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Matthew W. Maguire, *The Conversion of Imagination: From Pascal Through Rousseau to Tocqueville*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. ix + 285. USD\$49.95 (cloth). ISBN: 0-674-02188-6.

Reviewed by Michael Moriarty, University of Cambridge

Matthew W. Maguire argues that to understand the modern concept of imagination, we must go back before its generally accepted point of origin in Romanticism and Kantian philosophy, to the early modern period, above all to Blaise Pascal and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹ He attempts to establish Pascal's specific contribution by contrasting accounts of such figures as Augustine, Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza, while Rousseau's singularity is highlighted by discussion of Voltaire, Diderot, Hume, and La Mettrie. Malebranche and Bernard Lamy feature also, as authors whose inspiration Rousseau himself acknowledged. The final section of the book examines how post-Revolutionary authors (Constant, Stendhal, and above all Alexis de Tocqueville) handled the legacy of Rousseau. Rousseau, then, is the central figure, metaphorically and literally, and the chapters devoted specifically to him occupy nearly half the book. They offer a sustained and very illuminating treatment of this crucial yet elusive category in Rousseau's writing. The chapter 'Rousseau and the Revolution of Enlightenment' is an excellent account of the place of imagination in Rousseau's vision of politics and society. It engages with several standard controversies in Rousseau's exegesis (above all, as to the extent to which he propounds a coherent system): it offers an intertextual reading, linking the claim in *Émile* (1762) that happiness entails holding the imagination in check, so that desires do not exceed the capacity to satisfy them, with the political theory's stress on the need to unite the polity by creating a sense of communal identity. Although Starobinski's highlighting of the theme of 'le remède dans le mal' (the quest for a remedy in the disease itself) is not explicitly mentioned here, one is strongly reminded of it by Maguire's analysis of the process whereby definite "chimeras" or "illusions" (products of the imagination) can be used to constrain the imagination's infinite power to generate new disruptive desires. Both the Legislator in *The Social Contract* (1762) and the tutor in *Émile* resort to this strategy. This account calls into question the influential reading of Rousseau as an advocate of radical moral autonomy.

A discussion of *Julie* (1761) (111-34) engages with the crucial tension of the novel: its affirmation of the beauty of love combined with a frank insistence that love is an illusion. The previous chapter's suggestion that imagination needs to be managed and guided appears to be endorsed in a proliferation of potential guides — Bomston, Claire, Wolmar — who attempt to channel or sublimate the protagonists' imaginative feelings but who are all in some way undermined by the text, as if Rousseau were losing faith in the

¹ His enterprise could be interestingly compared with that of John D. Lyons in *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Stanford University Press, 2005) where the emphasis is on the discontinuity between the early modern imagination and Romanticism.

project of controlling imagination through the management of definite illusions. Certainly, this is the claim of the final Rousseau chapter, where the autobiographical writings are argued to be dependent on a notion of the self as imaginative flux, impossible to subordinate to any order of values or relationships (Rousseau recommends ordered communities, but can never settle in one). As is well observed, the *Confessions* (1782) are surprisingly lacking as an account of Rousseau's intellectual development: the vision of social contradictions and natural human goodness that was vouchsafed him on the road to Vincennes, never fully communicated in his writing, has escaped his memory. Instead, to the detriment of a possible genuine relation with others, he abandons himself to a world of fantasies and visions that seem to be valued not as supports for the self (like the illusions referred to earlier) but because they dissolve it. This is a suggestive and powerful narrative, and, if it involves (as I take it to) holding that, pretty well at the same time as he was working out in the *Social Contract* how the management of imagination can hold a community together, Rousseau was also depicting in *Julie* the failure of a similar project, that is, perhaps, just one of those tensions to which readers of Rousseau become accustomed and which exegetes have tried in vain to reconcile.

The treatment of post-Revolutionary authors shows how Rousseau's continuing presence both troubled and inspired them. Constant is shown to respond imaginatively to the sublimity of the ancient virtue celebrated by Rousseau, while rejecting any attempt, by would-be disciples of Rousseau such as the Jacobins, to imitate it in the present. In Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (*The Red and the Black*, 1830), the attempts of Julien (a passionate reader of Rousseau) and Mathilde to live lives inspired by their heroic imagination are a protest against the "tyranny of opinion"; yet the end of the novel rejects this ethic in favour of a love nourished by memory. For Tocqueville, the imagination is likewise associated with a heightened existence, an enthusiasm for freedom, not confined to any one kind of society: it is found among the Native Americans, but also among the American and (at the beginning) the French revolutionaries. But aristocracy is more propitious to it than democracy, which reduces imagination to a merely instrumental pragmatic role. The key tension in his thought appears as being between an endorsement of illusion, as ethically inspiring, and a detached and lucid sense of the truth of human nature, realized in the development towards a more uniform and more equal humanity. Rejecting modern forms of aristocracy (as in the antebellum South), Tocqueville "demonstrate[s] the historical power of encompassing illusions, extols[s] their power, and refuse[s] to become their advocate" (220).

I have said nothing yet of the reading of Pascal's *Pensées* (1670). His unique contribution is claimed to be that "the *Pensées*, as a text, allows the imagination to expand without limit by any discernible order of human experience" (22); that is, it escapes the control of reason, and can even impinge on the domain of charity, in that we can confuse its dictates with the dictates of the heart. The contention is that Rousseau alone inherits this conception of imagination, since the other early modern analysts of the imagination tend, broadly speaking, to subordinate it to the reason. And yet there is surprisingly little detailed discussion of the *Pensées*, besides a summary of the long fragment on imagination and a brief account of the analysis of diversion. True, Maguire decides (for sound methodological reasons) to emphasize only those passages of the *Pensées* reproduced in the original published version (the "Port-Royal edition") to which alone Rousseau could have had access. This breaks up the long fragment on imagination and omits some of Pascal's most striking insights in other passages. But even so, in the fragments as they appear in the Port-Royal edition, more of substance could have been extracted. In the end, I was not convinced of the necessity of the Pascal-Rousseau link. If Rousseau's appropriation of Pascal was selective, why could his conception of imagination not similarly come from a selective reading of, say, Nicolas Malebranche, another French philosopher to whom Maguire notes Rousseau's debt (61)? But this reservation by no means deprives Maguire's book of its value as a thought-provoking and penetrating discussion of Rousseau and his legacy.