

Byron Davies

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Education

Harvard University, PhD candidate in Philosophy, 2008-present (PhD expected 2017)

Reed College, BA in Philosophy, May 2007

Areas of Specialization

Ethics and moral psychology, aesthetics, social and political philosophy and its history

Areas of Competence

Philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, philosophy of action, philosophy and literature, philosophy and film

Dissertation

Persons, Things, and the Will: An Essay on Rousseau

Committee: Richard Moran (chair), Matthew Boyle, Frederick Neuhauser

Jean-Jacques Rousseau developed a criticism of relationships of domination that has special salience today, especially in its bearing on the pathologies that can inhere between those of superior and those of inferior social status. But though it is important to Rousseau's criticism that such domination be understood as involving the violation of another's personhood, received philosophical notions of personhood, and of "treating persons as things," are not adequate for capturing Rousseau's thinking on these pathologies. I develop an *affective* conception of a person according to which seeing another as a person is a matter of seeing them as a source of differential recognition (recognition that picks oneself out from among many). I argue that the pathologies of domination consist in the dominator's seeking differential recognition in a way that bypasses the other's independent powers of evaluation.

Academic Honors and Awards

Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, 2016-17

Richard M. Martin Dissertation Fellowship, Harvard Philosophy Department, Fall 2014; 2015-16

Participant, SIAS Summer Institute on the Second Person. National Humanities Center, Aug. 7-19, 2011; Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Aug. 5-17, 2012.

Harvard University Certificate of Distinction in Teaching, 2012

Class of '21 Award for exceptional creative work, Reed College, 2007 (Awarded to senior thesis)

Edwin N. Garlan Memorial Prize for outstanding scholarship in philosophy, Reed College, 2007

Phi Beta Kappa, 2007

Publications

“The Insult in Not Being Believed: Rousseau and Adam Smith.” *The Adam Smith Review*. (Provisionally accepted, with revisions.)

“An Autobiography of Companions.” *Modern Language Notes* 126 (5): 972-78. December 2011. (Issue devoted to Stanley Cavell’s *Little Did I Know*.)

Online Publications

“Spectators and Giants in Rousseau and Victor Erice.” *Aesthetics for Birds*. September 2016. <https://aestheticsforbirds.com/2016/09/28/spectators-and-giants-in-rousseau-and-victor-erice/>

Presentations

“*Amour-Propre* and Seeing Others as Persons.”

*POLETH Research Group in Political, Legal, and Ethical Theory. Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). March 29, 2017.

*Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy. August 31, 2016.

“Imagination, Artifice, and ‘Walls with a Soul’ in Two Films by Agnès Varda and Alain Resnais.” Harvard Philosophy Department Philosophy and Film Series. April 29, 2016.

“Rousseau on Seeing Others as Persons.” Mahindra Humanities Center “Panaesthetics” Workshop, Harvard University. March 30, 2016.

“Rousseau on Domination and Treating Persons as Things.”

*Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy. March 24, 2016.

*Harvard University Philosophy Department Talkshop. December 11, 2015.

“The Insult in Not Being Believed: Rousseau and Adam Smith.”

*Boston University Graduate Philosophy Conference. October 24, 2015.

*Conference on Themes from Smith and Rousseau. University of Glasgow. July 21, 2015.

*Between Ethics and Epistemology: Reflecting on the Work of Miranda Fricker. University of Massachusetts Boston. April 27, 2015.

“Personhood in Rousseau’s Account of Nascent Society.” Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy. May 4, 2015.

Comments on Ginger Clausen, “Fitting Love.” 2015 Harvard-MIT Graduate Student Philosophy Conference. April 18, 2015.

“Rousseau on Persons and Things.”

*Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy. October 26, 2014

*Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Metaphysics and Epistemology. May 5, 2014.

“What Role Is There for the Concept of Authority in Thinking about Ordinary Language?” Workshop on French translation of Richard Moran’s *Authority and Estrangement*. Université Paris I - Panthéon Sorbonne. January 18, 2014.

“Rousseau on Intersubjectivity.” Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Metaphysics and Epistemology. April 15, 2013.

“Appearances of the Self in Rousseau and Kierkegaard.”

*Annual Harvard Workshop in European Philosophy: The Discourse of Philosophy. December 7, 2012.

*Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Metaphysics and Epistemology. November, 27, 2012.

“Knowing What We Say.”

*Giving and Asking for Reasons: A Workshop with Robert Brandom. Universität Basel, Switzerland. May 5, 2012.

*Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Metaphysics and Epistemology. November 14, 2011.

*J.L. Austin Centenary Conference, Lancaster University, United Kingdom. April 6, 2011.

“The Importance of the Insult in Not Being Believed.” Harvard Philosophy Department Workshop in Metaphysics and Epistemology. April 16, 2012.

“An Autobiography of Companions.” Symposium on Stanley Cavell’s *Little Did I Know*, Johns Hopkins University Humanities Center. April 22, 2011.

“Ought’s Safe for Anscombe.” Fordham University Graduate Philosophy Conference on Aristotle in the 21st Century. March 5, 2010.

Teaching Experience

Philosophy Department Writing Fellow, Fall 2012-Spring 2013 (Writing instructor for undergraduates taking courses in the Philosophy Department)

As sole instructor of tutorials for undergraduate majors:

Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Spring 2015

Rousseau, Spring 2014

Philosophy of Film, Fall 2011

As teaching assistant:

From Sinners to Sociopaths: The Many Faces of Evil (John Hamilton and Amélie Rorty), Harvard Summer School 2015

Philosophy and Literature: Proust (Richard Moran), Spring 2012

Self, Freedom, and Existence (Richard Moran), Fall 2011

Introduction to Early Modern Philosophy (Alison Simmons), Spring 2011

Introduction to the Problems of Philosophy (Bernhard Nickel), Fall 2010

As grader:

Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein (Warren Goldfarb), Fall 2015

Aesthetics (Richard Moran), Spring 2014

Service

Graduate Representative to Harvard Philosophy Department Faculty, 2014-15

Organizer, Philosophy and Literature Reading Group, 2014-15

Member, CNRS (Centre National de de la Recherche Scientifique) International Research Group, "Philosophie du langage ordinaire et conceptions ordinaires en sciences sociales," 2013-present

Student organizer (assisting Matthew Boyle and Richard Moran), "Self, Knowledge, Expression" Workshop, Harvard University, November 2, 2012

Co-organizer, 2010 Harvard-MIT Graduate Student Philosophy Conference

Contributing editor, *OLP and Literary Studies*, 2010-present (Academic blog devoted to ordinary language philosophy, literature, and the arts)

Research Assistant for Professor Stanley Cavell, 2009-present

Professional Associations

American Philosophical Association

Rousseau Association

American Society of Aesthetics

Graduate Courses Taken

(All in Harvard Philosophy Department unless otherwise noted.)

First-Year Colloquium on Causation (Ned Hall and Alison Simmons)

First-Year Colloquium on Ethics (Douglas Lavin)

Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy (various faculty organizers)

Workshop in Metaphysics and Epistemology (various faculty organizers)

Aristotle on Justice (Gisela Striker)

Ethics and Action (Matthew Boyle and Douglas Lavin)

Topics in Intersubjectivity (Douglas Lavin and Richard Moran)

Deductive Logic (Peter Koellner)

The Rationalists (Jeffrey McDonough)

Kant and Hegel (Matthew Boyle)

Pragmatism (Peter Godfrey-Smith)

Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein (Warren Goldfarb)

Self-Knowledge and Self-Consciousness (Matthew Boyle)

Philosophy of Biology (Peter Godfrey-Smith)

Philosophy Translation Seminar: French (Richard Moran)

Painting, Smoking, Eating (Matt Saunders, Harvard Dept. of Visual and Environmental Studies)

Critical Media Practice (Matt Saunders, Harvard Dept. of Visual and Environmental Studies)

Graduate Courses Audited

(All in Harvard Philosophy Department unless otherwise noted.)

Philosophy of Action (Christine Korsgaard)

Kant's Ethical Theory (Christine Korsgaard)

Hume's Ethical Theory (Christine Korsgaard)

Equality and Liberty (T.M. Scanlon)

Topics in Ethics: Justice (Douglas Lavin)

Understanding Human Action (Jaegwon Kim, Brown University)

Speech and Intersubjectivity (Richard Moran)

Other Minds (Matthew Boyle and Richard Moran)

Aesthetics (Richard Moran)

On Beauty (Elaine Scarry, Harvard Dept. of English)

Languages

English (Native)

French (Research)

Spanish (Research)

References

Richard Moran

Brian D. Young Professor of Philosophy

Harvard University

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Matthew Boyle

Professor of Philosophy

University of Chicago

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Frederick Neuhouser

Viola Manderfeld Professor of German and Professor of Philosophy

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Warren Goldfarb (Teaching Reference)

Walter Beverly Pearson Professor of Modern Mathematics and Mathematical Logic

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Douglas Lavin

Permanent Lecturer in Philosophy

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Long Dissertation Abstract***Persons, Things, and the Will: An Essay on Rousseau***

It is easy to think that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writing is too immersed in eighteenth-century feudalism to have much bearing on contemporary social and political conditions. After all, in his criticisms of inequality and domination, Rousseau was much more concerned with interpersonal relationships like those between lord and bondsman than with the impersonal market characteristic of capitalist economies. For example, in the *Discourse on Inequality* and elsewhere, Rousseau was concerned with how a lord could be in the position to force or extract expressions of recognition (say, of his superiority) from his bondsman. But closer investigation finds that Rousseau's writing on domination is especially relevant under present conditions: that capitalism has in fact had the effect of liberalizing, and rendering inescapable, the relationships of domination that Rousseau critiqued. Whereas under feudalism such relationships inhered almost exclusively between lord and bondsman, we now see such relationships inhere between employer and employee, as well as between customer and employee in the service economy. Therefore, it is especially important that we consider Rousseau's positive political prescriptions in *The Social Contract*, and how they were (for example, by limiting inequalities, and in giving expression to a General Will) meant to alleviate the conditions that engender such relationships of domination.

In order to get clearer about Rousseau's notion of domination and its contemporary political relevance, we need to get clearer about the role that recognition plays in that notion, and also in what sense domination involves treating persons as "things." Unfortunately, received notions of personhood are not adequate to this task. For example, on what we might call a *political* conception of a person, acknowledging another as a person does indeed involve valuing their recognition: namely, their recognizing us as bearers of rights. This recognition is *non-differential* in that it involves recognizing another, not for any differentiating qualities, but as another person. Therefore, on this conception, violating another's personhood, as in violating their rights, somehow involves denying or forgetting their personhood. But in the sort of domination at the center of Rousseau's social critique, the dominator simply cannot have the satisfactions of domination unless they are knowingly dealing with another person. Moreover, the sort of recognition involved in domination is *differential* in that the dominator seeks somehow to be picked out from among many persons (for example, as superior in some respect).

Therefore, my dissertation argues that Rousseau employs an *affective* conception of a person, according to which acknowledging another as a person is a matter of seeing them as a source of differential recognition. Indeed, much of Rousseau's writing on love, friendship, and other features of our affective lives (especially in his educational treatise and novel *Emile*, as well as in his autobiographical writings) should be read as elaborations on the idea that, among all the entities we value, other persons are valuable as sources of a peculiar kind of satisfaction (that afforded by differential recognition). Moreover, Rousseau did not employ

the affective conception of a person to the exclusion of the political one. In fact, as one of the most important modern contributors to the political conception, he saw the two as deeply complementary. For Rousseau, the introduction of the political conception, and the notion of rights that goes with it, is central in alleviating the social conditions that engender relationships of domination (which cannot be fully understood or critiqued without the affective conception). Therefore, I argue against attempts to divorce Rousseau's articulation of the political conception from that specific political context.

In Chapter One ("Persons and Things"), I distinguish Rousseau's affective conception of a person from philosophical conceptions of personhood according to which seeing another as a person is a matter of applying monadic predicates (such as 'minded') to that other. Instead, for Rousseau, seeing another as a person is a matter of seeing them as *related* to oneself, and as setting limits on one's own will and activity. I then present the contrasting notion of a thing, as it appears in Rousseau's account of the original state of nature in the *Discourse on Inequality*. I argue that the *sauvage* of the state of nature, in being principally concerned with his own self-preservation, sees the world as exclusively a world of things.

In Chapter Two ("Personhood and *Amour-Propre*"), I consider the first appearance of *amour-propre*, or the desire for differential recognition from others, in Rousseau's account of "nascent society" in the *Discourse on Inequality*. After considering some passages about being confronted by other persons in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages* and in Rousseau's autobiographical writings, I argue that there is an important sense of 'person' made salient in our being subject to *amour-propre*, and that this is identical with the affective conception of a person. That is, in all the varieties of vanity, rivalry, and "living in the eyes of others," it is essential that we acknowledge others as persons in that sense.

In Chapter Three ("Domination and Treating Persons as Things"), I turn to Rousseau's critiques of domination in the *Discourse on Inequality* and the *Letter to d'Alembert*. I argue that, for Rousseau, making sense of the satisfactions of domination (for the dominator) requires seeing them as acknowledging the dominated as a person (in the affective sense). Moreover, for Rousseau, the pathology of domination consists in the dominator's seeking recognition in a way that bypasses the other's independent powers of evaluation. I also argue that it is characteristic of temporally extended relationships of domination (such as between lord and bondsman) to systematically engender false beliefs in both dominator and dominated.

In Chapter Four ("Personhood in the Social Contract"), I argue that among the primary tasks of Rousseau's positive political prescriptions is to alleviate the conditions that engender relationships of domination. I also argue that central to these prescriptions is the introduction of an artificial, political conception of a person. I end the chapter by distinguishing Rousseau's views on the relationship between these two conceptions of a person from two contemporary and broadly Kantian views that run these conceptions together: J. David Velleman on love and John Rawls on the social bases of self-respect.