



# To Tolerant England and a Pension from the King: Did Hume Subconsciously Aim to Subvert Rousseau’s Legacy?

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[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

*You have but ill disguised yourself. I know you, and you are not ignorant of it... [Y]ou brought me to England, apparently to procure me an asylum, but in fact to bring me to dishonour. You applied to this noble work, with a zeal worthy of your heart, and a success worthy of your abilities... The public love to be deceived, and you were formed to deceive them. I know one man, however, whom you can not deceive; I mean yourself.*

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau to David Hume, 23 June 1766  
(quoted in Hume 2021/1766, 297–298)

*Son Contract social pourroit bien le venger dans un tems des persécution qu’il a éprouvées.*<sup>2</sup>

—Adam Smith in conversation, 1784, as reported by  
Barthélemy Faujas de Saint-Fond (1797, 2:279)

It seems to me that practically all scholarship, even historiography, can be viewed as explanatory, in that certain things are treated as objects to be explained, and explanations are offered. Also, explanation may be seen as the spine of theorizing. Thus, even in historiography, we can find theorizing. I suggest three

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1. George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030. I am grateful for help and feedback from Jacob Hall, Luc Marest, Erik Matson, Nelson Lund, Dennis Rasmussen, and Marcus Shera.

2. The translation in Saint-Fond (1907, 2:246) is: “His *Social Contract* will in time avenge him for all the persecutions he suffered.”

questions to bear in mind when theorizing (Klein 2014b):

1. Theory of what?
2. Why should we care?
3. What merit in your explanation?

Here, I theorize about David Hume's motivations in the Hume-Rousseau affair—that is, the causes of Hume's eagerness, zeal, and dogged perseverance, in the face of a train of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's oddities, improprieties, and derelictions, and indeed in the face of unmitigated uncertainty about Rousseau's intentions, “to settle the celebrated Rousseau” (I:527)<sup>3</sup> in England and to procure for Rousseau a pension from the king. The causes of Hume's actions, therefore, are the answer to *Theory of what?*

The explanation explored here is that Hume subconsciously aimed to diminish Rousseau's legacy. Settling down in England, in arrangements crafted by Hume, and enjoying a royal pension would have undermined Rousseau's persona as an audacious radical critic of refinement, of modern commercial society, of established aristocracies, and of England in particular. He would be seen—or portrayed—as accepting and assimilating to that which he scorned and pretended to expose. That explanation is not suggested in discussions of the affair with which I am acquainted.<sup>4</sup>

As for *Why should we care?*, a number of response come to mind: (a) Hume and Rousseau were fascinating human beings, they have been and continue to be important figures, and plumbing their motivations deepens our feeling for them, for their writings, and for their significance; (b) thinking about the counterfactual of Hume successfully settling Rousseau in England with a royal pension provides a historical perspective and may deepen our understanding of history; (c) plumbing the depths of Hume's motivations teaches us about our ways of interpreting the conduct of historical figures.

As for *What merit in your explanation?*, my response must be made in rivalry with competing explanations of Hume's conduct, including:

- The praise and praiseworthiness of coming to Rousseau's aid;

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3. The citation “(I:527)” means volume 1, page 527 of *The Letters of David Hume* (1932) edited by J. Y. T. Greig. The quoted snippet is Hume explaining one of the reasons he returns to London, in a letter to Hugh Blair 28 December 1765.

4. I do not know whether any French-language literature suggests the hypothesis explored here. English-language literature on the Hume-Rousseau affair includes Goodman 1991; Mossner 2001, 512–532; Damrosch 2005, 403–433; Edmonds and Eidenow 2006; Zaretsky and Scott 2009; Harris 2015, 416–421; Rasmussen 2017, 133–145.

- the notoriety and celebrity, especially in France, of being Rousseau's protector;
- the praise and praiseworthiness in demonstrating a freedom-oriented solidarity among persecuted persons;
- the praise and praiseworthiness in demonstrating generosity towards intellectual adversaries; and
- the praise and praiseworthiness in serving Britain and the British establishment, including the King, George III, from whom the royal pension was procured.

Are those explanations not adequate? Is there not ample evidence for them? Is my explanation, the aim to diminish Rousseau's legacy, meritorious in ways that the others are not? And what evidence can I give for my explanation? This article labors under the rubric of the third question, *What merit in your explanation?*

Rousseau accused Hume of taking actions against him, particular actions deemed damaging, insulting, or incriminating.<sup>5</sup> Whether there is anything really to any of Rousseau's accusations does not much matter to the present interpretation. The accusations, in the concrete, concern trivialities; I have sifted the English-language evidence about them pretty thoroughly.<sup>6</sup> My sense of the matter is that on every count Hume is probably innocent, basically innocent, or 'guilty' of a non-offense. The burden of proof is on Rousseau, and he never meets it. The allegations are almost always absurd or unintelligible, and often deceitful. Rousseau was a very morally irresponsible person, prone to lying, getting into quarrels, and making enemies. His behavior in England after the blowup tends to confirm his guilt throughout (Zaretsky and Scott 2009, 194–197). Dennis Rasmussen (2017, 140) speaks of "the groundless nature of Rousseau's allegations."

But, if the whole effort was undertaken to subvert Rousseau's legacy, does Hume still enjoy an aura of innocence? If the whole effort was undertaken to subvert Rousseau's legacy, would that make the basic deed a dirty one?

In reading Hume's account of the affair one is struck, at two moments in Rousseau's mammoth 10 July 1766 letter, that Rousseau refers to Hume in the third person as though testifying before a public audience. As Dena Goodman (1991, 184) puts it, "Rousseau the narrator took upon himself the multiple roles of victim, witness, judge, accused, and prosecutor." The two moments that are by far most curious and arresting are Hume's alleged "stedfast, piercing look, mixed

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5. The 1766 French version of the account is the Hume 1766a item in the reference list here. The 1766 English version is the Hume 1766b item. The new presentation of the account, appearing alongside the present article, is listed as Hume 2021/1766.

6. I do not read French. I wish I could read Hume's French correspondence, Rousseau's correspondence (51 volumes), and French commentary and scholarship on the matter.

with a sneer” and his alleged repeated terrible nocturnal utterance, “*Je tiens J. J. Rousseau*”—“I’ve got J. J. Rousseau,” or, “I have J. J. Rousseau” (see Hume 2021/1766, 307, 318). In the letter, these two moments are dramatized and linked. Rousseau’s account prompts the reader to doubt Hume’s declared motives. Such intuition, if it exists, might stem from a sense that Hume might have aimed to subvert Rousseau’s legacy.

TABLE 1. Timeline of Hume-Rousseau affair

2 July 1762	Hume’s first letter to Rousseau
4–5 January 1766	“Je tiens J. J. Rousseau” would have occurred in Senlis, France <sup>7</sup>
10–11 January 1766	Crossing the Channel together from Calais to Dover
22 March 1766	Rousseau arrives and moves into Wootton in Staffordshire, a little-used residence owned by Richard Davenport
12 May 1766	Rousseau’s equivocal letter to Conway, not accepting (nor conclusively refusing) the pension
23 June 1766	Rousseau’s first open declaration to Hume of enmity
10 July 1766	Rousseau’s mammoth memorial/letter, the last to Hume
15 July 1766	Hume encourages Davenport to continue his accommodating of Rousseau
22 July 1766	Hume’s last letter to Rousseau
2 September 1766	Hume reiterates to Davenport to continue his accommodating of Rousseau
21 October 1766	<i>Exposé succinct</i> published in Paris
November 1766	<i>Concise and Genuine Account</i> published in London
1 May 1767	Rousseau vacates Wootton
21–22 May 1767	Rousseau crosses from England to Calais
February–July 1767	Hume advises officials (successfully) to sustain/rehabilitate the offer of the pension

Did Rousseau suspect that Hume’s aim was to subvert his legacy? To my knowledge, Rousseau never came out and said that was Hume’s aim. If Rousseau had felt that it was, would Rousseau have accused him of it, explicitly and publicly? Maybe not, because he might then be in a position of needing to explain why settling in England and accepting a royal pension would, at least in Hume’s imagination, have tended to subvert his legacy.

We need to clarify the sort of outcome Hume hoped for. For us, it is counterfactual. The counterfactual is a changed history from sometime after they land in Dover 11 January 1766. Suppose that the ‘English Settlement,’ if you will—that is, accommodation in England and the royal pension—were accepted by Rousseau. Suppose that he settled in England for many years or even to 1778, the year he died.

7. In the 10 July letter, Rousseau writes of “*Je tiens*” having happened “the first night after our departure from Paris” (see Hume 2021/1766, 318), which would be Senlis, but elsewhere he says, twice, Roye, France. Evidently, as Mossner (2001, 516 n.2) explains, it could not have happened there because they did not sleep in the same chamber.

Perhaps Rousseau would have produced works like:

1. *Dictionary of Music*, (1767)

Published after Rousseau's death in 1778:

2. *Confessions* (written 1765–1770)
3. *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (written 1772)
4. *Dialogues: Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques* (written 1772–1776)
5. *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (written 1777)

As a set of activities and as a single, protracted decision, Hume's arranging of things for Rousseau gets started July 1762. Going into the decision, Hume surely knew the following four works:

- *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, 1750
- *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, 1754
- *Discourse on Political Economy*, 1755
- *Julie; or, The New Heloise*, 1761

As for the following three works, Hume surely came to know them shortly after publication:

- *The Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right*, 15 May 1762<sup>8</sup>
- *Emile, or On Education*, 22 May 1762
- *Letters Written from the Mountain*, 1764

The three Discourses would have been quite sufficient to lead Hume to regard Rousseau as profoundly wrongheaded in morals and politics. Rasmussen writes:

Hume's thoroughgoing defense of the modern, liberal, commercial order was matched by Rousseau's blistering attack on that order. Hume believed, more strongly than even Smith, that civilization, refinement, and commerce brought in their wake an indissoluble chain of industry, knowledge, and humanity, while Rousseau insisted that they led to little more than inequality, dependence, and corruption. Where Hume was moderate and pragmatic, Rousseau was radical—radical in both his critique of the existing order and in the various prescriptions he offered to fix it. (Rasmussen 2017, 134–136)

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8. The day of publication of *The Social Contract* and *Émile* are given in Gourevitch's chronology, provided in both of his Rousseau Cambridge Texts volumes (Rousseau 1997a; b).

I believe if someone asked Hume in 1765, ‘Do you think that, irrespective of Rousseau’s personal well-being, the world would be better off from his settling in England with a royal pension?’ he would have said yes. He would sense that the English Settlement would reduce the sway of the wrongheadedness of Rousseau’s works through 1762, as well as any future works. As for how the English Settlement would affect Rousseau’s activities going forward, that too is something that Hume might have had hopes for. Hume might have, firstly, hoped that the pension and peaceful settlement in English would have subdued Rousseau. In Volume 3 of his *History of England* (1983, 3:135–136), Hume had highlighted the social benefits of putting the leaders of otherwise enthusiastic and troublesome religious sects on state salaries “to bribe their indolence.” Second, the English Settlement might help to bring Rousseau around to better thinking; it is possible that Hume hoped for Rousseau to become improved and produce less pernicious ideas. These possibilities might be summarized as taming Rousseau, and that, too, is something I include in ‘subverting Rousseau’s legacy’—I mean a legacy *and a Rousseau* like those of our history. But even apart from the either turning Rousseau into ‘dead wood’ or improving his ideas, the English Settlement would have significantly deflated his legacy, I think, and I think Hume sensed that.

If there is merit in my explanation, that merit need not exist over against the other explanations. It can be but an element within a bevy of explanations. My explanation, or *strand* of explanation, would be quite dependent on the other strands for cover. Were my strand true, even if Hume were conscious of it he could hardly reveal it plainly to Rousseau: ‘Jean-Jacques, I wish to fix things for you in England so as to mitigate the sway of your pernicious writings.’ Nor, on the improvement angle, could he say: ‘Dear Jean-Jacques, I wish to fix things for you in England so as to cure your wrongheadedness.’ Instead, Hume would play up the agreeable explanations.

We all know that motives that need to be kept underground on some occasions typically therefore also need to be kept underground on other occasions as well, or even all occasions, because occasions cannot reliably be kept separate. (‘But *Le Bon David* told me his *real* aim is...’). That is, people talk, word gets around. One needs to habitualize his story, both to ensure that he performs it accurately on needful occasions and to make it convincing, as flowing naturally from frankness and openness. In a course of action of such sort, when one first commences, the articulated motive will usually be of the public-story sort, and, once set out, one’s subconscious is chary to ever reveal that some other impetus was at work all along (‘Fooled ya!’). The unsaid impetus may remain hidden, and inarticulate or subconscious. Scholars say that consciousness accounts for no more than five percent of brain activity, and perhaps as little as one percent (McGilchrist 2009, 187); there’s a lot that your consciousness is not privy to.

One might be so habitualized to his public story that he might deny the unsaid impetus *even to himself* (“in denial”), though real. There is no necessary scandal in any of this, contrary to how Rousseau painted it. It’s the way things are once society and language get beyond the primeval band, and post-band existence is not something to scandalize.

For these reasons, lack of direct evidence is not necessarily conclusive. We would not particularly expect to find direct evidence for my explanation, even if real. Maybe there was a dog in the night that didn’t bark. One line of evidence is that Hume continued to work to salvage the plan, or parts of it, as much as a year after mutual enmity had become common knowledge, though Hume may have had other reasons to salvage what could be salvaged of the plan.

Throughout our rumination, we should bear in mind that Hume’s motivations might have been not only multiple but shifting in balance over time. Certain motivations may have waxed and waned as things went on.

## Hindsight bias

After making a start on the present paper in the summer of 2021, I experienced a progression of sentiment, from greater confidence in my explanation to lesser confidence. A cause of that progression had been a growing awareness of the 1765 Hume not having known certain things that I know. I felt that the advantage of hindsight had distorted my impressions. Two aspects of our post-January 1766 history stand out.

First, Rousseau rejected the English Settlement, and, moreover, from all we know about Rousseau’s 66 years (1712–1778), accepting the English Settlement would have been highly out of character. If one ascribes to Hume such impressions of a scarcely-tamable Rousseau, then one wonders: Why undergo such difficulties if the chance of success is close to zero? Hume’s declared motives begin to seem inadequate and dubious. When I first immersed myself in the account of the affair, I kept asking myself: *What was Hume thinking?* His actions seem vain and foolish, as Adam Smith seemed to indicate when he wrote: “I am thoroughly convinced that Rousseau is as great a Rascal as you, and as every man here believes him to be” (Smith 1986, 112). Hume’s copious epistolary remarks on the affair often have a frenetic air, as though he is confused and afraid that perhaps the warnings of Baron d’Holbach—“you’re warming a viper in your bosom” (Mossner 2001, 515)—might be right. Writing to his friends, Hume’s estimations of Rousseau are variably complimentary and depreciating. To smooth the path for Rousseau, Hume (2021/1766, 290) practices small manipulative guiles, such as his effort to secretly subsidize production of a recent work of his and to fix lodging and secretly pay



more for it than he would tell Rousseau he paid.<sup>9</sup> And sometimes Hume's letters to his friends have an air of false confidence. In hindsight, it all seems to drive inexorably toward mutual hatred and disgust. Rasmussen says "the break between them was all but inevitable" (2017, 137).

I've come to realize, however, that, while the break may have been inevitable, hindsight was distorting my view, that Hume might not have realized how improbable the English Settlement was; he might have been far off in his estimate of chance of success. If Hume had thought that settling Rousseau in England would be simple, that increases the plausibility of his motives having been primarily of the simpler sort, notably the doing of a good turn, like holding the door for someone.

Second, there is Rousseau's influence or legacy. This has two dimensions. One is magnitude, which has been enormous. But did Hume foresee its full extent? Almost certainly not. But if he anticipated half, even a quarter, that might be enough to give life to my explanation. Another is its value, positive or negative. I think it negative. Hume did as well, as I'll show, but again hindsight might make me more confirmed in that valence than Hume could have been. In her excellent article, Goodman quotes Friedrich Melchior Grimm about Rousseau having come 200 years after his time, namely the 16th-century age of religious factions organized around a charismatic personality. Goodman exclaims, "How wrong he was!" and shows the pro-Rousseau public reaction in France that quickly emerged after Grimm had made his remark (Goodman 1991, 198). "[T]hey responded rather in a Rousseauian fashion," writes Goodman (*ibid.*, 199), though the reaction was otherwise among Rousseau's dwindling associates in France (Damrosch 2005, 428). In a budding age of proto-social-media, Hume, like Grimm, simply might

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9. Edmonds and Eidinow (2006, 268–270) offer a listing of recriminations against Hume, highly unreliable and biased, I feel. Some of Hume's other small fibs include: In his 22 October 1765 letter to Rousseau, Hume should not have told of "the Respect, which every one there [England] bears to your Character" (as translated by Mossner 2001, 510; Hume's original French is at I:526). Hume knew, but said otherwise to Rousseau, that Davenport arranged a chaise for Rousseau for a journey he was to make, arranged under some false pretenses of it being available just coincidentally (II:29–30, 33). Hume's diminishing of the derisiveness of Horace Walpole's spoof Frederick the Great letter seems forced.

Also, though not fibs *to Rousseau*: Hume seems to overlook several of his friends when he says that his friends came round to supporting his publishing his account of the affair, as noted by Rasmussen (2017, 143; see also Mossner 2001, 529).

And I would not say, as Hume does, that Rousseau's letter to him of March 29 was written "in the most amicable terms imaginable" (Hume 2021/1766, 295) and was "very cordial" (*ibid.*, 312 n.29), nor that in that of March 22 "there is a most unreserved Cordiality; not the least Appearance of Suspicion" (308 n.20) and was "entirely cordial" (322 n.40). Indeed, in retrospect, Rousseau's words take on a definite antagonistic meaning, for example the following from the March 22 letter: "To make another happy, is to deserve to be happy one's self. May you therefore find in yourself the reward of all you have done for me!" (291). Such double-entendre recurs in those two letters, and I find it inconceivable that Hume did not sense a deep enmity in them, if only subconsciously.



not have seen how irresponsible people—the public—are, and hence how large Rousseau’s influence would be.

I came to recognize that, if we can reasonably imagine a 1765 Hume who:

- a. thinks the English Settlement will be easy; or
- b. does not expect Rousseau to ever have much future influence, regardless; or
- c. does not sense the value of that influence to be particularly negative,

then my explanation suffers. I have put the premises (a), (b), and (c) rather starkly. Indeed, if either (b) or (c) is strongly the case, then my explanation simply dies.

By the time I completed this article, however, I had experienced yet another progression of sentiment, recovering much of the original confidence I had had for some time and up to when I made a start on writing the article. The theorized Hume is somewhere between the Hume of those stark assumptions and the Hume I had thought up to then. My own sense of the theorized Hume now has moved a little toward the starkly-stated Hume, but only a little. An anxiety about possible hindsight bias induced me to think more carefully about these considerations.

## **Rousseau’s legacy, had the English Settlement succeeded**

Would Hume have sensed that the English Settlement would greatly diminish Rousseau’s legacy? The “greatly” refers not to the magnitude of Rousseau’s legacy, but to the reduction in it, as if multiplying by a scalar like 0.3. I think Hume would recognize that Rousseau’s legacy would be reduced substantially. Let us look at some of Rousseau’s words, to 1762, and ponder how the English Settlement would have affected their legacy.

Near the beginning of the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, Rousseau describes modern enslavement:

While the Government and the Laws see to the safety and the well-being of men assembled, the Sciences, Letters, and Arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which they are laden, throttle in them the sentiment of that original freedom for which they seemed born, make them love their slavery, and fashion them into what is called civilized Peoples. Need raised up Thrones; the Sciences and Arts have made them strong. Earthly Powers, love talents and protect those who cultivate them! Civilized peoples, cultivate them: Happy slaves, you owe

them the delicate and refined taste on which you pride yourselves; the sweet character and urbane morals which make for such engaging and easy relations among you; in a word, the appearances of all the virtues without having a single one. (Rousseau 1997a, 7)

Rousseau is rich, but think how much richer this becomes on the English Settlement. He ironically advises Earthly Powers: “love talents and protect those who cultivate them!” That’s how Earthly Powers enslave us! Meanwhile, Rousseau flies to “iron chains,” contrived by none other than David Hume, the most illustrious exponent of slavery’s devices, “the Sciences, Letters, and Arts.”

In a footnote to the passage just quoted, Rousseau explains: “Princes always view with pleasure the dissemination among their subjects of a taste for the agreeable Arts... For besides thus nurturing in them that pettiness of soul so suited to servitude, they well know that all the needs which a People imposes on itself are so many chains which it assumes” (1997a, 7 n.). On the English Settlement, people might wonder: Does that princely pension likewise work a pettiness of soul so suited to servitude? Rousseau concludes the footnote: “the Savages of America who go about altogether naked and live entirely off the products of their hunt have proved impossible to tame. Indeed, what yoke could be imposed upon men who need nothing?” How would this sound when spoken by a man in a royal yoke?

Imagine how the following would sound from a Rousseau who had embraced the English Settlement, from *The Social Contract* (1762): “As for you, modern peoples, you have no slaves, but are yourselves slaves; you pay for their freedom with your own. Well may you boast of this preference; I find in it more cowardice than humanity” (1997b, 115).

Thusly did Rousseau explain modern enslavement. Turn now to the life of virtue, from the *Discourse on Political Economy*, which appeared in 1755 in volume V of Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopædia*:

Certain it is that the greatest marvels of virtue have been produced by love of fatherland... It is patriotism that produced the many immortal actions whose brilliance dazzles our weak eyes, and the many great men whose antique virtues are treated as fables ever since patriotism has been turned into derision. That should not surprise us; the transports of tender hearts look like so many chimeras to anyone who has not felt them; love of fatherland, a hundred times more lively and delightful than the love of a mistress, can also be conceived only experiencing it; but it is easy to recognize in all the hearts it excites, in all the actions it inspires, this seething and sublime ardor which even the purest virtue does not radiate when separated from love of fatherland. (1997b, 16)

Undeceive yourself, he urges, by knowing from experience love of fatherland; only then will you radiate that sublime ardor a hundred times more lively than the love

of a mistress (a thousand times that of your children, no doubt), from his home in a country where he cannot speak the language, on the English Settlement.

Perhaps Rousseau would, however, have learned the language and love of his adopted fatherland—England! How would the following remarks strike a reader, given that Rousseau had accepted the English Settlement?:

[From *Essay on the Origins of Languages*, probably written before 1762:]

At Homer's feast an ox is slaughtered to regale one's guests, as one might nowadays slaughter a suckling pig... To get a notion of the meals of the ancients one need only consider the meals of present-day Savages; I almost said of Englishmen. (1997a, 270)

[From *Émile*, 1762:]

The English are noted for their cruelty [footnote: I am aware that the English make a boast of their humanity and of the kindly disposition of their race, which they call 'good-natured people;' but in vain do they proclaim this fact; no one else says it of them.] (Rousseau 1911, 118, n.1)

[From *The Social Contract*, 1762:]

Any law which the People has not ratified in person is null; it is not a law. The English people thinks it is free; it is greatly mistaken, it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as they are elected, it is enslaved, it is nothing. The use it makes of its freedom during the brief moments it has it fully warrants its losing it. (1997b, 114)

[From *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, written 1772:]

The Lawgiver as a body is impossible to corrupt, but easy to deceive. Its representatives are difficult to deceive, but easily corrupted, and it rarely happens that they are not corrupted. You have before your eyes the example of the English Parliament... (1997b, 201)

These four passages on England (only two of which could have been known to Hume at the time) help us understand how England in particular, as a place for settling, would have subverted Rousseau's legacy. They also speak to why a pension from the English Crown would have been rather different from the support he received from others.<sup>10</sup>

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10. Regarding offers of monetary support that Rousseau accepted, it is not something I have researched thoroughly. Damrosch (2005, 419) indicates that circa 1765 Rousseau enjoyed a guaranteed annual income of 600 livres (about 30 pounds) from George Keith Earl Marischal, who, it seems cut off Rousseau after the blowup (ibid., 428), 300 livres from Marc-Michel Rey, and 300 livres from publisher Pierre Guy. Other forms of support—protection, hospitality, lodging, etc.—Rousseau received from numerous other individuals, over the years.

Someone like Rousseau can appeal to people with literary politics, but the seduction would falter when it is common knowledge that the author enjoyed a royal pension and caretaking by Hume and the British establishment. It is hard to imagine that Hume would not have sensed the huge hit that Rousseau's persona, and legacy, would take. After the blowup, Hume wrote to Smith (August 1766) that exposing Rousseau's conduct "would blast him for ever; and blast his Writings at the same time: For as these have been exalted much above their Merit, when his personal Character falls, they would of Course fall below their Merit" (II:83).

Accepting the English Settlement would have subverted Rousseau's legacy partly in the way it would have served the English Crown and Britain's reputation as a tolerant and liberal nation—as a refuge for persecuted intellectuals. As early as 1 July 1762, Hume wrote to the Comtesse de Boufflers, "as I have some connexions with men of rank in London, I shall instantly write to them, and endeavour to make them sensible of the honour M. Rousseau has done us in choosing an asylum in England" (I:363). On 5 July 1762, he wrote to Gilbert Elliot:

Our present King and present Minister [Lord Bute] are desirous of being thought encouragers of learning: can they have a more proper opportunity of showing to the whole world that they are in earnest? Monsieur Rousseau is now thrown out of his ordinary course of livelihood; and tho he rejects presents from private persons, he may not think himself degraded by a pension from a great monarch: and it would be a singular victory over the French, worth a hundred of our Mindens,<sup>11</sup> to protect and encourage a man of genius whom they had persecuted. (I:367)

In a 19 January 1766 letter to the Comtesse de Boufflers, Hume reported how General Conway "seemed to embrace with zeal the motion of giving him [Rousseau] a pension, as honourable both to the King and nation. I shall suggest the same idea to other men in power whom I may meet with, and I do not despair of succeeding" (II:3). Rousseau, then, would be helping the British in a victory over the French. The optics of falling in with—or becoming a pet of—the British establishment would not have enhanced his appeal with would-be enthusiasts.

That the English Settlement would have hurt Rousseau's legacy is something of which readers are vaguely aware. Such vague awareness gives an unaccountable pungency to "*Je tiens J. J. Rousseau.*" Rousseau cannot come out and accuse Hume of aiming to subvert his legacy. But nonetheless Rousseau could have used aspects of the subversion idea to suggest ulterior motivation and to embellish his victimization. In his 10 July 1766 letter, he writes: "I saw very well there was something in the affair which I did not comprehend" (quoted in Hume 2021/1766,

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11. On 1 August 1759, at Minden, during the Seven Years War, Britain and allies defeated France and allies.

308). And he explains that a reason for his taking up Hume's invitation was to set "an example to men of letters, in a sincere union between two men so different in their principles" (ibid., 301). Rousseau highlights Hume's initial "good offices" to him, including "the zeal" Hume exerted in soliciting the royal pension and the trouble he took to find suitable accommodation (302, 303, 308, 314). Rousseau explains to Hume that, to confirm his suspicions of Hume, he embarked on a determined plan of disdaining Hume, enumerating a first, second, and third "slap of the face" dealt to Hume (312–313). Rousseau's 10 July letter opens by addressing Hume in the second person but soon shifts to the third person: "Could Mr. Hume, after so many instances of disdain on my part, have still the astonishing generosity as to persevere sincerely to serve me?... [H]e must have supposed me to have been an infamous scoundrel. It was then in behalf of a man whom he supposed to be a scoundrel, that he so warmly solicited<sup>12</sup> a pension from his Majesty" (318). Rousseau drives home that Hume had to have an ulterior motive.

And what, according to Rousseau, was it? What sense, after all, did Rousseau propose that *we make* of "*Je tiens J. J. Rousseau*"?

Rousseau tells us, in effect, that Hume, motivated perhaps by envy,<sup>13</sup> plotted, since Paris,<sup>14</sup> to draw Rousseau to England and then proceed to deceive, torment and humiliate him by conspiring with associates to deride, slight, and ignore Rousseau, by tampering with his mail, by suppressing publication of two pieces Rousseau sought to be published (see Hume 2021/1766, 306, 311), and by plotting to disgrace Rousseau over the royal pension, somehow (cf. Rasmussen 2017, 140).<sup>15</sup> The ulterior motive for this most marvelous plot of petty torments, according to Rousseau, is completely unsatisfying; it lacks substance and coherence. Far from wanting to trouble himself with tending Rousseau's comforts, and even farther from wanting to torment Rousseau, Hume wanted to realize the English Settlement, maintain an awkward yet peaceful cordiality with Rousseau, and otherwise be over with it.

My point is: That the English Settlement would subvert Rousseau's legacy lurked in the shadows of some people's minds, but no one could come out and say it.

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12. Where Rousseau writes "solicited a pension," think: *labored to maintain* the plan of a royal pension.

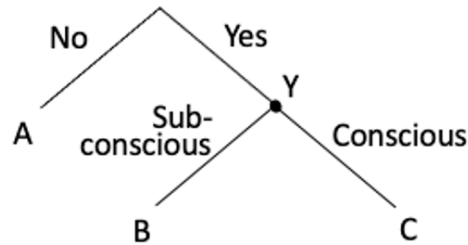
13. "He [Hume] saw [in Paris], and perhaps saw too much of, the favourable reception I met with from a great Prince, and I will venture to say, of the public. I yielded, as it was my duty, though with reluctance, to that eclat; concluding how far it must excite the envy of my enemies" (quoted in Hume 2021/1766, 301).

14. "I saw the plot which was put in execution at London, had been laid in Paris" (quoted in Hume 2021/1766, 310).

15. Rousseau's explanation of how Hume would "disgrace" him over the pension is unintelligible to me (quoted in Hume 2021/1766, 318).

## Further on Hume's motives

### Subverting Rousseau's legacy an impetus?



**Figure 1.** Subverting an impetus? Conscious?

Figure 1 is not a sequence of Hume's thoughts or decisions. Rather it helps us analyze *our* questions about Hume's impetus. I suggest that subverting Rousseau's legacy was an impetus, which would put us to node Y. As for whether Hume was conscious of that impetus, I think basically no, which would put us at B. My feeling is that Hume may have been a little bit conscious of it, putting him between B and C, but closer to B.

Again, Hume must have seen how the English Settlement would have diminished Rousseau's would-be legacy, whatever its magnitude, like multiplying by 0.3, and that he thought that legacy bad. Here I elaborate on these matters, and on Hume's consciousness of the conjectured impetus.

By the time the business starts in early July 1762, it was plain to everyone that Rousseau spoke to something in people, and the world responded, as he was very famous. Hume shows awareness of that from the start. In Paris in 1765, Hume marveled at the reception of Rousseau: "It is impossible to express or imagine the Enthusiasm of this Nation in his favour... Voltaire and every body else, are quite eclipsed by him" (I:529). Enjoying his role as Rousseau's designated conductor and protector, Hume elaborates colorfully on Rousseau's fame and popularity. He remarks on it frequently in his letters, for example in letter of 22 March 1766: "[O]f all the Writers that are or ever were in Europe, he is the man who has acquired the most enthusiastic and most passionate Admirers" (II:27). I recognize that witnessing the mania for Rousseau in the 1760s does not convince one that Rousseau will have a powerful influence for decades and centuries to come. After the blowup and the publication of Hume's *Concise and Genuine Account* of the affair, Hume says that Rousseau's popularity has been punctured and deflated, even "consign'd to perpetual Neglect and Oblivion," because Rousseau's rascality has been exposed (II:166; see also 168).

As for Hume's assessment of Rousseau's works and their influence, prior to the blowup it is ambivalent. First, we highlight the negative. Hume did not write anything of Rousseau until early July 1762, in correspondence with the Comtesse de Boufflers, who, importantly, is both highly sympathetic (at that time, but not later) to Rousseau and is becoming romantically entangled with Hume.<sup>16</sup> Hume eagerly responds to the idea of helping to settle Rousseau in Britain, writing back to Boufflers and writing to Rousseau. He also writes, 5 July 1762, to Gilbert Elliot and comments on Rousseau's works: "For my part, tho I see some tincture of extravagance in all of them, I also think I see so much eloquence and force of imagination, such an energy of expression, and such a boldness of conception, as entitles him to a place among the first writers of the age" (I:366). In this passage, written to a friend and fellow Scot, we see an ambivalence from the outset: The praise is about technique and style, not character and substance; he sees "some tincture of extravagance in all of them." In a letter of early 1765, he ventures to remark to the Comtesse on *Letters Written from the Mountain*, in which Rousseau sought vengeance on the rulers of Geneva after the city censored and burned *The Social Contract* and *Émile*:

I have read a great part of Les Lettres de la Montagne. The book in my humble opinion will not do credit to M. Rousseau, though it might to another. I disapprove particularly of the seditious purpose of the last letters, which have succeeded but too well at Geneva: for the magistrates of that city, which the author had formerly celebrated with reason as one of the best governed in the world, are in mortal fear every hour of being massacred by the populace. (I:493)

Hume does not endorse censorship, of course, but duty and justice call also upon Rousseau, who wields his own powers. Hume is quite right that *Letters Written from the Mountain* is incendiary. It says that "if one remarked an inclination toward violence in a Government" then "there would remain a sad but legal remedy, which in this extreme case could be employed as one employs the hand of a Surgeon when gangrene breaks out" (Rousseau 2001/1764, 305). The final paragraph urges the people to "come together" against Geneva's ruling council, for united makes right:

But above all come together. You are ruined without resource if you remain divided. And why would you be divided when such great common interests unite you? How do base jealousy and petty passions dare to make themselves

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16. Edmonds and Eidinow (2006, 266) suggest that perhaps Hume wanted to please the Comtesse de Boufflers. I have not much explored the idea (their correspondence is mostly in French, which I cannot read). I incline toward thinking that it may have initially prompted Hume to help Rousseau as she desired, but that other motives quickly became the dominant ones.



heard in such danger? Are they worth being satisfied at such a high price, and will it be necessary for your children to say someday while weeping over their chains: here is the fruit of our fathers' dissensions? In a word, it is less a question of deliberation here than of concord; the choice of which course you will take is not the greatest question: Were it bad in itself, take it all together; *by that alone it will become the best*, and you will always do what needs to be done provided that you do so in concert. There is my advice, Sir, and I end where I began. By obeying you I have fulfilled my final duty toward the Fatherland [Geneva]. (Rousseau 2001/1764, 306)

In a letter to Hugh Blair, 28 December 1765, Hume tells of Rousseau's recent travels through Switzerland on the road to Paris: "The Council of Berne, frightend for his Neighbourhood, on account of his democratical, more than his religious Principles, orderd him immediately to withdraw from their State" (I:528). Leo Damrosch (2005, 424) notes, "the British government was certainly alarmed by the inflammatory politics of *Letters Written from the Mountain*."

Perhaps Hume did not foresee the influence that Rousseau's moral and political writings would have. Still, we should ask: What did he think of the political works? He wrote Blair in a letter of 25 March 1766: "I think this Work [*Heloise*] his Master-piece; tho' he himself told me, that he valu'd most his *Contract sociale*; which is as preposterous a Judgement as that of Milton, who preferd the Paradise regaind to all his other Performances" (II:28). In the letter of 25 March 1766, to Blair, Hume reports that Rousseau himself had told him, "I still dread, that my Writings are good for nothing at the bottom, and that all my Theories are full of Extravagance" (II, 31).

After the blowup, Hume expresses—so quickly—a damning assessment of Rousseau's work, without ever denying Rousseau's eloquence. He would repeat the story about Rousseau confessing disgust at his own attempts at thought (see II:103–104). He writes 15 July 1766 to the Comtesse that Rousseau is "a man who has but too long deceived a great part of mankind" (II:62). In late Sept 1766, to Turgot, he suggests that, of course, he had always thought Rousseau's works sophistical and dangerous: "You know, that I always esteemed his Writings for their Eloquence alone and that I looked on them, at the bottom, as full of Extravagance and Sophistry... Is there any Harm that the Public in general shou'd adopt the same Sentiments, and shou'd appreciate at their just Value Compositions *whose general Tendency is sure rather to do hurt than Service to Mankind?*" (II:91, italics added). Writing to Blair in May 1767, anticipating Rousseau's memoirs, Hume predicts that they "will be full of Eloquence & Extravagance; tho' perhaps as reasonable as any of his past Productions. For I do not imagine he was ever much more in his Senses than at present" (II:141).

Hume's ambivalence about Rousseau pertains both to whether he might see

danger in Rousseau's influence and whether he was conscious of an impetus within himself to reduce that danger. Similarly, we should reflect on the respect that Hume had for Rousseau, as a man.

Hume's trail of remarks about Rousseau begins with his initial and enthusiastic response (1 July 1762) to the Comtesse about "asylum in England," saying, "I revere his greatness of mind" (I:363). The next day (2 July 1762), Hume writes his first communication to Rousseau, including:

I have long coveted, the Pleasure of your Acquaintance; and in time, as I wou'd fain flatter myself, the Honour of your Friendship. For I will use the Freedom of telling you bluntly, without affecting the Finesse of a well-turn'd Compliment, that, of all men of Letters in Europe, since the Death of President Montesquieu, you are the Person whom I most revere, both for the Force of your Genius and Greatness of your Mind. ... Permit me also some Liberty of boasting on this Occasion while I pretend, that my Conduct & Character entitle me a Sympathy with Yours; at least, in my Love of philosophical Retreat, in my Neglect of vulgar Prejudices, and in my Disdain of all Dependence: And if these Circumstances had happily prov'd the Foundation of an amicable Connexion between us; I shou'd have entertain'd the Project of engaging you to honour this part of the World with your Company... (I:364–365).

Hume's praises are frequent, but always followed by 'buts,' sometimes a considerable list of 'buts,' such as in his February 1766 letter to the Marquise de Barbentane (II:14).

But the lack of respect is also looming before the acrimony begins to surface. For example, to Blair, 28 December 1765, Hume writes: "I am well assur'd, that at times he believes he has Inspirations from an Immediate Communication with the Divinity: He falls sometimes into Ecstacies which retain him in the same Posture for Hours together" (I:530). To the Comtesse in January 1766, he says of Rousseau, "I believe at the same time that nobody knows himself less" (II:2).

Consider the start of Hume's short letter to Smith of January 1766:

Dear Smith

I can write as seldom and as Short as you—I am sorry I did not see you before I left Paris. I am also sorry I shall not see you there soon. **I shall not be able to fix Rousseau to his Mind for some Weeks yet:** He is a little variable & fanciful, tho' very agreeable. (II:5–6, boldface added)

Hume tells Smith that he will fix Rousseau "to his Mind." The remark is striking in its terseness and confidence, as though counting down to saying 'mission accomplished!' Although I think Smith disliked Rousseau and thought his influence was

bad,<sup>17</sup> I rather doubt that Smith ever encouraged the mission or ever expected it to succeed.

After the blowup, which happens June–July 1766, the ambivalence is gone entirely; afterward there is only enmity, often mixed with pity. To Blair, 1 July, he writes that Rousseau “is surely the blackest and most atrocious Villain, beyond comparison, that now exists in the World; and I am heartily asham’d of any thing I ever wrote in his Favour” (II:57). Later that month, Hume reflects on Rousseau’s abusiveness: “I do not however find, that, in other Respects he is madder than usual; nor is his Conduct towards me much worse than toward M. Diderot about seven Years ago” (II:70). To Turgot in September 1766 he writes: “The Life of such a Man is to be regarded as one contu’d Lye and Imposture” (II:90)

## Salvage efforts even after the blowup

After the blowup in July 1766, it is a full ten months before Rousseau departs England, on 21 May 1767, never to return (see Zaretsky and Scott 2009, 194–197). Hume tells Blair of Rousseau’s departure from Wootton, Davenport’s extra house: “You may perhaps have heard, that Rousseau has elop’d from Mr Davenport without any Warning; leaving all his Baggage except Mad<sup>lle</sup> [Marie-Thérèse La Vasseur], about thirty pounds in Davenport’s hands, and a Letter on the Table abusing him in the most violent Terms, insinuating that he was in a Conspiracy with me to ruin him” (II:135; cf. Edmonds and Eidinow 2006, 241, 251). The last piece of correspondence between Hume and Rousseau was 22 July 1766. Yet Hume’s efforts to salvage what he could of the English Settlement continued to at least July 1767, *a full year after open mutual enmity*.

After Hume has received the hateful letter of 10 July 1766, he writes to Davenport on 15 July: “if I may venture to give my Advice, it is, that you wou’d continue the charitable Work you have begun, till he be shut up altogether in Bedlam, or till he quarrel with you and run away from you” (II:65). Hume reiterates to him the same advice on 2 September 1766: “I shall use the Freedom to repeat my Exhortations to you, that you continue, as long as possible, the same good Offices towards him, which you have so charitably begun” (II:87). And Hume says in the Account: “Even since M. Rousseau’s Rupture with me, I have employed my good Offices with Mr. Davenport to continue the same charitable care of his unhappy guest” (2021/1766, 303 n.7).

As for the pension, the possibility of which Rousseau himself continued to

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17. I treat Smith’s attitude toward Rousseau in Klein 2014a and Klein 2021. Lund (2021) argues that Smith repeatedly twisted Rousseau’s words and arguments.

inquire after with the King's agents, Hume reports to Blair on 24 February 1767:

General Conway told me on my Arrival, that Rousseau had made an Application to him, thro' the Canal of Mr Davenport, to have his Pension granted to him. The General's Answer was, that I was to be in town in a few days; and without my Consent and even full Approbation he would take no Step in that Affair. You may believe, that I exhorted him to do so charitable an Action. (II:121)

On 19 March 1767, Hume writes to William Robertson:

When the matter was proposed to me, I exhorted the General to do this act of charity to a man of genius, however wild and extravagant. The King, when applied to, said, that since the pension had once been promised, it should be granted, notwithstanding all that had passed in the interval. And *thus the affair is happily finished*, unless some new extravagance come across the philosopher, and engage him to reject what he has anew applied for. (II:131, italics added)

The italicized bit is curious: "thus the affair is happily finished." Does Hume mean that this finish to the affair, that is, Rousseau receiving the pension, is a happy one? Or simply that we are happy to be finished with the affair?

In the 1 July 1767 letter to Davenport, Hume writes: "I know not, what can be done with regard to his Pension: It has pass'd all the Forms in the Treasury; but unless he appoint some Person to receive it, it never can be pay'd. Be so good as to mention that Matter to him, and desire him to write a Letter to Charles Lowndes Esqr Secretary to the Treasury, appointing him to pay the Money to some Person, whom he, Rousseau, shall chuse" (II:147).

Rousseau never received any pension payments.<sup>18</sup> A final snippet about the pension from Hume's correspondence is of note. He writes to the Comtesse on 26 April 1768: "I think that this philosopher [Rousseau] now speaks less of his return to this country; which indeed does not well suit him, as he would here be neither courted nor persecuted. *He does well to enjoy his pension at a distance from us*" (II:176, italics added). I suppose Hume means, *if* there is still life in the pension possibility, Rousseau would do well to enjoy it at a distance from Britain.

Why did Hume try to salvage what he could of the English Settlement? Maybe to display that he was not embittered against Rousseau, to show that he was bigger than the personal acrimony, and maybe to burnish the reputation of England as a tolerant nation and to serve British elites. I confess that those are reasonable

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18. I asked around with several Rousseau scholars, and the responses were all to the effect: No, not as far as we know. Edmonds and Eidinow (2006, 253) indicate that as of 1770 Rousseau had not received any payments of the pension.

enough. Still, another possible reason is that he continued to sense that the royal pension and settling in England would tend to subvert Rousseau's legacy.

## “I have Themistocles, I have Themistocles”

In December 1766, Hume wrote to the London bookseller Thomas Becket, who had worked with Strahan in publishing *A Concise and Genuine Account*. In the letter Hume gives a dozen revisions, mostly very minor, to be made, in the event of a second edition, which never happened. One revision is an insertion about Themistocles. So far as I know, it has not been noted in any of the treatments of the affair.

The Themistocles insertion pertains to “*Je tiens J. J. Rousseau.*” The insertion is an addition to the footnote given when Rousseau reports Hume saying “*Je tiens J. J. Rousseau,*” a footnote supposedly by Hume. It appears, however, that that footnote was one of those that was entirely the creation of the editors in France. With the insertion, then, Hume is adding something to something he did not write but which he could not simply undo or disavow as not of his composing. The footnote reads:

I cannot answer for every thing I may say in my sleep, and much less am I conscious whether or not I dream in French. But pray, as Mr Rousseau did not know whether I was asleep or awake when I pronounced those terrible words, with such a terrible voice, how is he certain that he himself was well awake when he heard them? (Hume 1766b, 79)

To that, Hume, in his December 1766 letter to Becket, instructs the following addition for a never-realized second edition:

If M. Rousseau consult his Plutarch, he will find, that when Themistocles fled to Persia, Xerxes was so pleas'd with this Event, that he was heard to exclaim several times in his sleep, I have Themistocles, I have Themistocles. Why will not M. Rousseau understand my Exclamation in the same Sense? (II:117)

Hume's allusion conforms to the text of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. Themistocles had been run out of Athens and fled to Persia. Plutarch (1975, 150) says that accounts differ as to whether the Persian king in the story was Xerxes or his son, as Xerxes died about that time, so Plutarch proceeds to speak simply of “the king.” Prior to encountering the king, Themistocles applied to a Persian commander to approach the king with the following message: “I, that come hither to increase the power and glory of the king, will not only submit myself to his laws, since so it hath pleased the god who exalteth the Persian empire to this

greatness, but will also cause many more to be worshippers and adorers of the king” (ibid.). Themistocles afterwards encounters the king and says: “If you save me, you will save your suppliant; if otherwise, will destroy an enemy of the Greeks” (ibid., 151). Plutarch continues:

The king heard him attentively, and, though he admired his temper and courage, gave him no answer at that time; but, when he was with his intimate friends, rejoiced in his great good fortune, and esteemed himself very happy in this, and prayed to his god Arimanius, that all his enemies might be ever of the same mind with the Greeks, to abuse and expel the bravest men amongst them. Then he sacrificed to the gods, and presently fell to drinking, and was so well pleased, that in the night, in middle of his sleep, he cried out for joy three times, *‘I have Themistocles the Athenian.’* (Plutarch 1975, 151, italics added)

Themistocles the Athenian was well treated by the Persian king. Once they could converse in the Persian language, “the king invited him to partake of his own pastimes and recreations both at home and abroad, carrying him with him a-hunting, and made him his intimate so far that he permitted him to see the queen-mother, and converse frequently with her.” The king assimilated Themistocles to Persian customs: “[T]he favours shown to other strangers were nothing in comparison with the honours conferred on him” (152).

The Themistocles would-be insertion regarding “*Je tiens J. J. Rousseau*” is significant. Hume casts Rousseau as Themistocles, who migrates in attitudinal space across empires to settle down in peace with a pension from the king. On the notion that Hume’s Persia is worth fortifying, everyone is better off, including the good soul of J. J. Rousseau. On that notion, Hume is helping Rousseau to become, in spite of himself, a better person.

## Concluding remarks

In 1767 there appeared a pseudonymous squib titled, “Heads of an Indictment Laid by J. J. Rousseau, Philosopher, Against D. Hume, Esq.” (reprinted in II:446–448). Its author, “Freebody,” lays out twelve indictments. Here are words from the first indictment:

1. That the said David Hume, to the great scandal of philosophy, and not having the fitness of things before his eyes, did concert a plan...to ruin the said J. J. Rousseau for ever, by bringing him over to England, and there settling him to his heart’s content.

Those words fit my suggested explanation for Hume's puzzling and perseverant endeavor to settle Rousseau in England with a royal pension. If Rousseau had embraced the settlement and royal pension in England, his legacy would have been diminished, maybe much diminished.

I think Hume strove to do things that would make the world better off, and with more scruple than most. I daresay the world would have been much better off if Hume had gotten Rousseau to settle in England with a royal pension. I believe that Hume never had any interest or inclination to torment Rousseau. On my speculation, Hume was manipulative, but it was a manipulation that, if successful, Rousseau would have consented to and participated in. It would have been, in a sense, the assisting of Rousseau in his own effort to manipulate himself. It would be Hume and Rousseau cooperating in the manipulation of Rousseau. Hume endeavored to bring Rousseau, with his own consensual participation, to a better state of being.

People are always somewhat confused about their personal affairs. But the period July 1762 to July 1766 was especially disorienting for Hume. He was appointed in 1763 secretary of the embassy in France, and in Paris he enjoyed a tremendous cultural celebrity wholly new to him. He was confused about his relationship with the Comtesse de Boufflers, and, relatedly, about where to live out his remaining years, and whether he would ever again write works that enhanced his *oeuvres* and legacy. Hume was flustered by various trends and machinations in English politics, including a hostility toward the influence of Scots in government office.

Amid all these commotions within Hume's selfhood was the affair with Rousseau. That an impetus works subconsciously gains plausibility if the person is in a state of novelty, distraction, and perplexity. Sometimes we don't know what we're doing.

Psychologizing the terrestrial transactions of an important person in history, occurring more than 250 years ago, is a novelty for me. I share my ponderings to the extent of my knowledge. I encourage others to tell me what I've missed and to criticize this essay, not least as concerns French-language materials.

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