

Péter Tánczos\*

**SELF, NATURE, AND THE LIMITS OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL SUBVERSION: THE  
“SOLITARY” ROUSSEAU-INTERPRETATION OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE**

**Abstract**

In this paper I suggest a typological distinction between political and philosophical subversion based on the interpretation of Nietzsche’s Rousseau-citations. These types of subversion are on different ontological and epistemological grounds. While the political subversion presupposes the identity of self and a clear distinction between culture and nature, the Nietzschean nominalist way of philosophical subversion denies these as misconceptions. Nietzsche identifies Rousseau as an actor of resentment of the political-cultural history, who found a new paradigm of thinking. I examine Nietzsche’s implicit distinction among these subversions based on the concepts of culture, nature, self and solitude.

120

---

**1. Unfashionable and virtuous elements of thinking**

If someone compares Friedrich Nietzsche’s political and educational writings to the early works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, numerous and significant analogies can be found. Both philosophers consider the current culture as a symptom of decadency, and they think that our civilized world completely lacks in proper virtues. According to them the noble virtue relates to some uncivilized, “barbaric” state; both thinkers question the absolute and progressive value of the cultural and scientific achievements. Neither Rousseau nor Nietzsche regard themselves as thinkers of their own ages, but they consider themselves as basically anachronistic philosophers. Both Rousseau and Nietzsche prefer the subversive methods in making new theories. When exclusively the analogies are taken into consideration, perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that Nietzsche is a “Rousseau” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (or Rousseau is a “Nietzsche” of the 18<sup>th</sup> century); although there are many differences between the Genevan and German author, so this statement of correlation is still an

---

\* Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary.

exaggerated assertion. To demonstrate the limits of the analogy firstly we should examine the above motives of intellectual similarities.

In the preface of *First Discourse* Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasises the anachronistic tendencies of his standpoint about the restoration of the sciences and arts:

“Clashing head on with all that is today admired by men, I can only expect universal blame: and it is not for having been honoured by the approbation of a few Wise men, that I should expect the approbation of the Public: Thus I have chosen my side; I do not care whether I please Wits or the Fashionable. There will always be men destined to be subjugated by the opinions of their century, their Country, their Society: Some men today act the Freethinker and the Philosopher who, for the same reason, would have been but fanatics at the tune of the League.”  
(Rousseau 1997a, p. 4.)

Rousseau is aware of the subversive character of his conception; though the *Discourse* won the prize of the Academy of Dijon because of the decision-making “few wise men”, the public will reject the unfashionable conclusions that the *Discourse* contains. The main cause of the approbation is the discrepancy between Rousseau’s theses and the convictions of the age. However, Rousseau supposes the universal validity of some ageless standpoints which are represented in, among others, his theory. Apart from this last consideration Nietzsche shares Rousseau’s view on the anachronistic task of the philosopher. In the late writing titled *The Case of Wagner* he writes that the thinker must overcome the notions and convictions of his age: “What does a philosopher demand of himself, first and last? To overcome his age, to become ‘timeless’. So what gives him his greatest challenge? Whatever marks him as a child of his age” (Nietzsche 2005b, p. 233.). Though Nietzsche, unlike Rousseau, denies the possibility of an eternal, absolute truth, he also rejects that the truth can be equated with the ageless accordance of wise men, with “consensus sapientium” (Nietzsche 2005a, p. 162.). Accordingly, Nietzsche’s anachronism is different from the analogous thought of Rousseau; while Rousseau identifies the unfashionable notions with the philosophical standpoints of the “wise men”, Nietzsche rejects the notion of “consensus sapientium” and considers the untimely thoughts to diverge from the invariable elements of the philosophical tradition. Nietzsche argues that the unfashionable way of thinking is in permanent movement.

The concept of untimeliness or unfashionableness (‘Unzeitgemässheit’) is more essential for Nietzsche than Rousseau. It is not by accident that Nietzsche gives the title *Unfashionable Meditations* to his second book. This text consists of four essays, and in each of them Nietzsche questions an unquestionable and evident notion of his age (e. g. the significance of history or culture). In the middle of the 1870s Nietzsche was planning a series of untimely meditations—he had ideas for fifty

essays, but finally only four was finished (Safranski 2002, p. 156.). In the third meditation he writes about untimeliness the following sentences:

“It was truly a flight into wishful thinking when I imagined I would find a true philosopher as educator, one who would elevate me above my inadequacies, to the extent that they were products of the age, and would teach me once again to be *simple* and *honest* in thought as in life—in short, to be unfashionable in the most profound sense of the word. For human beings today have become so multiple and complex that they cannot help but become dishonest the moment they want to speak at all, make assertions, and then act in accordance with them.” (Nietzsche 1995, p. 179.)

The task of the philosopher as educator is to relieve the youth of the conceptions and convictions of the age. The philosopher can help the younger contemporaries in this endeavour since a great thinker has already struggled against the fashionable convictions of himself. Thus, a proper philosopher is able to disassociate the fashionable elements from own untimely attributes:

“If every great human being prefers to be viewed as the true child of his age and, at any rate, suffers more severely and with greater sensitivity from its ailments than do all the lesser human beings, then the struggle of such a great person against his age appears to be nothing but a senseless and destructive struggle *against* himself. But indeed, it only appears to be so, for in his age he struggles against what prevents him from being great, and for him that simply means: from being free and entirely himself. From this it follows that his hostility is fundamentally directed at something that is a part of himself, but that is not actually his true self, against the impure confusion and coexistence of uncombinable and eternally irreconcilable things, against the false fusion of what in this age is fashionable with his unfashionableness; and ultimately the alleged child of his age turns out to be merely its *stepchild*.” (Nietzsche 1995, p. 194.)

The next relevant analogous concept of the two thinkers is the opposition of virtue and culture. Rousseau argues that the scientific and cultural progress corrupts the morality of People. In the *First Discourse* he gives several examples to the cultural corruption—e. g. Rome was found by a shepherd, but the cultural achievements made the “capital of the world”, the “temple of virtue” to the “theatre of crime” (Rousseau 1997a, p. 10.). Rousseau mentions that the improving of arts and luxury is directly proportional to the enervating of the “true courage” and the military virtues (Rousseau 1997a, p. 20.). It is quite clear that the ideal state of Rousseau is the ancient, virtuous Sparta:

“Athens became the home of sophistication and of taste, the country of Orators and Philosophers. The elegance of its Buildings matched that of the language. Marble and canvas enlivened by the hands of the most skilful Masters were everywhere to be seen. From Athens issued those astounding works that will stand as models in every corrupt age. The Picture of Lacedaemon is less brilliant. There, the other Peoples used to say, men are born virtuous, and the very air of the Country seems to inspire virtue.” (Rousseau 1997a, p. 12.)

Nietzsche also thinks that the virtuous person is more a barbarian master than a civilised poet or philosopher:

„Let us not be deceived about how every higher culture on earth has begun! Men whose nature was still natural barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, predatory people who still possessed an unbroken strength of will and lust for power threw themselves on weaker, more civilized, more peaceful races of tradesmen perhaps, or cattle breeders; or on old and mellow cultures in which the very last life-force was flaring up in brilliant fireworks of spirit and corruption. The noble caste always started out as the barbarian caste.” (Nietzsche 2002., p. 151.)

The Nietzschean “predatory people” symbolize the noble and virtuous men for him; this barbarian caste represents the primary “masters” morality oppositely to the current form of morals, to the “slave” morality (Nietzsche 2006b). On the contrary, Nietzsche does not disapprove the significance of the culture—according to him these barbarian masters are the founders of all great cultures. However it seems to be hard to imagine the barbarian origin of the high cultures. It is problematic to harmonise the affirmation of the wild, predatory values with the goals of the civilisation. Nietzsche creates a historic model to solve this philosophical problem. In the *Beyond Good and Evil* he argues that unfavourable conditions are in the backgrounds of the great states. A sturdy type of human comes into existence in the struggle against adverse circumstances. This strict, warlike type identifies his attributes as virtues, and aims to maintain the moral homogeneity of the state with extraordinary rigour. But if the adverse circumstances turn into favourable, the individual dares to be different and creates the cultural products of the type. The greatness of the renaissance Venice or the Greek polis can be traced back to this historic process: the artistic, scientific and philosophical works suddenly explode from the rigorous, military virtuosity (Nietzsche 2002, p. 158–159.). Accordingly, Nietzsche affirms the military virtues and the high culture together; his concept of virtue has noble, warlike as well as sophisticated characteristics.<sup>1</sup> As he describes it: “virtue in a style

---

<sup>1</sup> Schiller raises almost the same question: “can it bind nature in the savage, and set it free in the barbarian? Can it at once tighten a spring and loose it; and if it cannot produce this double effect, how will it be reasonable to expect from it so important a result as the

of Renaissance” (Nietzsche 2005c, p. 4.). In contrast to Rousseau, Nietzsche considers the Spartan state as the caricature of the polis (KSA 8: 60.), since a fully armed soldier cannot create culture (KSA 8: 64.).

The question of culture is connected to other central problem of the relevant philosophers too: the status of truth. According to Rousseau the drive for truth is not really a public but a private affair. In *Preface to Narcissus* he argues that the “taste for letters” only arises from two sources: idleness and craving for distinction (Rousseau 1997b, p. 97.). The latter is the more dangerous for the true virtue because the philosophers who want to achieve distinction do not teach the proper knowledge but some strange theory. The eccentric ideas are more suitable for achieving distinction, so the pursuit of the philosophers has an infectious nature. Rousseau reveals the common and selfish origin of our most noble notions, but in opposition to Nietzsche he affirms the importance of moral. He thinks there should be an only proper truth and moral certainty which somehow avoids originating from idleness and craving for distinction. Rousseau does not deny the existence of truth, he only protects this idea from the sophistic arguments (Rousseau 1997b, p. 93–94.). He admits the utility of some thinkers (e. g. Newton, Descartes, Bacon), but this honest type of philosophers would be more useful in serving the court. Unlike Nietzsche who declares if someone philosophies in an institute of the state, he is much more a servant of the state than a real philosopher (Nietzsche 1995, p. 244.).

For early Rousseau (especially in *First Discourse* and *Preface to Narcissus*) the cause of the moral diseases is not the sciences, arts or the philosophy but the widespread taste for study and letters (Marks 2002, p. 497.). The decay of the virtuous life is not derived from the inherent problem of the truth or the knowledge; it is a problem of taste. Though Nietzsche also questions the honesty of the drive for truth, but he registers it as a problem of morality. In his famous essay *On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense* he writes: “the constant fluttering of human beings around the one flame of vanity is so much the rule and the law that there is virtually nothing which defies understanding so much as the fact that an honest and pure drive towards truth should ever have emerged in them” (Nietzsche 1999c, p. 142.). Nietzsche regards the dissimulation as universal human law, so the drive for truth should be originated from that: the honest drive for truth is primarily the knowledge of the inevitable dissimulation (KSA 9: 260.). Nietzsche writes Lessing, the most honest theoretical man, revealed the motivation behind the scientific work: “searching for the truth meant more to him than truth itself” (Nietzsche 1999b, p. 73.). Consequently, Nietzsche does not acknowledge the existence of sophism-free truth.

---

education of man?” (Schiller 1902, p. 34.) While Nietzsche creates a historical solution for the problem, Schiller tries to solve it simultaneously.

## 2. The different concepts of subversion

There is one more supposed analogy between the two thinkers which must be examined here; it is perhaps the most relevant and mutual motif: the question of subversion. Above I mentioned that both Rousseau and Nietzsche create new thoughts by the subversion of the widespread ideas. In what meaning can we speak about Nietzsche's subversion? What does it mean calling Nietzsche as a subversive author?

In Nietzsche's works maybe the most common subversive figure is the inversion, the reversal of one thing into its opposite. Sometimes he uses the phrase 'subversion' as a pejorative term, for example he applies it in a similar meaning in an unpublished fragment from 1878 (likely the only textual evidence for using the 'subversive' phrase in the German original). In this note Nietzsche writes about a "subversive way of thinking" which is harmful to a good insight into culture (KSA 8: 551.). On other occasions he uses the phrase 'subversion' (mostly the German 'Umkehrung') in affirmative way. The most of his subversive philosophemes serve the aim of "revaluation of all values". The main attribute of the free spirits is that they like to turn round the traditionally valuable or sacral entities without regard of any consequences:

"With a wicked laugh he turns round whatever he finds veiled and through some sense of shame or other spared and pampered: he puts to the test what these things look like *when* the are reversed. (...) Behind all his toiling and weaving – for he is restlessly and aimlessly on his way as if in a desert – stands the question-mark of a more perilous curiosity. 'Can *all* values not be turned round? and is good perhaps evil? (...) – such thoughts as these tempt him and lead him on, even further away, even further down. Solitude encircles and embraces him, ever more threatening, suffocating, heart-tightening, that terrible goddess and *mater saeve cupidinum* – but who today knows what solitude is?..." (Nietzsche 2005d, p. 7.)

125

---

The curious reversal is connected to the phenomenon of solitude – the context is yet to be discussed later.

In *Daybreak* Nietzsche calls the faith in the coincidences one of the most ancient believes. We imagine that we are clever dwarfs with will and purposes who live beneath the realm of stupid giants. These giants represent the accidents, coincidences, and we are often overwhelmed and trampled to death by them (Nietzsche 2006a, p. 80.). The Greeks showed the idea of the incalculable and narrow-minded power in the image of Moiras. But a good god take place after the stupid giants and blind Moiras in the Christian era. The new fable of a loving god changed everything, as Nietzsche writes: "this fable represented so bold an inversion

and so daring a paradox that the ancient world, grown over-refined, could not resist it, no matter how mad and *contradictory* the thing might sound (...)” (Nietzsche 2006a, p. 81.). From this time until very recently people thought the slate falling from the roof was thrown down by divine love. Nietzsche registers similar inversion of values in the self-esteem of Jews. The ancient world regarded the Jews as people “born for slavery”, but the Jews called themselves “the people chosen of all people” (Nietzsche 2002, p. 84.). This was a miraculous inversion (‘Umkehrung’) of values. Nietzsche also writes about ‘Umkehrung’, when he turns back the chain of causation into the proper order (e.g. Nietzsche 2005a, p. 176–179.).

The most widely known subversive figure of Nietzsche is the reversal of “wisdom of Silenus” (Nietzsche 1999b, p. 22–23.). According to the ancient legend King Midas hunted for the wise Silenus, and when he captured him, Silenus was forced by Midas to tell him what the best thing for human beings is. He answered: “Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you not to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon” (Nietzsche 1999b, p. 23.). The words of Silenus reveals the deep and uncanny Dionysian truth which makes the human existence senseless. But the genius Greeks were able to make a subversive gesture, and they turned the metaphysical statement into its opposition. They produced the Apollonian instinct for beauty and the “dream-born figures of the Olympians”. They said instead of the wisdom of Silenus: „the very worst thing for them was to die soon, the second worst ever to die at all” (Nietzsche 1999b, p. 24.). This subversive thought made the life liveable again.

Generally, Nietzsche does not disapprove the subversive way of thinking; some of his most important thoughts arises from subversive methods. But usually he does not speak about the other subversive philosopher, Rousseau in high terms. Why does Nietzsche condemn the subversive processes of Rousseau? In addition, we can suppose that the Nietzschean form of subversion is the opposite of Rousseau’s procedure. In *Daybreak* Nietzsche defines himself as an intellectual enemy of Rousseau:

“*Contra Rousseau.* - If it is true that our civilisation has something pitiable about it, you have the choice of concluding with Rousseau that 'this pitiable civilisation is to blame for our *bad* morality', or against Rousseau that 'our *good* morality is to blame for this pitiableness of our civilisation. Our weak, unmanly, social concepts of good and evil and their tremendous ascendancy over body and soul have finally weakened all bodies and souls and snapped the self reliant, independent, unprejudiced men, the pillars of a *strong* civilisation: where one still encounters *bad* morality one beholds the last ruins of these pillars.' Thus paradox stands against paradox! The truth cannot possibly be on both

sides: and is it on either of them? Test them and see.” (Nietzsche 2006a, p. 100.)

Nietzsche agrees with Rousseau in the diagnosis of our civilisation, but while Rousseau blames the civilisation for the bad morality, Nietzsche blames the morality for the pitiableness of culture. He argues that we must reverse the direction of the question of Rousseau, and the culture must be affirmed instead of naturalness (KSA 12: 225.).<sup>2</sup> According to Nietzsche Rousseau misinterprets the proper reason. Rousseau regarded the philosophers as ideological trouble-makers; however, Nietzsche thought about Rousseau just the same. In the second book of *Human, All Too Human* he considers Rousseau to be a fanatical ideologist who turned the slowly Enlightenment to cruel, violent and impulsive Revolution (Nietzsche 2006a, p. 367.). Rousseau subverts the Enlightenment too. In *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche reckons Rousseau among fanatic thinkers. Rousseau is one of the antagonists of truthful persons, as Savonarola, Luther, Robespierre, and Saint-Simon too (Nietzsche 2005c, p. 54.), while Nietzsche’s protagonists are the sceptical philosophers, the decent types of intellectuals (Nietzsche 2005c, p. 10.). These are just some of the examples for the Nietzschean image of Rousseau. Several works thematise the ‘Rousseau-reader’ Nietzsche, the confrontation of the German philosopher with his ambivalent precursor (e. g. Ansell-Pearson 1996), the distinction between the two philosopher’s notion of honesty (e. g. Harrison 1995), or the notion of pity (e. g. Ure 2006) etc. The aim of the study is neither to reveal the motivic connection between the relevant philosophers, nor to reconstruct the proper Rousseau-interpretation of Nietzsche, but to demonstrate a potential typology of the philosophical subversion.

### 3. The cultural and political role of Rousseau in Nietzsche’s oeuvre

Unambiguously, Rousseau is not the most important person of the history of philosophy for Nietzsche; and also the name of the Genevan thinker also does not appear frequently in Nietzsche’s oeuvre. Though it does not mean that according to Nietzsche Rousseau is not one of the few key figures of philosophy. Obviously, Nietzsche knew the main concepts of Rousseau, and he was certainly familiar with *Émile* and the *Confessions* (Ansell-Pearson 1996, p. 20.). For Nietzsche Rousseau represents the philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and he approves that the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed against the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Nietzsche says every good Europeans should “wage a war against the eighteenth century” (Nietzsche 2006c, p. 162.). Basically, Nietzsche interprets the role of Rousseau in the context of the Enlightenment which

---

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche does not follow the German tradition which attempts to find a solution to the problem of Rousseau. Kant or Schiller accepted the diagnosis of moral decay and tried to conciliate the affirmation of culture with a demand of a moral reformation (e. g. Kant 2007, p. 65.; Schiller 1902, p. 34–35.)



was a French affair for him (Garrard 2008, p. 600.). Though the young, Romantic Nietzsche had expected a special, German emergence of culture against the French civilization, later he was disappointed in his hopes, and he started to appreciate the rationalist French philosophy of Enlightenment, especially the works of Voltaire (Dombowsky 2004, p. 58–59.). Rousseau brought to ruin the advancement of Enlightenment, accordingly, for Nietzsche he generates the recrudescence of harmful, mostly Christian misbelieves.

In the late notebooks Nietzsche proclaims his “five nos”; in five paragraphs he enumerates against what he struggles against. The third point is Rousseau: “My struggle against Rousseau's eighteenth century, against its 'nature', its 'good man', its belief in the rule of feelings - against the softening, weakening, moralisation of man: an ideal that was born of *hatred of aristocratic culture* and is in practice the rule of unbridled feelings of resentment, invented as a banner for the struggle” (Nietzsche 2006c, p. 172.). The fourth point is the Romanticism which is a mixture of Christian ideals and the notions of Rousseau; so, the Genevan thinker is an important “enemy” of Nietzsche in these late fragments. For him the “moral tarantula” Rousseau is a typical modern man with feminine attributes and pathological characteristics (Nietzsche 2006a, p. 3.; Nietzsche 2005a, p. 194.), who is an idealist and “Canaille” at the same time, and who needs “moral dignity” to sustain himself (KSA 12: 402, 441, 448.). He symbolises the resentment and malevolence of a “sick man”; psychological portrayal of Rousseau is a strange compound of vanity and self-loathing (KSA 12: 402, 448.).

Aside from the historical and psychological questions Nietzsche debates with Rousseau on the meaning of “nature”. Nietzsche thinks that his precursor regarded the idea of nature as evident notion, but the German philosopher argued that the concept of naturalness is much more complicated, than Rousseau had thought. It is symbolic that Nietzsche writes the name of Rousseau regarding the problem of nature at the first time in his oeuvre.

In a fragment from 1870 Nietzsche writes about the nature-conception of Stoicism and Rousseau. In this short note we can already detect the main characteristics of Nietzsche's Rousseau-critique. His question is who knows the goals of nature, and who could do anything unnatural (KSA 7: 199.)? He also suggests that the nature is not as harmless as the traditional nature-notion states that. Nietzsche relativizes the stable border of naturalness and unnaturalness. In his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he continues the critique, and reflects on the Rousseau-styled nature-concept. Nietzsche contrasts the modern idyllic picture of flute-playing shepherd with the Greek image of satyr (Nietzsche 1999b, p. 41.). Both were born of a longing for naturalness, but only the satyr is the original image of mankind, the representation of the absolutely uncultured but not animal human being. The shepherd is only a romantic vision of ancient man (coming from the ideal of Rousseau), when he speaks at the first time, at least sings a little (Nietzsche 1999b, p. 90.). Oppositely, sublime and divine figure of satyr is a proclaimer of wisdom

from the deepest heart of nature (Nietzsche 1999b, p. 41.), he represents the real natural man and the genuine truth of nature in opposition to the cultural lie. While the ancient Attic tragedy presupposes this half-animal, half-divine characteristics of human nature, the new Attic dithyramb and the opera reckons the shepherd as the ideal type of naturalness (Nietzsche 1999b, p. 89–93.; Nietzsche 2006c, p. 162.).

This image of ancient man has an impact on the conception of education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany (Blue 2016, p. 101.). In his Basel-years Nietzsche attends to the questions of education, and he must mull over the original nature of man over to fix the goals of education. In *Schopenhauer as Educator* Nietzsche writes about how we can educate ourselves against our age (Nietzsche 1995, p. 196.). In a sense we can read the chapter 4 as an ironic anti-speech for Rousseau's *First Discourse*. He raises a future possibility when the forests will become increasingly sparse, the libraries will be treated as firewood: "After all, most books are the products of smoking brains, so they might just as well revert to smoke again" (Nietzsche 1995, p. 196.). Perhaps it is an ironic reference to the culture-critique of Rousseau; a vision of a simple, virtuous future which would regard our era as a dark age. Rousseau is pressed to defend himself against the charge that he suggested burning down libraries (Marks 2002, p. 498.); maybe Nietzsche mocks a simplified image of a Rousseau-styled philosophy. Generally, the complete chapter can be read as an indirect critique of Rousseau. Like the Genevan thinker, Nietzsche also detects the symptoms of a decay, however he does not mourn the vanishing of a simple life but the decadence of culture:

"The educated classes are no longer lighthouses or havens in these agitated seas of secularization; they themselves become more agitated, mindless, and loveless with each passing day. Everything stands in the service of approaching barbarism, contemporary art and science included. The cultivated person has degenerated into the greatest enemy of cultivation, for he employs lies to deny the general malaise, and he thereby interferes with the work of the physicians." (Nietzsche 1995, p. 198.)

Nietzsche proclaims an intellectual war against the educated classes defending the education and culture, not the naturalness; he does not want to destroy the culture, he would like to protect it. For Nietzsche the contemporary culture has an inherent problem: the educational system is highly politicised. The education serves the states, the formation aims to train officials because the current philosophy suggests that the highest goal of humanity is the state. Nietzsche announces, "any philosophy that believes that the problem of existence can be altered or solved by a political event is a sham and pseudophilosophy" (Nietzsche 1995, p. 197.). There is not any real political solution for this problem; the proper possibility is eradicating stupidity in all of its manifestations, also the philosopher should eradicate the stupidity of the politicised culture, and he should depoliticise it.

Nietzsche shows three images of human beings: these are the Rousseau's man, Goethe's man and Schopenhauer's man (Nietzsche 1995, p. 201.) The first, Rousseau's human being is the most popular, the second one is made for only a few, and the Schopenhauerian man approaches the most active human beings. Superficially, Rousseau's man is one of the ideals of real human being between "worms" and "bovines" (Nietzsche 1995, p. 200.), but this image of human being only represents the first step: he despises himself, and he wish to transcend himself. The human being of Rousseau registers the unnaturalness of the state, and he proclaims a war against arts and sciences in the name of the "holy nature" (Nietzsche 1995, p. 201.). After all, this way of the cultural reform stays a political action (it incites revolutions), so the image of Rousseau's man is rated to a vision of "pseudophilosophy". In *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche writes that the political fantasists, like Rousseau, thinks that the temple of humanity will at once rise up after the revolutionary overturning of social orders, but we have already learned that every revolution brings about the resurrection of the most savage energies (Nietzsche 2005d, p. 169.). Only the man of Schopenhauer prepares to reverse his being whose achievement is the true meaning of life (Nietzsche 1995, p. 203.). The goal of this reversal ('Umkehrung') is to achieve our obligate existence:

"But there is a kind of negating and destroying that is nothing other than the outpouring of that powerful longing for sanctification and salvation, and Schopenhauer appeared among us desanctified and truly secularized human beings as the first philosophical teacher of this principle. All existence that can be negated deserves to be negated, and to be truthful means to believe in an existence that could not possibly be negated and that is itself true and without falsehood." (Nietzsche 1995, p. 203–204.)

In the time of cultural decay we need a reversal, a subversive turn, but this subversion cannot be a political revolution. The way of Rousseau presupposes the invariant, genuine existence of a harmless nature, and Rousseau's human being attempts to return to this originality with a reversal. The proper philosophical subversion does leaves nothing untouched, it does not recognise anything as self-evidence.

Nietzsche expects a "return to nature" too, but he prefers the "coming-towards" instead of "going-back" (Nietzsche 2005a, p. 221.). Not Rousseau, but Napoleon represents the proper naturalness, because the naturalness means immorality:

"Not 'back to nature': for there has never been a natural mankind. The scholasticism of unnatural and anti-natural values is the rule, is the beginning; man arrives at nature after a long struggle - he never comes 'back' ... Nature: i.e., daring to be immoral as nature is" (Nietzsche 2006c, p. 185.).

The two types of return to nature are the opposites of each other. While the way of Rousseau humanises, idealises the nature, Nietzsche goes to the other direction. For him the task is to naturalise the human being, and to dehumanise the nature (Hévízi 2004, p. 184–186.). The nature is immoral, and the individual must be evil to be natural; Nietzsche writes, the human being is not a “predator” anymore, unfortunately (KSA 12: 421.). In turn, the confessed immorality gives the superiority of culture over the un-culture (KSA 12: 560).

Nietzsche’s main problem with the nature-concept of Rousseau is the presumption of self-evident being. If we want to analyse deeper the distinction between the two forms of subversion, we need to compare the solitude-motif of Rousseau and Nietzsche, because aloneness can be a metaphor for something self-evident, something in itself.

#### 4. The figure of solitude and the notion of self

Solitude is another motivic analogy between Rousseau and Nietzsche, since both consider themselves as a figure of loneliness. It might be a symbolic gesture that in the earlier cited aphorism of *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche outlines loneliness right after he has written about reversal (Nietzsche 2005d, p. 7.). The subversion reveals the experience of proper solitude, only a free spirit knows what the solitude is. It would be a huge challenge to show the complexity of solitude-conception of Nietzsche, so I am going to focus on only one aspect which can demonstrate the difference from Rousseau.

There is a famous aphorism about solitude in *Daybreak* in which Nietzsche evokes Rousseau’s reflection on a remark of Diderot:

“*The evil man.* - 'Only the solitary man is evil!' cried Diderot: and Rousseau at once felt mortally offended. Which means that he admitted to himself that Diderot was right. It is, indeed, a fact that, in the midst of society and sociability every evil inclination has to place itself under such great restraint, don so many masks, lay itself so often on the Procrustean bed of virtue, that one could well speak of a martyrdom of the evil man. In solitude all this falls away. He who is evil is at his most evil in solitude: which is where he is also at his best thus to the eye of him who sees everywhere only a spectacle also at his most beautiful.” (Nietzsche 2006a, p. 203.)

The background of Rousseau’s pique is an observation of Diderot.<sup>3</sup> The French philosopher was one of the close friends of Rousseau, earlier Diderot encouraged

---

<sup>3</sup> About the paranoid register of Rousseau’s writings, see: Lilti 2008.

him to write the *First Discourse*, but Rousseau became estranged from him. Diderot has written a play titled *The Illegitimate Son*, and in that he made a problematic remark: “A good man belongs to society, and only evil wanders alone” (Diderot 2011, p. 41.). Rousseau found the observation unjust and insensible; as he wrote about the case in the second book of *Confessions*:

“Only the wicked man is alone. This sentence is equivocal, and presents two meanings, it seems to me; the one very true, the other very false; since it is even impossible for a man who is and wants to be alone to be able to and to want to harm anyone, and consequently for him to be a wicked man. Thus the sentence in itself required an interpretation. It required one all the more, on the part of an Author who, at the time he had that sentence printed, had a friend who had withdrawn into solitude.” (Rousseau 1995, p. 382.)

According to Rousseau Diderot must be wrong, because who is alone cannot harm anyone, so cannot be evil or wicked. The sentence also has a trivial meaning which Rousseau can accept too, but it is not clear what its evident meaning is. Presumably, the difference between the two meanings can be traced back to the question of purposefulness: someone who wish but cannot find friend, if nobody wants to be his company, must be a wicked man. But if someone avoids company wilfully, must be a harmless, consequently a good person. Rousseau’s assumption is the equivalence of goodness and harmlessness, and the identification of solitude with naturalness. In his unfinished book *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* Rousseau considers his solitude as a proof of his goodness and sociability (Rousseau 1992, p. 1.). Despite his virtue he became the “horror of the human race”, a “monster”, a “poisoner”, an “assassin” (Rousseau 1992, p. 2.). It is interesting that Nietzsche ascribes his prosecutor in the same way.<sup>4</sup> Rousseau supposes this condemnation extends to his afterlife – nobody will read his writings after his and his enemy’s death (Rousseau 1992. p. 5.). But he was wrong to Nietzsche’s biggest regret, and his writings dominated the intellectual life of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Rousseau really became a “poisoner” of the culture.

Nietzsche is on the opposite side, and he thinks that pique of Rousseau means the admittance of Diderot’s right. The eminent form of wickedness reveals in solitude; when we are lonely, we do not have to dissimulate (‘verstellen’) but we can be such evil, as we want. The society forces the individual to become good; without

---

<sup>4</sup> After the Diderot-episode of *Confessions* Rousseau writes about his other adversities, and cites one of his own letters: “Do you remember that man in the Comedy who cries out while giving blows with a stick? That is the role of the philosopher” (Rousseau 1995, p. 384.). The philosophy tragicomic aspects are important for Nietzsche too. In *Twilight of Idols* he states: “Can an *ass* be tragic? – Can someone be destroyed by a weight he cannot carry or throw off? ... The case of philosopher” (Nietzsche 2005a, p. 157.).

its limitations the individual does not want to be virtuous. In *Twilight of Idols* Nietzsche writes: “to live alone, you need to be either an animal or a god - says Aristotle. But he left out the third case: you can be both – a philosopher ...” (Nietzsche 2005a, p. 156.). The solitude is partly divine, partly bestial way of life – Rousseau should have to understand that he was as identical to the monster as to the “good man”. In *The Reveries* Rousseau tried to separate the essential self from the public representation of it, and he attempted to write a book only for himself (Rousseau 1992, p. 6.). Rousseau supposes a self-identical essence of himself which “inner feeling” can be morally integrated when he performs a mischief (Man 1979, p. 281.). Paul de Man analyses a relevant episode from *Confessions* in the *Allegories of Reading*: Rousseau stole a ribbon and fixed the blame on Marion, the girl who was secretly loved was by Rousseau. Rousseau states that viciousness was never further from him than when he accused Marion (Man 1979, p. 284.). Rousseau did want to show his intention to give her the ribbon, to confess his love to her; the confession was a figural displacement: Rousseau’s lie was a metaphor of his desire. The stealing did not make Rousseau a bad person because his “inner feeling” was right.

Nietzsche does not believe in the existence of such self-identical essence, unchangeable inner self. While Rousseau sees the opportunity of self-evidence and moral self-justification in solitude, Nietzsche prefers the differences, the “pathos of distance” in solitude (Nietzsche 2002, p. 151.). For Nietzsche loneliness is privilege, for Rousseau it is an undeserving punishment which – paradoxically – justifies his goodness. For Rousseau the self is a central certainty, while Nietzsche does not regard it as a given thing. Nietzsche argues that the self is something which the individual himself shall create (Ridley 2016, p. 425–428.). The self-equivalency is impossible because proper equivalency exists only in the case of tautology (Nietzsche 1999c, p. 144–145.). The individual is not a consistent, homogenic entity in the philosophy of Nietzsche, either. The notion of subject is based on the false observations of sameness, therefore the subject or the individual is not more than a mistake from epistemological perspective (Hévízi 2004, p. 132.). Nietzsche denies every certain form of equivalence or sameness; and this revelation opens the opportunity of self-creation.

Nietzsche argues that the individual has to develop his second nature (Nietzsche 2007, p. 163–164.). To achieve this goal, we must subvert everything, we must reverse all the unquestionable statements, believes, and the core of our personality. And this ultimate subversion may reveal a lifestyle which cannot be denied.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> It does not mean a divine, teleological necessity which, according to Nietzsche, cannot exist (KSA 13: 34–35.)

## 5. The two types of subversion: A new paradigm or decadency

Nietzsche regards Rousseau as a dangerous and subversive political ideologist who changed the course of history. But he was basically a decadent who destructed the achievements of Enlightenment and who was the cause of the decay of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The main problem with Rousseau is that his notions were suitable for establishing the revolutionary ideas (Kirkland 2010, p. 62). Rousseau founded a new era which was partly replaced by the Romanticism with its more adequate nature-concept (Nietzsche 2006c, p. 172–173.). But indeed, the Romantic movement is an intellectual heir of the philosophy of Rousseau. The performative power of his theory neutralized the outcomes of the 16<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, as Luther destructed the culture of Renaissance with the Reformation,<sup>6</sup> or as Socrates terminated the tragic culture. Rousseau did not found a genuine new paradigm, he is much more a symptom of decay for Nietzsche. With his subversive thoughts he seeks the certainty of self and creates an ideal notion of nature.

Nietzsche sets Rousseau against Napoleon regularly; the French emperor was a real paradigmatic figure, a proper successor of the Renaissance. Nietzsche shares Napoleon's antipathy for Rousseau (Dombowsky 2004, p. 56.), for him Napoleon represents the proper and immoral attributes of naturalness. Nietzsche regards Napoleon as the main agent of the virtue ('virtù') of Renaissance. This virtù-concept shows the differences of the moral theory of Rousseau and Nietzsche. Nietzsche prefers the culture instead of (traditional or Rousseau's) morality, but it does not mean that Nietzsche denies every concept of virtue. Machiavelli was held in account by both Rousseau and Nietzsche, but while Rousseau regarded *The Prince* as a satirical work and emphasized the republican commitment of Machiavelli, Nietzsche affirmed the tragic character of Machiavellian politics, too (Vacano 2007, p. 92.; Ansell-Pearson 1996, p. 42–43.). The young Rousseau considers the Renaissance to be a form of the moral decay, but for Nietzsche this culture represents the golden age. He hopes that another Renaissance will be born (Kirkland 2010, p. 74.; Ansell-Pearson 1996, p. 43.) – instead of the old one which was destructed by Luther. Nietzsche had to fight against Rousseau whose philosophy delayed the coming of Renaissance as interpreted in Nietzsche's writings.

---

<sup>6</sup> Earlier I made some remarks on the Luther-critique of Nietzsche. See: Tánczos 2015.

*Bibliography*

- Ansell-Pearson, K. (1996). *Nietzsche contra Rousseau: A Study of Nietzsche's Moral and Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blue, D. (2016). *The Making of Friedrich Nietzsche: The Quest for Identity, 1844–1869*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Garrard, G. (2008). Nietzsche For and Against the Enlightenment. *The Review of Politics*, 70(4), 595–608.
- Man, P. de (1979). *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Diderot, D. (2011). The Illegitimate Son. Translated by Kiki Gounaridou. In *Two Plays by Denis Diderot*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Dombowksy, D. (2014). *Nietzsche and Napoleon: The Dionysian Conspiracy*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Harrison, M. (1995). Pathological Honesty: Truth and Self in Rousseau and Nietzsche. *Qui Parle* 8(2), 20–53.
- Hévízi O. (2004). *A megfontolás rítusai: Tanulmány az autochton ítélkezésről*. Budapest: Gond-Cura Alapítvány.
- Kant, I. (2007). Essay on the Maladies of the Head. Translated by Holly Wilson. In I. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirkland, P. E. (2010). Nietzsche's Tragic Realism. *The Review of Politics*, 72(1), 55–78.
- Lilti A. (2008). The Writing of Paranoia: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Paradoxes of Celebrity. *Representations*, 103(1), 53–83.
- Marks, J. (2002). Who Lost Nature? Rousseau and Rousseauism. *Polity*, 34(4), 479–502.
- Nietzsche, F. (1995). *Unfashionable Observations*. Translated by Richard T. Gray. Stanford: Stanford University Press.



Nietzsche, F. (1999a). *Kritischen Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden (KSA)*. Herausgegeben von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag – de Gruyter.

Nietzsche, F. (1999b). *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. In F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1999c). *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. In F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2002). *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2005a). *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*. In F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2005b). *The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem*. In F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2005c). *The Anti-Christ*. In F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2005d). *Human, All Too Human*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2006a). *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2006b). *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2006c). *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Translated by Kate Sturge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2007). *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ridley, A. (2016). *Nietzsche and the Arts of Life*. In K. Gemes and J. Richardson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rousseau, J-J. (1992). *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Translated by C. E. Butterworth. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co.

Rousseau, J-J. (1995). The Confessions. In J-J. Rousseau, *The Confessions and Correspondence, including the Letters to Malesherbes*. Translated by Christopher Kelly. Hanover and London: University Press of New England.

Rousseau, J-J. (1997a). Discourse on the sciences and arts or First Discourse. In J-J. Rousseau, *'The Discourses' and Other Early Political Writings*. Edited and Translated by Victor Gourevitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rousseau, J-J. (1997b). Preface to “Narcissus”. In J-J. Rousseau, *'The Discourses' and Other Early Political Writings*. Edited and Translated by Victor Gourevitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Safranski, R. (2002). *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. Translated by Shelley Frisch. London: Granta Books.

Schiller, F. (1902). Letters of the Aesthetical Education of Man. In F. Schiller *Aesthetical and Philosophical Essays*. Boston: Francis A. Niccolls & Co.

Tánczos, P. (2015). Kilépés “Luther bandájából”: Nietzsche reflexiói a lutheri paradigmáról. *Többlet Filozófiai Folyóirat*, 7(2), 75–94.

---

137

Ure, M. (2006). The Irony of Pity: Nietzsche contra Schopenhauer and Rousseau. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 32, 68–91.

Vacano, D. A. von (2007). *The Art of Power: Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and the Making of Aesthetic Political Theory*. Lanham: Lexington Books.