

On the concept of “origin” in Rousseauistic understanding of history:  
through an examination of Condillac and Buffon

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This article aims to clarify the Rousseauistic concept of ‘origin’ and Rousseau’s view of history through reading “*Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*”. Other studies have concluded that Rousseau doesn’t explain a passage from the state of nature to the state of society and it’s a weak point of his philosophy (ex. R. Derathé). This article, however, demonstrates that this point, in fact, has a significant role in Rousseauistic discourse by comparison with Condillac and Buffon who were contemporaries of Rousseau. That is to say, we show that his silence on a passage from nature to society is not a weak point but a methodological strategy by Rousseau.

As a result, the following were able to be confirmed. First of all, the theory of origin in Condillac searches for a root cause and explains the continuousness of the causal relation. Condillac thinks that ‘origin’ is the first cause and that it is explicable. On the other hand, Rousseau considers the theory of origin as inexplicable for man, therefore, a rupture between nature and society inevitably subsists inside the Rousseauistic theory of origin.

Moreover, it turns out that Rousseauistic methodology of the description of humankind is similar to Buffon’s geological methodology, as Rousseau does not adopt Condillac’s approach. Namely, Rousseau stands in geological ‘actualism’ and he doesn’t use Biblical terms (ex. ‘Revolution’) when he explains a passage of history. Before Rousseau, Buffon adopted such an approach in his geology (“*Histoire et théorie de la Terre*”).

To put the assertion briefly, the Rousseauistic concept of ‘origin’ is greatly influenced by some of the most advanced sciences in the eighteenth century. We can consider that Rousseau didn’t take the metaphysical position (Condillac) but the physical or natural scientific position (Buffon). Through facing Condillac’s and Buffon’s methodology, Rousseau changed his philosophy of history from the analysis of society (“*Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*”) to the construction of society (“*Social Contract*”).