



# Materia giudaica

Rivista dell'associazione italiana  
per lo studio del giudaismo

XX-XXI (2015-2016)



Giuntina

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio del giudaismo.

Homepage: [www.aisg.it](http://www.aisg.it)

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*Gli articoli sono sottoposti a peer review tramite blind refereeing.*

*I libri per recensione vanno inviati alla redazione.*

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Registrazione del Tribunale di Bologna n. 6119 del 18.6.1992, direttore responsabile:

Mauro Perani.

Casa Editrice Giuntina.

ABC Tipografia, Sesto Fiorentino (FI).

Proprietà della testata: AISG.

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HERESY, APOSTASY AND THE BEGINNINGS OF SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY  
MOSES DOBRUSKA RECONSIDERED

*Redemption through failure*

If success has only one name, then the failure of Moses Dobruska was quite predictable. Born in 1753 as a Jew in Habsburg Brünn, nowadays Brno in the Czech Republic, Moses changed as many as seven names during his life. He became Franz Thomas von Schönfeld as he took baptism and was ennobled in 1775-78. When he joined freemasons, he was known as “Scharia”. But later on, Moses-Thomas changed the status of his affiliation and switched to the secret name of “Nachem”. Having left Austria for Strasbourg, Moses-Thomas-Scharia-Nachem entered his new life with a brand new name, Sigismund Gottlob Frey, which in turn became Junius Frey in revolutionary Paris. Had he not be guillotined in 1794, this chameleonic child of a stormy age would have probably added further gems to his impressive onomastic collection.<sup>1</sup> However appetite comes with eating, and in 19<sup>th</sup> century the French historian Georges Avenel bestowed on Dobruska an eighth name. According to Avenel, Moses-Thomas-Junius was incarcerated as “Eschine Portock”. Only the hell knows how this chimeric Portock was born. Meticulous as they are, all the available documents in Paris confirm that our unlucky hero was arrested and later brought to the scaffold as “Frey”. Either Avenel was mistaking or was he kidding. In both cases, to be awarded with a further, false name is the best recognition the many-named Moses could ever have deserved.<sup>2</sup>

Not less varying than his appellatives were his beliefs. Notwithstanding the fact that he formally left Judaism for Catholicism at the age of

twenty-two, he is heavily suspected to have been secretly a Sabbatian, that is neither a Jew nor a Christian but a follower of the odd Pseudo-messiah Shabbetai Zvi, who had renegaded Judaism for Islam in 1666. Three faiths being too modest a claim for such a restless man, Moses died on the scaffold as an enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution, having apparently discarded religious sectarianism in favor of universalistic ideals. Nor such a hyper-activism in the spiritual field could exhaust Dobruska’s faceted personality. Raised in a business-oriented family lead by a business-minded mother, he became a very successful banker and large-scale merchant, able to deal with to no less a customer than Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor.

Quite a social ascent indeed for a Jew coming from Moravia, and yet, all this glamorous apparel of luxury and money cannot dispel the aura of failure that hovers over Moses’ (guillotined) head. To be executed at the age of forty can be considered a sizable token of misfortune, but in the case of Moses Dobruska failure seems to have had a stronger grip. And a long-lasting one, that exceeds the span of his life. It is true that his deeds and misdeeds have found their way to scholarship. A masterly biography penned by Gershom Scholem has secured to Dobruska a place among 18<sup>th</sup> century minor celebrities. But such fame was not given to him unconditionally. He had to promise to play the adventurer, to behave like a spy if not like a scoundrel. In Scholem’s eyes, Dobruska personifies the contradictions of late Sabbatianism. Most of his adventures bear the mark of ambiguity, even if Scholem himself acknowledges that

<sup>1</sup> The best general survey of Dobruska’s life is offered by G. SCHOLEM, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme. La vie de Moses Dobruska, alias Franz Thomas von Schönfeld alias Junius Frey*, Paris 1981 (Italian translation, with an up-to-date bibliography: *Le tre*

*vite di Moses Dobrushka*, a cura e con un saggio di S. CAMPANINI, Milano 2014). See also S. WÖLFLE-FISCHER, *Junius Frey 1753-1794: Jude, Aristokrat und Revolutionär*, Frankfurt am Main 1998.

<sup>2</sup> G. AVENEL, *Lundis révolutionnaires: 1871-1874*,



his revolutionary conversion was sincere. In any case, Dobruska the gambler overshadows by far Dobruska the writer and the philosopher.

The present study aims at filling a gap in scholarship. I cannot promise to reverse failure in posthumous success, but I am convinced that this exotic sectarian had an exceedingly smart mind. His thought is no less surprising than his biography and deserves to be fully appraised. Dobruska's *Philosophie sociale*,<sup>3</sup> that he published anonymously during the last year of his life in Paris, opens new paths in social thought. Far from being just «a pamphlet» as Scholem termed it, the *Philosophie sociale* has to be considered as a forgotten masterpiece, in some respects a forerunner of sociology.

Dobruska's fault was mainly to be on the wrong side of history. His many names reflect his unease with fixed social status and his attempt to move across borders.

From Judaism to Christianity, from Catholicism to freemasonry, from Brünn to Prague, from Vienna to Paris, the ubiquitous wanderer Dobruska accumulated money and culture, until all his social capital suddenly went bankrupt and he was put to death. The strange Dobruska became Dobruska the stranger, a traitor to be executed, a foreigner, and a spy. Uncommon as it is, his biography is however only a part of the story. The present book focuses on the other side, on the intellectual dimension, on the unusual thought born out of an unusual life.

#### *And at the end... came sociology*

The *Philosophie sociale*, to which this study is mainly devoted, comes at the very end of an intense literary career. Dobruska began publishing as early as in 1773 and continued all

his life long, with a seemingly unceasing overflow of poetical texts, theatre pieces, epistles and essays. He even edited a short-lived *Gazette* in Vienna, whose publication was disrupted by a bitter quarrel with Giovanni Lattanzi, the Italian co-editor of the journal.<sup>4</sup> Dobruska's busy pen is credited with some seventy works. A number of them are now lost, some others are preserved in manuscript and a few found their way to print. Ambition shines on his oeuvre from the very beginning. His first booklet, a collection of German verses in pastoral attire, was printed in Vienna by Thomas Kurzböck, a well-established typographer who served Austrian clergy and aristocracy.

In a time when Jews in central Europe were still confined within the stiff borders of Yiddish, Dobruska's attempt to win attention in German Arcadia was quite daring, even too daring, according to the anonymous author who reviewed the *Etliche Gedichte zur Probe* (Some poems intended as a Specimen) in the 1774 issue of the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*.

I was not able to locate a single copy of this first poetical work by Dobruska, but having read others Arcadia songs composed during the 1770-ties by our intrepid Moses, I am inclined to think that rhyme and wording could well have been limping here and there. The reviewer was pretty merciless and lamented grammatical mistakes and the pompous style: «The author says in the preface that “he begun only a few years ago to study German (an excuse that he highly needs considering his mistakes) and to read works of taste” (why did not he read them in other languages?)».<sup>5</sup> Criticism might be justified but some anti-Jewish overtones are unmistakable. At his debut in the Republic of Lettres, the Jew Dobruska is immediately perceived as an intruder lacking good taste that is «the literary

Paris 1875, p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> [Junius Frey], *Philosophie sociale dédiée au peuple françois*, Paris 1793.

<sup>4</sup> O.M. GUGLER, *Die habsburgische Politik aus der Sicht eines Italiener am Hofe Kaiser Leopolds II*, in N. BACHLEITNER, A. NOE und H.-G. ROLOFF (Hrsg.), *Beiträge zu Komparatistik und Sozialgeschichte der Literatur: Festschrift für Alberto Martino*, Amsterdam 1997, pp. 683-701; R. ASCARELLI, *The Unfortunate Encounters of Moses Dobrushka*,

in R. ASCARELLI - K. DAVIDOVICZ (eds.), *Along the Road to Esau: Studies on Jakob Frank and Frankism*, Arezzo 2011, pp. 131-151.

<sup>5</sup> *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* 1794, p. 521. Der Verf. sagt in der Vorrede «daß er erst seit einigen Jahren deutsch zu lernen» (einer Entschuldigung, der er wegen seiner grammatikalischen Fehler sehr bedarf!), und Werke des Geschmacks zu lesen (warum las er denn die nicht in andern Sprachen?) angefangen habe.

skill that corresponds to the “bon ton” in society», as Madame De Staël put it.<sup>6</sup> His language is clumsy; his manners are devoid of grace: «Mr. Moses Dobruska, a Lithuanian Israelite, displays an exuberant fancy, through destitute of taste».<sup>7</sup> This last quotation is taken from the English summary of the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, published a year later in *The Critical Review*, where our Moravian Jew is mistakenly but significantly pushed further away, in remote Lithuania. In this way, he becomes also geographically a full-fledged outsider to European culture, a kind of exotic alien. Similar reproaches surface over and over again along Dobruska’s career and represent, so to say, the literary side of prejudice.

What matters here is not a bad review that would remain nothing more than a little accident if considered out of context. In fact, the whole intellectual career of Dobruska could appear a mere curiosity if taken out of its setting. The reason is that Dobruska himself is out of context, marginal and marginalized, an unwelcome guest to the great party of late 18<sup>th</sup> century European culture. Regardless to their value, uneven as it is, Dobruska’s achievements must be seen as a coherent corpus in order to be fully understood. What keeps together pastoral verses, freemason libels, sectarian secret lore and a bulky sociological treatise? Are we confronted with an array of amateurish imitations or can we detect some creative power and coherence? How to build an intellectual context out of social exception and cultural marginalization?

I think that the best way to contextualize Dobruska’s literary career is to re-balance the weight between his life and his works. Instead of seeing his œuvre as a by-product of his labyrinthian biography, we shall analyze the tight interaction between the texts written by Dobruska and his life, starting from the former in order to reconsider the latter. As an antidote to the pan-biographic disease, let us take a purifying bath in literature, and see how a distasteful “Lithuanian Israelite” fought his way into the Republic of Letters. Furthermore, we shall reverse the chronological perspective and look, so to speak, from the end toward the beginning.

<sup>6</sup> DE STAËL, *De l’Allemagne*: «Le goût en littérature est comme le bon ton en société».

According to Scholem, Dobruska went from Sabbatianism to the French Revolution, albeit keeping all his life long a secretive link with Jewish sectarianism. In other words, he was not what he looked like. He was neither a Jew nor a Christian, neither a loyal courtier in Vienna nor a naïf Jacobin in Paris. Scholem’s Dobruska is a theosophical animal, a case-study to be examined within the long evolution from kabbalah to libertarian thinking via heresy.

However if we look from the *Philosophie sociale* backwards, his career takes quite a different turn. The book does not show the faintest trace of occultism. It is true that biblical Moses plays the villain, but Jewish nation as such is neither damned nor abjured. Church is abhorred, religion is condemned but Christ is depicted as a kind of revolutionary agitator, a utopian full of good will and prone to wordily failure. What matters in the *Philosophie sociale* is freedom, an individualistic, pleasure-oriented idea of freedom, which Dobruska tries to demonstrate *more geometrico*. He praises Hobbes and Locke, criticizes Rousseau and reveres Kant as a saint of method and reason. He makes a discrete use of clandestine atheistic philosophy although he never quotes it explicitly.

The originality of the *Philosophie sociale* lays mostly in its strong theoretical approach. Dobruska-Frey is fascinated, one could say, even obsessed by principles. As he writes in his introduction:

Dans la philosophie sociale nous n’ayons pas même encore des définitions supportables, ni des principes fixes, quoiqu’on en parle tant, et que l’on pense, pour ainsi dire, vivre dans les principes, et être amalgamé avec eux... il faut profondément raisonner, et ne point proscrire chaque discussion approfondie sous le ridicule prétexte de métaphysique; si du véritable travail, on ne veut pas faire une espèce de jeu, au lieu de certitude offrir ces opinions, et se délivrer de toutes les peines d’une science, avant qu’elle en mérite le nom. C’est bien ici qu’il faut avant tout établir des principes fixes, des définitions stables, arrêter les écarts des conséquences, démontrer avec sévérité, aller lentement et pas à pas, si l’on veut gagner du terrain et parvenir au but.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> «The Critical Review» 40 (1775).

<sup>8</sup> *Philosophie sociale*, p. v.

Our author insists on the political significance of such a methodological clarity. In his opinion, only a firm theoretical structure can turn social theories into truly democratic tools. Dobruska takes great pain in defining his concepts and ideas, and, in so doing, gathers a first essential sociological lexicon. What is even more interesting, he puts such a newly drafted technical vocabulary at work.

The present study shows how he was the first to define and to adopt crucial ideas such as the “social self” («moi social», based on but different from Rousseau’s «moi commune») or the concept of “cultural capital” («moyens de culture», or «Kulturmittel» in the German draft). He was the first to define the importance of “disorganizing” the society as a prerequisite for its new foundation and shaping. Dobruska goes as far as to theorize the overall role of “disorganization”, and draws an illuminating parallel between dismantling widespread opinions on the one hand and breaking apart social and political structures on the other hand. To his mind, Christ and Kant are the greatest “disorganizers” of religion and philosophy, who accomplished the herculean task of tearing apart the old order before building the new one.

Dobruska’s *Philosophie sociale* has been considered to be the first book ever to carry such a title. This assumption is not correct, as a homonymous volume written by “l’Abbé Durosoy” had appeared in Paris as early as in 1783.<sup>9</sup> While this earlier attempt is still heavily influenced by Catholic moral and has a flourishing rhetorical style, Dobruska’s *Philosophie* inaugurates a new literary genre, aimed at assessing social structures and processes through the strictly demonstrative reasoning of illuminist philosophy.

The gulf that extends between the bigot work of Durosoy and Dobruska’s treatises is as wide as the difference between duties and needs. *Philosophie sociale ou essay sur les devoirs*, (Social Philosophy or Essay on Duties) announces in his frontispiece the Abbé Durosoy, thus warning the reader about the homiletic import of his work, that consists in a litany of commitments and obligations imposed on the individual by divine and political rules.

Dobruska takes a quite different approach, and focuses on the needs of the individual. He conceives social philosophy as a way to explore and solve the great question of social life. Which social order can maximize the satisfaction of the needs of all members of a given society and enable them to reach their happiness?

Dobruska is not concerned with abstract political theory. His goal is not to discuss an individual agent who chooses among different political systems on the basis of pure rational grounds. The individuals he examines are bound by desires and needs. First of all, they are moved by natural needs (§), since they keep all the impulses of the state of nature. At the same time, the social state – «état social» («Sozialzustand») or «état de culture» («Kulturzustand») – is characterized by new, expanded and potentiated needs, the social and cultural ones. Therefore society must ensure the widest possible satisfaction on both levels: the natural and the social ones, which co-exist together, as social status do not abrogate natural status. The aim of Dobruska’s *Philosophie sociale* is envisaging a society that fulfills on one side the widest possible range of individual impulses and aspirations, the only limit being the respect of the rights of other fellow human beings and on the other side, the common good of society.

Such a needs-oriented perspective represent a distinctive novelty of Dobruska’s work, and a first, decisive step in the rising of social philosophy, which in this way emancipated itself from political philosophy. While deriving ideas and materials from many previous sources (Hume, Rousseau, and Kant among others), Dobruska is the first author to elaborate extensively on the relevance of a full-fledged specter of individual needs, to be satisfied with all means at disposal of nature and culture.

Far from being purely speculative, the *Philosophie sociale* had a more immediate and practical goal. It was meant to lay the theoretical foundations of the new French Constitution, which was debated at the Assemblée Nationale during the very months our Moses wrote his book.

Is no coincidence if Dobruska dated his preface June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1793, just a day before the

Paris 1783.

<sup>9</sup> *Philosophie sociale ou Essai sur les devoirs de l’homme et du citoyen*, par M. L’ABBÉ DUROSOY,

Constitution was promulgated in Paris. The whole book is surprisingly near to the spirit and to the text of the constitutional draft, a fact that is even more intriguing if we consider that the 1793 Constitution has an uncommon, and partly mysterious origin.

The National Assembly had discussed for months and months the text that would replace the first revolutionary Constitution, promulgated in 1791. With the fall of the Girondists, in May 1793, the previous draft was abandoned, and a new one was written and approved in an extremely short time. The Assembly had entrusted to the good-looking and eloquent Marie-Jean Hérault de Séchelles with the task of preparing the text. A fine intellectual but not a constitutionalist at all, he nevertheless delivered a completely new Constitution within three weeks only.<sup>10</sup>

Did our Dobruska play some role behind the scenes? Should we take the *Philosophie sociale* not only as a parallel to the 1793 Constitution but also as a hidden source of inspiration for Hérault de Séchelles? We have no direct evidence on the backstage of this hectic constitutional rush, but we know for sure that Dobruska was intimately connected with people belonging to the circle and to the protégées of Hérault. A link that later turned out to be a *liaison dangereuse*: both men, Dobruska and Hérault, were guillotined on the same day, as supposed accomplices in the same conspiracy.

A Sabbatian as co-father of the French Constitution? Even if it not true, it is well conceived.

#### *Philosophie sociale and Sozialphilosophie. Dobruska's mirroring worlds*

Albeit obscured by the sad fate of his author, the *Philosophie sociale* exerted a noticeable influence. Not only it was reprinted in 1797, but also raised the attention of very distinguished intellectuals. The first edition was promptly reviewed in French learned journals, and even an

outstanding judge as Immanuel Kant, who received a complimentary copy through his publisher, was «delighted» by Dobruska's *chef d'œuvre*.

In the following pages I shall discuss in detail the *Nachleben* of the work, with a special attention for a relationship that has so far escaped the attention of scholars. Dobruska's influence can be detected in Henry de Saint-Simon, the French economist and political thinker, particularly as far as the positive import of social disorganization is concerned. The link between our Moses and Saint-Simon was not only a bookish one. We know that the two men, the apostate and the Catholic aristocrat, met personally, as they were inmates of the same revolutionary jail in Paris. Saint-Simon, who was then named «le citoyen Bonhomme» had been arrested as a suspicious speculator, the same charge being moved against Dobruska. While Bonhomme-Saint Simon managed to re-attain his freedom after a tenth-months imprisonment, the converted Jew was quite less lucky.<sup>11</sup>

In 1793, as he wrote his *Philosophie sociale*, Dobruska was indisputably well-read and had accumulated a remarkable wealth of knowledge. However his attempt to express his social theories in French was a risky one. At least, he had remained faithful to his excessive self-confidence in linguistic matters. Twenty years later his German immature verses, his French style caused many an eyebrow to rise. Sentences are sometimes quite obscure, and more than a sentence has a troubled grammatical stand. Here and there, the reader is left wondering if something is missing, or if some piece went out of place.

In fact, the shortcomings of the French text of the *Philosophie* should not be blamed on its author. Somebody, we do not know who, translated the work from the original German text written by Dobruska.

While most part of his draft seems to have disappeared, a sizable portion of the third Chapter is preserved among Dobruska's papers, which were confiscated at his arrest and later deposited at the *Archives Nationales* in Paris.

<sup>10</sup> E. DARD, *Un épicurien sous la Terreur. Hérault de Séchelles (1759-1794)*, Paris 1907. About the Constitution of 1793 see *La Constitution du 24 juin 1793: l'utopie dans le droit public français?*, textes réunis par J. BART, Dijon 1997; M. FIORAVANTI, *Aspetti del*

*costituzionalismo giacobino. La funzione legislativa nell'Acte constitutionnel del 24 giugno 1793*, in «Historia Constitucional» 8 (2007), pp. 123-142.

<sup>11</sup> See A. MATHIEZ, *L'arrestation de Saint-Simon*, in «Annales historiques de la Révolution française»



I am working at the critical edition of the German text of the *Philosophie sociale* that is still extant, together with the corresponding French translation. This source helps us in better understanding Dobruska's intellectual background. While his German style is clearer and more precise than the French version, occasionally blurred with inaccuracies, the major gain brought by the critical edition of the autograph is the recovery of the background of Dobruska's pioneering social analysis. Referring to Dobruska's *Philosophie*, Frank Fischbach laments, in his *Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale* (2009), the ill reputation of social philosophy in French contemporary academia as compared to Germany:

Bien que l'expression de *soziale Philosophie* ne soit pas originellement allemande, et qu'elle ne soit que la traduction allemande de l'expression française équivalente, pourtant, en Allemagne, la "philosophie sociale" est une discipline reconnue comme telle, il existe des chaires de philosophie sociale dans les universités.<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately things are often more complicated than they appear, especially when a complicated personality like Moses Dobruska is involved in the business. As the German draft I edit demonstrates, Dobruska's social philosophy has indeed a German birth, and his conceptual texture is largely reminiscent of German 18<sup>th</sup> century political and social theories, obviously centered on Kant but not in no way confined to Kantian teachings only. The fact that such a German offspring was brought to life in revolutionary France by a Jewish apostate of heretic descent cannot be explained as a mere twist of destiny. The mingling of cultures belongs to Dobruska's biography, and it is precisely out of such a mingling that his attitude to cross-bread heterogeneous ideas within new conceptual frames is born. Dobruska the finder of social theories amounts to more than the sum of his conflicting identities. German in France, Jew in Germany, heretic among Jews, he is both at ease and at unease everywhere and anyhow.

While keeping the sectarian background of its author in mind, I do not think that is fair to reduce Dobruska's work to a ghostly Avatar of Jewish sectarian thought.

If the *Philosophie sociale* is the work of a Sabbatian, then Sabbatianism has gone astray. Instead of the redemption through sin Sabbatians would have cherished so much, Dobruska want to secure freedom to everybody, even freedom to sin, should they like to do so, provided nobody is damaged by the abuse of liberty. Along the path from Brünn to Paris, he has made more than a detour. The intellectual harvest is now ripe, and a good number of new concepts can surface here for the first time ever in social thought.

A hermeneutic focused on ambiguity would suggest us that the true Dobruska hides himself behind the pages of the *Philosophie sociale*, the revolutionary masque being only the last one of his many camouflages. Why not to reverse the assumption and give way to an ambiguity focused on hermeneutic? The world postulated by the *Philosophie sociale* is the only one in which Dobruska could possibly feel at home. Since such a world did not exist in 1793, he wrote it down and had it published at his own expenses: a geometrical universe of extensive freedom, where Kant reigns, Jews are free from Moses-our-prophet, Christians are free from their Church and the French nation embraces and protects the whole humankind. If Dobruska the impostor and the sectarian is not what he looks like, then a question arises. Can we catch a glimpse of his enigmatic soul in his last book? Dobruska was a utopian who never forgot how important wealth is, and kept an eye open to business while writing about society, politics and constitution. And yet, amid unclear intrigues and frantic conspiracies, he managed to reach his own intellectual space, somehow clumsy in words but ambitious in thoughts.

*Philosophie sociale, dédiée au peuple françois par un citoyen de la section de la République française*, announces proudly the frontispiece of the 1793 edition. When the book is reprinted, four years later, Dobruska has died

2 (1925), pp. 571-575; Id., *Saint-Simon et Ronsin*, in «Annales historiques de la Révolution française»

3 (1926), pp. 493-494.

<sup>12</sup> F. FISCHBACK, *Manifeste pour une philosophie*

on the scaffold and the title undergoes a providential remaking.

*Philosophie sociale, dédié au tous les peuples par un citoyen de tous pays.*<sup>13</sup> It sounds much better and above all, is much more Dobruskaesque than the former. From Moravia to “Lithuania”, from there to Paris, and from Paris to *tous pays*, Moses Dobruska has eventually reached his homeland.

### *Climbing the steep ascent*

In early 18<sup>th</sup> century Bohemia and Moravia, under the watchful eyes of the Habsburg dynasty, Jewish life was tightly controlled. The number of Jewish residents, the places where they were allowed to live in, their trades and even the way they dressed were strictly determined by the government. Every departure from established rules was chastised, unless a special permission, usually a temporary one, had been granted.

Under these conditions of discrimination, social mobility was a difficult and awesome task. While a small élite of affluent bankers and merchants could enjoy exemptions and privileges, the large majority of the Bohemian and Moravian Jews were forced to accept their marginalized status. Some of them however, the more daring or the more ambitious ones, tried to work their way around prohibitions and segregation.

To this resourceful stock belonged Jacob Moyses, of the little town of Dobruška, in northeastern Bohemia. It was probably the desire to improve its business that persuaded him to slip away from the tiny Jewish settlement there, of 37 inhabitants only, and to move to Brünn in Moravia, a place where Jews had not been allowed to settle since their expulsion in 1454. To circumvent the prohibition, he took its residen-

ce in the outskirts, in a quarter called “Ob der Kröna”. In April 1730, Jacob Moyses started to trade in jewelry together with a Jew from Prague. In August of the same year we find him involved in a further business as a supplier of the army.<sup>14</sup>

It didn’t take long for the authorities to catch his flight. Discovered in September 1731, he was ordered to pack his things and to return to Dobruška within four months. Jacob Moyses was not the kind of man to get discouraged. He found supporters in the Habsburg administration, high-ranking officers who protected him. Even the governor of Moravia, Maximilian Ulrich von Kaunitz, the father of the future diplomat and statesman Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, intervened with his authority in favor of Jacob Moyses. Not only he remained in Brünn, but was able to maintain there a prayer room for Jewish ritual services as well. His many undertakings prospered swiftly. Besides keeping trading in food-supplies, he ran an inn and got the exclusive right to prepare Jewish food. In 1748 Jacob Moyses was able to offer a loan of 50.000 guilders to the Moravian government and, two years later, with a decisive stroke, he managed to lease the tobacco monopoly for the whole Moravia. In 1755 he added to his sources of income the toll levied on Jews entering Brünn and Olmütz. As he died, in 1764, he left a sizable fortune to his two children, Solomon and Esterle, the latter having been married to the Viennese banker Adam Oppenheimer. Within three decades and thanks to a lucky blend of boldness and entrepreneurship, Jacob Moyses had fought his way into economic success.

The first born, Salomon Levy Dobruska, continued and even widened the activities of his father. In 1765 he was the first Jew to be granted the right of residence in Brünn. A learned man, Solomon had married Schöndl of Prossnitz,

*sociale, La Découverte*, Paris 2009, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 8.R.6173.

<sup>14</sup> On Jacob Moyses Dobruska see B. MAURITZ TRAPP, *Dobruschka - Schönfeld - Frey*, in “[Brünnener] Tagesbote”, 16 January 1928, p. 5; J. KARNIEL, *Jüdischer Pseudomessianismus und deutsche Kultur: Der Weg der frankistischen Familie Dobruschka-Schönfeld im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, in

*Gegenseitige Einflüsse deutscher und jüdischer Kultur von der Epoche der Aufklärung bis zu Weimarer Republik*, Tel Aviv 1982, pp. 31-54: 33-34; D. UHLIR, *Juden in Mähren und das Mährische Zentrum des Frankismus im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert*, in «Aufklärung, Vormärz, Revolution» 4 (1999), pp. 45-54: 46-47, who has revealed also the troubles Jacob Moyses faced with the justice owing to his unscrupulous handling of some business.

twenty years his younger and celebrated for her beauty, who begot him twelve sons, six males and six females. Clever and bold was Schöndl too, and with a talent for leadership. As her husband died, on 17 May 1774,<sup>15</sup> she took the lead of the family business and governed it considerable success.

“*The prostitute of Brünn*”

We gain a glimpse on Schöndl’s personality from the *Sefer hitabbekut* (The Book of Struggling), a Hebrew book published by Rabbi Jacob Emden in 1762,<sup>16</sup> in which he targeted the Sabbatian movement. Schöndl Dobruska figures here as a prominent supporter of the Sabbatians, the one who organized and founded the sect in Moravia. According to Emden, it was she who received with all honors the prominent Sabbatian Wolf Eibeschutz during his visit to Brünn in 1758. Emden, a fierce opponent of the heresy, gratifies our lady with the disparaging title of *ha-zonah mi-Brünn*, “the prostitute of Brünn”, or *ha-zonah Dobruski mi-Brünn*, “the prostitute Dobruska of Brünn”. Such epithets are typical of the highly polemic prose of Emden, who was appalled by the active role played by Schöndl in religious affairs. In fact, her involvement in mystical and magical lore is proved also by a document written by Israel Böhm, a Jewish merchant from Bohemia,<sup>17</sup> who reportedly collected first-hand evidence about Wolf Eibeschutz deeds (or misdeeds) in Moravia. The text is preserved in the book by Emden, as a proof of Wolf Eibeschutz’s heretic stance as well as of his involvement in black magic. While Pavel Maciejco has brilliantly analyzed the first part of

the report,<sup>18</sup> the tale referring to Schöndl has remained unnoticed so far:

Around midnight Wolf [Eibeschutz] told to the young Eschel to go to the post together with a further boy. Along the road they saw two men approaching them. They had no head and carried a pile of burning woods in their hands. In seeing this, they were overwhelmed by fear and distress. They were left with no spirit and said one to the other: We don’t want to remain in such a place. How did the two men get here, and now they have disappeared! When the boy went back home with his friend, they both looked like dead. The wife of Zalman Dobruski asked them: Didn’t happen anything to you along the way? As they heard this, they fainted and fell to the ground. Then Wolf [Eibeschutz] started to reproach the wife of Zalman Dobruski for having said these things, while the two boys were lying sick on their beds. The following day, Wolf went to Eschel and to his friend, and told them: Do not be afraid, since you’ll get immediate rescue. He took an apple, divided it in two and arranged the mandolin. They ate the apple and, as soon as they ate it, they stood from their beds healed and strong. That boy told me: The two men were evil spirits and the piles of woods were souls that had been delivered to the impure powers.<sup>19</sup>

A nice piece of folk-literature indeed, written in a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish, which enables us to get a hint about the secretive world of Sabbatians in Brünn at the mid of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A furtive story unfolds here, a hidden domain about which sources are scanty and often unclear. While observing Jewish rites and beliefs outwardly, a sizable group of “believers”, as they used to defined themselves, kept in the secret of their families and circles their faith in

<sup>15</sup> WÖLFLE-FISCHER, *Junius Frey*, cit., p. 40 note 40.

<sup>16</sup> Altona, Printing press of the author, 1762 (Y. VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus of the Hebrew Book* [Heb.], Jerusalem 1993, Altona/72). Reprinted in ID., *Sefat emet u-leshon zehorit*, Lwów 1877.

<sup>17</sup> Israel Böhm is attested in Beuthen (now Bytom, Poland) in 1732. See B. DUDECK, *Juden als Stadtbürger in Schlesien*, Hamburg 2009, p. 55. On the family see also G. COHN in «Jüdische Familienforschung» 7 (1931), p. 404. O.K. RABINOWICZ, *Wolf Eibeschutz*, in «Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der

*Juden in der Tschechoslowakei»* 1 (1931), pp. 267-278, esp. p. 271 had already resumed the epistle of Israel Böhm, mentioning only that the scene was set «im Hause des Salman Dobruschka».

<sup>18</sup> P. MACIEJCO, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755-1816*, Philadelphia 2011, pp. 201-202. The first part of the tale refers to a pillar of fire descending on Brünn on a Christmas eve. Maciejco has shown that the episode refers to the appearance of a comet exactly on 25 December 1758.

<sup>19</sup> EMDEN, *Sefer hitabbekut*, ed. Lwow, fol. 40a-b.

Sabbatai Zevi, whom they venerated as the Messiah, notwithstanding, or even because of his conversion to Islam. As Zevi converted in 1666, most of his followers abandoned him in dismay; some imitated his example and adhered to Islam as well, whilst following secretly their peculiar rites; not a few, however, didn't leave the Jewish communities they were living in. They chose a strategy of dissembling and gave life to a mixed stock, which was considered devilish and heretical by rabbinic authorities. The Rabbis accused the Sabbatians of violating the precepts and of reversing them, doing what was prohibited by Jewish law. The followers of Sabbatai Zevi were labeled as immoral and prone to treachery, and heavily persecuted. On their part, Sabbatians in Central and Eastern Europe reacted tightening their ranks and eventually converting to Christianity.

In 1759, a wave of conversion, under the leadership of Jacob Frank, brought thousands of Sabbatians in Lwów and in Warsaw to baptism. Frank, who claimed to be a reincarnation of Sabbatai Zevi, was a maternal cousin of Schöndl Dobruska, and this familiar link surely reinforced her commitment to the sect. In March 1773 Jacob Frank even settled in Brünn, and remained there eleven years, until 1784, when he moved to Offenbach.<sup>20</sup> It is not off the mark to see a link between this long sojourn of Frank and Schöndl's energy and wealth. Since Sabbatians were very careful in marrying within their group, in order to preserve their secrets and tighten solidarity, it is probable that Solomon Dobruska shared the Sabbatian faith of his wife, even if no direct evidence of his involvement in the movement has been found so far. In any case, Salomon was well versed in rabbinic lore and was

involved in Jewish communal affairs.<sup>21</sup> It was in this multifarious, and often ambiguous milieu that our Moses Dobruska was born, on 12 July 1753, as the second son of Solomon and Schöndl. He was circumcised in the synagogue of Austerlitz (Czech Slavkov u Brna, east of Brünn), Solomon Dobruska having acquired the rabbinical supervision of that community.<sup>22</sup> A private teacher was hired to follow the studies of Moses and of his brothers. Rabbi Solomon Gerstl was his name, which he changed in Jacob Stembart when he converted to Christianity together with his three sons in May 1773, being most probably of Sabbatian belief as well.<sup>23</sup>

According to an earlier bibliographer, Moses received a good education in Jewish lore, as his father wanted «to make a great Rabbi out of him».<sup>24</sup> Yet he was granted the possibility to study secular subjects, Latin and modern European languages only after a long dispute with his father. These details were probably suggested by Dobruska himself and may be exaggerated,<sup>25</sup> but it is true that the knowledge of Gentile culture was uncommon among Jews in Central Europe at the time, the Sabbatian circles in the Czech region being a notable exception.<sup>26</sup> He began writing German poetry very early, and even published a first literary attempt at the age of twenty, to which many more compositions followed. Albeit his juvenile *Etliche Gedichte zur Probe* were judged quite severely by the learned reviewer Johann Enrich Biester, Moses Dobruska eventually made himself a reputation among German literati, and some of his verses were still included in poetical anthologies as late as in 1812.<sup>27</sup>

In 1775, Dobruska published the *Sefer ša'ašua'*, a commentary to the first part *Sefer*

<sup>20</sup> O.K. RABINOWICZ, *Jacob Frank in Brno*, in «Jewish Quarterly Review» 57 (1967), pp. 429-445.

<sup>21</sup> See also MACIEJKO, *Mixed Multitude*, cit., p. 192.

<sup>22</sup> TRAPP, *Dobruschka - Schönfeld - Frey*, cit.: «Salomon Dobruschka ... hatte die rabbinische Qualifikation, denn in der Austerlitzer Judengemeinde, allwo er sich die Zuständigkeit erworben hatte, wird er in der alte Pinax wiederholt als der reiche gelehrte und vornehm Mhrr (Mohrenuharav) geführt. Seine Kinder sind im dortigen Tempel beschnitten, obwohl sie in Brünn geboren worden,

weil Brünn zu jener Zeit keine Judengemeinde mit rituellen Brauchtum auszuweisen hatte».

<sup>23</sup> KARNIEL, *Jüdischer Pseudomessianismus*, cit., p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> I. DE LUCA, *Das gelehrte Österreich*, 2 vols., Wien 1776-78, vol. 2, pp. 105-107, esp. p. 106: «da er [i.e. his father] die Absicht hatte, einen großen Rabiner aus ihm zu machen».

<sup>25</sup> Such is the opinion of Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*.

<sup>26</sup> MACIEJKO, *Mixed Multitude*, cit., pp. 193-194.

<sup>27</sup> L.L. PFEST, *Die Jahreszeiten. Eine Liederlese*



*Behinat ha-‘olam* by Jedaiah ben Abraham Bendersi (c. 1270 - c. 1340).<sup>28</sup> This booklet, in which he shows a good command of rabbinic and philosophic literature in Hebrew and repeatedly quotes Moses Mendelssohn, is dedicated, in a pompous way, to Hayyim Poppers of Bresnitz, or Joachim Popper, later ennobled as Edler von Popper.<sup>29</sup> Such an enthusiastic dedication was motivated by the fact that Dobruska had married, on 20 May 1773, Popper’s stepdaughter Elke (Elkele) Joß. A good marriage indeed, since Popper was a wealthy and well-reputed merchant and banker and his adopted daughter Elke was «probably the best Jewish match in the Czech lands».<sup>30</sup>

As the young couple converted to Christianity together with their daughter Maria Anna, on 17 December 1775 in the St. Vitus Cathedral, Popper opposed the baptism and decided to withdraw the donations he had made to Elke. A lawsuit followed, which went on for quite a long time. In 1778 Moses and his wife signed an agreement, in which they renounced to any further claim, having been satisfactorily compensated.<sup>31</sup>

Moses wasn’t the first in his family to convert. As early as in 1764, his eldest brother Carl, born in 1751, left home against the will of his parents.<sup>32</sup> He then took baptism, entered the military service and became an officer in the Imperial army. Carl was also the first Dobruska to adopt the name Schönfeld. Most probably his example of successful assimilation in the Christian society influenced his brothers and sisters. On 17 November 1775, just one month before the conversion of Moses, two younger brothers of his, Blumele and Gerson, were baptized in the Wien Cathedral of Saint Stephen, with a lavish

ceremony. Blumele, aged sixteenth, was named Theresia Maria Josepha and Gerson, who was eighteen, became Joseph Carl. The two young Dobruska had fled from home in mid October, as a consequence of a love affair between Blumele and an officer of the Habsburg army, who frequented the salon of Schöndel Dobruska in Brünn. Since Schöndel opposed the liaison of her daughter with a non-Jew, the young girl, helped by the family of her sweetheart, bolted out together with his brother. Schöndel sued the “kidnappers”, but eventually lost the case, and the conversion was legally ratified.

The wave of conversions wasn’t over yet. Three further brothers – Jacob Naftali, Josef and David<sup>33</sup> – went to the baptismal font a few hours before Moses, in a separate ceremony. Within a couple of months, six members of the younger generation had abandoned Judaism. The Dobruskas were now overwhelmingly Christian, and willing to take advantage of their new role for advancing in social status.

It was Carl, the eldest son, who took upon himself the task of obtaining for the patent of nobility from Maria Theresa. After having written a first application in October 1777, he beseeched an audience with the Empress. He was received on 16 November of that year,<sup>34</sup> insisted with his requests and used the conversion as a strong persuasive argument. In a plea written on 30 June 1778, Carl rhetorically amplifies the economic losses suffered by his brother Moses for the sake of Christianity, as he renounced to a sizable fortune in order to take baptism:

In Betreff meines Bruders Franz Schönfeld, gegenwärtig dem Pater Denis Vorsteher der Gareli-

*für Freunde der Natur*, Salzburg 1812, p. 460 (Der Winterabend).

<sup>28</sup> The booklet was known to the Italian Hebraist Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi, who quotes it in his *Dizionario storico degli autori ebrei e delle loro opere*, 3 vols., Parma 1802, vol. 1, p. 167: «Mosè Dobruski stampò nel 1775 in Praga una nuova esposizione del I capitolo [of the *Behinat ha-‘olam*] col titolo di *Libro delle Delizie*».

<sup>29</sup> Popper was the first Jew to be ennobled by the Austrian Emperor, 1790, without having converted to Christianity. See S. KRAUSS, *Joachim Edler von Popper: ein Zeit- und Lebensbild aus der Geschichte*

*der Juden in Böhmen*, Wien 1926.

<sup>30</sup> MACIEJKO, *Mixed Multitude*, cit., p. 195.

<sup>31</sup> KRAUSS, *Joachim Edler von Popper*, cit., pp. 76-77.

<sup>32</sup> According to his own report in his request of ennoblement to Empress Maria Teresa dated October 1777: «nachdem [ich] als ein Knab von 14. Jahren aus eigenem Trieb meine Eltern verlassen, und das Licht des wahren Glaubens angenommen...» (quoted by WÖLLFLE-FISCHER, *Junius Frey*, cit., p. 45).

<sup>33</sup> They were called respectively Maximilian Friedrich, Leopold Prokop and Emanuel Neopomuk.

<sup>34</sup> WÖLLFLE-FISCHER, *Junius Frey*, cit., p. 52.

schen Bibliothec [!] im k.k. Theresiano, zugegeben, ist es um deswillen eine unumstößliche Wahrheit, daß er aus wahren inneren Antrieb zum heil. Katholischen Glauben sich bekannt, weil er nicht nur selbst ein eigen Vermögen von 12 bis 16 tausend Gulden durch seinen Schritt fast ganz eingebüßet hat, sondern auch seine mit sich gebrachte Frau eine adoptierte Tochter des bekannten Joachim Popper war, die er zu seiner Universal Erbin ernannt hatte, an welcher Erbschaft sie wenigstens etliche hundert tausend Gulden verlohren, endlich weil er außer seiner Frau, seine Kindern, seine drei Brüder samt Bedienten mit sich genommen, die heil. Christl. Gemeinde um mehrere Personen verstärkt, ein Anerbieten von m/130 fl. Wie Euer Kail. Majt. Bekannt, ausgeschlagen, diese zu unterlaßen, folglich Reichtum, Verwandtschaft und alles dem Vorsatz aufgeopfert hat, samt den Seinigen zur heil. Christl. Religion sich zu bekennen. Übrigens ist er vierzehn Monate bereits Christ gewesen, ohne um etwas auszusuchen, vielmehr hat er, um seine Mutter zu gleichen Schritt zu bewegen, in Brünn lange zeit zugebracht und noch gegen 1300 fl. Verwandt.<sup>35</sup>

Such rhetoric stuck a cord in the bigot sovereign. In July 1778, Maria Theresa graciously granted the patent of nobility to Carl himself, to Moses alias Franz Thomas, to his wife Wilhelmine to four further brothers and one sister.<sup>36</sup>

While Carl had been crucial in obtaining the collective ennoblement, Moses alias Franz Thomas had also contributed to the reputation of the family.

His role is mentioned with honor in the patent, where his contribution to the diffusion of Christian religion is explicitly referred to:

Franz Thomas Schönfeld ... durch das vom ihm erst vor kurzem aus dem französischen in die deutsche Sprach übersetzte Buch, als ein zur Verbreitung Unserer Catholischen Religion sehr ersprißliches Werk mehrmalen unserer vollkommenste Zufriedenheit erworben<sup>37</sup>

Notwithstanding the clear reference preserved in this passage, no scholar seems to have noticed so far that the newly converted Dobrus-

ka translated a book of devotion. Scholem, who believed that Dobruska's conversion was quite insincere, pointed out that for a Sabbatian used to disguise his true beliefs it wouldn't have been difficult to cheat Christian authorities. However it seems that our neophyte took things seriously and engaged in a considerable effort in order to show his religious fervor.

I was lucky enough to identify the work mentioned in the patent of nobility among the holdings of the Austrian National Library in Vienna. It is a thick volume of 338 pages, bearing the title *Seelenübungen zur Vorbereitung zu den Sakramenten der Buße und des heiligen Abendmahls*. Written in French by the Jesuit Denis-Xavier Clément (1706-1771) and first published in 1758,<sup>38</sup> the book has been reprinted several times in the late 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Dobruska's translation, the first and only one into German, opens with a dedication to Maria Theresa, and a short preface, signed «Schönfeld»:

Großen und rühmlichen Thaten werden Monumente erbauet, sie werden zum Beyspiel und steten Ruhm in den Geschichtsbüchern aufgezeichnet, und verherrlichen die Namen der Herrscher bey den spätesten Nachkömmlingen; doch Monumente und Geschichtsbücher [!] sind Werke der Menschen zerfallen, verlöschen und werden vergessen. Aber fromme heilige Werke des Glaubens und der christlichen Tugenden stellen sich dar dem Thron des Herrn der Herren, dem Antlitz des Königs der Könige, stehen und stehen ewig im vollen eigenen Glanze in dem Innersten seines Heiligthums, und trotzen der Zeit und den Zerstörungen allen.

Solche, in den Augen Gottes selbst rühmliche Werke sind es, die die Regierung der großen Theresia unter andern rühmlichen und erhabnen Thaten auszeichnen und verherrlichen. Alles was Religion und Tugend zu verbreiten vermochte, erhielt Schutz und Gnade bey Ihrem Thron. Voll dieser tröstlichen Zuversicht wagte auch ich, die Uebersetzung gegenwärtigen Werkes, das seinem erhabenen Endzweck so sehr entspricht, Ihrem glorwürdigsten Namen zu widmen, und die große christliche Königin erhörte mein fußfälligstes Bitten, welches ich

<sup>35</sup> *Eingabe des Leutnants Carl Schönfeld an Maria Theresia vom 30. Juni 1778 mit der Bitte um Nobilitierung*, in H. SCHNEE, *Die Hoffinanz und der moderne Staat*, vol. 5, Berlin 1965, pp. 226-228: 227.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph, Maximilian, Leopold, Emanuel and Maria Theresia.

<sup>37</sup> WÖLFLE-FISCHER, *Junius Frey*, cit., p. 53.

<sup>38</sup> D.-X. CLÉMENT, *Exercices de l'âme pour se disposer aux sacrements de pénitence et d'eucharistie*,

lebenslang als mein größtes Glück betrachten, und dafür in tiefster Erniedrigung ersterben werde Euer Kaiserl. Königl. Apostol. Majestät allerunterhänigst allergehorsamster Schönfeld.

While Dobruska's words are replete with rhetorical flourishes, they almost do not refer to Christianity at all. The mention of «the throne of the Lord of Lords, the countenance of the King of kings (der Thron des Herrn der Herren, der Antlitz des Königs der Könige)» is reminiscent of the Hebrew Bible, and would fit perfectly any rabbinic or even kabbalistic book, whereby the sacraments to which the work of Abbé Clement is devoted are passed under silence. One gets the impression that Dobruska is subtly plying with words in order to maximize his pretended zeal without conceding much to the faith he has just adhered to. In all events, the translation reached its goal and impressed Maria Theresa. Albeit probably insincere, the over-pious neophyte got the ennoblement he was longing for.

During the first years following his conversion, Dobruska managed to be appointed at the Garellian library in Wien (a position that he didn't hold for long) and even to work as a censor for books, first in Prague and then in Vienna.<sup>39</sup>

However he was too ambitioned to limit himself to administrative and cultural tasks only. He was very active as an entrepreneur in the fields traditionally practiced by his family:

H.L. Guerin et L.F. Delatour, Paris 1758.

<sup>39</sup> WÖLFLE-FISCHER, *Junius Frey*, cit., p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> R. HITTMAIR, *Der josefinische Klostersturm im Land ob der Enns*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1907, pp. 352-361, esp. p. 352: «Wien 12. Jänner 1788: Se. Majestät haben zu befehlen geruht, daß die unter den Kirchengerechtschaften vorhanden Edelsteine und Perlen der Jüdin Schendel Dobruska und ihrem ältesten Sohn Thomas zusammen, welche in diesem Geschäft für eine Person zu betrachten seien, um den Schätzungspreis mit einer Aufgabe zu 10 von 100 gegen Barbezahlung und Erlaubnis dieselben mautfrei außer Land führen zu dürfen solchgestalt überlassen werden sollen, daß alsogleich durch Kunstverständige eine billige und unparteiliche Schätzung dieser Preziosen zu veranlassen uns, sowie die Dobruska oder ihr Sohn eine Partie empfängt, von ihr die Barbezahlung mit der Aufgabe von 10% zu leisten sei; bei unrichtige

tobacco manufacture, army supplies, bank. He invested on his own name but mostly in partnership, his best partner being his mother Schönfeld.

It would be a mistake to believe to the strained family relationship depicted by the eldest brother Carl in his letter to Maria Theresa. It is true that Schönfeld had opposed the conversion of two of his children, Blumele and Gerson, basically because they were underage, but family allegiance surely weighted more to her than religious affiliation. Despite the fact that Moses had converted, Schönfeld kept tight economic relations with him. In 1788, Schönfeld and Moses/Franz Thomas achieved probably the highest point of their partnership and made a very ambitious deal with the Viennese court. They undertook the contract for all the jewelry and precious stones that had belonged to the monasteries suppressed by Emperor Joseph II. Upon cash payment of a tenth of the esteemed value, mother and son were able to buy whatever precious stone or pearl could be sorted out of the religious ornaments once preserved in monasteries and churches.<sup>40</sup> Starting with 1781, and up to his death in 1791, Joseph II suppressed almost a half of all monasteries in his domains.<sup>41</sup> Not only the jewelry business was a very conspicuous one, but also the fact that Church properties ended in Jewish hands must have caused more than a negative comment among clergy and Christian believers.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the daring entre-

Schätzung zum Nachteil des Religionsfondes würde man sich an die Schätzmeister halten. Würden die Schätzmeister zu hoch schätzen, müßten sie die zu hoch geschätzte Ware selbst nehmen». See also S. BRUNNER, *Die theologische Dienerschaft am Hofe Joseph II*, Wien 1868, p. 162; A. WOLF, *Die Aufhebung der Klöster in Innerösterreich 1782-1790: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Kaiser Joseph's II*, Wien 1871. The Church jewelry trade of the Dobruskas is well-known to historians of the reign of Joseph II but has been ignored by the biographers of Moses Dobruska, the only exception being H.G. HAASIS, *Geht der Freiheit Flügel: Die Zeit der deutschen Jakobiner 1789-1805*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1988, p. 836, who mentions it very briefly.

<sup>41</sup> K. GUTKAS, *Kaiser Joseph II: Eine Biographie*, Wien - Darmstadt 1989, p. 303.

<sup>42</sup> A negative echo of the dispersion of Church belongings, albeit without mention of Dobruska's in-

preneurship of Schöndel and of his son shows itself here in its full strength. The pious translator of Jesuit literature has now transformed himself into a profit-oriented and even cynic businessman. The jewelry deal, officially signed on 1 May 1788, had a validity of twelve years.<sup>43</sup> In April 1790, the undertaking was still effective, as Schöndel, alias Katharina Dobruska, his son Franz Thomas and Sara Dobruska got a further mandate for Church objects in the Carmelite monastery of Graz and in whole Inner Austria.<sup>44</sup> I wasn't able to locate further documents after this date, and the business ended most probably with the death of Schöndel.

Such remarkable achievements in business testify the credit Moses Dobruska enjoyed during the reign of Joseph II. The Austrian National Archives in Vienna preserves several business proposals Dobruska addressed to the administration and to the Court, some of them have been rejected but a few having been approved. According to the Christian scholar Karl Friedrich Kretschmann (1738-1809),<sup>45</sup> Moses was highly regarded within the most powerful circles of the Habsburg court.

volvement, can be found in the memories of the Viennese salonnière Caroline Pichler (*Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben*, herausgegeben von E.K. Blümml, 2 vols., München 1914, vol. 1, pp. 68-69: «Das ganze Mittelalter versank auf diese Art hinter uns in einen Abgrund von Nacht und Unscheinbarkeit, und wenn man sich erinnert, auf welche Art Friedrich II., der sogenannte Große, den Fund des Liedes der Nibelungen aufnahm, so darf sich nicht wundern, wenn in Österreich bei den Aufhebung der Klöster der Archive wenig oder gar nicht geachtet, Altertümer an Manuskripten, Gerätschaften, Arbeiten, Malereien als Produkte barbarischer Zeit geringschätzt, um Spottpreise verauktioniert oder wohl gar vertilgt wurden, nachdem man höchstens von alten, vielleicht unschätzbaren Dokumenten die goldenen Kapseln der Siegel abgeschnitten, die Schriften verbrannt oder in die Papierstampe gegeben, die Kapseln aber als Pagamentsilber behandelt hatte».

<sup>43</sup> HITTMAIR, *Der josephinische Klostersturm*, cit., p. 304.

<sup>44</sup> I. WOISETSCHLÄGER, *Die Kreuzwegbilder in Steiermark zur Zeit der kirchlichen Reformen Kaiser*

### *Under the sign of discontinuity*

The life of Moses Dobruska can be easily divided in separate units, apparently independent one from the other. Such a discontinuity is particularly striking in the last part of his lifetime, the one that concerns us here the most. When he entered France, in March 1792, Dobruska carefully tried to make a clear cut in its own biography. Not only he chose a new name, but also concealed or at least hold back the truth about his conversion from Judaism to Catholicism, his ennobled status and his financial activities at the Court in Vienna. Some piece of evidence suggests that his sister Leopoldine, presented herself as belonging to the Moravian Church, more a positive lie than a deception by omission. Briefly, we can assume that Moses, his brother Emanuel and their younger sister Leopoldine, who were travelling together, changed their version about their provenance according to the different interlocutors they were interacting with. Since Moses was the leading figure among them, he is the one who should be credited with the plan of severing links with the past and beginning a new existence in France.

*Josephs II*, in «Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark» 58 (1967), pp. 129-145 esp. pp. 130-131: «Am 21. April 1790 erhielten wiederum Katharina Dobruska, Franz Thomas von Schönfeld und Sara Dobruska für Georg Pelz, bürgerlicher Trödler zu Graz, und Bernhard Ostertag zu Wien eine Vollmacht für die Übernahme und Schätzung der vom Karmeliterkloster zu Graz und in ganz Innerösterreich erliegenden Kirchengerschaften (Stmk. La/Bürgergasse, B 180, Wien 21 April 1790, Nr. 4995)».

<sup>45</sup> K.F. KRETSCHMANN, *Ehrengedächtniß der Herren Franz Thomas, und Emmanuel Ernst von Schönfeld*, in «Almanach und Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen für 1799», pp. 178-184, esp. p. 181: «Bald war er [i.e. Schönfeld] den Großen der österreichischen Monarchie als ein brauchbarer Geschäftsmann bekannt: Laudon selbst (wie mir glaubwürdige Personen versichert haben) machte es bei Übernehmung der Heerführerstelle in dem letztern Türkenkriege, zu einer Bedingung, das Thomas von Schönfeld als Hauptkommissar bei der Armee angestellt würde».



Seen in a broader perspective, a new start in life well integrates in the atmosphere of renewal and rebirth that spread in France after 1789. Many contemporaries of Dobruska altered their names as well, as they joined the Revolution. In an epoch that changed the names of the months and the way of counting years, it is no surprise if a former Jew trying to integrate in a foreign and traditionally anti-Jewish milieu took advantage of cosmopolitanism and kept silence about his provenance.

However Dobruska's countless twists are striking even in age of extensive transformations. In confronting his unlimited ability to adapt himself to different milieus, one is overwhelmed by what we could term the multiplying effect of successive transformations. Since boyhood, he went through different stages, living in many countries, speaking and writing different languages, professing conflicting faiths.

Change and discontinuity are so deeply interwoven with his biography that they seem to represent its major and more evident mark of continuity. Incoherence as coherence: it sounds like a pun, or like the title of an old philosophical treatise of the Middle Ages, Averroes' *Incoherence of the Incoherence*.

Far from being just an innocent joke, however, the contradictions of Dobruska career and public image cost quite dearly to him. France, which he described in a letter he sent to his friend Voss, as a «paradise»,<sup>46</sup> became his tomb.

In order to unthread the tangle that are Dobruska's last years, we shall try to analyze, first of all, which strategies he followed, and which social and cultural tools he used. At the same time, we would like to discuss how his contemporaries judged him, and to which extent they reacted to his public stance.

The question that hovered on him from the beginning of his activities in France concerned his true origin and his «sincere» goals. Doubts were raised quite soon, but it was only in late 1793 that the doubting party took the lead and eventually caused him to be arrested and put to death.

*Ma patrie est le monde, ma profession de faire le bien*

As Moses Dobruska arrived in Strasbourg, together with his younger brother Emmanuel and his sister Leopoldine, the city was packed both with enthusiasm and fierce contrasts.

Situated at the border between two cultures and traditions, Strasbourg was equally divided between French-Catholic and German-protestant population.

Since the beginning of the Revolution, quite a number of intellectuals had flocked from German-speaking countries to Alsace, driven by the dream of liberty. The inner-French and the German immigrants had even taken the lead of the revolutionary movement, pleading for radical view and reforms.

While a pronounced cosmopolitanism thrived the Strasbourg Jacobinists, the local élite was inclined to oppose the newcomers, and to defend its privileges. Head of the conservative party was the mayor of Strasbourg, Philippe-Frédéric de Dietrich. Scion of an old and notable family, Dietrich played a pivotal role in the new political system after having held high offices under the Ancient Regime. A baron by birth and a distinguished scientist on his own, Dietrich was a friend of General Lafayette.

The radical faction was led by Charles Laveaux and Eulogius Schneider, both arrived from Germany in 1791. Laveaux, a native French, had lived in Basel and in Berlin and also held a chair for French literature in Stuttgart; Schneider had entered the Franciscan order before becoming a preacher at the Court in Stuttgart and a professor at the University in Bonn. In Strasbourg, Laveaux founded the *Courrier of Strasbourg*, while Schneider directed *Argos oder der Mann mit hundert Augen*. Besides being involved in a hectic trade as a journalist, Laveaux was elected president of the Société des amis de la constitution, after the moderate wing had left it in February 1792.<sup>47</sup>

It was only natural that Dobruska, imbued with German culture, entered France from

<sup>46</sup> Letter dated Strasbourg, April 8th, 1792: cf. WÖLFLE-FISCHER, *Junius Frey*, cit., p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> D. SCHÖNPFLUG, *Der Weg in die Terreur. Radikalierung und Konflikte im Strassburger Jakobinerklub (1790-1795)*, München - Oldenbourg 2002, especially p. 114.

its eastern gate in Alsace. What could seem less obvious is the fact that a high-profile businessman like him, who even had been the fixer in some substantial deals involving the Court of Vienna, could support wholeheartedly the radical wing against its wealthy opponents.

Dobruska, or Junius G(ottlob) Frey, as he used to sign himself in Strasbourg, spared no effort in sustaining Laveaux. In April the conflict between the two factions escalated, and Dietrich had Laveaux arrested, with the charge of sedition. Frey vociferously supported his friend in jail and offered a noticeable amount of money in order to assist him during detention. As Laveaux was freed, in May, our former Austrian baron let mint a commemorative medal that he had carefully conceived for the occasion.

The pecuniary involvement of Dobruska, and his sudden appearance at the side of the radical Jacobinists, didn't fail to raise the attention and the suspects of the adverse party. In an epistle signed «Eleuthere» but written by the journalist Chairoux, the *Feuille of Strasbourg*, the paper of the supporters of Dietrich, cast doubts on the true identity and on the purposes of the mysterious friend of Laveaux:

Les amis de la liberté de Strasbourg apprennent de plus à tous les bons Français qu'un étranger, dont on ne connaît ni le vrai nom ni la profession, ni la mission, du moins apparente, en France; qui paraît aimer les théâtres à révolutions, et qui vient, dit-on, de quitter cette ville, pour en-parcourir d'autres, a prostitué de l'argent, destiné d'abord à une fête que n'ont pas voulu partager les citoyens de Strasbourg, pour faire frapper des médailles d'or et d'argent, qui attesteront à la postérité, (si les frais Jacobins ne souillent de cette offrande l'autel de la patrie) les mensonges de la plume anarchique de Jean-Charles Laveaux, et l'opprobre de sa prétendue absolution.<sup>48</sup>

Dobruska answered a couple of days later, with a letter published in Laveaux's *Courrier de Strasbourg*. He made a witty offer to his critic and took the opportunity for a solemn cosmopolitan profession of faith:

Le sieur Chairoux a dit: qu'on ne connoit ici ni ma patrie, ni ma fortune, ni ma profession, ni ma mission. Qu'il vienne chez moi, ce Chairoux qui m'a procuré le plaisir de faire une bonne action, et je lui prouverai, en l'embrassant, que ma patrie est le monde, ma profession de faire le bien, ma mission celle de toutes les âmes sensibles, et ma fortune assez considérable pour payer à 20 sous le mot toutes les sottises qu'il pourra dire contre moi sans se répéter. Je comptois partir aujourd'hui, mais je resterai ici demain toute la journée pour l'attendre à bras ouverts.

Je loge chez M. Caire, sous les grandes arcades No. 30. J'invite M. le principal du collège national à se rendre chez moi, et je lui prouverai, par un grand nombre de lettres de recommandation, que je ne suis pas indigne de sa haine, ni de celle de tous les aristocrates et feuillans de l'univers.<sup>49</sup>

The shift of emphasis between the two texts is apparent. While Chairoux labels its adversary as «a foreigner», the true name of whom remains obscure, Dobruska-Frey widen the question, thus paving the way for his own answer – «no one knows here neither my homeland nor my substance...».

In fact, to the suspicious conservative, it would have been enough to know that a foreigner was dilapidating his money in supporting an ambiguous «théâtre à révolution». Dobruska, however, reverses the negative definition of «foreigner» into philosophic universalism. His defiant response is a two-faced one. On the one hand, he claims for himself the ancient Stoic credo «I am a citizen of the world». On the other hand, he proudly makes a show of his wealth – my substance is large enough to... mock you. Interesting enough, at the end of his letter, he mentions the many letters of recommendations, which would attest his revolutionary and anti-aristocratic pedigree. Cosmopolite, wealthy and revolutionary of adamantine faith, the newly arrived Dobruska has cast the die.

<sup>48</sup> «Feuille de Strasbourg» n. 35, May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1792, pp. 181-182.

<sup>49</sup> «Courrier de Strasbourg» n. 122, May 25<sup>th</sup> 1792, pp. 485-486.

THE PHILOSOPHIE SOCIALE (1793)  
HOW A *PHILOSOPHE*  
ENVISAGED SOCIETY

*The forgotten finder of the social treasure*

In his classical introduction to the basic aims and concepts of sociology, Norbert Elias depicts the cultural wealth of past generations with the following words:

Versetzen wir uns in eine Zeit zurück, in der der gesellschaftliche Schatz des Wissens um vieles kleiner war, als er es heute ist. Menschen brauchen, um sich zu orientieren, ein zusammenfassendes Bild, eine Art von Landkarte, die ihnen zeigt, wie die verschiedenen Einzelphänomene, die sie wahrnehmen, in Zusammenhang miteinander stehen.<sup>50</sup>

Most probably, the reader won't be aware that the locution «gesellschaftliche Schatz des Wissens», that here surfaces quite naturally as a common good of sociological discourse, has a long history, dating back to the end of the Eighteenth century, and precisely to the *Philosophie sociale* by Moses Dobruska, alias Junius Frey.

In fact, it is in the pages of the 1793 edition of the *Philosophie sociale* that we encounter for the first time the very words «trésor social», which Dobruska defines as:

tous les moyens de culture avec leur véhicule, la faculté appétitive matérielle et intellectuelle, étendue et perfectionnée.

No previous social thinker had used such a metaphoric expression, that is to the image of a storage in which all cultural goods, available within a given society, can be preserved.

According to Dobruska, this treasure is on the disposal of the “sovereign” of the society, who is entitled to use it for the common good. It is true that Jean-Jacques Rousseau defines providence, or nature, as the «trésor du pauvre»,<sup>51</sup> but he does not elaborate the notion any further and, what is most relevant here, does not extend the similitude of a treasure to the social realm.

We shall analyze in detail the genesis and the context of such a metaphoric language, which is highly characteristic of Dobruska's background and of his intellectual approach. At this introductory stage of our reflections, it suffices to remark that a few crucial concepts, commonly adopted in modern sociology, ascend in fact to our largely forgotten Jewish convert and to his pioneering work.

In the case of the «trésor social», the chain of transmission is relatively easy to follow. After Dobruska, there is no mention of it until 1830, when in a French patriotic poem by P.E. Raboteau, we read that «au trésor social chacun doit ses tributs».<sup>52</sup> It is a vague reminiscence indeed, and does not forcefully implies a direct knowledge of the *Philosophie sociale*.

Quite different is the case with the *Harmonies économiques* by Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850), published in 1850. Bastiat, the influential liberal theorist, discusses the advantages of social and economic exchange. In criticizing Daniel De Foe's *Robinson Crusoe* for its oversimplified idea of a state of nature, he writes:

Un des philosophes les plus populaires, dans un roman qui a le privilège de charmer l'enfance de génération en génération, nous a montré l'homme surmontant par son énergie, son activité, son intelligence, les difficultés de la solitude absolue. Voulant mettre en lumière tout ce qu'il y a de ressources dans cette noble créature, il l'a supposée, pour ainsi dire, accidentellement retranchée de la civilisation. Il entraînait donc dans le plan de Daniel de Foë de jeter dans l'île du Désespoir Robinson seul, nu, privé de tout ce qu'ajoutent aux forces humaines l'union des efforts, la séparation des occupations, l'échange, la société.

Cependant, et quoique les obstacles ne soient qu'un jeu pour l'imagination, Daniel de Foë aurait ôté à son roman jusqu'à l'ombre de la vraisemblance, si, trop fidèle à la pensée qu'il voulait développer, il n'eût pas fait à l'état social des concessions obligées, en admettant que son héros avait sauvé du naufrage quelques objets indispensables, des provisions, de la poudre, un fusil, une hache, un couteau, des cordes, des planches, du fer, etc.; preuve décisive que la société est le milieu nécessaire de l'homme, puisqu'un romancier même n'a pu

<sup>50</sup> N. ELIAS, *Was ist Soziologie?*, Frankfurt am Main 2006 (München 1970<sup>1</sup>), p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> Rousseau *juge de Jean Jaques: Dialogues*, II:

«O providence! ô nature! trésor du pauvre, ressource de l'infortuné».

<sup>52</sup> P.E. RABOTEAU, *Poème*, Paris 1830, p. 77.

le faire vivre hors de son sein. Et remarquez que Robinson portait avec lui dans la solitude un autre trésor social mille fois plus précieux et que les flots ne pouvaient engloutir: je veux parler de ses idées, de ses souvenirs, de son expérience, de son langage même, sans lequel, il n'aurait pu s'entretenir avec lui-même, c'est-à-dire penser.<sup>53</sup>

Thanks to this well-written, vivid example, the decisive step in spreading the “social treasure” imagery was accomplished. While the knowledge of the *Philosophie sociale* had been confined to a restricted circle of French thinkers, Bastiat’s work, often reprinted during the second half of the Nineteenth century, was widely read. It is no surprise to find many an author toiling with the social treasure of culture and of language, in the wake of Bastiat’s reappraisal of *Robinson Crusoe*. From late Nineteenth century on, from Ferdinand de Saussure<sup>54</sup> to Marcel Proust,<sup>55</sup> from Russian geneticists<sup>56</sup> to American urban theoreticians,<sup>57</sup> the spectrum of the metaphoric “treasures” has gone well beyond the pale of sociology and has become a kind of passkey to a variety of intellectual domains.

It is a bitter irony of destiny, that none of the later propagators of the social storage idea ever heard about the unlucky first conceiver of the image. But alas, to be guillotined as a spy and a traitor is no enhancement for an academic pedigree whatsoever.

Nor is this the only case where Dobruska’s

sociological frame of thinking had a pioneering value. As already mentioned, he is the one who first employed, in social theories, terms like «moi social» or «disorganization», obviously without having ever been duly recognized for his cultural services.

A question raises here. How can we explain the fruitfulness of Dobruska’s method? Is there any link between his understanding of social phenomena and the wealth of intuitions, sometimes surprising, which are scattered through his somehow awkward prose?

In many a respect, Dobruska is an accomplished outsider in academic discourse. His troubled biography, his dubious undertakings as a financier, his self-thought philosophic learning, his daring attempt to publish a refined theoretical book in French, a language he did not master fully, all these elements seem to point to a dilettante, who cannot aspire to any degree of scholarly originality.

Instead, a throughout study of the *Philosophie sociale* reveals a work that, notwithstanding its linguistic shortcomings, stands at the very foundation of European social philosophy. A considerable amount of self-confidence and even of audacity is here undeniable, an attitude aptly expressed by the Hebrew word *hūṣpah*. But Dobruska the social thinker is more than an insolent or a deceiver, as Robespierre tried to brand mark him.<sup>58</sup> He is a sharp-focused theorist, who must be recognized for his creativity.

<sup>53</sup> F. BASTIAT, *Harmonies économiques*, Bruxelles 1850, pp. 99-100.

<sup>54</sup> F. DE SAUSSURE, *Cours de linguistique générale* (1913), Paris 1972, p. 30: «La langue est un trésor déposé par la pratique de la parole dans les sujets appartenant à une même communauté, un système grammatical existant virtuellement dans chaque cerveau, ou plus exactement, dans les cerveaux d’un ensemble d’individus; car la langue n’est complète dans aucun, elle n’existe parfaitement que dans la masse».

<sup>55</sup> M. PROUST, *A la recherche du temps perdu*: «La nobilité plus accentuée s’était marquée quand Albertine, parlant d’une jeune fille qui avait mauvaise façon, avait dit: “On ne peut même pas distinguer si elle est jolie, elle a un pied de rouge sur la figure”. Enfin, quoique jeune fille encore, elle prenait déjà des façons de femme de son milieu et de son rang en disant, si quelqu’un faisait des grimaces:

“Je ne peux pas le voir parce que j’ai envie d’en faire aussi”, ou si on s’amusait à des imitations: “Le plus drôle, quand vous la contrefaites, c’est que vous lui ressemblez” Tout cela est tiré du trésor social».

<sup>56</sup> Alexander Serebrovksy as quoted in *Democracy, Social Values, and Public Policy*, edited by M.M. CARROW, R.P. CHURCHILL and J.J. CORDES, Westport (CT) - London 1998, p. 171.

<sup>57</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, edited by K.R. McNamara, Cambridge 2014, p. 133: «Fredric Clemson Howe and Simon Nelson Patten developed visions of urban life praising “crowding together of mankind” as a “social treasure”».

<sup>58</sup> See the draft of a speech by Robespierre found among his papers after his death. *Pièces trouvées dans les papiers de Robespierre et complices*, Affaire Chabot, Faction Proly, Paris 1794, p. 67: «Il existe à Paris, depuis les premiers temps de la



While nobody can alter history, and compensate him for having been neglected for so long, Dobruska deserves a thorough examination for the richness of his approach to social theories, an approach that is both new and daring.

In the following pages I shall sketch the basic novelties of the widely-forgotten *Philosophie sociale* and its place within the broader frame of the philosophical reflections about society at the end of Eighteenth century. I am well aware that my picture might be still lacking in some details, the subject having remained quite neglected so far.

However, the risk of such a reconnaissance in a new territory is worth the reward. To penetrate the secluded world of this earliest social philosopher, irregular and daring as he is, can help us in understanding how sociology moved its first steps ever.

### *Sociologie for close friends only*

Both its date of publishing, in 1793, and its aim as a companion to the Constitution of the same year, set the *Philosophie sociale* in the troubled context of the French Revolution. It is an époque of intense transformations, of febrile activism, when social theories born out of the Enlightenment fight their way into real life. As we shall see, the so called Montagnard Constitution of June 1793 offered a unique chance for transforming the body of laws of revolutionary France and for shaping it according to a quite advanced idea of society. In fact, the attempt proved to be quite unsuccessful. The Terror crushed both the spirit and most of the promoters of the June Constitution, including Do-

révolution, deux monstres dignes de servir la cause des tyrans, par la profonde hypocrisie qui les caractérise. Ils avoient perdu, à Paris, les titres et le nom qu'ils portoient à la cour de Vienne; l'un d'eux avoit associé à celui l'un, d'eux avoit associé à celui qu'il a adopté, le nom du fondateur de la liberté romaine; il étoit entouré de titres patriotiques; il avoit composé des ouvrages éloquens pour la défense des droits de l'homme et de la révolution française; il avoit même des brevets de persécution; il avoit été banni de l'Allemagne par l'empereur Joseph II. Aucun des patriotes qu'il attiroit chez lui, n'y entroit

bruska himself. The juridical experiment was wiped away together with its protagonists, even if some principles promulgated in 1793 had a durable and long-lasting influence on social legislation.

During such a period of upheaval, intellectuals were compelled to work at full steam in order to keep the pace with the political stage. It is worth mentioning that the very word "sociologie" is first attested in an unpublished work by Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748-1836), one of the chief theorists of the French Revolution.

As it is well known, historians of sociology usually ascribe the neologism "sociologie" to Auguste Comte, who proudly advocates to himself the first conception of both of the word and of the academic discipline to which it refers:

Je crois devoir hasarder, dès à présent, ce terme nouveau exactement équivalent à mon expression déjà introduite de physique sociale, afin de pouvoir désigner par un nom unique cette partie complémentaire de la philosophie naturelle qui se rapporte à l'étude positive de l'ensemble des lois fondamentales propres aux phénomènes sociaux.

The French philologist Jacques Guilhaumou has shown that, some fifty years before Comte, Sieyès lists "sociologie" within a synoptic table devoted to society and social organization. Although no further definition is available in the text, Guilhaumou suggests that Sieyès could have referred here

à la prise en compte, certes aussi par le législateur, de l'homme utile comme "être à besoins", selon un mode d'intervention spécifique sur le terrain social.<sup>59</sup>

sans le surprendre, la plume à la main, rêvant sur le droits de l'humanité, on courbé sur les oeuvres de Plutarque ou de Jean-Jacques. L'extérieur austère et le costume révolutionnaire de Junius répondoient parfaitement à l'idée d'un si grand caractère; la coupe philosophique de sa chevelure, le bonnet rouge qui ornoit sa tête philosophique, garantissoient à toute la terre la pureté de son patriotisme. Junius Frey avoit acquis l'estime de toute sa section; il s'étoit lié avec des patriotes qui s'honoroiient de l'amitié de ce vertueux ami de l'humanité».

<sup>59</sup> J. GUILHAUMOU, *Sieyès et le non-dit de la so-*

His manuscript having remained unpublished two-centuries long, Sieyès' coinage of the word didn't have any direct impact on later studies. Such an early emergence of the idea of sociology, however, is quite interesting, especially considering the fact that Sieyès is the author of one of the most influential texts of the French Revolution. His *Qu'est-ce que est le tiers état?*, published in 1789, had an enormous impact in voicing the vision of a new social order.

In some respect, the case of the forgotten «sociologie» of Sieyès and of the conceptual innovations of Dobruska, that were submerged by his tragic end, have some affinities.

In both circumstances, the intensive power of innovation in social theories that characterizes the late Eighteenth centuries has remained buried under the more vociferous and less troubled Nineteenth century scholarship. When asked what he did during the Terror, Sieyès laconically answered «J'ai veçu»,<sup>60</sup> a healthy albeit modest goal Dobruska was unable to attain.

#### *Old bricks, new building*

At a first reading, the intellectual pedigree of the *Philosophie sociale* seems easily ascertained. Hobbes, Montesquieu, Locke, Rousseau, Kant – Dobruska repeatedly quotes some of the most influential thinkers of the great age of Enlightenment. Instead of mentioning a vast array of men of learning, he prefers to focus on big names, and spares no effort in showing that he can match the most revered protagonists of Seventeenth and Eighteenth century social philosophy.

In some crucial points, Dobruska's social theories are modelled on his predecessors. From Hobbes and Rousseau he adopts the idea of a social contract; his emphasis on education owes much to Montesquieu; the methodologic foundations of his *Philosophie* draw on Kant, and his idea of freedom is influenced by Locke.

So far so good. After having pondered this preamble, the navigated reader, who is acquaint-

ted with late Eighteenth century *philosophes*, and with their overstated ambitions, has probably downgraded his expectations. Here comes a well-read, self-thought, second class thinker. By no means an original one, but a decent re-painter of well-known landscapes.

If dismay does not prevent our connoisseur from a further reading, and if Dobruska is given a second chance, things are likely to change.

In the case of the *Philosophie sociale*, the first impression proves to be misleading. The bricks might have been partly reused, some piece of carpentry looks recycled, but the whole building has been projected anew, by a hand bolder than expected. The intimacy with a handful of selected masters has not crushed originality, on the contrary.

The novelty of the *Philosophie sociale* resides probably in its spurious character. On the one hand, Dobruska is the recipient, one would say the proud heir, of a well-established illuminist conception of social development. On the other hand, his vision has a distinct humanistic flavor, as a short discussion of his conception of man, nay, «de l'homme», will hopefully show.

#### *«Homme» as a pivotal concept of social philosophy*

It is only at the beginning of the third part of his *Philosophie sociale*, before introducing the aims and limits of the social contract, that Dobruska formulates his definition of man:

L'être homme est un être vivant dont l'instinct est susceptible du développement le plus étendu et de la plus grand perfection.

As he repeatedly states, this definition is meant to be as broad as possible. Dobruska avoids intentionally to distinguish here between state of nature and social state, although this two stages, and their reciprocal relationship dominate his vision of mankind.

Pour nous – he writes – nous ne donnerons ici ni une définition particulière de l'homme naturel, ni

*ciologie: du mot à la chose*, in «Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines» 15 (2006), pp. 117-134: 117.

<sup>60</sup> W.H. SEWELL, *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: the Abbé Sieyès and What is the Third Estate?*,

une définition particulière de l'homme sociale. Nous définirons généralement l'être homme.<sup>61</sup>

We are told that the ground for avoiding more particular definitions is a political one. According to Dobruska, to alter the unity and integrity of human beings reflects a typical bias of undemocratic political systems:

[La] définition double et particulière de l'être-homme, nous conduirait à consacrer le système de division et de distinction entre l'homme et le citoyen, ou entre l'homme, et l'homme politique et l'homme civil; système introduit par le monarchisme et la tyrannie, mais qui ne peut convenir aux législateurs de la France; qui connoissent la nature, qui ne veulent ni s'en écarter, ni agir contrairement à elle, et pour qui le citoyen, l'homme politique, l'homme civil, n'est que l'homme social, l'homme vivant réuni avec ses semblables, lequel, par cette association, n'a reçu aucun change-ment dans son essence.

According to our author, while tyrannical and aristocratic régimes aim at fragmenting individuals through unequal rights and privileges, and thus attain a better control and social stratification, revolutionary France must recognize that men are all equal in their essence and are equally entitled to full citizenship.

As he writes elsewhere, individuals associate freely without merging together and society must be seen as the multiplication of singular elements and not as a superior entity which transcends its components.

Although men share a common essence as citizens, individuals differ in their abilities and must be free to strive toward perfection. Indeed, they have the faculty to improve themselves and to reach the utmost grade of perfection. Driven by a dynamic force, man remains the same as citizen while trying to change individually for better. The context within such an improvement is possible is the social one:

Cette définition nous présente l'homme dans toute son étendue, depuis le berceau de l'instinct brut pour ainsi parler, jusqu'au plus haut degré de sa culture et de sa virilité. Nous pouvons parler

maintenant des droits et des rapports de l'homme dans l'état de nature, les étudier, en déterminer la latitude, et y trouver la mesure exacte de ses droits et de ses rapports dans l'état de culture.

L'essence de l'homme demeure toujours la même, elle ne fait que se développer et se perfectionner.

The way Dobruska emphasizes the dynamic sameness of individual identity is clearly reminiscent of the Humanistic tradition. The most famous and influential prototype of such a theory is to be found in the so called *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (Oration on the Dignity of Man) by the Italian Renaissance thinker Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). Pico states here that God, after having fashioned the whole universe, and having bestowed each creature with its attributes and its specific function, decided to create man, but had no peculiar quality left for him:

At last, the Supreme Maker decreed that this creature, to whom He could give nothing wholly his own, should have a share in the particular endowment of every other creature. Taking man, therefore, this creature of indeterminate image, He set him in the middle of the world and thus spoke to him: "We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine".<sup>62</sup>

Durham - London 1994, p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> *Philosophie sociale*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>62</sup> G. PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Translated by A.R. Caponigri, Chicago

To man, to the first Adam as to every man, God has given a basic instinct for transformation, the possibility to move swiftly along a double-edged path. He is free either to improve himself and ascend ultimately to heaven or can he descend toward bestiality and plunge into evil.

Pico, who was deeply influenced by Neoplatonism, envisaged the ascend as a mystical liberation from the burden of matter, while descending into evil meant to him to get entangled in physical matter and to obey to the basest instincts. Chronologically remote as it is, Pico's theory was most probably known to Dobruska, who was particularly well-read in Christian exoteric lore. And yet, our late Eighteenth writer gives to the old Humanistic theory a more modern, and quite more social turn. Instead of the mystical asceticism suggested by Pico, Dobruska sees perfection as a social harvest, thus complying with the *esprit* of his age. No ascetic restraint is needed in order to achieve perfection, the distinctive goal of humankind. Living together, taking advantage of the unlimited chances offered by the association with others, and yet keeping all our own individuals prerogatives, this is the ladder to ascent as Dobruska conceives it.

We could say that the Fifteenth-century ideal of ascent has been re-framed within the peculiar optimistic approach of Enlightenment. Dobruska seems here to come close to the path taken by Christian Wolff (1679-1754), a philosopher he never quotes by name but whom he had for sure studied, if only through Kant's refutation. In fact, Wolff's theory of perfection is one of the preferred targets of Kant, who considers it devoid of a true philosophical basis.<sup>63</sup> Notwithstanding such criticism, Wolffian perfectionism had a remarkable impact on European Enlightenment, and influenced social thought, as it is the case with Dobruska. According to Wolff, the innate human quest for perfection arises from different classes of duties. Duties to the self come first, because we are first committed to our own welfare, both physical and intellectual. Then come our duties to God and thirdly the duties to others. Wolff's approach might have been termed

«self-referential»: «we will not always be able to maximize our own end of self-perfection with our own resources and will have to ask others for help, but we can reasonably expect such help only if ye are also willing to extend it to others when we can».<sup>64</sup>

Such an interactional context of perfection is quite relevant for us, since it represents the very ground on which Dobruska has grown his own conception. The attainment of perfection is relational for him too, and based on mutual benefit. While for Wolff, the duties to others descend ultimately from our duties to God, the *Philosophie sociale* offers a more secular perspective, according to which perfection can be fully explained within the boundary of human nature and instincts.

### *The Social Contract*

As Dobruska himself clearly states, his definition of man, as apt to reach perfection, is functional to the way he conceives social contract.

On this respect, our author remains faithful to Rousseau, and maintains a two-stages history of sociability. The first stage is a zero-grade of social interaction, and a full-grade of absolute independence:

L'homme dans l'état de pure nature, ne doit rien à personne. La nature, mère commune de tous les êtres vivans, l'a pourvu de l'instinct de se conserver et de propager son espèce comme le reste des êtres vivans; il vit, se nourrit et se propage comme eux dans les forêts et les cavernes; il ne connoît ni langage ni société, et il n'en a pas besoin.

The main feature of the *état de pure nature* being isolation and selfishness, natural man is devoid of any cultural skill. He can't even speak, let alone to be able to socialize with his fellow human-beings. As a compensation for his isolation, he enjoys complete autarchy, since he can satisfy his basic needs without the help of others.

1956, pp. 5-6.

<sup>63</sup> See *Kant's Observations and Remarks: A Critical Guide*, edited by S. MELD SHELL and R. VELKLEY,

Cambridge 2012, p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> P. GUYER, s.v. *Wolff, Christian*, in «Encyclopaedia of Ethics», vol. 3, New York - London 2001



May be for the sake of brevity, Dobruska oversimplifies here the concept of natural man, and risks a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*. Needless to say, such a theoretical construct, a human being who «can preserve and propagate his species» without communicating in any form is purely fictive. Nor is it clear how can he be termed “human”, while lacking all human prerogatives, like language and sociability. Confronted with such a selfish beast in some philosophical forest, one would have probably thought to have meet somebody who only looked like a man, a bookish creature similar to mythological chimaeras.

A major characteristic of Dobruska’s approach is here evident, a trait already implicit in the way Rousseau conceives the natural state of mankind. Far from being the result of concrete historical thinking, *l’homme dans l’état de pure nature* described by our author is a purely philosophical *posse*, a social man who hasn’t moved from potency into action yet.

If Rousseau fills such a natural state of isolation with his nostalgia for a utopian solitude,<sup>65</sup> Dobruska downgrades his natural man to pure abstraction and qualifies him mainly negatively. One has the impression that our Jewish convert didn’t share Rousseau’s enthusiasm for the *bon sauvage* and that he accepted him as a logical antecedent of social man only.

It is important to reflect on this issue in order to understand how “philosophical” *Philosophie sociale* is. As often is the case with social thought born out of Enlightenment, the scenario drawn by Dobruska is essentially a pseudo-historical one. The antithesis between nature and culture has a logical import, the former being possible non *per se* but as a contrasting polarity of the latter. No natural state as such ever existed nor is Dobruska interested in assessing its unlikely historical setting.

What really matters in the *Philosophie sociale* is society, and sociability, and not nature as an independent value. If we prefer to express this process dialectically, culture is the thesis while nature works like the antithesis, so-

ciety being the synthesis of the pair of opposites. The fact that in the illuminist narrative about mankind, from Rousseau to Dobruska, the logical order is reversed, the state of nature being credited with historical priority, has mainly a rhetorical function. We could term such a reversal as a successful *hysteron proteron* of social thought, meant to focus on how important the construct “nature” is in order to understand the basic reality available in human sciences, that is «culture».

Having posited a hypothetical state nature as the first step of mankind, Dobruska is free to focus on “needs”, his preferred social ingredients. The contrastive relationship between nature and culture is defined by the emerging needs of human-beings. While nature is posited as the blissful state of no-need, culture discloses the vase of Pandora of thousands and thousands needs, poison and balsam of society:

L’homme de la société doit aux autres, parce qu’il a besoin d’eux. Dans cet état, la providence de la nature créatrice, ne lui suffisant point, il se livre alors à la providence de l’art, créature de la société.

It is in order to regulate the overwhelming flow of needs that the social contract is conceived and signed, thus sealing a free agreement on equal basis between contracting parties:

Comme dans cet état il doit aux autres, parce qu’il a besoin d’eux, il est nécessaire qu’il sache apprécier ce qu’ils lui doivent pour pouvoir déterminer ce qu’ils peuvent exiger de lui. Voilà ce qui détermine le véritable contrat social. Les articles de ce contrat doivent être pesés avec d’autant plus de précision qu’ils nous mettent en état de nous convaincre que l’homme, comme individu, en contribuant trop peu à la société, léseroit cette dernière qu’au contraire en y contribuant trop, il se léseroit lui-même; que ce seroit foiblesse ou prodigalité d’un côté; et oppression de l’autre. Dans les deux cas, le contrat social seroit frappé de nullité.

The social contract, first conceived by Hobbes<sup>66</sup> and further developed by Rousseau,

(1992<sup>1</sup>), pp. 1815-1817.

<sup>65</sup> As L. STRAUSS, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago - London 1953, p. 255 put it, «The farewell to society, authority, restraint, and responsibility or

the return to the state of nature remains [for Rousseau] a legitimate possibility».

<sup>66</sup> HOBBS, *Leviathan*, XIV: «From this Fundamental Law of Nature, by which men are command-

is presented here in quasi-juridical terms, as an accord entered into by real partners. Dobruska does not follow in this case Kant, who felt somehow uncomfortable with the fictive character of such an agreement and preferred to conceive it as a regulative principle, «which can serve as a test and touchstone of social institutions and enactments, rather than as their historical explanations».<sup>67</sup> Dobruska takes the social contract face-value, and projects it in the usual pseudo-historical setting. But his true aim is to describe the making of society as the result of contrasting forces, an equilibrium originated from a harmonizing agreement between individual needs. The regulating principle of these needs is given an old philosophical name, «appetitive faculty»:

Mais quel est l'avantage précis que l'individu brut reçoit de la société? Il n'en reçoit en effet que le seul développement de sa faculté appetitive, matérielle et intellectuelle. Que doit-on entendre par la faculté appetitive, matérielle et intellectuelle perfectionnée et développée? L'instinct mûri et formé par la société.

Albeit the name is old, Dobruska's definition is new, since it mingles Kantian philosophy and a distinctive social approach. In his German draft of the *Philosophie sociale*, preserved in the French National Archives in Paris, Dobruska

ed to endeavour Peace, is derived this second Law; "That a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himselfe he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himselfe". For as long as every man holdeth this Right, of doing any thing he liketh; so long are all men in the condition of Warre. But if other men will not lay down their Right, as well as he; then there is no Reason for any one, to devest himselfe of his: For that were to expose himselfe to Prey, (which no man is bound to) rather than to dispose himselfe to Peace. This is that Law of the Gospell; "Whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them". And that Law of all men, *Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris*. See also *ibid.*: «The mutual transferring of Right, is that which Men call Contract».

<sup>67</sup> W. STARK, *Fundamental Forms of Social*

ka speaks of «Begehrungsvermögen», a term which helps us in better understanding the context out of which the concept has been derived. According to Kant, the faculty of desire («Begehrungsvermögen») «is the being's faculty of becoming by means of its ideas the cause of the actual existence of the objects of these ideas».<sup>68</sup> Besides a lower appetitive faculty, Kant theorizes a higher power of desire, that is will, or practical reason:

The faculty of desire, in so far as its inner principle of determination as the ground of its liking or predilection lies in the reason of the subject, constitutes the will. The will is therefore the faculty of active desire or appetency, viewed not so much in relation to the action which is the relation [13] of the act of choice as rather in relation to the principle that determines the power of choice to the action. It has, in itself, properly no special principle of determination, but in so far as it may determine the voluntary act of choice, it is the practical reason itself.<sup>69</sup>

In distinguishing between material and intellectual appetency, Dobruska follows the Kantian path of the double faculty of desire («Begehrungsvermögen»). Such a double way is different from the old Aristotelian conception of *orexis* (desire), that can be either desire for pleasure (*epithumia*) or for rational good (*boulesis*) or even for anger and retaliation (*thumos*).<sup>70</sup>

*Thought. An Essay in Aid of deeper Understanding of History of Ideas*, New York and London 2010 (1962<sup>1</sup>), p. 92.

<sup>68</sup> KANT, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Vorrede, 4 Anm. (II. 10): «das Vermögen, durch seine Vorstellungen Ursache der Gegenstände dieser Vorstellungen zu sein».

<sup>69</sup> KANT, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Einleitung I (III.14): «Das Begehrungsvermögen, dessen innerer Bestimmungsgrund, folglich selbst das Belieben in der Vernunft des Subjekts angetroffen wird, heißt der Wille. Der Wille ist also das Begehrungsvermögen, nicht sowohl (wie die Willkür) in Beziehung auf die Handlung, als vielmehr auf den Bestimmungsgrund der Willkür zur Handlung betrachtet, und hat selber für sich eigentlich keinen Bestimmungsgrund, sondern ist, sofern sie die Willkür bestimmen kann, die praktische Vernunft selbst».

<sup>70</sup> See G. PEARSON, *Aristotle on Desire*, Cambridge, 2012.

To the philosophical approach of Kant, our author adds his own idea of social dynamic. The ultimate desire is, to him, the result of social interaction – «l’instinct mûri et formé par la société».

In this way, the social multiplier «need» has found its philosophical trigger. From matter to reason, the ladder of desire enables the earthy ascent of man.

However, Dobruska the social ascender is well aware of the implicit weakness of one-sided theory, based on need only.

By empowering desire and so producing ever-growing needs, society risks to generate dismay and frustration:

C’est dans cet état de développement, que nous supposons l’homme devoir aux autres, parce qu’il a besoin d’eux. Cependant on ne peut contracter d’obligation qu’en échange d’avantages réels. Le développement de la faculté appétitive est-il un avantage réel, sans la liberté la plus complète [sic] de se servir de tous ses moyens pour la satisfaire?

A rightful society must offer a balance between needs on the one hand and the means to satisfy them on the other hand.

Dobruska pays special attention to this principle, that focuses on the equilibrium between needs and means. And rightly so, since it represents the core of his social theory.

Such a balance reflects the mechanistic vision that characterizes the *Philosophie sociale*, according to the prevailing trend of Eighteenth century social thought.<sup>71</sup> Society is conceived as a mechanism that can function properly provided its forces are well balanced. If equilibrium is broken, law must enforce its restoration, otherwise disorder and injustice will follow.

This general principle is put at stake if the total amount of individual needs surpasses the means each one has at his own disposal in order to satisfy such needs. Each individual must be free to exploit all available means, the only limit to his freedom being the freedom of other fellow citizens:

Mais cette liberté complète [sic] peut-elle s’exercer par tous les individus, sans que l’exercice des uns n’empêche l’exercice des autres? ou sans que le bonheur des uns ne s’établisse aux dépens du bonheur des autres? Où peut-on, au contraire, empêcher la liberté de l’exercice des facultés des uns, malgré que tout individu ait reçu par le développement de sa faculté appétitive le même désir de se procurer de la même manière, le dernier degré de bonheur, lorsqu’ils ne peuvent en jouir sans enfreindre l’égalité du droit qu’ont les autres d’exercer cette même faculté dans toute sa latitude, et qui seule est un bénéfice réel du développement de la faculté appétitive?

Or, comme tout ce que l’individu doit à la société se réduit au développement de sa faculté appétitive, qui n’est point un bénéfice réel, sans la liberté de faire usage de toutes ses facultés pour satisfaire ses désirs développés, et comme tous les individus sont absolument dans le même cas par rapport à cet exercice libre de leurs facultés pour atteindre le bonheur désiré, il n’y peut exister d’inconvénient que lorsque l’exercice de cette liberté dégénère en licence, c’est-à-dire, lorsque la liberté de l’un enfreint la liberté de l’autre, et empêche de cette manière l’égalité du droit d’exercer ses facultés pour se rendre aussi heureux qu’il est possible.

The goal of society is to foster the happiness of its components. Accordingly, the social contract is envisaged like a scale that determines with «geometrical exactness», the obligations and the rights of individuals:

Voilà la seule échelle du contrat social qui détermine avec une exactitude géométrique, ce que l’individu doit à la société, et ce qu’il a droit d’en prétendre; voilà la mesure d’une garantie de la liberté et de l’égalité de tous, par rapport à l’exercice de tous leurs moyens, pour se rendre heureux, et qui établit les mêmes peines contre les infracteurs.

The exponential explosion of needs represents a potential, dangerous unbalance. The equilibrium must be restored by maximizing the means of satisfaction as well. Dobruska doesn’t elaborate here on the viable methods for expanding resources. In fact, the *Philosophie sociale*

<sup>71</sup> See STARK, *Fundamental Forms of Social Thought*, II, *Society as Mechanism*; relevant Eighteenth century example of social mechanistic theo-

ries are discussed by H. GOURIER, *La jeunesse d’Auguste Comte et la formation du positivisme*, Paris 1964<sup>2</sup>, vol. 2, pp. 6-48.

is not aimed at assessing a model of economic expansion, or at discussing cultural progress, but at outlining the social theory needed for the new French constitution.

Dobruska focuses therefore on rights and obligations. His question is how to grant access to resources, and not how to produce them, albeit he is clearly convinced that an individual-focused society is the best multiplier of economic and cultural growth.

On the side of social and political rights, the exploitation of all available resources is permitted and even desirable, provided the rights of others are not endangered.

According to Dobruska, no one is allowed to alienate his desires nor can society escape its commitment to ensure individual happiness and the fulfillment of individual needs. Are these requirements not met, the social contract is void and each individual has the right to rebel against authority, «his rebellion being a holy resistance against oppression».

I. L'homme reçoit de la société le seul développement de sa faculté appétitive, matérielle et intellectuelle qui est: L'instinct mûri et formé par la société.

II. Pour que cette recette de la société soit une recette réelle et obligatoire, il faut qu'elle ait la liberté d'employer tous ses efforts pour satisfaire ses désirs de la manière la plus complète, ou pour atteindre son suprême bonheur, conformément au développement de sa faculté appétitive.

III. Cette liberté de chaque individu est l'égalité des droits la plus parfaite.

IV. Personne ne peut aliéner cette égalité libre ou liberté égale, sans se déclarer prodigue ou foible, trompé ou forcé, cas dans lesquels tout contrat d'aliénation est nul de fait, parce que la faculté appétitive cessant par cette aliénation d'être un avantage réel, cesseroit aussi d'être obligatoire.

V. Il est clair que le développement de la faculté appétitive intellectuelle doit suivre les mêmes principes. Toute formule coercitive de penser ou de croire est donc une infraction à la liberté égale et à l'égalité libre.

VI. Dans le seul cas où les efforts d'un individu empêcheroient les efforts de l'autre, l'usurpation

de la liberté égale doit être réprimée par la loi, afin de mettre en sûreté les droits que tous les individus de la société ont au bonheur.

VII. Les lois ne sont donc et ne doivent être que la garantie de la liberté et de l'égalité, ou du droit de l'exercice de tous ses efforts, pour atteindre le suprême bonheur dans la société.

VIII. Sans ce droit, le développement de la faculté appétitive cesse d'être un bénéfice réel: et dans ce cas-là l'individu ne doit plus rien à la société, et la loi devenue trop foible pour garantir ses droits, met hors de responsabilité sa rébellion qui n'est alors que la sainte résistance à l'oppression. Oui, elle sanctifie son insurrection, et lui en fait un devoir. Ses facultés développées et puis réprimées par la force ou la ruse justifient sa vengeance, et demandent la punition des tyrans par ces mêmes principes qui sanctifient les lois et les peines.

The right to rebellion phrased by Dobruska reminds us the famous article 35 of the 1793 Constitution:

When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people, and for every portion thereof, the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.

Dobruska gives his own characteristic interpretation of such an obligation to rebel. The basic right being the fulfillment of individual needs, the faculty of desire becomes, for our social philosopher, the highest revolutionary tribunal ever.

The idea of the balance between needs and means of satisfaction, clearly stated in the *Philosophie sociale*, can be traced in later sociological thought. It suffices here to quote a passage from the famous empirical study about suicide by Emile Durkheim, where the great sociologist discusses a kind of suicide, the anomic one:

Un vivant quelconque ne peut être heureux et même ne peut vivre que si ses besoins sont suffisamment en rapport avec ses moyens. Autrement, s'ils exigent plus qu'il ne peut leur être accordé ou simplement autre chose, ils seront froissés sans cesse et ne pourront fonctionner sans douleur.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> E. DURKHEIM, *Le suicide*, Paris 1897, pp. 272-275. See also J.K. RHOADS, *Critical Issues in Social*

*Theory*, University Park (Penn.) 1991, p. 83.



Like Dobruska, Durkheim emphasizes the state of equilibrium as the happy, healthy one, while imbalance produces anxiety and can lead even to suicide:

chez l'animal, du moins à l'état normal, cet équilibre s'établit avec une spontanéité automatique parce qu'il dépend de conditions purement matérielles... mais il n'en est pas de même de l'homme, parce que la plus part de ses besoins ne sont pas, ou ne sont pas au même degré, sous la dépendance du corps

According to Durkheim, no individual is able to set a limit to his desires. Since no one can expand indefinitely the resources at his disposal, a balancing factor must be introduced. The superior instance that provides us with limits is the society.

Mais comment fixer la quantité de bien-être, de confortable, de luxe que peut légitimement rechercher un être humain? Ni dans la constitution organique, ni dans la constitution psychologique de l'homme, on ne trouve rien qui marque un terme à de semblables penchants. Le fonctionnement de la vie individuelle n'exige pas qu'ils s'arrêtent ici plutôt que là; la preuve, c'est qu'ils n'ont fait que se développer depuis le commencement de l'histoire, que des satisfactions toujours plus complètes leur ont été apportées et que, pourtant, la santé moyen-

ne n'est pas allée en s'affaiblissant. Surtout, comment établir la manière dont ils doivent varier selon les conditions, les professions, l'importance relative des services, etc.? ... En tant qu'ils dépendent de l'individu seul, ils sont illimités. Par elle-même, abstraction faite de tout pouvoir extérieur qui la règle, notre sensibilité est un abîme sans fond que rien ne peut combler... Seule, la société, soit directement et dans son ensemble, soit par l'intermédiaire d'un de ses organes, est en état de jouer ce rôle modérateur; car elle est le seul pouvoir moral supérieur à l'individu, et dont celui-ci accepte la supériorité. Seule, elle a l'autorité nécessaire pour dire le droit et marquer aux passions le point au delà duquel elles ne doivent pas aller.

It is interesting to remark how, moving from similar premises, Dobruska and Durkheim reach contrasting conclusions. While for the latter, society prevails over individual desires and control them, the former drafts a future of unlimited personal aspirations. With no higher power hovering above their heads, citizens compel society to serve them as a catalyst of happiness. An optimistic perspective indeed. By far too optimistic, if compared with the tragic end Dobruska encountered in revolutionary France.

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## SUMMARY

Moses Dobruska (1753-1794) has attained renown owing to his adventurous life. Born as a Jew in a family that adhered to Sabbatean heresy, he converted to Catholicism, was ennobled by Empress Maria Teresa and made his fortune as a banker. In 1792 he moved from Vienna to Paris in order to join the French Revolution. He was guillotined during the Reign of Terror, after having been charged with spying and treason. For the first time, this study focuses on the *Philosophie Sociale*, written in German and published in French by Dobruska in 1793. This book presents itself as a forgotten masterpiece of early social thought and a forerunner of some crucial sociological concepts.

**KEYWORDS:** Jewish Converts; Social Mobility; Early Social Philosophy; History of Sociology.