

**Shklar, Judith. “Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory.”
Cambridge University Press, 1969.**

Judith Shklar sees Jean-Jacques Rousseau as the last of the classical utopists, concerned with presenting models of what the world could be and preoccupied with criticism rather than improvement – to “judge the actual by confronting it with the perfect.” She writes that Rousseau presented two mutually-exclusive models of utopia: a tranquil household and a Spartan city. On her interpretation, Rousseau sees the forced choice between these models as an unfortunate product of our mixed condition – we are neither fully man nor citizen. Our half-natural and half-social state makes us unfit either for genuine community or genuine autonomy.

For Shklar, this is the original taproot of alienation. Because these models are incompatible, the attempt to pursue both goals simultaneously “enhances the strain under which men actually labor,” which is “intensely demoralizing” because it is impossible to compromise between self-repression and self-expression. Both the Spartan and the Savoyard are free, but those who are stuck in uneasy compromise cannot achieve freedom. This is said to lead to a “march to self-enslavement” because absent the intervention of an outside force, amour propre will lead people’s desires to expand to the point where their fulfillment involves moral compromise. The uniquely human capacity for choice is a nearly-inevitable conduit to disaster. Social norms consequently loom large as the only mechanism whereby reprobate people can be saved from themselves. The atmosphere of opinion can guide human behavior, but how are we to shape the atmosphere of opinion? We must again appeal to an outside force.

Both the tutor in *Emile* and the legislator in *The Social Contract* are examples of such an outside force. As Shklar puts it, “What is needed is someone so extraordinary in intelligence and moral strength that he can restructure the environment in which men live and thus indirectly compel them to turn away from their present course.” She compares the figure of M. Wolmar in *Emile* to God, and justifies this God-figure by reference to prevalent vice. “The miracle of the true man of authority is that he subjugates the will of his pupils so that they may develop enough inner strength to throw off the yoke of personal servitude.” The fact that such people are rare did not trouble Rousseau, weaned as he was on Plutarch. But this entraps Rousseau in paradox, because he also frames the surrender of the self to authority as simply the perpetuation of dependence, a major source of evil. As Shklar puts it, “[t]o Rousseau it did not appear that genuine authority limits freedom. The real tension was between authority and equality.”

Finally, Shklar treats Rousseau’s positive programs of reform (like *The Social Contract*) not as attempts to realize utopia but rather as cautionary accounts of how republics collapse, requiring her to treat concepts like the general will as mere metaphors rather than actual manifestations. This is a minority view, and would benefit from more extensive engagement with the secondary literature. Shklar concludes by channeling Rousseau’s pessimism¹ – “we will not become men until we are citizens,” but becoming citizens will require resolution of the “outside force” paradox discussed above. Shklar thinks

¹ “History is the story of mankind’s inability to achieve peace or justice.”

this is irresolvable, and her final interpretation is that Rousseau asks his readers “not to choose, but to recognize that the choice was impossible, and that they were not and would never become either men or citizens.”

Shklar, Judith. "Rousseau's Images of Authority," *American Political Science Review* 58.4 (December 1964): 919-932

This article covers the same ground as Chapter 4 in *Men and Citizens*. Shklar gives a taxonomy of the types of authority found in Rousseau’s work. The need for authority is motivated by the development of a “false self” based on *amour propre*. This false self is willing to accept a loss of independence in order to realize its ambitions. As a result, people become entangled in situations of mutual need which they would prefer to avoid. The force of *amour propre* cannot be overcome merely by radical social change, and the motive power must come from outside. This is why authority is so important. In *Emile*, for instance, the godlike figure of the tutor is paramount, and the possibility of *Emile* growing up into such a being is never considered. “Without the directing intelligence, and an order maintained by it, most men would inevitably destroy the conditions of freedom.”

On Shklar’s reading, Rousseau seems to be deeply ambivalent about authority. Since authority involves subordination, Rousseau was reluctant to grant it the status of true freedom, but since we are precluded from self-help external intervention seems to be the only way forward. He remained aware, however, that “[a]uthority may keep them from evil, but it does not fully liberate. It only perpetuates dependence.” It is this ambivalence that leads Rousseau to focus on the extremes – we must either accept the pure rule of law and the elimination of spurious authority, or (in a quasi-Hobbesian twist) we should accept arbitrary and unlimited personal rule. Despite all this, Shklar thinks that Rousseau did not see a tension between genuine authority and freedom, and that for him the real tension is between authority and equality. Rousseau’s definition of freedom is entirely negative – freedom from compulsion or restraint. Authentic authority liberates, “giving liberty to those incapable of creating it for themselves.” In fact, peace may be a higher value than freedom because it is more achievable, since genuine freedom would require “one perfect tutor for each newborn child.”