

usual. Better to try to predict the behavior of mirrors at the speed of light! Forgive my whimsy, dear colleague, times such as ours stress even a nobleperson's sensitivities. I will convene the Committee on Totally Discrediting a Potential Threat to the Status Quo, and you will here our reply shortly.

Strictly between you and me, Randolph, I find this Rousseau fascinating. If merely his thinking could be restrained, we would have a valuable PR tool. I have never read a text so contradiction-laden¹, but that still compels me to read, read, until every word has been drunk (if not digested). I suspect this affect would be replicated in the common man, for interest and excitement are base and unrefined, and hence the real threat of Rousseau's work. It might inspire the ghastliest of behavior—and to think of the nerve to write a tract so blatantly concerned with inspiring action! Behavior, Randolph, from an intellectual!— he obviously knows not or cares not that behavior must be studied from afar, preferably as far away as possible. Academia will never be the same, I fear, if Rousseau is not made to be reviled.

Just conceive, if you will, the havoc to be wrought by common villagers taking these lines seriously: "...The sciences, letters and the arts... spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which [the common folk] are burdened, stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seem to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized peoples." (Third paragraph of Part One)

If people realize that they're being kept down by our devices, they will never forgive us. Never mind all our hard work to convince them that their place is fixed, immutable, destined, determined, natural, holy, and/or proper; failing that, we had to rely on combining our ranks as intellectuals with a sense of holy mission and proper distance— just think of all the great minds, over centuries, put to the task of making intellectual discourse utterly incomprehensible to everyone, including many intellects. And Rousseau dares make it plain and clear! How can we found our righteous superiority on knowing-what-few-can, when just anyone can spot the inconsistencies and fallacies in our policies?

And he doesn't understand how we deserve our place in the world: high above it. To his way of seeing, we are merely indoctrinated vassals, dragging the party line into a new generation. Oh how little does he realize how focused, intentional, and specific our labors and the labors of our noble ancestors have been. Does he think a ruling class comes about by accident? Power must be seized— and successfully grabbing it is all the right one needs [memo to the Académie: I have heard some good things about this fellow Hobbes in Britain; I believe we can put him to good use].

And even after countless years trying in vain to persuade the wretched masses of their innate inferiority, which is clearly all in their best interests, we are still attacked from within our ranks. And by someone from Switzerland! Will the indignity never

end?

I humbly apologize, dear Randolph, for passion is not an admirable trait in a civilized man. I perhaps got a little worked up there for a second or two. Do forgive me. It is that intemperate Italian blood from my mother's side.

I am looking forward to hearing your ideas about how to best deal with Rousseau; currently I am stumped.

Sincerely,
Sir Mortimer

12 March 1750

My dearest Mortimer,

I share your distress as only a fellow of your stature can; I strongly believe Rousseau is a threat to our entire way of life. While our Disinformation Campaigns have usually met with success, I cannot recall a time when a figure like Rousseau has emerged from nowhere, carrying as big a threat as this; let alone how they overcame it all.

My first idea was tempting, but somewhat traditional for such a human disturbance: give him the reputation of a rascal and scoundrel, being lewd with the ladies and temptuous with the men; not to mention every addition personal vice in the catalogue.

But unfortunately, dear Mortimer, Rousseau beat me to it! He's been seen all over town, drunken and cavorting and swinging from balconies on vines. The people love him! And worse, the aristocracy have shown suspect tolerance for him—even though he hasn't really made his mark on society in anyway, the few parties he's attended has been critical successes. Rousseau is becoming almost well-known. Also, all people seem to forgive him all sins; truly, in fact, they delight in his sinning. He's becoming a walking Home Entertainment System to modern France.

After lying down under a nursemaid, I had a brainstorm. You had previously characterized the issue as one of legitimacy, of authority. Surely, we need a method of discrediting that element of Rousseau which most appeals to everyone. Or at least, drawing attention away from it. Let's make his celebrity his Achilles' heel—in short, let us make him old news fast, in the name of the history of all things intellectual. Frankly, what I propose may sound fabulous at first listening, but I beg of you hear me out. There are seductive advantages to my strategy...

First, let us award him the Gold Medal of Dijon! May his name saturate the newspapers and dormitory hallways and beerhalls of Europe! Traditionally, of course, such academic rewards go only to brilliant recitations of our ancient theories; but perhaps it would not be so inappropriate to award it in the name of squashing down a philosophy that is a direct threat to us and the Académie. To both ends may this contest justly serve.

We are all aware of the tragic bell-curve of celebrity; for as one soars into the mouths and minds of the community, they are beginning a trek destined to end in the blackness of obscurity reserved strictly for that which has tested the patience of the

public and is permanently out of style. To such a fate, let us consign Rousseau.

To help, our Marketing Department has come up with a series of tales, expressions, and vacuous summaries of the man's perspective that will ensure an easy dismissal of Rousseau, once his time in the public eye is done. My favorite idea of Marketing's is that his entire moral philosophy pertaining to the last 3000 years of history and the progress of mankind and the relationship between Man and nature can be boiled down to one catch-phrase: "the noble savage." Cute, verily? It will be spread throughout the land, and in a fortnight, people will be so tired of it they will start to apply it Rousseau himself: the Noble Savage of Geneva. Notice how the connotation crosses from intellectual irony to something better described as pathetic when used differently.

Also, we plan on coming up with some glib dismissals of Rousseau for the time when his star drops precipitously from the sky; my personal favorite is the phrase "monkeyboy," which I believe originated in a late-night performance of a wandering comedian and his minstrels, although the records have been lost.

Both Marketing, Public Relations, and myself agree that this would be the most effective way of thoroughly squelching Rousseau and his disastrous ideas. Respond si vous plait as soon as possible. [memo to secretary: there has to be a shorter way of saying this phrase. Please look into it.]

Yours always,
Sir Randolph

15 March 1750

My dearest Randolph,

As always, I take delight at whatever your mind chooses to fasten itself. Your plan is an admirable one, and I believe with my influence we can get it by the Committee in no time.

I consider the problem all but solved, and only the most skeptical part of my mind wonders what we shall do if Rousseau dares to submit another essay for a future contest.

But no matter.
Sincerely,
Sir Mortimer

Afterword by the Translator:

The reference to Rousseau's work cited by Sir Mortimer is indeed from the third paragraph of Part One of Rousseau's first Discourse. He fails to mention that he quoted from the Donald A. Cress translation, published by Hackett Publishing. Why he needed a translation is anyone's guess, but such were the times we call the Enlightenment.

— Sir Randolph Mack
The Loquacious Academy
Birminghamshiretonville, UK
1996

Notes

1— [Note: 18th century European noblemen were not as sensitive to sarcasm as today's scholars, although they were more sensitive than most collegic professors.] •