

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau and ‘le hobbesisme le plus parfait’:
An historical and philosophical study of Rousseau’s engagement with
Thomas Hobbes and Hobbism**

Submitted by Robin Andrew Douglass, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
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Abstract

This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's engagement with the political thought of Thomas Hobbes and Hobbism. This involves tracing Hobbes's French reception in the first half of the eighteenth century amongst authors with whom Rousseau was familiar, thereby elucidating the context in which he responded to Hobbesian ideas and arguments. When situated in this context, many of the difficulties in understanding Rousseau's engagement with Hobbes are overcome, and the deeply polemical character of the engagement is revealed. In particular, Rousseau's state of nature theory sought to collapse the prevalent bifurcation between Pufendorfian sociability and Hobbesian Epicureanism in order to show that Hobbes's natural law critics were in fact no better than Hobbes; a line of argument that Rousseau also pursued in the *Social Contract*. In addition, Rousseau's invocation of Hobbes was intended to support his republican critique of *doux commerce* theory, by revealing that the modern defenders of commercial society rested their theories on a Hobbesian picture of man's natural condition. This picture closely resembled the neo-Augustinian account of man's post-lapsarian state, and by rejecting this Augustinian-Hobbesian depiction of man Rousseau was able to offer a vision of a well-ordered republic for men who were yet to be corrupted by the onset of luxury and entrenched relations of inequality. In examining Rousseau's engagement not just with Hobbes, but also with natural law, republican and Augustinian contexts, an original interpretation of his political thought is advanced throughout the thesis. This interpretation stresses the importance and interplay of three themes, the problematical relationship between which often leads to much confusion in the scholarly literature on Rousseau: first, nature understood as a normative standard; second, free will as an inalienable gift of nature; and, third and finally, the role of the passions in general and of *amour-propre* in particular.

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A Note on Sources and Translations

All references to Rousseau are given to standard English and French editions where both are available. The following abbreviations are used throughout, in each case given by volume and page number (e.g. *CW*1:3/ *OC*2:4):

- CW* *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, series ed. C. Kelly & R.D. Masters, in 13 vols. (Hanover, NH, 1990-2010).
- OC* *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Pléiade edition, dir. B. Gagnebin & M. Raymond, in 5 vols. (Paris, 1959-1995).
- CC* *Correspondance complète de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. R.A. Leigh, in 52 vols. (Geneva, 1965-1971; Oxford, 1972-1977).

All references to Hobbes's *De Cive* are given to both English and French translations followed by page number, with the following abbreviations (e.g. *Cam*.5/ *Par*.6):

- Cam.* *On the Citizen*, ed. & trans. R. Tuck & M. Silverthorne (Cambridge, 1998).
- Par.* *Le Citoyen ou les Fondements de la Politique*, trans. S. Sorbière (Paris, 1982).

Original chapter and section numbers are also given to *De Cive* but it is worth noting that Sorbière's French translation occasionally deviates from these. References to Hobbes's other works are given either to individual editions or to *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. W. Molesworth, in 10 vols. (London, 1839-1845), given by volume and page number (e.g. *EW*7:8).

Throughout the thesis both original French sources and English translations have been consulted where available. Where suitable, references are given to scholarly English translations of primary sources. Where these have been either unavailable or inadequate the translations provided are my own and the original is provided in a footnote for consultation. When quoting seventeenth and eighteenth-century English works I have refrained from modernising the original spelling and punctuation myself, unless this has been updated in the modern edition cited.

Occasionally I have felt it necessary to alter the English translation or preserve the original French term. Most notably, both *amour de soi-même* and *amour-propre* are sometimes translated into English as self-love, but given the importance that Rousseau (even if not his contemporaries) attached to the distinction between these two varieties of self-love I have retained the French terms. Similarly, I have standardised all translations of *amour de la patrie* to 'love of fatherland'.

The original publication date of modern primary sources is given in square brackets in

the footnote the first time the work is referenced, if the date is not mentioned in the body of the text. On some occasions explanatory footnotes have been used for this purpose. Suggested composition dates for works unpublished in the author's lifetime are only provided where relevant.

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