert the primacy of pity in a re-conception of Rousseau's political and educational thought is, first of all, to insist on the already existing auto-immunity of the state and subject. The primacy of reason developed in *Emile* and the *Social Contract* immunises against this existential condition. And, as I argue, this existential condition is also an ethico-existential condition that Rousseau was well aware of in the Second Discourse. Thus, to ignore or reason away this ethical primacy in existence is to shut down the ethical in the educational and political. In Rousseau's own terms from the Second Discourse, a reasoned pity isn't pity at

all. The primacy of pity educates us of the position of our own rational limits. It interrupts our rationality and can provoke a care and concern which might not always result in the most rational, self-interested actions for ourselves. To learn *of* the primacy of pity and *from* the primacy of pity would mean to inconvenience educational and political systems and philosophies which rationalise pity. But this rational inconvenience might then also be an ethical opportunity.

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Ethics and Education on 05/05/16, available online: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17449642.2016.1160521

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