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Mark Blackell, John Duncan, and Simon Kow, eds., *Rousseau and Desire*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2009. vii +206 pp. Notes and bibliography. \$43.00 U.S. (cl) ISBN 978-1-4426-4041-2.

Review by Christopher Kelly, Boston College.

This volume is a collection of eight essays structured somewhat loosely around the subject of desire in Rousseau's political thought. While the authors all address the issue in relation to Rousseau's understanding of the characteristics of modern society, they approach the subject from a wide variety of perspectives. One of the distinctive and very useful characteristics of the volume is that each of the essays contains references to several of the others, highlighting influences, agreements, and disagreements. The editors are to be applauded for adopting this feature and seeing to it that each of the contributors took part in it. To be sure, some of the cross references are rather perfunctory, as if the authors were simply dutifully following instructions from the editors. In numerous cases, however, they contribute to a sense of unity of purpose in the volume even--or especially--when they are pointing out differences of opinion.

If the contributors go out of their way to address each other, it is not the case that they do much to address the work of other Rousseau scholars. Few of the essays refer to more than one or two works from the extraordinarily large secondary literature on Rousseau and some of them refer to none. For example, John Duncan's very solid treatment of the structure of the *Second Discourse* does not engage any of the considerable secondary literature on this subject. The major exception to this is the editors' introduction which does provide a useful brief survey of works which have touched on the theme of desire in Rousseau. Grace Roosevelt's contribution also makes references to several studies of both Rousseau and Adam Smith.

Although the contributors seldom address the scholarship on Rousseau very directly, more than half of them do present Rousseau in comparison with other thinkers. Among the thinkers dealt with extensively are Condillac, Mandeville, Smith, Locke, and Constant. Visiliki Grigoropoulou treats Rousseau's reliance on and departure from Locke's understanding of desire and will and Mark Blackell provides a useful account of the way Constant follows as well as departs from Rousseau. Perhaps the most interesting confrontation of the contributors is between Grace Roosevelt and Simon Kow on the subject of Rousseau's relation to Mandeville. They agree that Rousseau's discussion of Mandeville in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* can serve as a useful point of departure for understanding his thought. Roosevelt goes on to emphasize the extent to which Rousseau offers an alternative to both Mandeville and successors such as Smith. Kow agrees that Rousseau and his supporters represent an alternative to Mandeville, but insists upon the superiority of Mandeville's understanding. In this respect Kow distinguishes his view, not only from Roosevelt's essay, but also from those of Katrin Froese and Mira Morgenstern.

Kow's defense of Mandeville, or rather, his attack on Rousseau raises a series of questions that are addressed in other essays in this volume. Kow contrasts what he calls Mandeville's "hard-headed and clear-sighted" perspective (p. 78) with Rousseau's position which he characterizes as

nostalgic, romanticized, sentimental, and, even, risible (pp. 63, 64, 72, and 78). The core of his argument lies in his analysis of the two thinkers' treatments of moral virtue and its relation to pity or compassion. The key to the analysis is the fact that Rousseau identifies pity as the source of social virtues while Mandeville denies the connection. The reason for this difference is interesting. In the final analysis Rousseau and Mandeville agree that pity is a feeling and that it is connected to our love of ourselves. According to Kow this very fact is what keeps pity from being considered as the source of virtue for Mandeville. In Mandeville's view, "any admixture of self-love is sufficient to deprive an action of its virtue" (p. 66). Unlike Mandeville, as Brian Duff also shows in his contribution, Rousseau does not separate moral virtue so radically from love of oneself. In other words, Mandeville's "moral realism" rests on an extremely rigorous and pure standard of disinterestedness. From Rousseau's perspective this is a very unrealistic, if not romanticized or sentimental, basis. Thus it is, perhaps, a more open question than Kow suggests as to which thinker is more hard-headed and clear-sighted.

The question remains of how Rousseau derives virtue from love of self. Pity plays a role in this derivation, but it is hardly sufficient by itself. Katrin Froese and Mark Blackell both discuss what they see as a paradox or tension in Rousseau's position. Blackell in particular identifies the source of the tension in the same passage of the *Second Discourse* that Kow relies on, the passage that asserts that social virtues derive from pity. Blackell argues, "Rousseau's ethical thought operates across a tension between virtue as a voice that emerges from some inner source of nature, and virtue as what we might call an other-directed, intersubjective construct" (p. 126). He concludes that Rousseau is unable to bring these two sides together. In other words, he is unable to connect the natural standard, rooted in instinct, of doing what is good for oneself with a social virtue that is based on seeing oneself in terms of one's relations with others.

Because the topic of desire which forms the subject of this book leads so directly to the question of the relation of individual desires and social co-operation it is worth spending some time on this issue. The dissatisfaction the Kow and Blackell express with Rousseau (and with some of the other contributors) is based in large part on two statements regarding pity that occur in the *Second Discourse*.^[1] The first concerns Rousseau's characterization of pity as "the sole Natural virtue that the most excessive Detractor of human virtues was forced to recognize." This statement introduces his discussion of Mandeville. The second is his statement that Mandeville "did not see that from this quality alone flow all the social virtues he wants to question in men." Taken together, these statements seem to indicate that pity is a natural virtue from which flow such social virtues as generosity, clemency, and humanity which Rousseau lists immediately after the second statement.

Rousseau's entire argument is rather more complicated and, I believe, less subject to the difficulties identified by Kow and Blackell. In the paragraph before the first of the statements Rousseau says, that at first glance it seems that men in the primitive state, "had neither vices nor virtues: unless, taking these words in a physical sense, one calls vices in the individual the qualities that can harm his preservation, and virtues those that can contribute to it." That fact that Rousseau says that this seems at first to be the case could be taken as preparation for his assertion that pity is, contrary to this initial impression, a moral (non-physical) virtue. In the immediate context, however, Rousseau does not go so far. He merely asserts that, if civilized men have more and weightier vices than they have virtues, the state of nature would be preferable from a moral perspective. This would be true even if natural men have neither moral virtues nor vices. Given this standard for a natural virtue, pity is one only to the extent that it furthers the preservation of the individual who feels it. For example, repugnance at seeing suffering might lead one to shun potentially dangerous situations. This, however, would not make pity into a moral or social virtue because it would not lead to helping others.

Perhaps for this reason, after introducing pity by saying that Mandeville acknowledges it to be a social virtue—a claim which Kow shows is almost but not quite precise (p. 67). Rousseau gradually changes his tune. He says that “[e]ven should it be true that commiseration is only a feeling,” this would only strengthen his case. In the next paragraph he endorses this possibility, saying, “It is very certain, therefore, that pity is a natural feeling.” Indeed, he adds that, in the state of nature, it takes the place of virtue. His considered position, then, is that naturally pity is not a virtue, except perhaps in the physical sense discussed above.

How can it be the case that the social virtues flow from pity which is naturally merely a feeling? Rousseau concludes the First Part of the *Discourse* by saying that he has shown that the social virtues, “could never develop by themselves, that in order to develop they needed the chance combination of several foreign causes which might never have arisen.” It is precisely this element of chance that Duncan stresses in his contribution to the volume. Clearly, the social virtues do not flow immediately and automatically from pity. Pity can, but need not, lead to these virtues. Near the conclusion of the Second Part, after discussing accidental causes in detail, Rousseau indicates a crucial ingredient in the transformation. He says that “to this ardor to be talked about, to this furor to distinguish oneself, which nearly always keeps us outside of ourselves, we owe what is best and worst among men, our virtues and our vices.”^[2] The furor to distinguish oneself is a manifestation of amour-propre, the bad form of self love that is the artificial desire, par excellence. Perhaps the most common misreading of Rousseau involves ignoring that amour-propre plays a positive role in the acquisition of moral qualities. In this volume, Blackell, Froese, Duff, and Morgenstern come closest to acknowledging this role, but none of them is sufficiently explicit about this.

NOTES

[1] The following quotations are all from the *Second Discourse* in Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1990-2010) Vol. 3, pp. 36-42.

[2] Ibid, p. 62.

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