

**DID ROUSSEAU SUPPLY AN ENDORSEMENT
FOR THE TERROR OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION?**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
September, 1991

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DEDICATION

Completing this thesis has been both arduous and enlightening. I started with a very simple idea, but soon found myself paddling in unchartered waters. I learned much about myself, but even more about those who supported me as I worked to meet my objective. To these individuals I dedicate the pages which follow. To my daughter, Jenni-ann, I say thank you for never questioning why your father remained a student while your playmates received the benefits of having financially stable parents. Mom and Dad, I could not have done it without your relentless love and support. To my wife Valerie, I offer my profoundest love and appreciation for your patience and understanding as I burned the candle at both ends. To my colleagues at Dalhousie, thank you for listening as my conversations about Rousseau became redundant. It was the best of times. Finally, and absolutely not least, thanks to Paulette Simard for editing and typing the thesis and for always assisting me in any way possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	iv
Abstract	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: THE TERROR IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICTING REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS	4
CHAPTER 2: THE RELATION TO ROUSSEAU OF THE CONFLICTING GROUPS	14
CHAPTER 3: ROBESPIERRE'S AFFINITIES WITH ROUSSEAU	26
CHAPTER 4: ROUSSEAU AND ROBESPIERRE'S JUSTIFICATION FOR THE TERROR	36
CHAPTER 5: EXCULPATING ROUSSEAU	54
ROUSSEAU'S DEMOCRATIC PRESCRIPTION	55
ROUSSEAU'S VERTU AND THE POLITICS OF REVOLUTION	61
NATIONALISM, FACTIONALISM AND ROUSSEAU'S CALL FOR CIVIL RELIGION	75
THE GENERAL WILL AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ITS REPRESENTATION	89
NOTES	101
WORKS CITED	111

ABSTRACT

Every revolution has its philosopher, and the name of Jean-Jacques Rousseau was certainly invoked during the heady days of the French Revolution, days often connected to the abuses of the Terror. Thus, Rousseau's political philosophy has been lamented as the prototype for atrocities committed under the auspices of Robespierre. The Terror was clearly brutal and arbitrary, and Rousseau did suggest that recalcitrants might be "forced to be free." Combining this with the fact that Robespierre and his followers claimed Rousseau's endorsement for their policies, completes the proposition connecting Rousseau's theory with the practice of revolutionary terror.

I assail this position on two levels. First, I argue that Rousseau qualified his punitive allowances, in ways neglected by revolutionary terrorists. Second, I contend that Robespierre and his followers, even though claiming Rousseauist inspiration, significantly misinterpreted Rousseau's doctrine on at least ten counts; primarily in terms of the structure, purpose and instruments of a legitimate government.

In the end, I present a view of Rousseau more politically conservative than is generally argued. The thesis will show that Rousseau would have condemned, rather than posthumously endorsed, the practice of revolutionary terror. My position is augmented by noting Rousseau's advice to the Poles and Corsicans. That Robespierre and those of a similar ilk neglected these readily available works, focusing rather upon the abstractions of the Social Contract, resulted in an inadequate perception of Rousseau the practitioner. Rousseau may have been too inclined to paradox. He may have been utopian and arguably paranoid. But he was not the theoretical architect of the Terror.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While my thesis is the product of original ideas, assumptions and research, I could have never hoped to see the exercise through without the input of many significant individuals. I must acknowledge the assistance and inspiration of Dr. Guy Chauvin, Department of Political Science, Saint Mary's University; the many hours I spent in his office instilled my interest and appreciation for political philosophy. Furthermore, without the direction, supervision and unwarranted patience of Dr. David Braybrooke, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University, the thesis would have remained a muddled series of fragmented thoughts. Moreover, I must acknowledge the individuals who made the French Revolution a watershed in human history; without their efforts, the annals of history would have been missing its most shining example of philosophy translated into practice. Finally, and most importantly, I acknowledge the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for in reading his written thoughts I have been convinced that principles and emotions have a valued place in the world of pragmatic and rational politics.

INTRODUCTION

Two full centuries ago, revolutionaries sought to launch France upon a course of liberation and equality. Similarly, two centuries of scholarly debate has failed to adequately explain why the French Revolution detoured upon a course of oppression and mass execution. The following does not pretend to answer all the related issues, but opts rather to focus upon an aspect of revolutionary history in need of rethinking; namely, the extent to which the atrocities of the French Revolution should be laid at the feet of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

By 1792, the ideas that had fuelled the explosion of 1789 gave way to a system of government based on coercion. This was the time of the Terror and the legacy of the gouvernement révolutionnaire. But from where, or whom, did the justifications emerge which endorsed the political policies of those leading the revolutionary charge from 1793 until July, 1794? Well, the preponderance of literature alleges that Robespierre was the chief architect of revolutionary terror and that he and his followers derived inspiration from the political philosophy of Rousseau. As such, the tendency is to indirectly blame Rousseau for the ideology of the Terror by assuming that the Genevan provided the kindred spirit driving Robespierre and those of a similar ilk. However,

believing that Robespierre was the chief architect of terror, at least as concerned events in Paris, is not enough to lead one to a conclusion that Rousseau would have agreed with the revolutionary interpretation of his doctrine. Evaluating this proposition lies at the heart of the thesis.

The over-arching question is whether or not we can conclude that the justifications offered for the Terror by Robespierre and his closest followers occurred with equal significance within the works of Rousseau. Answering as much demands an analysis on a number of levels. First, we need to determine if Robespierre's group were indeed the only, or most vociferous, exponents of Rousseauist doctrine during the 1793-1794 period. Second, and having established Robespierre's group as the most vociferous disciples of Rousseau, we examine the points of doctrine our subjects held in common. If it is determined that no such doctrinal affiliation existed, then the entire exercise may be summarily terminated. Determining otherwise, however, will lead to the third level of analysis; namely, a close examination of the points of Rousseauist doctrine interpreted by Robespierre's group as an endorsement for the Terror. At this point, the endeavour moves from generalities to specifics. Fourth, and assuming that the preceding context is necessary, we arrive at the heart of the thesis. The point here is to determine if the justifications for the Terror paralleled the level of allowance expounded by Rousseau himself. At this juncture, it is necessary to offer

a detailed evaluation of Rousseauist doctrine vis-a-vis those aspects used by Robespierre's group to legitimize arbitrary and cruel government.

**CHAPTER 1: THE TERROR IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICTING
REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS**

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times"

C. Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities

Rather than meeting the revolutionary ideals symbolized by storming the Bastille on 14 July, 1789, the two years up until 1791 ushered in an entire host of new and even more complicated problems for the vanguard of the French Revolution. France found itself at war with most of Europe. The nation was fraught with political dissension, as popular enthusiasm for the Revolution translated into anarchic insanity. The factors prompting the explosion of 1789 remained clear enough; however, the direction in which affairs were bound seemed less certain. Into the fray emerged four main political groupings, the only certainty they offered being a constant power struggle to fill the vacuum left by the dismantling of monarchical absolutism.

What were the four main political groupings operating in 1792?

In the twentieth century, the terms "left", "center" and "right" are used to pigeonhole political ideologies along a spectrum ranging from neo-Marxists to fascists. However, the origin for these terms is rooted in the lexicon of the French Revolution. Simply, upon entering the front door of the

National Assembly in 1791-92, one would find to their immediate "left" the proponents of a far-reaching revolution, in the "center" those more moderate in approach, and to their "right" those ostensibly content with affairs prior to 1789.

At any rate, the "revolutionary" Right consisted of the Royalists. For this group, the salvation of France lay in undoing that which had transpired since 1789; the Royalists wished to reaffirm monarchical absolutism, feudal privilege and Catholicism as the national religion, arguing that the abolition of traditional institutions marked a rejection of all that had made France a great nation.¹ Any change should be incremental and organic rather than compulsive and rash.

Perceiving France as a distinct nation with an unique set of needs demanding an unique course of resolution, the Royalists promoted the ideal of nationalism over that of the universal, abstract principles expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. There were no rights of man, only those of Frenchmen. Put on the defensive, and unable to effect their goals, the Royalists soon faded from the political arena. Less extreme were the constitutionally moderate Feuillants. Realizing that absolutism was antiquated, the Feuillants sponsored the Tennis Court Oath and the Rights of Man. Absolutism was not necessary for a monarch to rule effectively.² The Feuillants feared that order and property would fall in the wake of popular radicalism and, thus, promoted a bicameral assembly and a constitutional monarchy

vested with an absolute veto. The latter was designed to forestall a levelling revolution bound to render the King sovereign in name only.³ Hence, the group's denouncement of universal suffrage. Constitutionalism would suffice to check the self-protective feature of a royal veto, and simultaneously promote representative government and guarantee property rights. Under the Feuillant scheme, king and people alike would benefit from the eradication of the "ministerial tyranny" that had long plagued the nation. Within a limited revolution, Louis would emerge as its chief beneficiary rather than its main victim. The trick, then, was to sell this programme to Louis, lest monarchism be utterly destroyed. History tells us it was to be otherwise.

By June, 1792 Lafayette emerged to replace the deceased Mirabeau as the chief exponent of the Feuillant position. Taking aim at the Jacobins as a "sect that has usurped national sovereignty and tyrannized the citizens", Lafayette's allegations made it clear that the revolutionary bourgeoisie was not a homogeneous group.⁴ The Feuillants also assailed the Royalists on the grounds that a rigid defense of absolutism would surely push popular support toward the radical and republican left and away from monarchism.

To the left of the Feuillants were the Jacobins, the most vociferous and famous revolutionaries. Products of the Enlightenment, the Jacobins propagandized the interest of the lower and middle classes, holding the nobility and clergy in

utter contempt. Propounding sacrosanct notions of liberty and equality - both civil and political - the Jacobins riveted their attention on resolving the inequalities resulting from privilege. Fully republican by 1792, the Jacobins looked to universal suffrage as the key to meeting their objectives.

The effort to solidify domestic support by seizing upon the frenzy of foreign wars was bolstered when the Jacobins formed a popular front with the sans-culottes.⁵ However, the issues of war and affiliation with the "meaner sort", split the Jacobin Club; Brissot formed the Gironde, Robespierre directed the Mountain, and Danton wavered back and forth between the two. The struggle to control the Revolution centered round the subfactions of Jacobinism. Eventually, Robespierre's group carried the day following the execution of the Gironde ministers (31 October, 1793), and the Dantonists (30 March, 1794).

At the extreme left was the popular revolutionism of the sans-culottes. Like the Jacobins, these radical republicans denounced absolutism and privilege. Going beyond the Jacobin position, they detested all wealth and professed a notion of social egalitarianism rooted in a fraternity of producers and consumers.⁶ Concentrated in Paris, the sans-culottes greatly influenced revolutionary politics; neither Brissot nor Robespierre could survive without their support.⁷ Unequivocal support was another matter, however, as the sans-culottes constantly questioned the masters of the Convention and the

Committee of Public Safety.

The sans-culottes were essentially a militant mob movement, consisting of fragmented social elements, ranging from liberal professionals to artisans and day labourers. Such left the sans-culottes anything but a political party with a collective mentality.⁸ Nonetheless, their cause was championed by the Cordeliers Club and Hebert. Perhaps Chaumette was the most characteristic of sans-culottes ideals. Significantly, the fall of Robespierre's group did not mean the end of the sans-culottes movement, as evidenced by the philosophy invoked by Babeuf's Conspiracy of Equals (1795-96).

The main concern of the sans-culottes was personal survival. By 1792, the cost of bread accounted for a full fifty-eight per cent of a worker's budget.⁹ Hence, the sans-culottes called for the Maximum, a system of price controls intended to curb famine by lowering and then fixing food costs. The revolutionary vanguard depended upon popular support to maintain its political position and, thus, satisfied sans-culottes demands by implementing the Maximum on 29 September, 1793.¹⁰ The premise of the Maximum was that political and civil freedom was of little consolation to the hungry masses in Paris. In the end, the Maximum failed to alleviate the concerns of the sans-culottes, as the regulated economy estranged peasants, merchants and artisans and, thereby, divided the group. The Thermidorians recognized that

the Maximum had not fulfilled its political and social purpose, repealing the legislation in 1795.

The sans-culottes were the heart and soul of the social undercurrents driving the Revolution. Frustrated by the constitutional haranques of 1789-91 and arguing that such did little to relieve economic deprivation, the sans-culottes instigated the second Revolution of 1792-93.¹¹ Suspicious of representative democracy, the sans-culottes interpreted the concept of popular sovereignty quite literally; the Revolution was in fact a loi agraire made possible by the people through rightful and direct participation. This would set the sans-culottes against the Jacobins.¹² However, and in spite of numerical superiority, the sans-culottes were unable to overpower the middle-class biases of the Jacobins. Eventually the leadership of popular revolutionism fell prey to the Terror the sans-culottes had originally supported. The potential for a socially levelling revolution perished with the sans-culottes leaders upon the scaffold.

What was the political environment in which these groups operated?

Robespierre summed up the situation thus: "Revolutionary government owes good citizens the whole protection of the nation. To the enemies of the people, it owes nothing but death." Torn asunder by internal dissent and external conflict, the "republic seemed a sinking ship, crazed in dition by mutiny in its own ranks."¹³ For the government, the

survival of the Revolution hinged upon vanquishing enemies both at home and abroad. The Revolution became a life and death struggle. There would not be a middle way, only winners and losers. Compromise gave way to intrigue and manipulation as political success - individual survival for that matter - depended upon an ability to adapt and re-adapt to evolving and volatile circumstances.

How did this environment translate into the Terror?

The gouvernement révolutionnaire was the response to political instability. Under the auspices of the Committee of Public Safety and, thus, Robespierre's group, the government sought to secure the course of the Revolution by suspending constitutionalism and declaring itself "revolutionary until peace" on 10 October, 1793; that is, until all recognized, by force if necessary, the sovereignty, independence and indivisibility of the Republic.¹⁴ The government's solution to factionalism and counter-revolution was revealed on 5 September 1793, when terror became the "order of the day." Opponents were 'amalgamated' as the government struck the Royalists and the Gironde. The Hebertists and Dantonists would soon meet a similar fate, but meanwhile Robespierre's group had entrenched its hegemony.

What was the Terror designed to eradicate?

On the one hand, Robespierre's group used terror as a political tool to obliterate factionalism and instability and, thus, to maintain revolutionary resolve. The art of political persuasion gave way to the arbitrary elimination of threats, real or perceived, justified on the grounds that revolutionary success demanded unanimity. The trials of March, 1794, certainly erased any doubts in this regard.¹⁵

On the other hand, terror was to induce a moral and political creed rooted, essentially, in religious sentiment. The Reign of Virtue and the Cult of the Supreme Being incorporated the practice of terror to the end of intimidating or executing dissenters. Any misgivings about this dubious equation were glossed-over by Robespierre: "Without virtue, terror is evil; terror, without which virtue is helpless." That terror meant death for the opposition was clear enough; that virtue meant agreement with Robespierre's programme would become equally clear.

Justified on political and moral grounds, the Terror proceeded unmercifully toward eradicating factionalism and, thus, forging revolutionary unanimity. If branded an 'enemy' death was certain and the Law of 22 Prairial (10 June), ensured that such was swift; that is, execution without due process of trial or defense.

What was the legacy of the Terror?

Driven by the relentless will of Robespierre, at least in the context of Paris, the Terror became unmanageable and transcended its original purpose. Victories at the Front and the consolidation of power under the Committee of Public Safety, led Danton to call for a relaxation of terror; it had served the purpose of curbing counter-revolution and centralizing political authority. However, Robespierre's group was unwilling to forsake the weapon which had secured its ascendancy. Indeed, the circle of terror widened as the path to virtue narrowed. As Saint-Just reasoned: "It is not enough, citizens, to have destroyed factions, it is necessary now to repair the evil that they have done to the country."¹⁶ Usher in the Great Terror, as the execution of the Hebertists and the Dantonists left no doubt that the Terror now encompassed true revolutionaries. Eventually, a whole nation would recoil at the atrocities of the Terror, culminating in the execution of Robespierre and his henchmen on 9 Thermidor (28 July, 1794). They who had lived by the guillotine, died by the guillotine.

The Terror "created the politics of the impossible, turned madness into a theory, and blind audacity into a cult."¹⁷ Evolving from the notion of revolutionary dictatorship, the Terror proved precisely what European conservatives wanted to know: that a republic, in a large, wealthy and civilized nation was impossible, impractical,

dictatorial, and inevitably inclined toward blood-letting. The Terror had delivered a blow so severe that the ideal of republicanism in Europe remained a fiction until the revolutions of 1848.

CHAPTER 2: THE RELATION TO ROUSSEAU OF THE CONFLICTING GROUPS

"The only thing of certainty, is that there are no absolutes"

David Hume: Treatise on Human Nature

To evaluate the claim that the political and moral justifications for terror employed by Robespierre's group were derived from Rousseauist doctrine, we must launch investigations on a number of levels. We begin by determining which groups claimed Rousseauist inspiration on the one hand, and on the other which groups advocated the use of terror. If it can be established that some 'Rousseauists' were non-terrorists, or that some terrorists were non-Rousseauist, in both instances the case for affiliating Rousseauist doctrine to the ideology of the Terror would diminish. Indeed, we then could argue that justifications for the Terror may have evolved extraneous to the scope of Rousseauist doctrine. However, if there existed a group professing both Rousseauist inspiration and advocacy for the Terror, then the case is only weakened and not destroyed. In such an event, one must examine closely the relationship between such a group - possibly Robespierre's group - and the invocation of Rousseauist concepts to justify the Terror.

Is Rousseauist doctrine and the Terror mutually inclusive?

The Royalists were neither 'Rousseauist' nor supporters of the Terror. Indeed, Rousseau assailed the notions of feudalism and privilege upon which royalism rested, holding that these prevented the "regeneration" of human kind. This was hardly a position endorsed by the ardent Royalists of the French Revolution. Furthermore, the Terror was initially struck at an 'aristocratic plot' to reaffirm absolutist monarchism; the Royalists suffered from the Terror rather than finding it a means for solace. Thus, on both counts the Royalists may be dismissed from further consideration.

The sans-culottes view that sovereignty resided in the people, who collectively embodied the general will, was Rousseauist enough; however, the idea that individual rights superseded national laws pointed the sans-culottes in the opposite direction. Rousseau contended that the laws were paramount and thus by demanding direct democracy the sans-culottes effectively denied Rousseau's warning that this form of political participation in a large state would translate popular sovereignty into unbridled anarchy.¹ Furthermore, by defining social equality in terms of economic levelling, the sans-culottes went entirely beyond the scope of Rousseauist doctrine as expressed in either his Poland or Corsica. In the end, then, the radical republicanism espoused by the sans-culottes far surpassed the conditions laid down by Rousseau.

The sans-culottes clearly supported, if not straight out

demanded, the implementation of the Terror. Their opinion would change when the Hebertists were executed in 1794, but until this time the group endorsed the use of fear and coercion. As such, the selective invocation of Rousseauist doctrine ignored important qualifications, yet the sans-culottes clearly favoured the use of terror to address their concerns.

The Feuillants fall under the reverse formula, owing much to Rousseauist inspiration yet in no measure endorsing terror. Had Mirabeau been alive in 1792, he would have certainly belonged to the Feuillants.² Arguably the most prominent statesman of the 1789-91 period, and more articulate than any Feuillant who survived him, it seems justifiable to briefly examine Mirabeau's political position. Effectively, this will allow for an accurate analysis of the Feuillant's relationship to both Rousseauist doctrine and the rationale for the Terror.

Mirabeau and Rousseau agreed that man had been corrupted and inclined toward despotism by having to exist within an ill-conceived society. Essentially, innate goodness was the primary casualty of socially orchestrated self-interest. Furthermore, when Mirabeau claimed that sovereignty must rest solely with the people, and that the king can be no more than the first magistrate of people, he was echoing Rousseau's prescription for monarchism in a large and wealthy nation such as France.³ Moreover, Mirabeau's denouncement of despotism as

the "negation of government, and his promotion of the right of the people to revolt "in order to break their chains",⁴ aligned him with Rousseau's notion of political rights. Did the right to resist involve an allowance for violent revolution? Mirabeau and Rousseau would have opted for cautious reform. As Mirabeau pondered: "Have these men studied...how revolutions [drive men] far beyond the limits of moderation, and by what terrible impulses an enraged people is precipitated into the excesses at the very thought of which they would have shuddered."⁵ Rousseau's advice to the Poles marked similar concerns about the peril of violent revolution.⁶

Mirabeau certainly would have condemned the Terror. First, Mirabeau was politically moderate and wary of the extremism accompanying a rigid adherence to revolutionary principles. "Above all else", declared Mirabeau, "let us not mistake the fervid advocacy of principles for their perversion."⁷ Second, Mirabeau rejected coercion under any circumstances, arguing that force was more apt to deviate from rather than secure desired goals. As he wrote: "Our fate lies in wisdom. Violence might jeopardize, even destroy, the liberty, which reason assures us."⁸ Third, Mirabeau held violence the last refuge of those able to achieve only through force what properly belonged in the domain of persuasion. Of those supporting a violent extension of the Revolution in 1791, Mirabeau remarked: "I became very discontented with

those who were precipitating us into the abyss."⁹ Finally, Mirabeau argued that the sole raison d'etre of the Revolution lay in abolishing feudalism and privilege. Thus, the Constitution of 1791 marked a significant realization of his aspirations. The use of terror to push beyond a limited revolution could have only been, for Mirabeau, the product of ambition, jealousy and anarchy.¹⁰ The Feuillants, and Rousseau, would have agreed. All told, Mirabeau's opposition to the Terror would have been rooted in ideology, practicality and rationalism, opting in the end for moderation and enlightenment.

Accepting Mirabeau as a posthumous representative of the Feuillants allows for some significant observations vis-a-vis a relationship with Rousseauist doctrine and the ideology of terror. Briefly, Rousseau and the Feuillants had common ground in the areas of sovereignty, the separation of legislative and executive functions, reform within a large and wealthy nation and a condemnation of violent revolution. The Feuillants did not directly refer to Rousseau, but his inspiration was evidenced in the group's political platform. During the Terror, the Feuillants fell victim as "enemies of the Republic" whilst the Committee sought to vanquish an 'aristocratic plot.'¹¹ Thus, the Feuillants echoed Rousseau in many important respects, and they denied the utility of terror.

We are left to consider the Jacobins. By 1793, the Club

was polarized between the Mountain and the Gironde, led by Robespierre and Brissot, respectively. Fluctuating between these two sects were the Indulgents, led by Danton. Again, while these sects were collectively Jacobin, philosophical distinctions existed. The Brissotins reflected the negative rationalism of Voltaire, Robespierre's group the religiosity of Rousseau, and the Dantonists the negative positivism of Diderot.¹² I take this observation as indicative of a need to analyze the Jacobins along sectarian lines to properly evaluate the relationship between political groupings, the Terror and the crux of Rousseauist doctrine.

How did Brissot, the most active and articulate Girondin, regard Rousseau? He pronounced: "Rousseau deserved to become the model for all centuries... for his virtue."¹³ He added that Rousseau was the greatest philosopher of the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Furthermore, and in accordance with Rousseauist thought, Brissot saw revolution as a means to the end of replacing monarchical `honour' with republican `virtue', as rooted in viewing the poor as "nature's children" and the people as the repository of goodness and uncorrupted by wealth. Brissot denounced elitism and Robespierre's ascendancy, and like Rousseau he felt that France was unfit for republicanism given "much ignorance, much corruption, too many industries and too many people."¹⁵ For Brissot, the possibility for virtue lay in observing a single general will; in principle a Rousseauist position, although Brissot argued

that the general will was no more than majority opinion.¹⁶

Brissot unreservedly opposed the Terror as contrary to the people's will. As he argued: "The people is responsible to only itself in the exercise of sovereignty and no power can prescribe rules of conduct to it."¹⁷ And the Terror was absolutely about the arbitrary creation of rules of conduct! Accordingly, Brissot labelled Robespierre's group a violent and presumptuous minority, falsely claiming to represent the sovereign people. Brissot summarized: "They (Robespierre's group) tell one faction that it is the whole people, the true people, and only sovereign.... They think they have the general will and all they have is the will of a handful of tribunes adopted by slaves or by idiots."¹⁸ As the Terror was directed by a minority, Brissot's condemnation was closer to Rousseau's abhorrence of particularism than the Mountain was to Rousseau's views on the potential for a minority to discern and promote the general will.

All told, the Brissotins derived from Rousseau both theoretical and programmatic inspiration. As to the Terror, the Gironde fell prey by 31 October, 1793, and opposed the debauchery as effected by a minority through coercion. Conclusively, then, the Gironde was another group which professed Rousseauist doctrine and denounced the Terror.

Danton reflects the reverse of the Girondin position, thereby supporting the assertion that Rousseauist thought and the Terror need not go together. Unlike Rousseau, Danton held

that the Revolution had little to do with regenerating France; abstract principles did not have a role in pragmatic politics.¹⁹ Furthermore, Danton believed that the exigencies of tactical situations demanded forsaking moralism and personal sentiments. The only point of agreement, to my knowledge, between Rousseau and Danton centered on the idea that Economic prosperity demanded the abolition of feudalism.²⁰

Danton was a proponent of terror, endorsing the Committee of Public Safety, the Revolutionary Tribunal, and all the measures sundry culminating in spilling rivers of blood. For Danton, terror was necessary to eradicate factionalism and consolidate governmental authority. Simply, Danton held terror a means to end political wrangling so that France might proceed with the business of winning the war; terror did not have a thing to do with establishing an idyllic Reign of Virtue. This view led Danton to argue that the propriety of terror had become muddled under Robespierre. Indeed, following France's military victories at the Front during 1793, Danton proposed a relaxation of terror and amnesty for those no longer engaged with counter-revolutionism.²¹ Noting this and that Danton would eventually ascend a scaffold cannot dismiss his support for the Terror.

In the final analysis, Danton denied in effect the utility of Rousseauist doctrine, and endorsed the Terror. That Danton's rationale for terror stressed nationalism and military victory, rather than the 'virtuous regeneration' of

France, moves his position even further afield from Rousseau's thought.

What does all of this tell us?

Rousseauist doctrine and the justifications for the Terror are not necessarily mutually inclusive. Indeed, while the Feuillants and the Brissotins were influenced by Rousseau and denounced the Terror, the sans-culottes and Dantonists supported terror yet drew little inspiration from Rousseau's thought. Of course, the Royalists apply in neither instance. Thus, a group could be either non-Rousseauist and pro-terrorist, or the reverse; thereby diminishing the case for linking Rousseau to the Terror. That is, Rousseauist doctrine was used to back policies other than the Terror, and terror derived justifications from sources extraneous to Rousseauist allowances.

Did a group endorse both Rousseauism and the Terror?

Here emerges the importance of Robespierre's group, composed of the twelve men dominating the Committee of Public Safety and, in turn, revolutionary politics down until 9 Thermidor (27 July, 1794). By mid 1793, Couthon, Saint-Just, Jeanbon Saint-Andre and Prieur of Marne had formed the resolute nucleus of the Mountain. Soon, Barere, Lindet and Herault de Sechelles were rallied to the cause. Robespierre was enlisted on 27 July, and on 14 August, Carnot and Prieur

of Cote-d'or joined ranks. Membership was made complete with the inclusion of Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois on 6 September. Less than a year later the union would collapse, but each member had their place in the course of the Revolution.

Robespierre, Saint-Just and Couthon ruled the Committee of Public Safety (hereinafter referred to as either Robespierre's group or the Committee). That these individuals formed a core of first amongst equals is revealed in noting that the Law of 22 Prairial (10 June, 1794), was conceptualized by Robespierre, drafted by Saint-Just and presented by Couthon. Barere was a staunch nationalist and defender of the war effort. Collot d'Herbois was equally resolute, but in support of the sans-culottes and opposition to the Indulgents. Billaud-Varenes was in agreement with Collot d'Herbois, perhaps more famous for his suppression of the committee of clemency on 26 December, 1793.²² By July, 1794, Barere, Collot d'Herbois and Billaud-Varenes opposed Robespierre's core; nonetheless, the trio were deported from France by the Thermidorians on 13 April, 1795. Carnot was the most vociferous opponent of Robespierre by mid 1794, and having been spared execution or deportation, he replaced Sieyes on the post-Thermidorian Directory. Of the remaining members, Lindet was the most noteworthy, becoming the Minister of Finance under the Directory. Such was the composition of the Committee, essentially driven by the will of Robespierre,

Saint-Just and Couthon from mid-1793 until mid-1794.

Prior to 1789, Robespierre was more an exponent of Montesquieu than of Rousseau. Arguing that it was impossible to legislate morality and that policies must conform to existing mores, Robespierre added: "An absolute idea of purity and perfection can only be a source of political mistakes."²³ He might have done well to remember this in the future! Nonetheless, the political crisis of 10 August, 1792, converted Robespierre to Rousseauism. Adopting Rousseau's notion of vertu as essential for France's regeneration, Robespierre's group deemed Rousseau the "preceptor of the human race" and the Social Contract the "bible" which from they derived inspiration.²⁴ If the Social Contract was little known in France prior to 1789, it was certainly required reading for the 'virtuous' during 1793-94. Indeed, Robespierre presented Rousseau as the new Jesus of the Moral Republic.²⁵ Reference to Rousseau gave Robespierre's group a decided advantage over their political foes; Rousseauist doctrine was tailored to revolutionary harangues. Regardless of accuracy, Robespierre's group assuredly considered themselves disciples of Rousseau.

Robespierre's group was undeniably the chief architect of terror, at least as concerned Paris; the Committee made it the "order of the day", defined the concept in terms of virtue and decided who would ascend the scaffold. The Terror became the means for creating a moral and indivisible republic; a

weapon to combat counter-revolution emanating from foreign adversaries and internal factions.

What does the position of Robespierre's group force us to consider?

The position of the Feuillants, Brissotins, sans-culottes, Dantonists and the Royalists suggest that Rousseauist doctrine and the Terror need not go together. However, the reverse claim is only weakened - not destroyed - as Robespierre's group alleged Rousseauist inspiration and directed the Terror. Thus, we must examine closely the ideological relationship between Rousseau and Robespierre's group, and the entrenchment of terror as a political instrument. To what extent did Robespierre's group claim Rousseau's inspiration on points of doctrine? How were these points of doctrine used to justify terror? Did these rationales mesh with allowances offered by Rousseau? These emerge as the important questions.

CHAPTER 3: ROBESPIERRE'S AFFINITIES WITH ROUSSEAU

"Divine man, you taught me to know myself, and to think about the mighty principles of social order"

M. Robespierre

What was the ideological relationship between Rousseau and Robespierre's group?

Robespierre considered Rousseau the "sublime and true friend of humanity", the philosopher "whose writings developed amongst us those principles of public morality which made us worthy to conceive the plan of regenerating our patrie."¹ More tangible, and like Rousseau, the Committee argued that social existence had corrupted man. Reason and self-control were held requisite for man to curb the self-interest which translated into social decadence. Robespierre's group paraphrased Rousseau by shrouding regeneration with a concept of "virtue" and demanding the acceptance of "god", Providence and Divinity.² For Robespierre, man and society must:

...desire morality instead of selfishness, honesty and not mere honour, principle and not mere custom, duty and not mere propriety, the sway of reason rather than the tyranny of fashion, a scorn for the vile and not a contempt for the unfortunate...good men instead of good company, merit in place of intrigue, talent in place of mere cleverness, truth and not show, the charm of happiness and not mere pleasure...in short the virtues and miracles of a republic and not the vices and absurdities of a monarchy.³

How was all of this to be effected? In part, it required

fiscal probity; that is, an avoidance of opulence. The hallmark of citizenship demanded the subjugation of self-interest to the public good. Moreover, virtue required the suspension of factionalism, an entrenchment of equality and the promotion of civic and political freedom through limiting personal ambition. All of this parallels Rousseau's thought. As Cobban noted, Rousseau defined virtue as "an absence of moral conflict between an individual's desires (means to happiness) and the laws imposed upon him by his environment."⁴ Indeed, Rousseau and Robespierre's group argued that virtue depended upon a willingness to shed passions and fuse individual will with that of society at large.

For Robespierre's group, virtue was the key to happiness and indifference to this recognition was the source of all evil.⁵ For Saint-Just: "One can only make a republic by means of virtue."⁶ Effectively, then, Rousseau's concept of vertu provided the Committee with the crux of a revolutionary philosophy designed to regenerate a morally corrupt France. The idea would translate as a civic code manifest by a "love of the fatherland" and its laws. Of course, Robespierre's group viewed themselves fit to develop and apply these principles. Indeed, Robespierre declared himself one "ever incapable of yielding beneath the yoke of baseness and corruption."⁷ The Committee was virtue looking for a place to happen, and revolutionary France provided the arena. As Carr quipped: "No wonder they died young; for such men were too

saintly to live long."⁸ At any rate, the whole sermon appeared a Rousseauist exercise, rooted in developing good moeurs and the Reign of Virtue.

As the leaders of the Old Regime were holding firmly to the remnants of their power, Robespierre's group argued that revolution was necessary to reform man and society along moral and political lines. ^{basically a direct quote of Rousseau} Saint-Just, the Revolution was "to substitute the public interest for all other interests, to make nature and innocence the passions of all hearts and to create a patrie."⁹ Convinced that reform was impossible within the existing political system, Robespierre asserted: "Louis must die because the country must live."¹⁰ Here was an allusion to Rousseau's contention that monarchism was generally antithetical to freedom; periodically, a violent outburst of civil agitation was necessary in order "to awaken a nation's dormant vigour."¹¹ ^{Social Contract} Rousseau ^{BL II Chap} qualified this allowance, but this was neglected when Robespierre's group justified the King's execution.

Revolutionary virtue referred to popular sovereignty. As Saint-Just declared: "The people have the right to speak as masters to the governments which neglect them."¹² Furthermore, Saint-Just argued that the sovereign consisted of "all the hearts yearning for virtue", thereby echoing Rousseau's concept of the collective sovereign and its distinctiveness from sovereignty as the exercise of the general will.¹³

A stress on popular sovereignty, responsibility, reason and goodness reflects a democratic philosophy; however, Robespierre's group opted for limited democracy, holding people yet too corrupt to enjoy unbridled political liberty.¹⁴ This is not far from Rousseau's view that "Liberty is a food easy to eat, but hard to digest; it takes very strong stomachs to stand it."¹⁵ The task was not impossible, and for Rousseau and Robespierre's group the first step - the hard step - was to develop and entrench virtue.

This points to the proposition that politics is about morality and promoting republican virtue. For Robespierre, "politics is nothing but public morality". Here the Rousseauist connection is clear. Rousseau held: "Those who would like to treat politics and morals separately will never understand anything about the two."¹⁶ Accordingly, any government must realize and promote the politico-moral equation. Robespierre was firm on this point: "Virtue can only flourish under the umbrella of governmental institutions designed to preserve freedom and encourage the elevation of man's mind."¹⁷ The government and the people would enter into a reciprocal relationship; the people would grant to the state its moral and physical energies, and the government would use, in turn, these energies to maintain the "un-enslaved" republic. Rousseau would have agreed with the synopsis that the state was the supreme end of social existence; a moral community in which all participated and exercised

responsibility.¹⁸

This brings us to the General Will theory, central to both Rousseau and Robespierre's group. As the expression of collective interests, the general will was rooted in the conceptualization and practice of moral liberty and guaranteed by political and civil equality. Although more than the "sum of individual interests", the general will remained the societal manifestation of individual morality and virtuousness. The implication here is that the general will might vary over time and space, depending upon the needs of a particular society. Fair enough, and I have not found anything in Rousseau's work which contradicts the contention that Rousseau would have admitted as much. At any rate, the general will fused republican virtue with a virtuous citizenry and was indivisible and inalienable. Saint-Just agreed: "The only true command is that of the general will."¹⁹ Robespierre added: "We need one will, ONE WILL."²⁰ Rousseau's Social Contract is laced with similar thinking, and as with Robespierre's group, the central thrust was that referral to the general will ensured that only the voice of the people's interest would be heard.²¹ Rousseau and Robespierre's group agreed, then, on the need to reform man and society within a framework of individual and republican virtue. The general will was the concept underpinning the entire process.

Which Rousseauist ideas did Robespierre's group attempt to apply, and by what means?

How was philosophy translated into political practice by Robespierre's group? Would Rousseau have agreed? Addressing these key issues lies at the heart of analyzing the transposition of conceptual ideals into revolutionary practice.

Rousseau and Robespierre's group agreed that a system of law rooted in the general will was bound to forestall anarchy. "When the whole people decrees for the people," wrote Rousseau, "this act is what I call a law."²² Saint-Just echoed Rousseau on the point that "the law must be an expression of the general will."²³ However, Rousseau and Robespierre's group were of the opinion that the citizenry was ill-equipped, due to centuries of mistaken habits, to accurately determine the general will in the first instance. Hence, this task fell to the semi-divine Legislator, who would present his vision of the general will for popular approval. By incorporating customs and prohibitions into a system of political and social organization, the Legislator would command the future. According to Saint-Just: "It is for the Legislator to will what is good and perpetuate it, ... the virtues of the Lacedemonians were in the heart of Lycurgus."²⁴ Rousseau went straight to the heart of the matter: "In order to discover the rules of society best suited to nations, a superior intelligence would be needed.... The Legislator occupies in every respect an extraordinary position in the State."²⁵

The significance of the Legislator, and the nature of his task, suggests a correlation between unanimity and the general will. As such, factionalism was held the primary threat to the indivisible and virtuous republic. Rousseau's advice to the Poles pointed at the potential for anarchy and disunity precipitated by factionalism,²⁶ and was mirrored in Robespierre's belief that factions represented the effort of sectional interests to gain advantage at the expense of the general will.²⁷ Thus, Rousseau and Robespierre's group apparently agreed on yet another theoretical level.

How might factionalism be circumvented? Robespierre's group sought economic and religious resolutions. First, the Committee believed that economic inequalities and disparity procured factionalism and discontent amongst the lower orders.²⁸ Indeed, Saint-Just alleged that economic inequality was the primary cause for the demise of past republics; that is, social equality and political liberty disappear in the face of economic deprivation. Virtue, then, hinged on eradicating poverty. "If you wish a republic to be virtuous", wrote Saint-Just, "it is impossible in the midst of poverty."²⁹ Now, the trick was to limit the accumulation of private property, for the right of possession remained central to individual prosperity and, thereby, the linking of individual will to the general will. The answer was not economic levelling, but rather limited accumulation as the means to alleviating the social tensions caused by deprivation

and hunger. The State would protect the economic interests of the whole citizenry in return for allegiance to the Republic. This was revealed by Robespierre's definition of property as "the portion of goods...guaranteed by law, and limited in that property cannot prejudice the security, the liberty; the existence, or the property of our fellow men."³⁰ Factionalism would be circumvented on two levels: limit accumulation to ease economic deprivation; guarantee the right to property possession to gain popular allegiance to the Republic.

Second, Robespierre's group sought a religious solution to factionalism. Their religious sentiment was distinct from traditional Christianity in that the Church was held responsible for the emergence of dual loyalties between citizens and the faithful. Manifest in the Cult of the Supreme Being, and expressing a belief in some sort of god and Divine Providence, the new religious creed was to supplement insufficient human authority and facilitate virtuousness.³¹ (Carr, p. 139). The fusion of the temporal and spiritual was intended to dismiss dual loyalties and, thereby, undermine another source for factionalism.

Did Rousseau suggest economic and religious solutions for the problem of factionalism? First, Rousseau's Discourse on the Origins of Inequality is a ringing critique of unlimited property accumulation as the crux of human misery. Rousseau, like Robespierre's group, asserted that private property was

necessary if individuals were to tie their lot to the interests of the State.³² Unlimited accumulation, as beyond the simple right to property possession, was the real threat to social unity. Rousseau said as much to the Corsicans: "No law can despoil any private citizen of any part of his property; the law can merely prevent him from acquiring more."³³ Hence, the Committee's property policy was a paraphrase of the accommodative position espoused by Rousseau.

The religiosity of Robespierre's group was undeniably derived from the penultimate chapter of the Social Contract and the L'etre a d'Alembert. Such is made clear in noting Rousseau's hypothesis that "It is very important to the state that each citizen should have a religion that makes him love his duty."³⁴ This is Rousseau's brand of civil religion, neither Christian nor atheist, as Rousseau denounced both.³⁵ Like Robespierre's group, Rousseau sought to purge corruption and eradicate the factional threat to republican virtue by inoculating the citizenry with a faith rooted in sentimentality.

To what extent, then, did Rousseau inspire Robespierre's group?

Clearly, Robespierre's group vociferously identified with Rousseau, translating such into a philosophical and tactical blueprint for political, economic and social action. Building on Rousseau's view that the innate goodness of man could only be restored by the legal recognition of the virtuous general will, Robespierre's group promoted the Legislator as paramount in this transitory process. Factionalism necessitated the revamping of property and religion so that the general will might operate free of social tensions and dual loyalties. Certainly, the affiliation of Robespierre's group to virtue and reason, the correlation of private and public interest and the reliance on public spirit, was an essentially Rousseauist exercise. These observations, however, require some important qualifications. How was Rousseauist inspiration translated into a justification for the Terror under Robespierre's group? Would Rousseau go along with the translation and the justification? These issues now demand our attention.

CHAPTER 4: ROUSSEAU AND ROBESPIERRE'S JUSTIFICATION FOR THE TERROR

"I am the people"

M. Robespierre

Without reservation, Robespierre said of Rousseau: "I wish to follow in your hallowed footsteps."¹ Such remarks raise the question whether Robespierre's group derived its justification for terror and state tyranny from Rousseau. Beset by political, economic, social and military crisis, the Committee did in fact seek in Rousseauist doctrine an endorsement for the remedial measures encompassed by the Terror. What points of Rousseauist doctrine were specifically invoked by Robespierre's group to justify terror? What did the Committee hope to achieve, and by what means? What purported to justify their assumption to represent a revolutionary vanguard? In other words, how did Robespierre's group utilize Rousseauist doctrine to endorse the politics of the gouvernement révolutionnaire, and how did these policies translate as a justification for the Terror?

How did Robespierre's group view the Revolution?

For Robespierre's group, the Revolution would leave France a global model and glorious paradigm for true democracy; the salvation of the wretched and the scourge of oppressive tyranny. Liberty, equality and fraternity would be the legacy of responsible, rational and virtuous man. This is democratic enough, and parallels Rousseau's perception of human nature. The promotion of universal, direct suffrage and the notion of fusing reform to the lot of the masses, did much to enhance the 'democratic' reputation of Robespierre's group and its ascendancy as a revolutionary vanguard for the people.

But who, according to the Committee, were the people? Simply, the nation "minus the previously privileged." This limited concept of democratic right drew the class lines upon which the Terror would initially proceed, as the traditional upper classes were deemed unpersons. Soon, this general denunciation would include monarchism as symbolic of privilege and, thus, the enslavement of man. Here was an application of Rousseau's belief that while democracy was prone to corruption, monarchism was inevitably corrupt. Equating privilege with immorality, and seeing morality as virtuous, it followed that monarchical feudalism was a threat to the democratic republic. Events could not wait for man to develop virtue and it fell to the 'enlightened' few to champion republicanism. Hence the emergence of Robespierre's group as

a revolutionary vanguard, determined to do for "the people what it cannot do for itself." If this involved terrorizing recalcitrants, so be it; the ends justified the means.

Robespierre's group curbed the tendency of popular sovereignty to become "libertarian anarchy" by centralizing authority and vanquishing the 'aristocratic plot'.² For democracy to replace monarchism, or so the argument went, the government needed the ability to dismiss all threats to republican unanimity. As terror would only fall upon the 'enemies' of the new republic, Robespierre's group had justified arbitrary coercion. Initially, this meant assailing the monarchists.

Not satisfied, Robespierre's group propagandized that the "deroyalized" Constitution of 1791, would not realize democracy. By September 22, 1792, Robespierre utterly denied any monarchical-republican equation; the concepts were held antithetical. Now the Committee utilized Rousseau's allowance that upon rare occasions building the "new" required destroying the "old."³ The "old" was the Ancien Regime, and the King was the first victim. Saint-Just reasoned thus: "It is impossible to reign and to be innocent."⁴ As the antithesis of democracy, Louis would have to die so that the republic might live.

Foregoing the possibility for peaceful reform, the Revolution became a violent exercise directed against the Ancien Regime. "The republic will only be established", vowed

Saint-Just, "when the will of the sovereign represses that of the royalist minority and rules over it by conquest."⁵ The Assembly was purged of 'royalists' and the franchise was granted to the passive citizens of the Paris Section - declared anti-aristocrats. This sealed the fate of a throne over thirteen centuries old. The revolution would obliterate the Ancien Regime, absolutist or otherwise.

In the nineteenth century, Taine argued that a rigid adherence to democracy precluded the acceptance of royal proposals made in June 1789, and thereby opened the floodgates for anarchy and the Terror.⁶ Taine was probably correct, for the divorce of monarchism and democracy, and the definition of the latter in terms of rule for the poor and oppressed, divided France into two camps: evil monarchists and good democrats. Robespierre's group asserted that democracy was the domain of the virtuous masses, and the Committee certainly knew how to separate the sheep from the goats. The next step was to justify terror. As Robespierre stated: "One leads the people by reason, and the enemies of the people by terror."⁷ Essentially, then, Robespierre's group invoked Rousseau's doctrine to endorse terror as the expedient necessary to ensure the victory of democracy over its monarchical antithesis and, thus, allow for the realization of republican virtue.

What was the philosophical basis of the new republic?

In holding virtue the condition of public policy, "which must [root] our republic, once indivisible and imperishable", Robespierre promoted governmental austerity as guaranteed through fear.⁸ For the Committee, establishing the Reign of Virtue would resolve all subsidiary concerns. Subsequently, secular justice was suspended to facilitate the pursuit of philosophical virtue.

Unanimity underpinned the politico-moral equation. Virtue was the order of epoch, as supported by terror as "the order of day". The virtuous need not fret, Saint-Just assured, for "terror will seize with a steady hand all the perverse intriguers and will not strike one good man."⁹ As the saviour of the patrie- the devotion which submerges private into general interest - the Terror applied solely to the enemies of the republic; the egoists, ambitious, corrupt and non-virtuous only worthy of death.

[Inspired by Rousseau's concept of vertu, Robespierre's group polarized France between the good and the evil. The task of promoting the moral regeneration of civil society was assumed by the Committee, and all opposition was branded the product of tyranny, inequity and oppression.] The significance of the endeavor permeated the use of terror as quick, inflexible justice and, therefore, in of itself a promoter of virtue.¹⁰ Indeed, establishing and perpetuating the Reign of Virtue rendered terror more a duty than a crime; republican

virtue, justified coerced unanimity. For better or worse, Rousseau's philosophy provided Robespierre's group with the recipe for defining freedom and happiness in terms of virtue. What seemed new was the correlation of virtue and arbitrary massacre.

In what sense did the Terror escalate?

During 1792, the punitive will of the revolutionaries took aim at an 'aristocratic plot' to restore monarchism. Louis was held evil; virtue was republican not monarchical. Beginning with Rousseau's claim that the "goodness" of a state was determined by the entrenchment of the general will, and that politics was about fostering virtue, Robespierre's group initially confined the assault to monarchism. Nonetheless, equating republicanism with virtue, and virtue with the general will, and in holding both republicanism and the general will indivisible through a correlation with virtue, seemed to mark an effort to create a full Rousseauist utopia.

Corruption was not a royalist monopoly and, therefore, the Terror soon extended beyond its aristocratic focus. Having dismantled monarchism and vanquished the 'aristocratic plot', the Terror struck at anyone opposed to the perception of virtue offered by Robespierre's group. Indeed, a full sixty per cent of those executed throughout France were peasants and workers, hardly the "privileged gentlemen" of Bourbon France.¹¹

The Girondins assailed the Committee's definition of virtue, and like King Louis became "aliens in our midst." The dichotomy between the good and bad had been extended, and each 'purification' left France yet divided between virtuous Frenchmen and evil aliens. Rousseau's concept of republicanism and denunciation of monarchism was stretched to include the obliteration of those at odds with the select "defenders of the people". Dissent was resolved upon the scaffold. Rather than compromise and persuasion, the government adopted terror as the main weapon in the effort to guarantee the indivisibility and inalienability of the sovereign republic in the face of external and internal threats.

What external influences precipitated the Terror?

Robespierre's adoption of Rousseau's belief that republicanism was the supreme end of one's political and social existence, became in foreign affairs a notion of patriotic nationalism aimed toward eternal threats - real or perceived. Revolutionary nationalism centered on Rousseau's claim that a republic retained the right and duty to defend itself and the process of human regeneration.

As late as September, 1792, Robespierre warned that foreign conflict would result in dictatorship, given its tendency toward dissension and the exhaustion of national resources. Robespierre split with Brissot over this very

issue. However, Robespierre's group could not resist the wave of popular enthusiasm accompanying the military victories during November, 1792. Thus, public opinion granted Robespierre's group another justification for terror, as unanimity was held necessary for continued success at the Front.¹² Furthermore, military success enhanced the Committee's image and legitimized the Terror; the Convention regarded the odious nature of dictatorship a lesser evil than defeat at the Front. Thus, war and patriotic nationalism facilitated the acceptance of terror and the suspension of rights. Simply, the maintenance of the democratic and virtuous republic justified all means toward the end of smashing foreign threats. Lefebvre would wax eloquently: "The die had been cast which clad the Revolution in the warrior's garb needed to challenge the world."¹³

Robespierre's group extended the nationalistic rationale for terror to a defense of Europe from monarchical despotism. "Let liberty in France perish", eulogized Robespierre, "and the whole world will be covered by universal tyranny."¹⁴ In spite of earlier hesitations, the revolutionary nationalism of Robespierre's group took on a cosmopolitan flavour.

Foreign conflict allowed the government to declare itself "revolutionary until peace" on 10 October, 1793. On 5 September, 1793, the government had made terror "the order of the day". Effectively, the government's power was centralized, rights were suspended, and terror had been

entrenched. To do otherwise, it was contended, would undermine unity and, thus, threaten the military effort. Terror and virtue had taken root in the notion of patriotic nationalism.

As one military victory followed another without a relaxation of terror, it became obvious that the gouvernement révolutionnaire was founded on more than national defense. Indeed, the application of the Terror widened as military victory undermined the legitimacy of the Committee. Presented with a new threat to its hegemony, Robespierre's group shifted the focus of the Terror from externalities to internal considerations. The Committee now addressed internal factions in the effort to maintain its hold in power.

What was the relationship between terror and factionalism?

Like Rousseau, Robespierre's group perceived factionalism the chief danger for republican unanimity. Such a perception would underpin the Terror in its fullest manifestation, as the Committee sought to protect the Reign of Virtue from dissent within the body politic. This rationale underscored Robespierre's allegation that "all these factions meet at night to concert their activities... [and] connive to extinguish liberty between two crimes."¹⁵ In terms of the potential for consequent chaos, Saint-Just added: "Citizens, the nation is in danger. Domestic enemies more fearsome than foreign armies, are secretly plotting its ruin."¹⁶ Terror

would be fought with the Terror, with the guillotine as a deterrent. Ultimately, the persistence of factions necessitated the continuance of the revolutionary phase.

During the summer of 1793, the Girondins attacked the centralization of government. This convinced Robespierre that domestic 'enemies' must be vanquished thoroughly and expeditiously. Robespierre eventually convinced the Convention to entrench the authority of the Committee of Public Safety, and the Girondin leaders were quickly dispatched to the scaffold as traitors to the Revolution. Simultaneously, the Jacobin popular front disintegrated; Robespierre's group was now in direct competition with the Dantonist and Hebertist sects. The path to virtue had narrowed once more, and the application of terror inevitably widened. The politics of revolution was now polarized between Robespierre's adherents and everyone else.

Employing the standard argument to proscribe opponents and justify the ideology of terror, Robespierre's group branded Danton and Hebert "rogues" unworthy of inclusion amongst the sovereign people. Saint-Just reasoned thus: "What constitutes a republic is the total destruction of whatever is opposed to it. In a republic, which can only be based on inflexibility, the expression of pity for a crime is a striking sign of treason."¹⁷ Clearly, toleration was not a term used in the revolutionary lexicon! Furthermore, in asking "Are our enemies at home not the allies of our enemies

abroad?"¹⁸, Saint-Just implied that internal factions were linked to foreign counter-revolutionism. Factionalism was defined as opposition to Robespierre's group, as the Committee assailed the royalists, Indulgents, radicals and enrages. The scenario may have been viewed as a victory for virtue, but it remains that the execution of the Dantonists and the Hebertists entrenched the Committee's political hegemony.

How did the existence of factionalism legitimize the political institutionalization of the Terror?

According to Robespierre's group, resolving factionalism demanded that the government be free to act unfettered by rules only fit for peacetime. Hence, the gouvernement revolutionnaire and the weapons of terror and dictatorship. By 18 November, 1793, the government's programme was in place, entailing the banning of collaboration between local administrations and popular societies, the restriction of delegated authority and the disbanding of revolutionary armies in the provinces.¹⁹

Not satisfied, Saint-Just convinced the Convention to grant the Committee further powers with the preservation of his Sur les factions de l'etranger. Civil liberties were suspended, with justification centering on the effort to combat the resurrection of tyranny and the death of the patrie. Conveniently, Robespierre's group did not consider themselves a faction; the "select few" could not be a divisive element.

By striking the Dantonists and the Hebertists, Robespierre's group proscribed the moderate and popular movements. Consequently, those to whom Robespierre's group had owed its ascendancy now began to question the legitimacy of a Committee which had sanctioned the death of devout patriots. Rather than quelling dissent, Robespierre's group opened a Pandora's Box. Now, more than ever, the Committee's political survival hinged entirely upon the application of the Terror.

Usher in the Law of 22 Prairial (10 June, 1794), which meant the denial of due legal process during the Great Terror. The accused met only acquittal or death. The gouvernement revolutionnaire, terror and the Law of 22 Prairial evidenced that as its hold on power weakened, the Committee became ferocious in reaction.²⁰ The terror became the last refuge of an unmasked scourge; the 'aristocratic plot' had faded, the punitive will of the people had been dulled, and popular fever for the Terror had subsided. The Law of 22 Prairial extended beyond popular inclinations. Why, then, did Robespierre's group extend the margins of terror? While vertu remained the hallmark of politics, many questioned the Committee's claim to represent the moral characteristics of republicanism. Accordingly, terror was used to forestall the real and growing possibility that Robespierre and his followers might soon find themselves hurled upon the scaffold.

Tired of bloodshed, popular revolutionism became more

moderate. Robespierre's group was ousted on 9 Thermidor (27 July, 1794), and Robespierre, Saint-Just and Couthon were dispatched to the guillotine the next day. The Terror was rescinded, but not before most of the leading revolutionaries in Paris had perished upon the scaffold. From Rousseauist doctrine, Robespierre's group derived the theoretical justification to assail factionalism and endorse the Terror. It remains to be seen if Rousseau would have condoned the extent to which the Committee attacked factions and its relationship to arbitrary execution.

How did Robespierre's group view the connection between civil religion and factionalism?

Like Rousseau, Robespierre's group tied religious sentimentality to dutiful citizenship. Allegiance was to focus upon the State rather than the Church, and, thereby, resolve dual loyalties. Now, it would have been political suicide to promote deChristianization in a religiously devout France, so Robespierre's group attempted to end factious theological disputes by promoting a "civil sentimentality" somewhere between atheism and Catholicism. Make no mistake, however; both atheists and Catholic zealots were held enemies of the moral republic. Indeed, the 'atheists' and refractory priests whom did not support either Louis' execution or the Girondin purges were proscribed on 25 October, 1793.²¹ Furthermore, church closures in Paris proved religious toleration a myth. Ultimately, the Cult of the Supreme Being

was more than a religious substitution, acting as yet another mechanism for political unity and moral redemption. It was a short step from this position to the argument that the detractors of civil religion deserved death as enemies of the republic.

How did civil religion translate as terror?

The adoption of Rousseau's politico-religious equation was a portent of the Committee's attempt to impose a rigid value-system upon an entire nation. Hence, a rationale for terror transcending factionalism. Indeed, Article 12 of the Cult of the Supreme Being banned religious meetings that might disturb public order. Furthermore, Article 13 promised severe punishment for engaging in counter-revolutionism. The political welfare of the virtuous republic was guaranteed by terror as justified on religious grounds. Once again, virtue and terror were joined; while the Cult was to evoke and glorify virtue, the Law of the 22 Prairial saw to the expeditious obliteration of those allegedly working against the civil religion. Robespierre was predominant in all of this; a sans-culottes was heard to remark upon occasion of Robespierre's procession during the Festival of the Supreme Being: "The b_____ isn't satisfied with being master, he's got to be God as well."²² Events would prove this was not an exaggeration.

For Robespierre, civil religion was to augment education

in virtue. Thus, he concluded that disapproval over the new faith was tantamount to undermining the potential for moral regeneration. Clearly, religiosity became a pillar of virtue and its emanation - terror. "Civil religion had canonized their [Committee's] murders", wrote Taine, "and justified the Terror as an act of philanthropy."²³ Once again, Robespierre's group interpreted a point of Rousseauist doctrine - the purpose and rationale for religious sentiment - to endorse terror as a necessary and legitimate instrument of republicanism.

How did Robespierre's group substantiate its right to employ terror?

Robespierre's group took from Rousseau the notion that the over-arching purpose of political action was the implementation of an indivisible and inalienable general will. Once in office, the Committee asserted that its policies reflected, by definition, the general will. Accordingly, dissent was the product of neither bad policy nor a mistaken general will, but the result of sectarianism. Opposition to the "infallible" Committee was tantamount to denying the general will.

Although in agreement with Rousseau as to the significance afforded to the general will, Robespierre's group defied Rousseauist logic in asserting that the collective interest might be represented. Eventually, the group claimed to personify the essence of popular sovereignty, marking a

significant departure from Rousseau's thought - one deserving and soon to receive a detailed evaluation (See Chapter 5). For now, in alleging itself the embodiment of the general will, the Committee assumed the "right" to mete out punishment for dissent. Again, to deny this was to betray the Republic. In the end, Robespierre's group had revealed the rationale for "forcing men to be free".

What role did the Legislator have in the Terror?

Robespierre's group believed it represented the general will because these individuals felt imbued with the attributes requisite for discerning and promoting the public's true interests. This led the Committee to invoke Rousseau's Legislator as he was best suited to take Frenchmen through the transition from vice to virtue. In this sense, the Legislator marked a political compromise, as popular sovereignty found indirect expression through the beacons of virtue. Robespierre's group discerned, represented, promoted and enforced the general will. If anyone questioned the dictatorial implications of this position, Robespierre unabashedly asserted that "I am the people"; the mortal equivalent of Rousseau's semi-divine Legislator. Thus surfaced yet another justification for the Terror, as Rousseau's Legislator was used to legitimize the Committee's policies.

To justify adding terror to the Legislator's arsenal,

Robespierre used Rousseau's contention that: "If peril is such that the apparatus of the law may be a stumbling-block to avoid, then a supreme authority is appointed, who silences the laws...".²⁴ Able to count heads when it suited him, and to discard the results when it did not, Robespierre emerged as the Legislator of the Revolution. He had utterly entrenched his role as arbitrator of good and bad.²⁵ And to the need for using terror, Saint-Just remarked: "To be feeble will avail the Legislator nothing".²⁶

Robespierre and Saint-Just, who once agreed that "it is better to spare 100 guilty men than to sacrifice a single innocent person", now personified cruel and unrelenting governmental power under the pretence of granting emergency power to a Committee allegedly in possession of the characteristics Rousseau reserved for the Legislator. The upshot was to deface for all time the image of an uncorrupted and benevolent law-giver laid out by Rousseau, as Robespierre's group interpreted this point of Rousseauist doctrine to endorse the arbitrary application of terror.

Where does all of this leave us?

It appears that the rationale for the Terror was derived almost entirely from Rousseauist doctrine. Indeed, Robespierre's group rooted terror in the need to establish a democratic and virtuous republic, in the face of factionalism and through the means of civil religion, the general will and

the Legislator. A selective reading of Rousseau would support the assumption. However, was Robespierre's group accurate in its interpretation and application of Rousseauist thought, or did the Committee distort or ignore key qualifications made by Rousseau? In other words, did Rousseau give the same significance as the Committee to the points of doctrine used to endorse the Terror? This is a crucial question, as the philosophical reputation of Rousseau seems to turn on the perception of his relationship to revolutionary terror. Any attempt to acquit Rousseau of the charge of posthumously fermenting the Terror must begin by accurately determining the relationship between Rousseauist doctrine and its revolutionary interpretation under Robespierre's group. For to claim Rousseauist inspiration and to accurately reflect his doctrine might well be entirely different matters. Of course, if Rousseau was not the prophet of the Terror, then we must develop some idea as to how Robespierre's group detoured from Rousseauist qualifications in entrenching terror as a philosophical and political instrument of the virtuous republic.

CHAPTER 5: EXCULPATING ROUSSEAU

I hate because I do not understand

Latin Proverb

Blaming Rousseau for the popular disorder in which the Revolution began and for the abuses in which it ended turns on a failure to compare thoroughly the political policy of Robespierre's group and the political philosophy of Rousseau. Having attended to the former, we now consider the latter. C.E. Vaughn's conclusion that the "latter and more terrible phases" of the Revolution saw the triumph of the Social Contract contrasts with of Chateaubriand, who esteemed Rousseau as the arch-enemy of the revolutionary terrorists.¹ This dichotomy suggests that while revolutionary oratory was marked by Rousseauist evocations, the issue remains if such was an accurate interpretation of this thought. Hampson argued that Rousseau provided "the type of political philosophy that lent itself too easily" to the inclinations of Robespierre's group.² But is it fair to hold Rousseau responsible for how a subsequent generation applied his work?

Analyzing the ideology of the Terror in juxtaposition to Rousseauist thought involves examining three sets of corresponding principles expounded by Rousseau himself. First, what did Rousseau have to say about democracy, virtue,

revolution and governmental centralization? Effectively, Rousseau was commenting upon what to do, how to do it, and what to avoid in the context of human and socio-political reform. Second, what was Rousseau's view of nationalism and factionalism and its potential for undermining the process of reform? Finally, what role did the civil religion, general will and Legislator have in facilitating the process of human regeneration. In all of this, of course, Rousseau's view of representation must be granted particular attention.

ROUSSEAU'S DEMOCRATIC PRESCRIPTION

In what sense was Rousseau a democrat?

The Revolution was "democratic" in its effort to free people from the yoke of absolutism and oppressive privilege. However, while Rousseau spoke in terms of tyranny, Robespierre's group zeroed in on monarchism as the chief target to the end of "democratizing" France. But did Robespierre's group reflect Rousseau's democratic prescription?

Rousseau's notion of democracy was neither institutional nor classicist - it made no referral to legislatures or to the lot of masses. For Rousseau, democracy meant liberty; that is, the freedom to obey a law one has prescribed for oneself. It was the right and duty to observe the general

will realized by popular sovereignty. In the end, Rousseau's notion of democracy was exemplified by the small property owner and artisan - not the revolutionary sans-culottes.

How did Rousseau correlate democracy and governmental form?

For Rousseau, any governmental form was suitable so long as it established republicanism, promoted the general will and guaranteed the equal participation of the whole citizenry. This is quite in line with democratic thought. Categorizing governmental forms in this way was merely a clarification of the choices open to the Legislator. Significantly, in Rousseau's estimation either monarchism or aristocracy could be republican, as long as it met the above criteria which stood for any good government.

Now, Rousseau had preferences in this context. While he believed an elected aristocracy was most apt to facilitate democratic republicanism, reference to revolutionary France leaves it more appropriate to consider Rousseau's view on the potential for democracy under monarchism. After all, the Revolution and the Terror initially struck at Louis, King of France. For Rousseau, "monarchy is only useful for corrupt nations" and if "men had more vertu they would have no need for one;" however, he also contended that monarchism and republicanism might co-exist.³

According to Rousseau, monarchism was neither inherently corrupt nor oppressive.⁴ The central flaw of this form of

government stemmed from dynasticism, for "hereditary in the crown and freedom in the nation will always be incompatible."⁵ Thus, an elected monarchy might circumvent the justifications for abolishing the institution by curbing the potential for kingship to focus on self-interest and, thereby, usurp popular sovereignty. Public interest would then be the king's main priority, moving the monarchy toward the requisites of Rousseau's Legislator.

Rousseau's prescription for an elected monarchy revealed his distrust of "pure", or direct, democracy: "A people which would always govern well would not need to be governed."⁶ Rousseau found no historical precedence for this condition, nor did he hold much hope for its future realization: "If there were a people of gods, it would govern itself democratically. So perfect a form of government is not for men."⁷ Furthermore, Rousseau reasoned that "there is no government so subject to civil wars and internal factions as the democratic or popular one, because there is no other which tends so strongly...to change its form, nor which requires more vigilance and courage to maintain its own form."⁸ In other words, the nature of democracy demanded a legitimate yet flexible source of political authority for the nation to enjoy stability. Monarchism, if elected, could satisfy this need.

Did a nation's geographical size affect the potential to realize democracy?

Rousseau asserted that democracy was best suited to the small, federated, agricultural city-state. Under such conditions power, "...not being entirely concentrated at one point, does not carry with it an unequal distribution of power, but leaves people dispersed equally throughout the territory: such is democracy".⁹ He added that "a purely democratic government is suitable rather to a small town than to a nation."¹⁰ In any event, men could only rule the smallest of states: "Only God can govern the world; and it would require more than human capacities to govern large nations."¹¹ Furthermore, Rousseau's primary fear of democracy emanated from the view that in a large state 'the people' would assume both legislative and executive authority. This denied the necessary distinction between the legislating people and the law-enforcing government, leading to the executive's usurption of sovereignty.

Much of the weakness accompanying democracy in large nations, deputation involved the relinquishment of popular sovereignty and facilitated corruption. As Rousseau summarized: "In a large nation...the legislative power cannot itself appear in the people, and can only act by deputation. That has its bad and its good, but the bad predominates.... Its representatives are fooled with difficulty, but easily corrupted."¹² The general will would be the first casualty of political self-interest and, thus, Rousseau questioned the

rationale for democratizing the large nation and revealed the essence of his criticism against the democratic undercurrents within the growing states of eighteenth century Europe. An elected king, imbued with the public's interest and the corporate will, was the solution to inevitable anarchy.¹³

Do these comments relate to revolutionary France?

Two points in this context. First, Rousseau's notion of democracy transcended the classicist defense of the poor and wretched, in that the concept demanded the full and equal participation of the entire citizenry in exercising the general will. Simply, democracy must not be pigeonholed into any governmental category. The key was to fuse popular sovereignty and republicanism. As Rousseau penned: "I call a republic... any state which is ruled by laws, no matter what the form of its administration may be... for then the public institution alone governs, ... every legitimate government is a republic."¹⁴ Under these conditions, "even a monarchy is a republic."¹⁵

Second, Rousseau's allowance suggests that the Revolution would have been better served by incorporating, rather than obliterating, the aristocratic segments of society and by leaving open the possibility of a monarchical solution. Indeed, France had no alternative but to opt for monarchism, in Rousseau's estimation, for a large and wealthy nation "cannot operate without intermediate orders; it is necessary

to have princes, the great nobility, ... none of which is suited to a small state."¹⁶ France was not small, nor did it epitomize the meaningful equality and austerity necessary to practice full and direct democracy. Until such time, France should maintain its monarchy. Corsica stood alone as a nation equipped with the attributes needed to implement democracy.¹⁷

Clearly, Rousseau would have instructed the French revolutionaries to accommodate aristocracy, reform rather than abolish monarchism, and avoid implementing full and direct democracy. Thus, Rousseau's position is more conservative than commonly allowed by those alleging that the democratic rationale used by Robespierre's group to justify the Terror, in its initial phase, derived from Rousseauist doctrine.

Did the practice of Robespierre's group correlate to Rousseau's prescription?

Rousseau's proposition that a large nation such as France was best served by an elected monarchy, suggests that he would have condemned the exclusion of French aristocrats as "unpersons". Indeed, Rousseau would have viewed the Constitution of 1791, a move toward properly reforming the nation's political institutions. The execution of Louis under the Committee's direction effectively negated this option, and marked a significant departure from Rousseau's position. Furthermore, the Committee's alliance with the sans-culottes evidenced that revolutionary democracy promoted the interests of the middle and lower classes. Rousseau's demand for

participation by the entire citizenry was dismissed. Moreover, Rousseau stressed that majority opinion could fail to properly reflect the general will due to the infiltration of partial interests.¹⁸ The danger was accentuated in the case of minority rule. At any rate, and according to Rousseau's position, Robespierre's group was not justified in claiming to have infallibly discerned the means for democratically reforming France.

All told, rather than satisfying Rousseau's democratic prescription, Robespierre's group manifest the chief problem of democracy: the rights and duties of the government and the sovereign people were linked. Rousseau was adamant that sovereignty was inalienable and indivisible, holding public interest superior to a government's inclination or aspiration. Thus, law was "an act of sovereignty" for Rousseau; the opinion expressed by a government "is merely a particular will, or act of magistracy...."¹⁹ Robespierre believed the Committee could perform both functions and, as such, Rousseau's warning of the usurption of popular sovereignty was realized.

ROUSSEAU'S VERTU AND THE POLITICS OF REVOLUTION

How did the politics of democracy relate to virtue?

For Rousseau, democracy was rooted in the politics of virtue. Political virtue facilitated an appreciation of one's fellowmen and, thereby, induced the fusion of private and

public interest necessary for democratic practice. [People could be virtuous within any political system, but democracy demanded a virtuous citizenry.] In other words, good people might form good political institutions, but good institutions do not guarantee that a citizenry will be virtuous. In the end, virtue was a prerequisite for man to exist in civil society, which was in itself absolutely necessary. Rousseau had established the paradigm whereby man must live in society and that civil existence depended upon the individual expression of virtue. The state was the sphere of this higher moral existence, a moral community in which all participated.²⁰

The inclusive nature of morality and politics, and the notion that one must view the public interest as an expression of individual interest, was reflected by Rousseau's definition of virtue as "an absence of moral conflict between an individual's desires [means to happiness] and the laws imposed upon him by society."²¹ Social harmony was possible only if individual self-interest was founded on an identification with the community's interest.

Rousseau was quite contemptuous of those denying the politico-moral theorem. For those placing personal interest above that of the community, Rousseau was adamant: "The conservation of the State is then incompatible to his; one of the two must perish, and when the guilty one is put to death it is less as a citizen than as an enemy."²² Now we arrive at the Rousseauist dialectic whereby liberty leads to an

Inquisition. In prescribing, in effect, the death penalty for recalcitrants of republican virtue, Rousseau left himself open to the claim that this allowance was an endorsement for the Terror. Indeed, Robespierre's group recalled this Rousseauist pronouncement time and time again when proscribing the "enemies of virtue." However, there is more to the issue than this simple correlation of Rousseauist doctrine and revolutionary interpretation; Rousseau leaned toward the death penalty on only one occasion, and in a context referring to a concise definition of virtue.

Might the equation of virtue and terror by Robespierre's group be tied to Rousseauist doctrine?

Except for the chapter on Civil Religion in the Social Contract, we find Rousseau more accommodative to the unsavoury variables of human nature than is generally assumed to be the case. Rousseau attempts to do more than simply making the best of a bad situation, reasoning that "since new citizens cannot be created all at once, you must begin by making use of those who exist, and to offer a new road for their ambitions is the way to make them follow it."²³ The path to virtue must be gradual, and accept human nature as it exists. Rousseau's conciliatory attitude is revealed at the outset of his Social Contract: "I mean to inquire if, in the civil order, there can be any sure legitimate rule of administration, men being taken as they are and laws as they might be."²⁴ Furthermore, virtue was neither universal nor

absolute, but rather the conformity of particular wills to the general will of a specific nation.²⁵ Rousseau remained sceptical of the potential to wholly entrench moral principles within political institutions, opting rather to advocate the exercise of virtue as an external check inclined to guarantee the moral participation of all men. In the end, we see that Rousseau's concept of virtue was incremental, conciliatory and qualified. None of these elements were incorporated by Robespierre's group as they set out to establish the Reign of Virtue. What of using terror to induce virtue? Rousseau would have none of it: "Fear does not stimulate, it restrains; and its use in penal laws is not to make men do good, but to prevent from doing evil."²⁶

Robespierre's group, partly due to megalomania and partly because of revolutionary fervour, did not have the luxury of time to establish a virtuous utopia. Robespierre's group attempted to institutionalize virtue before the citizens possessed such lofty attributes. Consequently, Rousseau's commentary to the Corsicans was ignored: "Common sense suffices to govern a well-considered state."²⁷ The Terror was many things, but rooted in "common sense" does not apply. While the debauchery unleashed during the Terror certainly made reference to a notion of virtue, in significant ways the practice of Robespierre's group detoured from the course to virtuous transformation laid out by Rousseau.

Did Robespierre's group possess the attributes Rousseau

determined as essential for one to properly ascertain what constituted virtue in the first instance? If not, then, the use of terror to initiate, promote and entrench revolutionary virtue might well be the product of a biased and defective approach rather than an accurate application of Rousseauist doctrine in this context.

This issue has much to do with the general will theory and its relationship to virtue. It is a mistake, however, to view Robespierre's group as equipped to properly discern virtue any more than the general will. In spite of its claim to be otherwise, Robespierre's group was a political faction representing partial interest. Consequently, Rousseau would have condemned, rather than condoned, the Committee's effort to instill its concept of republican virtue within the citizenry. The general will, as espoused by Robespierre's group, was rooted in bias and, therefore, defective from the outset. The result was the perceived need for terror, but as a consequence of the Committee's wantonness and not of Rousseauist doctrine. Now we may see Rousseau's allowance for the death penalty in a qualified sense: Rousseau prescribed such on the premise that a general will had been properly discerned; Robespierre's interpretation of the general will evolved not from the common interest but rather from personal biases and prejudices. Indeed, its behaviour in setting up the Cult of the Supreme Being clearly suggests that the Committee was celebrating and creating virtue simultaneously,

employing the death penalty as an expedient. The whole affair was a pursuit of a will o' the wisp, going far beyond the specific context presented by Rousseau in allowing for the execution of moral reprobates.

Unlike Robespierre, Rousseau's code for virtuous conduct was not premised on a rigid adherence to a strict perception of morality. Virtue rested on the observance of civil laws, as it was doubtful that people would express a common morality.²⁸ This position evolved from Rousseau's rejection of the notion that humankind had an innate "social sense." There was not a natural "general society of mankind" bound together in terms of a common natural morality. What was true for humankind in general, also applied to the separate existences of particular societies. Revolutionary practice evidences that Robespierre's group detoured from this position as concerned both France and continental Europe.

Undeniably, both Rousseau and Robespierre's group deemed virtue the essence of republicanism. However, Rousseau's concept of virtue differed significantly from that underlining the Terror. First, Rousseau's skeptical view of humankind's potential to imbue virtue rendered institutionalization, along these lines, beyond the scope of human endeavour: "All the works of man are as imperfect, transitory, and perishable as man himself."²⁹ Robespierre's group believed quite the contrary. Second, while Rousseau held the need for virtue as universal, this is not the same thing as saying that one

concept of virtue was universally applicable. It was precisely the "universalist" aspects of revolutionary virtue which gave great impetus to the Terror. Third, Rousseau's brand of punitive will was qualified; punishment was reserved for bad actions and "not for having failed to act."³⁰ Robespierre's group meted out punishment to both active and passive dissent. If anything, Rousseau's position was closer to Danton's, in that the latter called for a relaxation of terror against those not actively conspiring against the Revolution. All told, then, terror was an instrument used to maintain political hegemony by a Committee operating under a guise of mistaken virtue. Clearly the revolutionary correlation of virtue and terror owes little to the accommodative, particularistic and tolerant conception of virtue espoused by Rousseau.

Did Rousseau endorse revolution as a means to democratic, virtuous republicanism?

Consciously or not, Rousseau seems to endorse revolution as a means to create the ideal society.³¹ The "noble" transformation of society is a radical concept by any measure, accentuated by Rousseau's observation that an oppressive law was justifiably disobeyed. For Rousseau, the denial of popular sovereignty warranted revolt: "In the history of the state there are occasionally violent periods...(wherein) revulsion against the past acts as a substitute for a loss of memory and the state, blazing in civil war, is born from its

ashes and resumes the vigour of its youth as it escapes from the arms of death."³² This would seem a prophecy for the thrust of French politics from 1793-1795, and suggests that Rousseau might have endorsed the violent upheaval directed by Robespierre's group.

Was violence the inevitable consequence of Rousseau's revolutionism?

Rousseau, like Aquinas, Locke and numerous eighteenth century political thinkers, allowed for revolt; however, this does not mean Rousseau believed that revolution and violence were mutually inclusive variables. In fact, in dedicating his Discourse on Inequality Rousseau warns of the danger of revolution to an extent equalled in Burke's Reflections - the magnum opus for conservative and incremental change during the eighteenth century. For Rousseau, revolution was risky business, more apt to worsen the condition of society; that is, humankind might well emerge from one form of slavery only to be enslaved by another. Furthermore, the tendency of revolution to degenerate into violent blood-letting threatened social cohesion, making the scenario too costly even as a means of forging liberty.³³ Ultimately, Rousseau denied that a sudden transformation would secure reform.³⁴ Rousseau wrote it best: "It is prudent ... [as well as] possible to effect the patrie by degrees and without any perceptible revolution."³⁵

Rousseau's doctrine was relatively conservative in the sense that reform was to cleave, as far as possible, to

existing institutions; although imperfect, old-established institutions were a manifestation of a simpler and less corrupt age. "The task" Rousseau wrote, "is not so much to alter as to perfect the existing state of affairs."³⁶ To the Poles, Rousseau added: "While revealing your plan in its full extent, you should not abruptly begin putting it into operation in such a way as to fill to the republic with malcontents; ...Never shake the machine too brusquely."³⁷ If such appeared necessary, Rousseau warned: "Caution must be exercised in deciding this, and make sure to distinguish between legitimate actions and seditious tumult, between the will of an entire people and the clamour of a faction."³⁸ Everyone would have done well to cite this passage, at one time or another, during the Revolution.

Rousseau's prescription for reform in revolutionary France would have been one of caution, not violence and terror: "What man would dare... to abolish old customs... and give to the state [France] a form different from that which 1,300 years of existence have brought in?"³⁹ This statement by Rousseau, more than any other, suggests that the violent nature of revolutionary Terror marked a significant departure from Rousseauist doctrine.

Did Robespierre's group exercise cautious reform?

Rousseau's cautious approach to reform required a period of tranquillity and stability; a time for people to "work upon

yourselves and rejuvenate your constitution."⁴⁰ Perhaps due to the volatile political environment of 1793-1795, Robespierre's group did not allow for the transition phase noted by Rousseau. The Terror moved forward relentlessly, yet to an undetermined end. Terror and revolution became synonymous in the process of virtuous transition; a process Rousseau believed would take time by its very nature and importance. In a phrase, Robespierre's group had shaken the machine too brusquely.

Would have Rousseau denounced the despotic nature of the Terror?

Thus far, we have established that Robespierre's group departed significantly from Rousseauist doctrine in terms of the purpose, foundations and means for democratic, republican and virtuous reform. How did the eradication of despotism, as crucial for creating a legitimate government, fit into this scenario? Addressing this issue demands examining Rousseau's views on centralized authority. The point here is to determine if the Terror was despotic and, if so, if such was a logical extension or a misinterpretation of Rousseau's thought.

Did Rousseau promote political centralization?

Rousseau argued that despotism was an "inherent and inevitable defect" of political centralization.⁴¹ This axiom was most pronounced in a democracy, as the weakening of

government had the effect of consolidating power by committee.⁴² The solution presented by Rousseau for a large nation was a system of federated government; federalism, not centralization, was the key for democratization.⁴³ Clearly, political centralization, and consequently despotism, had no place in Rousseau's notion of republican sovereignty. The wonderfully, simple solution lay in letting individuals rule themselves, not in a system of coercive dictatorship.

Did Rousseau separate executive and legislative functions?

It is assumed that Robespierre's group derived a justification for state tyranny from Rousseau's supposed hostility to a separation of governmental power as tantamount to a division of sovereignty.⁴⁴ This argument represents a shallow interpretation of Rousseauist doctrine. Indeed, Rousseau's referral to unanimity in the context of political authority, was a general one; he demanded a separation of executive and legislative functions.⁴⁵ For Rousseau, popular sovereignty was paramount and, thus, law-enforcers concerned with particular acts of government were not to infringe upon the law-making powers of the legislating and sovereign people. As Rousseau mused: "What is the government? It is an intermediary body established between the subjects and the sovereign to enable them to communicate with one another, and entrusted with the execution of the law."⁴⁶ Here we find no provision for the fusion of executive and legislative

functions under Robespierre's group. The Committee, in effect, prevented what it claimed to promote; the full exercising of popular sovereignty. Rousseau warned about this usurpation, arguing: "Any corporation which serves as a depository of executive authority tends strongly and continuously to subjugate the legislative power, and succeeds sooner or later."⁴⁷

Clearly, executive authority fell under the watchful aegis of the legislature and, thus, with representation rejected, the sovereign people.⁴⁸ Governmental centralization undermined the full and equal expression of sovereignty, resulting in despotism - not republicanism. Under these circumstances, Rousseau asserted that "the people are enslaved to a single man; I see in them nothing more than a master and his slaves, I do not see a people and its ruler."⁴⁹

How does this relate to the practice of revolutionary terror?

Rousseau's concern about the odious nature of governmental centralization was most marked in the context of the large nation, as "the capital city breathes forth a constant pestilence which finally saps and destroys everything."⁵⁰ Rousseau was not denying the need for a focal point for political power, as he suggested that the seat of government in a large nation rotate from province to province. The thing to avoid was one urban area deciding, unilaterally, the national agenda. That Paris was the loci of Jacobin hegemony and the fuelling ground for the ideology of

revolutionary terror, testifies to Rousseau's warning - not his posthumous endorsement. Again, the political centralization and state tyranny implemented by Robespierre's group was contrary to Rousseau's prescription.

The view that Rousseau provided a congenial spirit for state tyranny evolves from a failure to accept that Rousseau meant what he wrote respecting a separation of legislative and executive functions. Robespierre's group confused rather than applied Rousseau's doctrine in this context, as the political practice of the Committee neglected his summarization: "In a word, no function which has a particular object belongs to the legislative power."⁵¹ The fact of the matter is that the Committee made and enforced upon particular victims numerous laws. The Law of 22 Prairial, and its relationship to the Great Terror, echoed Rousseau's contention that a fusion of legislative and executive functions would result in the abusive usurpation of popular sovereignty. Clearly, the administrative and legislative means for terror are not endorsed by Rousseau, given his denunciation of political centralization. If anything, the despotism of Robespierre's group manifested Rousseau's ominous prophecy: "The usurpation of sovereignty leads the government to assume that it has the support of those whom fear prevents from speaking, and to punish those who dare to speak."⁵² To satisfy Rousseau's requirements for a legitimate government, the Committee would have had to put two questions to the sovereign people: Does

it please the sovereign to preserve the present form of government? Does it please the people to put its administration in the hands of those who are actually in charge of it?⁵³ Robespierre's group asked neither of these questions. The Terror was an absolute denial of Rousseau's notion of political right, as rooted in the equal participation of the entire citizenry, rendering the Committee's legitimacy not more than that "of what a master has over its slaves."⁵⁴

What about Rousseau's allowance for the suspension of the law and the promotion of a "supreme ruler" in times of peril? Rousseau attached to this allowance two significant qualifications. First, Rousseau argued that a dictatorship should be brief, no matter the extent of peril.⁵⁵ In declaring the government "revolutionary until peace", Robespierre's group had stretched Rousseau's allowance. Second, Rousseau was adamant that the "supreme ruler" was not to make laws. That the Law of 22 Prairial originated from the Committee means, effectively, that the "legal" entrenchment of terror defied Rousseau's doctrine in this context.

Where does all of this leave us?

Thus far, Rousseau's doctrine differs significantly from the justifications offered by Robespierre's group for terror on a number of counts. First, Rousseau would have lamented the attempt to institute "pure" democracy in a nation as large

and wealthy as a revolutionary France. Second, Rousseau did not contend that monarchism and republicanism were necessarily antithetical. Third, Rousseau denounced the use of violent revolutionism as a means to the end of social and political reform. Fourth, Rousseau argued that an attempt to realize a rigid and all-encompassing concept of virtue was so much whistling in the dark. Fifth, the centralization of political authority was a denial rather than an application of Rousseauist doctrine. On all counts, Robespierre's group thought otherwise in endorsing the Terror. On all of these counts Rousseau may be acquitted of the charge that his political philosophy endorsed the arbitrary persecution and execution of those questioning the Committee's policies.

The aforementioned variables refer, essentially, to the "institutionalization" of the Terror. Now we must address the variables underpinning and allegedly justifying the "focus" of the Terror; namely, nationalism, factionalism and civil religion. The important issues here are what did Rousseau think of such matters and to what extent does such relate to the justifications offered by Robespierre's group for the application of terror?

NATIONALISM, FACTIONALISM AND ROUSSEAU'S CALL FOR CIVIL RELIGION

Does Rousseau's brand of nationalism equate with that espoused

to justify the Terror?

What is meant by nationalism? In our context, the concept refers to the relationship of revolutionary France with other European nations, the causes of war and, in turn, the rationale for terror.

By promoting the right of a nation to self-defense Rousseau indirectly allowed for the possibility of war. However, he offered a qualification: "A sudden invasion is a great misfortune, no doubt, but permanent enslavement is a far greater one."⁵⁶ Furthermore, Rousseau held that the potential of war to "enslave" a people was more pronounced for those doing the invading. Hence, Rousseau's denunciation of wars of conquest and the ideal of cosmopolitanism. Essentially, the latter led to the former, undermining domestic stability and peace, and thereby denying the possibility for civil and political liberty. "The essential thing is to be good to those amongst whom one lives", wrote Rousseau, "and beware of those cosmopolitans who go looking afar in their books for the duties they disclaim to recognize around them."⁵⁷ Rousseau would have advised Robespierre's group that "such wars almost always end by a loss of freedom."⁵⁸

To justify war in terms of cosmopolitanism was, according to Rousseau, no more than a means for a government to elicit the blind faith of the people toward a policy of aggrandizement. Thus Rousseau advised: "Pay no more attention to foreign powers than as if they did not exist."⁵⁹ The key

to humanity was confining attention to one's fellow-citizens.⁶⁰ Indeed, people were more concerned with just rule and peace, than the glory and power of the state.⁶¹ Clearly, then, the Committee's claim that war was necessary to spread the virtues of the Revolution across Europe was contrary to the advice given by Rousseau. Equally clearly, the use of terror to impose the cosmopolitan flavour of revolutionary warfare transcended the defensive nature of Rousseau's allowance. In the end, the 'nationalistic' wars conducted under the auspices of Robespierre's group resulted in the subjugation of liberty and, thus, undermined the crux of citizenship.

Rousseau would have certainly told the Committee that its proper course lay in co-existing with its foreign neighbours; that is, once the attacks wrought upon France had been fended off, the Committee had best not assume this as an opportunity to take the offensive. "No people has much chance of self-preservation", wrote Rousseau, "unless it places itself in a sort of equilibrium with all the rest [nations], which more or less equalizes the pressure."⁶² Robespierre's group would have done well to heed this dictum.

Did Rousseau hold factionalism a threat to republicanism?

Rousseau's concept of secular redemption hinged upon the indivisible and inalienable general will - a point elaborated upon shortly. For now, suffice it to note that the public good required an absence of interest groups promoting

sectional advantages. Thus, political rivalries represented a sectarian competition to claim representation of the general will. But Rousseau stressed that sovereignty cannot be represented by an individual or a partial group, the danger of factionalism being that "when one of these associations wins out over all the others, you no longer have a general will, and the view that wins out is only a private will."⁶³ Factionalism detracted from good order and precipitated anarchy, and rather than minimizing civil and political tensions, it accentuated and entrenched discord at the expense of liberty and equality. We begin to see the embryo of Rousseau's conviction that the representational aspects of government provided the most fertile ground for the operation of factions. Regardless of the particular form of government, factionalism threatened republican unanimity. Robespierre's group certainly agreed in so many words, but not in practice. For the Committee was itself a partial faction in the fullest sense of Rousseau's lexicon.

How would have Rousseau resolved differences of opinion?

Censorship and the death penalty are commonly assumed to be two means endorsed by Rousseau to circumvent the ramifications of factionalism. However, these measures were qualified by Rousseau. First, Rousseau presented the censor's task as the preservation of existing morals - morals emanating from a properly discerned notion of republican virtue. The point is that the censor was to never re-establish or create morals. Robespierre, more radical here than any other Committee member, did not make such a qualification upon the mandate of the revolutionary censor.

Second, too much stress is placed upon Rousseau's isolated approval for prescribing the death penalty to those opposing the republic. This allowance was made in a specific context, as the general will must have been properly discerned by an unbiased source and opposition must be continual and active. Furthermore, Rousseau concluded that the death penalty signified a weak government, resorting to force where it failed in the art of persuasion.⁶⁴ Robespierre's group had entirely neglected the contextual prerequisites laid down by Rousseau for the death penalty.

Did Rousseau's view of factionalism parallel that of Robespierre's group?

Robespierre's group certainly distrusted factions, moving the Committee to employ censorship and the death penalty in the service of republican unanimity; that is, to remedy the

civil disorder, divisiveness and factional strife caused by political in-fighting and foreign conflict. The Terror was the primary instrument used to this end, the consequence being the ascendancy of Robespierre's group to the upper echelons of political power. The paradox here, and tied to Robespierre's reliance upon arguments supporting representational democracy, is that the expression of partial interests was inevitable. The Committee was besieged by opponents from all sides, and the Robespierre was prepared to apply terror against Jacobin compatriots was starkly displayed by the execution of Brissot and Danton.

The idea that factionalism undermined republic unanimity is traceable to Rousseauist doctrine, producing difficulties in acquitting Rousseau of the charge of posthumously endorsing the tyranny of revolutionary terror. But again, Rousseau qualified his observations in ways neglected by Robespierre's group.

First, Rousseau's denunciation of factions evolved from a contempt for the host of privileged groups in eighteenth century Europe which curbed the meaningful expression of liberty and equality. Most notable were the Parlements of France and the Petit Conseil of Geneva. But Rousseau's critique was a trend during the Enlightenment and if we cannot accept this, we should at least be able to understand it.⁶⁵

Second, Rousseau's opinion on censorship, and the extreme corollary of execution, is significantly qualified. If forced

to choose between factionalism and censorship, Rousseau would have opted for the former: "Discipline is good, but liberty is better; and the more you hedge liberty with formalities, the more means of usurpation will these formalities furnish."⁶⁶ "It is an even greater evil", added Rousseau, "for a good citizen not to dare to speak; they will soon say nothing but what is apt to please the powerful."⁶⁷ Clearly, Rousseau held freedom of expression superior to coerced unanimity.

Third, Rousseau argued that factions can and may exist.⁶⁸ He even praised the Polish Confederation, by definition a conglomeration of regionalized factions within an overarching political entity. The reality was that the state consisted of a nexus of smaller associations - a position clearly reiterated through Rousseau's Political Economy.

Fourth, Rousseau was prepared to accommodate the existence of factions. For Rousseau, under such circumstances "it is best to have as many [factions] as possible to prevent them from being unequal."⁶⁹ The thrust here is to prevent the tendency of bloc voting to circumvent individual expression and the deliberation process.⁷⁰

Fifth, in claiming to represent virtue and all its trappings, Robespierre's group was precisely what Rousseau would have termed a faction. Recall Brissot's remark: "They think [Robespierre's group] they have the general will, but all they have is the will of a faction..."⁷¹ Robespierre's group could function as a faction, according to Rousseauist

doctrine; however, the group's justification for terror based on the contention that it was not a faction defies Rousseau's logic.

What, then, of Rousseau's relationship to terror and the eradication of factions?

Rousseau would have questioned the correlation between factionalism and terror on a number of counts. First, rather than promoting the existence of many factions, Robespierre's group used terror to limit varied opinions as far as possible. But proscribing the freedom of expression was the reverse of Rousseau's position. Furthermore, the Terror created precisely what Rousseau had warned against - discontent and divisiveness. Indeed, the persecution of refractory priests incensed the urban masses and in turn, compelled Robespierre's group to move against the sans-culottes.

Second, much of the dissension within France was caused by the misguided policy for 'liberating' Europe from the yoke of monarchism. Rousseau would have condemned the use of terror in this context on two levels: monarchism was not necessarily antithetical to republicanism; Frenchmen would have been best served by tending to the nation's domestic concerns following the defensive victories of late 1794.

Third, in claiming prematurely and mistakenly to representing the general will, Robespierre's group was itself a faction in Rousseauist lexicon. Indeed, the Committee's hegemony manifested Rousseau's worries about the ascendancy

of a partial association - not his explicit or implicit endorsement.

All told, Robespierre's group justified terror along the lines of vanquishing factionalism because its untenable position meant that opposition was intolerable. Had the invocation of Rousseau's doctrine heeded his qualifications, Robespierre's group would have accommodated rather than obliterated factions.

Did Rousseau's concept of civil religion influence Robespierre's group?

For Rousseau, republican unanimity was reflected in the observance of the civil religion. This concept, as expounded in the penultimate chapter of the Social Contract, seems to support the allegation that Rousseau was an apostle of tyranny and the theoretical architect of the Terror. It is difficult to dismiss the doctrinaire nature of Rousseau's civil religion for two reasons: it seems absurd to suggest that detractors of the civil religion retire from the community; Rousseau allows for the death penalty as a means of protecting the civil faith.

Civil religion was to fuse religious sentiment and love of country; that is, induce a necessary connection between the virtuous individual and the good state. In this sense, civil religion was fundamental to republicanism, but was not an end in and of itself. Rousseau's promotion of the concept evolved from a distrust of priestly Christianity as a religion fit for

slaves and for those without a fatherland.⁷² The chief assertion was that traditional religion created "dual loyalties" for an individual between the Church and the State. The consequence of this struggle over spiritual and temporal allegiance was a destruction of the corps moral. There is nothing really new in this claim - as evidenced by debates emerging from the Theory of the Two Swords during the last millennium - for the purpose of civil religion was establishing the community as superior to a partial association like the Church.

Rousseau's civil religion was only concerned with aspects of religion referring to public welfare and social morality - the duties of individuals and citizens. This was not a call for atheism; Rousseau's civil sentiment was cornerstoned by a recognition of Providence and Divinity as manifest in the Cult of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul. Such must be glorified constantly.

Furthermore, Rousseau's civil religion was more moderate than often assumed. In fact, Rousseau did not grant the religion absolute authority, nor did he place it under the auspices of the executive. Moral corruption was part of the "nature of things" and civil religion fell to the direction of the community, actively legislating through the expression of the general will. Ultimately, the best one could hope for was the recognition of a civil sentiment, leading Rousseau to conclude the Social Contract with an eloquent denunciation of

intolerance.

Robespierre's group certainly accepted that civil religion was key to republican unanimity and virtue. As Saint-Just argued: "If men were given laws which harmonize with the dictates of nature and of [their] heart[s] [they] he will cease to be unhappy and corrupt."⁷³ Furthermore, the zeal for civil religion exuded by the Committee was rooted in a profound distrust of traditional Christianity; civil sentiment, as with Rousseau, was intended to resolve "dual loyalties" and vanquish a corrupt priesthood. Moreover, Robespierre's group held Providence, Divinity, the Supreme Being and the immorality of the soul the crucial elements of the new faith. Such was to be taught in schools and worshipped at Public Festivals. Robespierre was not exaggerating when he promoted Rousseau as the new Jesus of the moral republic.⁷⁴

Did Rousseau's civil religion differ from that professed by Robespierre's group?

Rousseau and Robespierre's group had common ground respecting the purpose, importance and content of civil religion; however, significant differences existed in the terms in which the concept was enshrined during the Committee's reign. First, Rousseau contended that religious ceremonies must be "simple and proud, not pompous, brilliant and frivolous."⁷⁵ Robespierre's Festivals were anything but simple, as he and his followers had entered the realm of

vanity.

Second, Robespierre's group betrayed the essence of civil religion by using terror as an instrument to produce faith. The indispensable element of Rousseau's civil religion was mutual toleration and the exclusion of religious intolerance. As Rousseau observed: "theological intolerance must inevitably have some civil effect; ... the sovereign is no longer sovereign."⁷⁶ Furthermore, Rousseau added that "it [civil religion] can compel no one to believe..."⁷⁷ Thus, Rousseau proscribed the religious intolerance manifest in the effort of Robespierre's group to impose value judgements under the guise of civil religion.

Third, while Rousseau and Robespierre's group agreed that civil religion was a celebration "appropriate for a free people", were Frenchmen free and by whose definition? The point here is that Rousseau believed that the citizenry must embody the attributes of civil sentiment prior to the institutionalization of the civil religion; that is, the cause of moral freedom must be its effect. This is heady stuff, but all it really means is that moral people make for good institutions; civil and political structures alone cannot create a moral citizenry. Robespierre's group failed to incorporate this axiom, as evidenced by the simultaneous implementation of the Cult of the Supreme Being and the Law of 22 Prairial. Consequently, while Rousseau suggested that people "might be forced to be free", Robespierre's group

accepted such as a hard political fact. Significantly, Robespierre declared "I am the people" - the vicar of civil religion - an assertion Rousseau believed beyond the aspirations of mere mortals.

Fourth, Rousseau's qualified approach to addressing recalcitrants was entirely ignored by Robespierre's group. Rousseau prescribed the death penalty for individuals whose claim to recognize the civil religion did not match their actions.⁷⁸ This is not the same thing as justifying terror against those who opposed the civil religion in both word and deed. Furthermore, Rousseau's allowance of "forcing men to be free" is not as sinister as Robespierre's invocation would suggest. The real crux of Rousseau's position was that in order for an individual to enjoy the benefits of existing in civil society - which was absolutely necessary - one had to contribute a fair share to the maintenance of the community. Rousseau, in effect, was assailing the notion of "free-riders" by defining civil sentiment in terms of observing the law. Moreover, Rousseau held the death penalty a sign of a weak and mistaken government, resorting to tyrannical abuses where it had failed in the art of persuasion. In the end, Rousseau presented banishment as a practical alternative to the death penalty. This is not an absurd idea, nor is it primarily Rousseauist; Locke had previously asserted that residence in a civil society was tantamount to an acceptance of its guiding principles and laws.

What, then, of Rousseau's civil religion and the Terror?

As with other key justifications for the Terror, Robespierre's group failed to accurately interpret Rousseau's notion of civil religion. The fact of the matter is that Robespierre's group betrayed the essence of Rousseau's construct in claiming to personify the attributes of civil religion; republican sentiment was a socially collective manifestation, not an individual trait. Thus, the Terror was partly the result of the sacrosanct opinion Robespierre's group held of itself, hardly sanctioned by Rousseau.⁷⁹ Essentially, the brand of civil religion espoused by Robespierre's group was no more than a particular concept of a partial group. In the end, the Committee used the importance of civil religion to justify the abuses of the Terror, but the concept was more a tool of political expediency to entrench its hegemony. Once again, Rousseauist doctrine proscribed, rather than prescribed, the policy of terror.

Where does all of this leave us?

Thus far, we have seen that Robespierre's group significantly misinterpreted important aspects of Rousseauist doctrine in justifying the Terror. We have also made numerous references to the General Will Theory; expounding upon which is crucial, as the legitimacy of Rousseau's many prescriptions

rested foremost upon the recognition of the general will. If we can show that Robespierre's group misinterpreted or misapplied Rousseau's concept of the general will, then the previous arguments are augmented to the extent that the claim of Rousseau being the theoretical architect of the Terror is largely destroyed. In this case, we would be left to consider what led the Committee astray from the holistic approach of Rousseau.

THE GENERAL WILL AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ITS REPRESENTATION

What was Rousseau's view of the general will?

For Rousseau, the general will was the political manifestation of man's moral needs and virtues. If properly discerned, its operation was infallible and indivisible - and inalienable for the same reasons. Rousseau revealed the absolute necessity of the general will thus: "Each of us puts in common his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will."⁸⁰ He was adamant on this point, and his detractors have taken this to mean that Rousseau put the general will over partial interests. This is correct; but is the logical implication of the General Will Theory the totalitarian intolerance evidenced during the Terror?

Rousseau defined the general will as "the sum of the

differences of each private will, as distinct from the will of all, which is simply a sum of the private wills."⁸¹ This amounts to a reconciliation of popular sovereignty and the sanctity of the state, for the "will of all" is the product of selfish interests and the "general will" is an expression of community interest. The thrust of his position was to guarantee that all citizens were at liberty to participate in this expression. Undeniably, the general will demanded that public goods take precedence over private goods; in this way the friction between individual and community interest was resolved. But the legitimacy of the state turned on its potential to reflect the general will as firmly rooted in notion of popular sovereignty. To deny the sovereign its inalienable right to constantly express the general will was tantamount to surrendering liberty. That is, a legitimate law must be willed by all citizens and applicable to all members of society. People would rule themselves; a wonderfully simple solution to the problem of directing, yet guaranteeing, a free citizenry.

In Rousseauist lexicon, to disobey the general will is to disobey a law one has prescribed for oneself. Hence the theoretical allowance for "forcing men to be free". But again the law must reflect a general will properly discerned. If it is otherwise, the citizens have the right and duty to change the law.⁸² Under no circumstances is the general will to seek recourse in coercion. "To yield to force", wrote

Rousseau, "is an act of necessity, not of will; at the very most it is an act of prudence. In what sense is it a duty?"⁸³ This comment speaks directly to Rousseau's view that the government was the minister of the sovereign, not sovereign in and itself. The general will was not the business of the executive authority. As Rousseau summarized: "Just as the private will cannot represent the General Will, the general will in turn changes nature when it has a particular object, and cannot, being general, pronounce either on a man or a fact."⁸⁴

Did Robespierre's group reflect key elements of Rousseau's General Will Theory?

Rousseau and Robespierre's group agreed that the general will was the hallmark of the virtuous republic, and that the concept superseded the "will of all". Furthermore, both parties believed that the government must enforce the laws protecting and maintaining the expression of the general will. Moreover, Rousseau and Robespierre's group contended that a rigorous system of laws was fundamental to the process. Indeed, Rousseau's view of law as an expression of the General Will parallels Saint-Just's assertion that "outside of the laws everything is sterile and dead."⁸⁵ All of this suggests that the Committee reflected Rousseau's General Will Theory; however, a significant departure emerged on the determination and representation of the general will.

In what ways did Rousseau's concept of the General Will differ from that of Robespierre's group?

Robespierre's group accepted Rousseau's claim that people remained corrupt; yet it neglected to accommodate this point when promoting an infallible general will. Rousseau's recognition compelled him to argue that until such time as the citizenry accomplished its transition to virtue, the best republicanism could achieve was a legitimate government. Robespierre's group claimed that its general will was, in fact, infallible thereby dismissing the incremental approach crucial to Rousseau's position. While Rousseau defined virtue in terms of the general will, the perception espoused by the Committee amounted to no more than obeying government dictates.

This difference stemmed from the Committee's denial of the citizenry's full and equal participation in the expression of the general will - yet another of Rousseau's demands. By 1794, Robespierre's group had proscribed the participation of the Royalists, Feuillants, aristocrats, Brissotins, Dantontists and Hebertist. Either an almost entire nation had missed the mark on virtue, or the general will presented by Robespierre's group was flawed. In either case, according to Rousseau, the political environment of France before or after the Revolution was not conducive for entrenching a properly discerned general will. Furthermore, and absolutely contrary to Rousseau's allowances, Robespierre's group claimed to represent the general will. The Committee was "having its

cake and eating it, with a vengeance."⁸⁶

For Saint-Just "the [objective] of the natural will of the people...is to sanctify the objective interests of the majority."⁸⁷ This belief would devolve quickly into a "tyranny of the minority", but in the meantime Robespierre's group had confounded Rousseau's distinction between executive and legislative functions - the sanctuary of the general will lay in the gouvernement revolutionnaire rather than a Rousseauist sovereign community. For Rousseau, this amounted to the usurpation of sovereignty, not the expression of the general will. The partiality Rousseau attempted to circumvent became full-blown through the Committee. Indeed, Robespierre lectured: "I am better placed than anyone else to judge and make pronouncements about individuals."⁸⁸ Contrast this to Rousseau's assertion:

When cliques and partial associations are formed at the expense of the whole, the will of each of these associations becomes general with reference to its members, and particular with reference to the state; then it can no longer be said that there are as many voters as there are individuals, but only as many as there are associations. The differences become less numerous, and give a less general result.⁸⁹

Regardless of its intentions, the Committee was a partial association in Rousseau's lexicon and, thus, moved government policy away from the general will. The "general will" of Robespierre's era was neither general nor generally held by all. "It is undeniable", wrote Carr, "that the Robespierrists were unfaithful to this article of Rousseauist canon."⁹⁰

Did Robespierre's group reflect Rousseau's concern about representation?

Earlier, we noted that Rousseau's stricture of democracy centered on its penchant for factionalism. This criticism was most pronounced in the context of the general will. Democracy, by definition, meant representation and the entrenchment of intermediary bodies in the expression of the general will. In Rousseauist terms, this resulted in the usurpation of popular sovereignty as the partial association with the most power ultimately decided the content and direction of a general will.⁹¹ Essentially, then, Rousseau denounced representation on two grounds; the general will cannot be represented by either individuals or political institutions.

Rousseau's notion of a republican general will turns on the "rule of all by all". Representation implies that the citizenry has withdrawn from the public-realm, thereby weakening the connection between individual and community interests. The consequence for the sovereign community, in Rousseau's estimation: "As soon as a people gives itself representatives, it is no longer free, and no longer exists."⁹² Rousseau saw parliamentary democracy as particularly prone toward the perversion of the general will through its reliance upon representation: "Sovereignty cannot be represented; ...every law the people has not ratified in person is null and void. The people of England [are] free

during the election. As soon as they [representatives] are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing."⁹³ Institutional representation detracts from the general will. "You cannot corrupt the people", wrote Rousseau, "but you can often deceive it; and it is then only that it seems to will something bad."⁹⁴ Individual representation also corrupts the general will. As Rousseau advised: "They [representatives] are hard to deceive, but easy to corrupt."⁹⁵

Rousseau the theoretician hoped for the unmitigated expression of the general will, "for in the presence of the person represented, the representative no longer exists."⁹⁶ But Rousseau realized that representation was part-and-parcel of the expanding nation-state system of eighteenth century Europe. Under this scenario, government power was accentuated, rendering absolutely necessary the frequent assembly of the sovereign people. In order to prevent the foresaking of the general will, Rousseau made two proposals. First, the large nations of Europe should opt for an elected aristocracy under a federation of small republics. Second, if representation was a reality, politicians must be subject to recall and referendum, and must give strict account to their constituents, for "the deputies of the people...are only its commissioners; they can conclude nothing definitively.... Power can well be transmitted, but not will."⁹⁷ Neglecting these proposals meant that representation was nothing more than the substitution of despotism for despotism. The primary

casualty was the general will and, thus, popular sovereignty, as the citizenry was removed from active participation in directing the moral republic.

Robespierre's group relied upon democratic arguments for support. This was particularly true in soliciting support from the sans-culottes. The result, of course, was the enshrinement of representation. But Robespierre's definition of democracy clearly reflected that the people had a secondary role in directing the republic: "Democracy is not a state in which the people...itself directs public affairs."⁹⁸ Furthermore, and unlike Rousseau, Robespierre left little scope for the unmitigated expression of a general will. For Robespierre "the people does for itself what it can do well, and by its delegates what it cannot."⁹⁹ Rather than representatives acting as a trustee of a sovereign people aware of its needs, Robespierre's group presented representatives as those equipped to resolve the inadequacies of the people. Rousseau's concept of popular sovereignty and political right was turned on its head. Megalomania set in as Rousseau's warnings of representation and its inclination toward interpretation of the general will were fully evidenced during 1794-95. As Lefebvre says, revolutionary representation was based on the idea that through legal displays of the peoples' will, representatives had the power to force compliance.¹⁰⁰ Everything we have noted of Rousseau thus far suggests that Robespierre's group had clearly

misinterpreted or ignored Rousseau's doctrine as regarded the perils of representation.

Might Robespierre's group be excused by fulfilling Rousseau's conditions for a Legislator?

As we have seen, Robespierre's group claimed the potential to represent the general will, and in doing so found a justification for terror to the end of establishing an infallible, indivisible and inalienable republic. We also know, however, that the whole scenario transgressed the significance of allowance offered by Rousseauist doctrine. At this juncture, we might look again at Rousseau's notion of Legislator as a possible vindication for Committee policy. That is, the case for linking Rousseau to the Terror is not destroyed if Robespierre's group met the requirements of Rousseau's Legislator.

Rousseau's Legislator was to discern the general will; Robespierre's group certainly agreed, and used this provision to endorse its role as representative of sovereignty. Robespierre meant it when he said, "I am the people", and it was a short jump for the group to justify terror as a legitimate weapon in the Legislator's arsenal. "It is time", alleged Saint Just, "that we laboured for the happiness of the people. Legislators ... must pursue their course as unswerving as the sun."¹⁰¹

Rousseau's Legislator evolved from a need for civil

architects to avoid wasting their time saying what ought to be done; "[one] should do it or be silent."¹⁰² Effectively, the Legislator's task resulted from the people's inability to direct for themselves, the transition from corruption to virtue. Consequently, Rousseau wrote, "It would need gods to give laws to men."¹⁰³ Now, Rousseau's Legislator may not have been god-like, but he would have been semi-divine and compelled by impartiality and dispassion in discerning an acceptable and workable set of political and social institutions.

In spite of the Legislator's significance, Rousseau offers qualifications beyond those of personal attributes. First, the Legislator must rely upon persuasion in seeking the sovereign's endorsement for his recommendations. Any relaxation of this condition would invite the of private aims, Rousseau suggested, and "would inevitably mar the sanctity of his work."¹⁰⁴ Second, the Legislator must not participate in either magistracy or the expression of sovereignty.¹⁰⁵ Such augments the effort to leave particular will in conformity with general will. Third, Rousseau's Legislator cannot employ coercion.¹⁰⁶

Robespierre's group thought it collectively personified the Legislator; but did the justifications for terror in this context reflect an application of Rousseau's qualifications? The preponderance of the evidence supports a negative response. First, Robespierre's group consisted of mortals

and, thus, were as prone to corruption as anyone else. By Rousseau's measure, then, the Committee was neither semi-divine nor impartial. Second, Robespierre's group was many things, but not persuasive. Third, as law-makers and law-enforcers, Robespierre's group clearly entered the realm of magistracy and sovereignty. Fourth, the Terror was precisely an overt expression of coercion. All told, then, the partial, confrontational, legislative and violent programme of the Committee precluded it from assuming the role of Rousseau's Legislator. As such, it is absurd to argue that terror was endorsed by utilizing Rousseau on this point of doctrine. Indeed, "public terror" was envisaged by Rousseau as the result of men assuming the Legislator's function; such usurpers "made fine speeches on liberty in the depths of slavery."¹⁰⁷

Comparing the justifications for revolutionary terror to Rousseauist doctrine established that Robespierre's group either misinterpreted or neglected Rousseau on at least ten counts. In the end, Rousseau did not provide a theoretical endorsement for the tyrannical Reign of Virtue during 1793-94, in spite of the Committee's constant invocation of his doctrine. In fact, the analysis suggests that those espousing Rousseau's programme - like Mirabeau and Brissot - were the victims rather than perpetrators of the Terror. The endeavor to sort out the rationale for arbitrary persecution prior to 9 Thermidor must look to sources other than Jean-Jacques

Rousseau.

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- ²⁸Cole, xiv.

- ²⁹Rousseau, "Poland" 273.
- ³⁰Rousseau, "Corsica" 325.
- ³¹Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 8.
- ³²Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 8.
- ³³Cobban, 56.
- ³⁴Hampson, Will 77.
- ³⁵Rousseau, "Poland" 251.
- ³⁶Rousseau, "Corsica" 336.
- ³⁷Rousseau, "Poland" 272.
- ³⁸Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. III.
- ³⁹Rousseau, "Poland" 267.
- ⁴⁰Rousseau, "Poland" 267.
- ⁴¹Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 10.
- ⁴²Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 7.
- ⁴³Rousseau, "Poland" 202.
- ⁴⁴Cobban, 101.
- ⁴⁵Cobban, 102.
- ⁴⁶Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 1.
- ⁴⁷Rousseau, "Poland" 190.
- ⁴⁸Rousseau, "Poland" 191.
- ⁴⁹Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. I, Ch. 5.
- ⁵⁰Rousseau, "Corsica" 292.
- ⁵¹Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 6.
- ⁵²Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 18.
- ⁵³Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 18.
- ⁵⁴Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. I, Ch. 4.

- ⁵⁵Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. IV, Ch. 6.
- ⁵⁶Rousseau, "Poland" 243.
- ⁵⁷Rousseau, "Poland" 246.
- ⁵⁸Rousseau, "Poland" 242.
- ⁵⁹Rousseau, "Corsica" 381.
- ⁶⁰Rousseau, "Political Economy" 130.
- ⁶¹Cobban, 183.
- ⁶²Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 9.
- ⁶³Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 2.
- ⁶⁴Rousseau, "Poland" 192.
- ⁶⁵Cobban, 71.
- ⁶⁶Rousseau, "Poland" 198.
- ⁶⁷Rousseau, "Poland" 198.
- ⁶⁸Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 3.
- ⁶⁹Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 3.
- ⁷⁰Rousseau, "Poland" 204.
- ⁷¹Bruun, 147.
- ⁷²Rousseau, "Poland" 193.
- ⁷³Bruun, 47.
- ⁷⁴Blum, 135.
- ⁷⁵Rousseau, "Poland" 170.
- ⁷⁶Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. IV, Ch. 8.
- ⁷⁷Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. IV, Ch. 8.
- ⁷⁸Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. IV, Ch. 8.
- ⁷⁹Carr, 122.
- ⁸⁰Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. I, Ch. 6.

- ⁸¹Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 4.
- ⁸²Rousseau, "Political Economy" 123.
- ⁸³Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. I, Ch. 3.
- ⁸⁴Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 4.
- ⁸⁵Bruun, 46.
- ⁸⁶Hampson, Will 247.
- ⁸⁷Brunn, 140.
- ⁸⁸Hampson, Will 235.
- ⁸⁹Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 3.
- ⁹⁰Carr, 122.
- ⁹¹Cobban, 62.
- ⁹²Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 15.
- ⁹³Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 15.
- ⁹⁴Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 3.
- ⁹⁵Rousseau, "Poland" 192.
- ⁹⁶Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 4.
- ⁹⁷Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. III, Ch. 15.
- ⁹⁸Palmer, 115.
- ⁹⁹Gamble, 91.
- ¹⁰⁰Lefebvre, 43.
- ¹⁰¹Bruun, 32.
- ¹⁰²Rousseau, "Social Contract" Intro.
- ¹⁰³Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 7.
- ¹⁰⁴Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 7.
- ¹⁰⁵Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 7.
- ¹⁰⁶Rousseau, "Social Contract" Bk. II, Ch. 7.

¹⁰⁷Rousseau, "Corsica" 382.

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