Dissertation Abstract: Freedom, Justice, and the Social Contract: A Study in the Moral and Political Philosophies of Rousseau and Kant

In my dissertation I identify and articulate the main difference between the political philosophies of Rousseau and Kant: that they ground justice in two different concepts of freedom.

The two different concepts of freedom are related in that they're both concepts of freedom as self-determination. The first concept is the kind of freedom that is definitive of agency, namely, freedom as the capacity for self-determination. The second concept is that of freedom as the ideal of agency, namely, freedom as the ideal of proper or *moral* self-determination.

Though closely related, the two concepts of freedom are distinct. The first is the presupposition of agency and, as such, is a property of any agent, no matter what else is true about her. The second is an ideal of agency and, as such, is an achievement that agents may or may not have reached.

The two concepts of freedom support different norms of freedom. The first kind of freedom supports the norms of liberty: norms of original first-personal authority, of rights of independence, of equal external freedom, and so on. The second kind of freedom supports norms of moral autonomy: of perfection and virtue, of education, of cultivation of the human dispositions for freedom, of self-mastery, integrity, and so on.

Now, between the two of them these two normative concepts of freedom as liberty and moral autonomy do most of the normative work in the moral and political philosophies of both Rousseau and Kant. That is, both Rousseau and Kant affirm both kinds of freedom and structure their moral philosophies around the normative implications of these kinds of freedom. Yet, Rousseau and Kant take different approaches to the relation between the norms of liberty and moral autonomy, and this difference has important consequences for their theories of justice.

The main difference is that for Rousseau justice is about securing the conditions wherein moral autonomy can be realized, whereas for Kant justice is about securing liberty. Now, the norms of liberty play an important role in Rousseau's philosophy, so the difference is not that Rousseau takes justice to be exclusively about moral autonomy and Kant takes justice to be exclusively about liberty. The difference, rather, lies in how they arrive at the norms of liberty. For

Rousseau, justice is about the conditions that can secure moral autonomy and the rights of liberty are justified, because they are necessary for moral autonomy. For Kant, justice is about liberty, not about moral autonomy – moral autonomy has its own domain, namely, virtue. So, for Rousseau, liberty is just one aspect of what justice requires. For Kant, the requirements of justice are exhausted by the norms of equal liberty. For Rousseau, justice is realized only in one type of society: the one where human beings best can realize their moral autonomy. For Kant, justice is realized in many types of society, for many different kinds of society can satisfy the principle of liberty. Simplifying a bit, the contrast can be drawn quite sharply: Rousseau grounds liberty in justice, Kant grounds justice in liberty.

The point of the dissertation is not, however, merely to identify and articulate this difference between Rousseau and Kant. The point, is to bring to attention how, by force of their different approaches to the relation between freedom and justice, Rousseau and Kant exemplify two different liberal traditions.

The affirmation of the norms of equal liberty is, I think, a definitive feature of liberalism. But within the liberal family we find two branches according to the two views on the political implications of moral autonomy. First, there is the branch that maintains that justice is exclusively about securing the norms of equal liberty. This branch was given its first clear statement by Grotius, was continued by Kant, and continues in Hayek and contemporary defenders of classical liberalism. The other branch, maintains that justice is about securing the conditions of moral autonomy and that the norms of liberty are justified by reference to the norms of moral autonomy. This branch started, I believe, with Rousseau and continues via Hegel to Dewey and, as I read him, Rawls.

The point of this dissertation, then, is to draw attention to these two different traditions of liberalism. Once attention has been drawn, my next step will be to articulate the difference in less historical terms so that we may take a stance on which of these traditions provides the superior grounding and defense of liberal democracy.