



German Historical Institute London



Civic virtue and modernity: Debates on Rousseau in German-speaking Europe and in Britain

5-6 June 2009

The German Historical Institute and UCL
London

“The sovereign authority being everywhere the same, the same principle should be found in every well-constituted state” (*On the Social Contract*, III.4). The principle underpinning all forms of sovereignty was, according to Rousseau, virtue; this was his response to Montesquieu’s characterisation of virtue as the foundational tenet of democratic republics alone. Civic virtue maintained a central position in Rousseau’s philosophy, from the early *Discourses* on the arts and sciences and on the origins of inequality to works on theatre, language, education, and politics. Accompanied by a harsh critique of commercial society and the denial of natural human sociability, Rousseau’s notion of civic virtue challenged contemporary views in various domains (as manifest in his proposal for a civic religion in the *Social Contract*, or in his opinions on women’s social roles in *Émile*).

This emphatic focus on virtue – either as it had allegedly been exercised in antiquity or as a blueprint for the regeneration of European society – exerted significant influence on philosophy and political praxis across Europe. The impact of Rousseau’s notion of civic virtue has been widely observed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France and in Rousseau’s native republic, Geneva; it has frequently been invoked in relation to the American and French Revolutions. German-speaking Europe has been less intensively studied, perhaps due to the broad variety of political and cultural outlooks within the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg territories alongside Swiss cantons, Hanseatic towns, and other areas in Central Europe. The conference aims to examine the reception and transformation of Rousseau’s notion of civic virtue in these different political, social, and religious contexts, while comparing them to English, Scottish and Irish responses. Contributors will analyse German and British reactions to the ancient and early modern sources of Rousseau’s concept of civic virtue; attempts at its practical application in education, philanthropy, and religious or political reform; and its repercussions not only in contemporary philosophy but in a wide range of cultural and literary practices. The geographical focus and comparative nature of the conference should highlight the diverse roles played by civic virtue east and west of France in the late eighteenth century and around 1800.

Friday, 5th June 2009

Venue: German Historical Institute, 17 Bloombury Square, London
(<http://www.ghil.ac.uk/contact.html>)

9:00 Welcome: Andreas Gestrich (GHI London)

9:15-11:15 *Civic virtue in politics and commerce*

Chair: Tim Hochstrasser (LSE)

Béla Kapossy (Lausanne): Rousseau's thought in German Swiss debates
on economic reform

Isaac Nakhimovsky (Cambridge): Rousseau and Fichte

Commentator: Richard Whatmore (Sussex)

Coffee

11:30-13:00 *Philanthropy, education and civic virtue*

Chair: Adam Sutcliffe (KCL)

Andreas Gestrich (GHI London): Education and social reform in
Germany

Daniel Tröhler (Luxembourg): Rousseau and Swiss education reform

Commentator: Axel Körner (UCL)

Lunch

14:00-16.00 *Women and civic virtue*

Chair: Regina Pörtner (Swansea)

Heide von Felden (Mainz): Notes on the reception of Rousseau among
contemporary women in German-speaking Europe

Karen O'Brien (Warwick): Women, Rousseau and civic virtue in Britain

Liselotte Steinbrügge (Bochum): Mary Wollstonecraft's reception of
Rousseau

Commentator: Sean Gaston (Brunel)

Tea

16:30-18:00 *Civic virtue between republicanism and monarchy*

Chair: Richard Butterwick (SSEES-UCL)

Iain McDaniel (Munich): Sociability, inequality, and the liberty of
monarchies: revising Rousseau in the later Scottish
Enlightenment

Ultán Gillen (Queen Mary): Civic virtue in Irish republican and loyalist political thought in the era of revolutions

Commentator: John Robertson (Oxford)

Tea

18:20-19:00 *Keynote lecture*

Istvan Hont (Cambridge): J. J. Rousseau and Adam Smith

Conference dinner (GHI)

Saturday, 6th June 2009

Venue: The Wellcome Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL, 183 Euston Road, London (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/histmed/about/location>), 5th floor

9:15 Coffee

9:30-11:00 *Virtue, religion and the arts*

Chair: John Hope Mason (Middlesex)

Alexander Schmidt (Jena): German responses to Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and the Sciences*

Brian Young (Oxford): The nature and status of civil religion in England, compared to Europe

Commentator: Frederick Neuhouser (Columbia)

Coffee

11:30-13:30 *Civic virtue, the state of nature, and contemporary society*

Chair: Chris Brooke (Oxford)

Tristan Coignard (Bordeaux): Wieland's reflections on civic virtue and the social contract: beyond a critical position against Rousseau?

Avi Lifschitz (UCL): Debates on the state of nature and self-interest in mid-eighteenth century Berlin

Iain Hampsher-Monk (Exeter): Rousseau, Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society*, and Revolutionary ideology

Commentator: Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge)