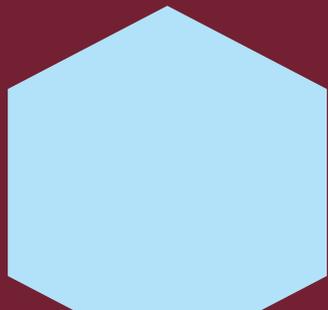


Polish Journal
of Political
Science

Volume 11 Issue 4 (2025)



Polish Journal of Political Science
Volume 11 Issue 4

Editorial Board

Clifford Angell Bates Jr., *University of Warsaw*

Stephen Brooks, *University of Michigan*

Michael Freeden, *University of Nottingham, University of Oxford*

Marzenna James, *Princeton University*

Angieszka Łukasik-Turecka, *John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin*

Agostino Massa, *University of Genoa*

Paolo Pombeni, *University of Bologna*

Bogdan Szlachta, *Jagiellonian University in Krakow*

Filip M. Szymański, *Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw*

Andrea Zanini, *University of Genoa*

Tomasz Żyro, *University of Warsaw*

Editorial Team

Lead Editors

Chief editor: **Jarosław Szczepański**, *University of Warsaw*

Secretary: **Błażej Bado**, *University of Warsaw*

Associate Editors

Katarzyna Gruszka, *University of Warsaw*

Paulina Szczepańska, *University of Warsaw*

Zofia Kulińczak, *Warsaw University of Life Sciences*

Graphic design of the journal

Krzysztof Trusz, *Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw*

Desktop publishing

Karolina Trusz

Language editor/Reviewing

Adam Petrétis

All articles in the journal are peer-reviewed

The journal is published by the Interdisciplinary Research Center
of the University of Warsaw “Identity – Dialogue – Security”
(Interdyscyplinarne Centrum Badawcze Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego
„Tożsamość – Dialog – Bezpieczeństwo”)

Editorial address

Polish Journal of Political Science

Interdisciplinary Research Center of the University of Warsaw
“Identity – Dialogue – Security”
Prosta 69, 00-838 Warsaw
email: centrum.tozsamosc@uw.edu.pl

Warsaw 2025

eISSN 2391-3991

Original version: e-book

Submit your paper: pjps@uw.edu.pl



Polish Journal of Political Science is included in:



Table of Contents

Articles

- 4 Przemysław Biskup**
The 2025 UK-Mauritius Agreement
Concerning the Chagos Archipelago:
Legal and Strategic Consequences of the Cession
- 22 Cezary Smuniewski, Tomasz Kamiński**
Patriotism as Understood by Polish Secondary
School Graduates: A National Defense Perspective
- 35 Sümer Esin Şenyurt, Murat Özay Taşkın**
Neighboring Crisis: Forced Displacement
from Ukraine and Poland's
Response Strategies (2022–2025)
- 53 Maciej Kobiałka**
AI in the Service of Justice: Opportunities and Threats
in the Application of Language Models (LM) and Large
Multimodal Models (LMM) in Judicial and Extrajudicial
Dispute Resolution with Specific Consideration of Civil Law.
Reflections on the Current Dispute Resolution Modern

Book review

- 69 Clifford Bates Jr**
Alain de Benoist's *Un autre Rousseau* and
the Reclamation of the Revolutionary Conservative
Anti-Enlightenment Tradition

Clifford Bates Jr*

Alain de Benoist's
Un autre Rousseau
and the Reclamation of
the Revolutionary Conservative
Anti-Enlightenment Tradition

DOI: [10.58183/pjps.05042025](https://doi.org/10.58183/pjps.05042025)

* University of Warsaw, e-mail:
c.a.bates@uw.edu.pl, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6454-0925>

Introduction

“Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” With that provocation, Rousseau stakes his claim to a radical disruption of the modern order. For generations, that phrase has stood as the locus of liberal, Jacobin, and Marxist invocations. Yet in *Un autre Rousseau*,¹ Alain de Benoist stages something more daring: a guerrilla raid on Enlightenment historiography, reconquering Rousseau from the Jacobins and the liberal establishment. Where Rousseau’s reputation is often taken as a gift – or threat – to modern revolutionary discourse, de Benoist insists that Rousseau has been misread, misclaimed, and essentially expropriated by those who would make him the founding prophet of liberal collectivism. His book thus frames itself not just as a reinterpretation, but as a counter-insurgency: Rousseau the conservative.

Alain de Benoist is by now a towering, if hotly debated, intellectual figure of the European New Right. A prolific author of more than a hundred books and numerous articles, and founder of the journal *Krisis*, de Benoist has long sought to carve out a “third field” beyond the left and right. *Un autre Rousseau* was published by Éditions Fayard in May 2025 (299 pages in the paperback edi-

1. A. de Benoist, *Un autre Rousseau*, preface by M. Onfray, Éditions Fayard 2025.

tion). Its front is graced by a “contre-préface” by Michel Onfray, which positions the volume somewhat provocatively as a turning of the tables on conventional Rousseau reception.

My contention in this review is that de Benoist succeeds, albeit with some risks, in rehabilitating Rousseau not as a Jacobin firebrand or a precursor to totalitarianism, but as a “revolutionary conservative.” He argues that Rousseau must be understood as a fundamentally anti-Enlightenment thinker whose political project seeks moral self-limitation over technocratic progress, and that the modern reception (especially in Anglo-American classical liberal and conservative traditions) has systematically effaced this radical conservatism by subsuming Rousseau under the very liberal modernity he critiques. Throughout, de Benoist’s strength lies in his rigorous textual grounding – he continually returns to passages from *The Social Contract*, *Discourse on Inequality*, *Project for the Constitution of Corsica*, *Poland*, and *Emile* to show how the conventional caricatures break down under pressure.

This review will proceed in several parts: first, a summary of *Un autre Rousseau* (its arc and major themes); second, a closer exposition of de Benoist’s core interpretive framework and its textual foundations; third, a contrast with Anglo-American conservative and classical liberal treatments of Rousseau (and how de Benoist’s reading subverts them); fourth, a critical evaluation of the book’s merits and limits; and finally, reflections on its relevance for contemporary conservatism. In an era – 2025 – marked by populist retrenchments, identity anxieties, and ecological backlash, de Benoist’s Rousseau offers a polemical and intellectual tool for rethinking the conservative relation to modernity.

Summary of *Un autre Rousseau*

De Benoist’s essay is structured in roughly three movements: first, diagnosing how Rousseau has always been “inclassable” vis-à-vis the Enlightenment; second, reconstructing Rousseau’s political oeuvre as fundamentally antithetical to liberal modernity; and third, tracing how Rousseau has been misappropriated – and often violently distorted – by revolutionary and liberal historiographies. The methodology is philological, comparative, and polemical: de Benoist reads Rousseau’s major texts dialectically, juxtaposing statements from different works and historical project texts to expose tensions and recover their coherence under his conservative reading.

In the first part, de Benoist argues that Rousseau must be understood as both within the Enlightenment and against it – a movement that he often shares in diagnoses (critique of religion, critique of aristocracy), and against which he ultimately places himself by rejecting the Enlightenment's confident rationalism and progressive optimism. The second part reconstructs three principal axes of Rousseau's thought: his proto-sociological critique of political economy, his cultural organicism (the opposition of "culture" to "civilization"), and his primacy of sentiment or instinct over abstract reason. De Benoist sees in Rousseau a precursor to modern social critique (even Marx) in his demystification of "natural laws" in economics. He also reads *Emile* and Rousseau's constitutional projects as expressing a rooted, organic cosmology, opposed to the alienating abstractions of modern commerce. The final section is the most polemical: de Benoist systematically attacks how Rousseau has been claimed by Jacobin historiography (especially the Terror) or demonized by liberal critics (Berlin, Strauss) and insists on a "reopening" of the dossier based on the texts themselves.

Among key themes, de Benoist emphasizes Rousseau's "social question," which he treats almost as a proto-sociology: Rousseau repeatedly interrogates inequality not as a moral aberration from nature, but as generated by property, luxury, and social stratification. De Benoist draws a provocative link (e.g., p. 184 in the promotional excerpt) between the misreading of Rousseau and the misreading of Marx, as modern liberal frameworks have expropriated both. Another central motif is cultural organicism: for Rousseau, the contrast is between culture (rooted, participatory, local) and civilization (alienating, cosmopolitan, superficial). His ideal is often Spartan: austere, civic, attached to the soil rather than to cosmopolitan salonnieres. Third, Rousseau's distrust of reason and his insistence on the primacy of sentiment or instinct are recurrent, as de Benoist seeks to reverse Enlightenment hierarchies: reason must serve virtue, not dominate it.

Michel Onfray's counter-preface adds rhetorical punch: he frames Rousseau as "la guillotine sur le cou de la pensée judéo-chrétienne occidentale," a subversive destroyer of liberal humanism, planted decades before the French Revolution itself. This framing helps set the book's tone as deliberate provocation. De Benoist repeatedly invokes the need to "reopen the dossier," rejecting caricature and urging textual fidelity over inherited clichés. That rhetorical posture sets up the terrain for the subsequent interpretive battle.

De Benoist's Interpretation: Rousseau as Reactionary Conservative

Core Thesis and Textual Reconstruction

At the heart of de Benoist's reading lies the paradox: how can Rousseau be both revolutionary and conservative? De Benoist resolves this by insisting on the internal logic of Rousseau's writings: his rupture is not with tradition per se, but with the modern consequences of the Enlightenment. In de Benoist's hands, Rousseau becomes the first systematic opponent of the Enlightenment, wielding its language (freedom, virtue, social contract) against its own teleology.

Rousseau's political vision is centered on a Republic of Virtue, grounded in collective sovereignty and moral self-limitation. The social contract is not a liberal pact of individual rights, but a mechanism by which citizens alienate their private rights to secure political rights, to reconcile freedom and obligation: "*viser à concilier la liberté et l'obligation sociale.*" In Book I, Chapter 6 of *The Social Contract*, Rousseau insists that each associates himself with all, such that one obeys only oneself through the general will. De Benoist reads this not as totalitarian coercion but as positive freedom through duty, where freedom is redefined within a common moral horizon. In de Benoist's view, modern interpreters have either dismissed this as naive or translated it into modern collectivism, missing its radical restorative ambivalence.

By juxtaposing passages from Rousseau that address duty, virtue, and austere self-restraint, de Benoist demonstrates that Rousseau's ideal republic requires moral rigor, sacrifice, and a limited scope of governance. Rousseau's economic moderation, his suspicion of luxury, and his stress on moderation, self-sufficiency, and agrarian values are not mere rhetorical flourishes but integral to his political architecture. In contrast to liberal free trade hegemony, Rousseau (in de Benoist's reading) ascribes to a form of economic reactionism in which *autarky* is a bulwark against dependency and social corruption.

Anti-Progress and the Haunting of Decadence

Core pillar of de Benoist's approach is Rousseau's radical **anti-progressivism**. Rejecting the Enlightenment's faith in inevitable progress, de Benoist highlights Rousseau's concern about moral decline. As Rousseau says in his *Discourse on Political Economy* (a text echoed in *The Social Contract*,

Book III), “*Les anciens politiques... parlaient sans cesse de mœurs et de Vertu; les nôtres ne parlent que de commerce et d’argent.*” De Benoist highlights this aphorism as emblematic: Rousseau sees in modernity the decadence of focusing on commerce rather than virtue.

In de Benoist’s reconstruction, Rousseau views history not as linear progress, but as a process of denaturation, where man strays further from his civic and moral origins. The role of a restored republic is therefore restorative rather than teleological. This inverts the Jacobin optimism. Rousseau is not waiting for human perfectibility, but instead calling for moral self-discipline in the face of decadence.

Anti-Liberalism and the Primacy of the Political

De Benoist further emphasizes Rousseau’s profound anti-liberalism. In the *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theatre* (1758), Rousseau condemns luxury: it “*corrompt à la fois le riche et le pauvre.*” Paired with the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Second Part), where property is diagnosed as the root of division and alienation, de Benoist frames Rousseau’s economic critique as rejecting Lockean individualism in favor of the *bien commun*. The general will is not an abstraction but a political organic consensus, binding individuals to their shared polity rather than to atomistic interests. These threads, de Benoist argues, show Rousseau to be a political thinker who subordinated economic logic to the political order.

Cultural Organicism and National Specificity

Next, de Benoist accentuates Rousseau’s cultural rootedness and anti-cosmopolitanism. In the *Project for the Constitution of Corsica*, Rousseau writes: “*Le meilleur mobile d’un gouvernement est l’amour de la patrie, et cet amour se cultive dans les champs.*” Similarly, in *Considerations on the Government of Poland* and in *Emile* (Book IV), Rousseau denigrates cosmopolitan claims: “*ces prétendus Cosmopolites, qui se vantent d’aimer tout le monde pour avoir le droit de n’aimer personne.*” De Benoist uses these passages to reclaim Rousseau as a thinker of rooted difference rather than universal abstraction. The famous dictum from *The Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter 7, “*Il faut opter entre faire un homme ou un citoyen,*” suggests that one must choose between universal humanity and particular

citizenship; de Benoist takes this to underline Rousseau's insistence on **non-universal polities**. In this tradition, Rousseau anticipates anti-globalist conservatisms and identitarian impulses.

Innovations, Strengths, and Polemical Reversals

One of de Benoist's most meaningful innovations is the bifurcation he draws between Rousseau the sentimental (the literary, emotional Rousseau) and Rousseau the political. This enables him to resolve puzzles, such as reconciling the critique of reason with calls to moral self-legislation. He thereby reframes Rousseau not as a destabilizing romantic but as a normative political thinker.

Another strength is how de Benoist traces Rousseau's influence forward on Herder, Fichte, the German Romantic backlash, and even contemporary identitarian critics of liberalism, thus situating Rousseau as a key ancestral node of modern anti-liberal constellations. In this sense, he recovers Rousseau as both a precursor and an interlocutor for a post-liberal, conservative philosophy of rootedness.

Finally, de Benoist inverts classical right critiques – such as Maurras' dismissal of Rousseau as utopian – by arguing that Rousseau is, in fact, a conservative via revolution: the method is rupture, but the end is a return to moral order. This reversal is grounded in textual exegesis, not mere rhetoric.

In the dominant Anglo-American narrative, Rousseau is the prime suspect in the genealogy of totalitarian democracy. His *Social Contract* gets conflated with Jacobin terror (Robespierre invoking the general will as warrant for purges), and interpreters from Lord Acton to Jacob Talmon see Rousseau as the midwife of collectivist despotism (*Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 1952). Isaiah Berlin famously cast Rousseau as the “dark father” of positive liberty, whose logic compels coercion. Conservatives from Burke to William F. Buckley view Rousseau as the anti-founder, whose abstraction of the political economy dissolves property and individual rights. In short, Rousseau is demonized as the origin of progressivism's worst excesses.

De Benoist's central subversion is to treat that reading as a straw-man expropriation. He argues that revolutionaries cherry-picked egalitarian rhetoric while discarding Rousseau's deeper po-

litical economy and moral architecture. Rousseau's austerity, distrust of commerce, emphasis on rootedness, and moral self-limitation are entirely foreign to the liberal reinterpretations. By conflating Rousseau with 19th- and 20th-century collectivism, the Anglo tradition sustains liberal hegemony and continues to hide its premises.

For example, Leo Strauss in *Natural Right and History* dismisses Rousseau as a relativist lacking a firm grounding in nature. But de Benoist counters that Rousseau's normative core lies not in abstract natural right but in political moral order: duty, virtue, participation. Similarly, neoconservatives (e.g., Irving Kristol) often equate Rousseau with the ideological roots of modern authoritarianism, refusing to see his profound critique of commerce, cosmopolitanism, and statist technocracy. De Benoist's textual excavation reveals that such readings are selective or anachronistic.

The implication is profound: the liberal and conservative tradition's anti-Rousseau animus is itself an ideological move to preserve modern liberalism's self-image. De Benoist's recovery offers a path for conservative thinkers to reengage Rousseau on his own terms – and thereby to contest liberal teleologies from within the Western canon.

One of the book's most outstanding merits lies in its dense erudition and textual fidelity. De Benoist weaves cross-referential clusters of Rousseau passages into a coherent interpretive fresco, often rescuing neglected or marginalized texts. The insertion of Onfray's counter-preface adds rhetorical energy without derailing the argument. For readers fatigued by caricatures of Rousseau, *Un autre Rousseau* offers a fulsome corrective.

However, the essay is not without limitations. De Benoist's commitment to a New Right lens occasionally risks ideological projection: his emphasis on rootedness, anti-cosmopolitanism, and organic difference sometimes seems to overshadow Rousseau's genuinely radical democratic impulses (for instance, his radical equality in the *The Social Contract*). The tension between sovereignty and individual expression remains underexplored. Furthermore, by focusing almost exclusively on the political and polemical aspects of Rousseau, de Benoist underplays other dimensions, such as Rousseau's aesthetic, pedagogical, and religious thought. His treatment of the state of nature as a hypothetical tool might also have been developed more rigorously to counter standard liberal criticisms.

Critical Evaluation: Merits, Shortcomings, and Broader Relevance

From the vantage of 2025, though, this reading is significantly relevant. In the age of global supply chains, identity dislocations, ecological anxiety, and backlash against technocratic liberalism, de Benoist's Rousseau offers a resource for rooted conservatism – a conservatism that is critical of global capitalism, cognizant of cultural specificity, and willing to reclaim virtue over utility. For Anglo-American conservatives immune to Rousseau, this essay may prompt a reevaluation of anti-Rousseau dogma through a confrontation with texts such as *Émile* or the Corsican project.

Conclusion

In *Un autre Rousseau*, Alain de Benoist accomplishes a rare feat: he reimagines Rousseau as a reactionary conservative, not by superficial polemic, but through exacting textual reconstruction. He dismantles the Jacobin myth of Rousseau as a progressivist progenitor and probes the liberal canon's fear of Rousseau as a deeper guard against itself. For conservative intellectuals disenchanted with liberal modernity, de Benoist's Rousseau offers more than an apology; instead, he provides resources for a revived conservatism that is rooted in virtue and political sovereignty.

I would recommend this book to political theorists, conservative thinkers, and anyone dissatisfied with the liberal-left appropriation of the canon. It might spark intriguing dialogues with contemporary national conservatism (e.g., Yoram Hazony) or prompt liberal critics to reexamine Rousseau. In de Benoist's hands, Rousseau's enduring paradox returns: *"The problem is to find a form of association... by which each, united with all, may nevertheless obey only himself."* This is no longer a revolutionary danger but a conservative axiom – if one is willing to rediscover it on Rousseau's own terms.

References

de Benoist A., *Un autre Rousseau*, preface by M. Onfray, Éditions Fayard 2025.