On Rousseau
An Introduction to his Radical Thinking on Education and Politics

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Few would want to dispute that Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the most fascinating figures of the Enlightenment; a man whose interests ranged over a variety of subjects, from politics, to education, to music, to botany. He was also one of the most contradictory and controversial thinkers and exciting writers of his time; the writer of the first modern autobiography and author of the best-selling novel of his day. Emile was among his most celebrated works, a book he regarded as his crowning achievement. Its revolutionary ideas have influenced radical thinkers and made him famous with generations of educators right into the twentieth century.

Rousseau made other contributions to education, but his more political works on the subject are usually ignored by commentators. There has been no shortage of books about him in recent years, including general introductory ones. But a comprehensive introductory book dealing with all the aspects of his thoughts about education and politics has long been overdue. On Rousseau: An Introduction to his Radical Thinking on Education and Politics fills this void, and should interest educators, educators of educators, philosophy students, and all with a general interest in education and politics and the history of ideas.
On Rousseau
KEY CRITICAL THINKERS IN EDUCATION
Volume 3

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On Rousseau

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DEDICATION

For
Dylan and Lori
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INTRODUCTION

Introducing Rousseau

“It is too difficult to think nobly when one thinks for a living. If one is to have the strength and the courage to speak great truths one must not depend on one’s success.”

(Rousseau, The Confessions completed 1770, first published 1781)

EMILE IN CONTEXT

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is best known in the world of education for his famous book Emile or On Education (1762b). More usually referred to as Emile the book has been universally regarded as an education classic: “one of those rare total or synoptic books … comparable to Plato’s The Republic, which it is meant to rival or supersede,” (Bloom, 1979:1991, pp. 3–4) and “a seminal book” for the modern theory of education. (Rusk, 1918:1979, p. 100) Hence, not surprisingly, most of what has been written about Rousseau and education is about Emile virtually disregarding the rest of his writing on the subject. Indeed, his writing on education began well before he even started writing Emile, which was in 1758. His first thoughts on the subject appear very much earlier and in a much shorter work, the Project for the Education of M. de Saint-Marie written in 1740 after a short period of time when he tried his hand, unsuccessfully, at being a family tutor. A decade later in the Discourse on the Sciences and Arts (henceforth the First Discourse), published in 1750, we find his first critical remarks on the current state of education in his society. The link of education with politics established with this his very first political work, was to subsist consistently in his later thinking. It is not very visible, however, to the reader who confines her interest in Rousseau to the reading of Emile (particularly if that interest is further limited to the early parts of the book that have most influenced modern pedagogical practices). With readers of this kind, who tend to be typical in the world of education, the link is mostly unnoticed, and with it the writing on education that stems directly from his political work tends to be ignored also.

Significant among the latter is his work about the political role that institutions of public instruction, namely public schools, should play in society, and about the state’s stake in such institutions. These were topics first addressed in an article on Political Economy which he wrote for Volume 5 of the Encyclopaedia and published in 1755 and which subsequently appeared as an independent essay in 1758 under the name Discourse on Political Economy (henceforth the Third Discourse). Many years later, in 1771, we find him taking up the same subject again in Considerations on the Government of Poland (henceforth Poland, published posthumously). These writings about public schooling, however, do not exhaust the list of other educational writings besides Emile. There are important pedagogical passages in Julie or the New Heloise (henceforth Heloise), published in 1761, that anticipate Emile and that
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are often passed over by readers and commentators despite their intrinsic interest. *Heloise* and *Emile* were designated by Rousseau himself as novels, though today’s reader would find little in them that would identify them as such. *Heloise* is also a book about domestic education, another dimension of his writing on education which is not found in *Emile*, and which is politically relevant also in its own right. Book Five of *Emile* is about the education of women. Then there is a part late in Book Four, named the ‘Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar’ on self-education. Gabriel Compayre, an early twentieth century commentator on *Emile* dismissed it out of hand as “somewhat of a digression in an educational treatise,” and remarked that it has “small value” as “a philosophical work.” (1908:2002, p. 46) But Rousseau regarded it as the most significant part of *Emile* capable of standing alone as a separate book in its own right, to the extent that he entrusted it to the keeping of his surest friends when he thought the manuscript as a whole was in danger.

We are really only interested here in the first of these judgments, but Compayre is mistaken in both. Given the great importance we know that Rousseau attached to the subject of religious education his thoughts on the subject cannot be described as marginal to his thoughts about education in general, even less as “a digression” from them. With regards the Profession’s philosophical value, Rousseau himself insisted that his philosophical thinking was very close to the Vicar’s. “The result of my arduous research,” he says towards the end of his life, “was more or less what I have written in my ‘Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar’.” (1776b:1979, p. 55) And Judith Shklar has remarked that although they are not strictly identical the Vicar’s views are fairly close to Rousseau’s. (Strong 2002, p. 125) A third way of reading the Profession is as an account of a project of self-education; what Rousseau refers to as his “arduous research.” From this point of view it features as still another dimension of Rousseau’s writing on education, usually unnoticed, besides that of the family and the citizen. Finally, to complete our list of his contributions to education Nicholas Dent has described his *Moral Letters*, written in 1757–58 for Sophie d’Houdetot, namely in the same period as *Heloise*, as an educational work “loosely defined,” because though they are not “truly intended as sources of guidance and instruction,” their didactic tone is unmistakable and also echo themes in *Emile*. (2005, p. 24)

WRITING ABOUT ROUSSEAU

*Emile* was written almost concurrently with his political classic *On the Social Contract* (henceforth *Social Contract*) published a month before it in April 1762. Between the First and Third Discourse Rousseau wrote the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* first published also in 1755 (henceforth the Second Discourse), also regarded as a classic of political philosophy. In Chapter One I shall discuss these political works, together with *Poland*, in relation to his interests in education. Rousseau, an autodidact himself, wrote on a variety of other subject besides politics and education; on music, language, the theatre, religion, botany, and so on, and his writing was always controversial – and this includes *Emile*. He entered into frequent,
often very bitter, polemics of different sorts with his contemporaries on these subjects. He was charged by them with desultory writing and disconnected thinking, his work dismissed as a body of “fatuous declamations, adorned with fine language but disconnected and full of contradictions.” Accusations he strenuously rejected, repeatedly defending the integrity of his work as a consistent project, “profoundly thought out, forming a coherent system … which offered nothing contradictory.” (1776a:1990, p. 209)

What order should we follow in discussing these works in our commentary on his thinking on education? I have set aside Dean Rusk’s advice to begin with Poland. Rousseau’s last contribution to the subject. Rusk reverses the historical order of Rousseau’s writing arguing in self-defence that this accords with “a natural and logical order.” (1918:1979, p. 105) He does not explain why he regards Poland a natural or logical beginning nor do I know what he means in this context. I do not myself believe that there is any natural or logical way of writing about any author never mind one like Rousseau who was constantly defending himself from critics who dismissed his works as disordered and illogical. If we look at Rousseau’s own wish on the matter, we find it in the mouth of the ‘Frenchman’ in Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues, his last but one substantial work completed in 1776 close to the end of his life and, like most of his later work, published posthumously (henceforth the Dialogues) that he wanted his work to be read in “the reverse of their order of publication.” This would seem to vindicate Rusk, but Rousseau was thinking not of Poland but of Emile as his last published work (and so it was). Emile was, by his estimation, the culmination of his literary labours and was intended to bring them to a conclusion. (1776a:1990, p. 211) The writings that followed after were “destined only to the personal defence of his homeland and his honour.” (p. 211) Poland, in this sense, was a one off, a work written against a commission.

On my part, I have decided that the safest way to go about writing this short introductory work (not necessarily unnatural or illogical either) is to follow, more or less, the historical order of his writing from the First Discourse on and leading up to his trilogy of masterpieces on politics and education, Heloise, Emile and the Social Contract – the last mentioned I also read as a work of this kind. Although there is nothing mentioned directly about education in it, it is concerned with the education of the citizen and conceives the state itself as an educational agency. I have put Poland in Chapter One and discussed it together with the Third Discourse as, in a sense, a practical attempt to put the principles of state education which he had explored in the earlier work in a specific national context. Chapter Two begins with a discussion of Heloise which he started shortly before Emile. A discussion on Emile itself follows in the same chapter which also includes Rousseau’s views about the education of women and the Vicar’s project of self-education referred to earlier. Chapter Three, the concluding chapter, is mainly a historical/political/pedagogical evaluation of Emile and its author, of their influence on modern education and their significance today. A Rousseau biography runs through all the chapters together with the commentary and sets the biographical context for the works discussed.
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READING ROUSSEAU

The biographical context is important in Rousseau’s case. As Tracy Strong has remarked about him; his “books do not lend themselves to be understood … unless one understands their author.” (2002, p. 12) And this, indeed, is nothing more than what Rousseau himself declared. Maurice Cranston who has written a detailed three-volume biography of Rousseau adds that “it is a commonplace that Rousseau’s writings, more than those of most authors, need to be read in the context of his life.” (1983, p. 10) My concurrence with this thinking explains why I chose not just to distribute his biography over the book (rather than confine it briefly to the pages of the introduction) but also to give it the generous space it occupies in the book. Like most other of his biographies mine depends substantially on his own autobiographical writing, on The Confessions (1770) especially, but also on the unfinished Reveries of the Solitary Walker (henceforth Reveries) and the Dialogues. In several places in these works, Rousseau relates his writing with personages and episodes in his own life. Thus, for instance, he reads himself to a considerable degree in the character of St Preux, Julie’s tutor in Heloise, and is the unknown young man receiving the Vicar’s (a character himself based on two priests who had influenced his life in his own youth) advice in Emile. The character named ‘Rousseau’ in the Dialogues says to the ‘Frenchman’ about Jean-Jacques (the subject of the dialogue, namely Rousseau himself) “I find in him today the features of Emile’s Mentor. Perhaps in his youth I would have found those of St Preux.” (1776a:1990, p. 90)

Dent (2005), Cranston (1983), and Matthew Simpson (2007), and others have suggested that his work can be profitably divided into three phases corresponding with his age and the changing circumstances of his life and personality; the three commentators differ only in the time bands and in the titles they give to each phase. Dent dates the first and earliest phase between 1712 and 1749 and refers to it as Rousseau’s ‘apprentice’ years. This was a time when his interests lay principally in the arts and he wrote musical, literary, and theatrical works, and scholarly works on music and language, and when his political ideas and agenda were still in the process of forming (Simpson, ‘Youth’, 1712–1742, Cranston, ‘Early Life and Work’, 1712–1754). I follow Dent who I take to have picked 1749 because it was the defining year for Rousseau. As we shall see, it signalled a radical change in his interests, outlook, and way of life. The second phase Dent refers to as ‘mature’ and marks between 1750 and 1764, the years when Rousseau produced his best writing in politics and education. This phase, however, effectively reached its culmination in 1762 with the publication of Emile, as Simpson and Cranston hold. (Simpson, ‘Ascendancy’, 1742–1762, Cranston, ‘The Noble Savage’, 1754–1762). It opened with the writing of the First Discourse and encompassed the peak years of his writing that produced the masterpieces for which he has remained famous and that are our chief concern in this book; his three Discourses, the Social Contract, Heloise, and Emile. Finally, the years until his death in 1778 were years of ‘decline’, of retreat and solitude, blighted by paranoia about a grand plot against him by his erstwhile friends, all bent in his mind on his persecution and destruction. (Simpson, ‘Retreat’:1762–1778, Cranston, ‘The Solitary Self’: 1762–1778). Rousseau’s writings in this phase, The Confessions, the Dialogues, a pamphlet To All
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Frenchmen ..., written also in 1776 just after the Dialogues, culminating in his last work the Reveries, also started in the same year but left unfinished at his death, were mainly confessional and autobiographical and intended for his self-vindication and for the sake of posterity.

WHY READ ROUSSEAU?

What Rousseau’s autobiographies offered his reader, as he says himself, was his candid self-disclosure. What he sought from his reader in return was “a direct and unmediated response to his writing,” an unbiased reading uninfluenced by the voices of his hostile critics, (Strong, 2007, p. 8) a ‘friendly’ ear. (Reisert, 2003) Why, however, should one listen at all to Rousseau today? Several answers could be suggested. One could easily be intrigued by his controversial and in many ways tragic life and personality, for instance. Or perhaps because we still find him relevant today! It “could be that Rousseau, whether telling us of our history or of his condition, whether examining the social contract or writing his confessions, illuminates one of the deep enduring themes that troubles both our social thought and our social practice – the relationship between individual and community,” as one writer has suggested. (Gauthier, 2006, p. 4) Put slightly differently, he may be relevant to us because he

“(…) addresses each of his readers personally because he addresses the concerns, small and great, that each of us must confront for ourselves, in our daily existence. He writes about the everyday challenges of the moral life, about how hard it can be to live up to our own ideals, and about what steps we can take in order to live happier and better lives. He writes about the everyday challenges of our living together in political community, about the difficulty of preserving our freedom, both from the powerful, institutional forces that threaten to overwhelm us from the outside and from our vices that threaten to destroy our liberty from within.” (Reisert, 2003, p. ix)

In short, because his concerns are still ours, yours and mine, and because he “addresses these concerns – my concerns – with passion and intensity, as if they matter more than anything else in the world.” (p. ix) And what are these concerns about the politics of existence if not also concerns about education?

When the question of Emile’s relevance was being discussed, as it periodically has continued to be, just over a century ago, at the time when his fame was slowly growing again after years of virtual neglect, Compièyre referred to “forgotten recesses” in the book where, as he put it, “lurk more than one reflection which, hitherto unperceived, proves to be fruitful in instruction for the people of our time, and directly suited to their present requirements.” (1908:2002, p. 4) It is a moot point whether this remark is still significant today; whether any such ‘recesses’ still remain after so many readings and depredations from the book by followers and critics. One wonders whether the archive of pedagogical reflections for educators one finds in the book is not now exhausted and whether we should not simply
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declare it as beyond its sell-by date for educators and their practice. Compayre declared that “Emile deserves to remain the eternal object of the educator’s meditation, were it only because it is an act of faith and trust in humanity.” (p. 5)

But is it an act of faith and trust in humanity? Allan Bloom, much more recently (1978), and also a sympathetic voice, says yes. He insists, like David Gauthier (2006) and Joseph Reisert (2003) whom I have just quoted, that Emile still speaks to and “of a real world of which we all have experience, no matter what our language,” i.e. he agrees that the book is immortal, and that reading it stretches the horizons of our understanding of human possibility. (p. vii) It is a book, Bloom says, “with which one can live and which becomes deeper as one becomes deeper,” (p. 3) even if, he remarks, it “has little appeal to contemporary taste.” (p. vii) As a teacher, reading it still provokes him, he says, to consider his practices and his pedagogical philosophy. It gives one a “new sense of what it means to be a teacher and of the peculiar beauty of the relationship between teacher and student,” and could still, for that reason, be held up today as a pedagogical example. (p. ix) But is he right? Is there truly a beautiful relationship between teacher and student described in Emile that should inspire teachers universally and for all time? Can one advise teachers today to adopt the tutor in Emile as their model? These are questions that will be returned to in Chapter Three, when they will be addressed specifically. There are other questions that will also need to be taken up in that chapter and in earlier ones. Rousseau was, if nothing, as I remarked briefly earlier, a controversial and often paradoxical personality and thinker. This makes him difficult to place; was he conservative or progressive, an early democrat or a deeply totalitarian thinker? What is his relation to the modern world, what has been his influence on it? We know that he aroused strong passions in his society both for and against him, and that the controversy has never ceased though the passions may long have dampened so that there are still contrary evaluations of his works today as there have ever been.

Bloom, a conservative critic, whose famous translation of Emile I am using in this book, is among the more sympathetic of his commentators. “A latter-day representative of the natural rights doctrines of Rousseau,” as he has been referred to, he even favours some of the more hotly contested of Rousseau’s views; on the role of women and the family, for instance, subjects still very much contended over today, views that, to the contrary, irk his progressive critics, women more generally, feminists in particular, and liberal-minded men also. (Spring, 1994, p. 114) Rousseau himself always described his work as didactic; as dedicated to revealing to his readers the source of human error and prejudice and to indicating to them “the route to true happiness,” back to their hearts where they could “rediscover the seeds of social virtue” stifled by the so-called progress of their societies. (1776b:1990, p. 22) Is this call still relevant today? Some have described him as a modern thinker, even the first. His educational thought has been described as championing children’s rights and inspiring child-centred pedagogies. Others have questioned his more general commitment to freedom, and described him as anti-social and obsessed with the solitary individual. These contrary readings are explored in this book. But first, his early biography.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born on June 28, 1712 in Geneva, the second son of Isaac a master watchmaker, member of the select class of highly skilled artisans in the city, and a citizen, and Suzanne Bernard, a Calvinist pastor’s daughter of higher breeding. Geneva at the time was “a sombre fortress ruled by the austere, repressive ethos of Calvinism. And yet it was a city with good grounds for pride, for it was a centre of culture and learning, and had a long history of political autonomy,” with the citizens enjoying civil liberties unknown in most of the Europe of the time. (Cranston, 1983, p. 14) Suzanne died of puerperal fever on 7 July soon after his birth, aged thirty-nine, leaving him “almost dead,” and with a tragic legacy to bear for his life, “the seed of a disorder which has grown stronger with the years.” (1770:1953, p. 19) Isaac raised him with the help of a nurse and an aunt also named Suzanne whose singing to him influenced his lifelong passion for music.

His early childhood was spent reading his mother’s novels with his father, from where, he says, he acquired his earliest knowledge of the human passions. Then they turned to the serious part of her library; diverse histories and classics, among them Plutarch’s Lives which remained his “favourite” for life. (1776b:1979, p. 63) He was not allowed out to play with other children of his age, a factor that denied him a “true childhood” and deeply influenced his later writing of Emile. He was, he says, a “prodigy” who “always felt and thought like a man.” (1770:1953, p. 67) To his father he later attributed his “strongest passion,” of patriotism, a “proud and intractable spirit,” and an “impatience with the yoke of servitude,” which marked his life and influenced all his political and educational thinking. (p. 20) He also followed his father in being “scrupulously upright, and most religious,” but also “pleasure-loving.” (p. 66) One day in 1722, Isaac got involved in a violent quarrel with a Captain Gautier and had to flee the city to avoid arrest, abandoning Jean-Jacques and his older brother Francois in the process.

His maternal uncle Gabriel Bernard took them both in his charge, apprenticed the latter, and put Jean-Jacques and his own son, roughly his age, in a boarding school in the neighbouring village of Bossey run by a Pastor Lamberciere and his thirty year old sister. There Rousseau received the only formal schooling of his life at the hands of Lamberciere, “a very intelligent man” who did not overwhelm his pupils with excessive work, and whose teaching, though uninteresting, was efficient, and, “despite the compulsion,” not “distasteful.” (p. 24) From Lamberciere he learnt Latin and the Calvinist catechism together “with all that sorry nonsense as well that goes by the name of education.” (p. 23) Mlle. Lamberciere aroused his first erotic fantasies and desires. In 1724, after two happy years at Bossey, the cousins were recalled home by Bernard. A year later the young Jean-Jacques, aged nearly thirteen, was apprenticed with an engraver, a M. Ducommun, “an oafish and violent young man” who beat him savagely and frequently and “managed in a very short time to quench all the fire of my childhood, and to coarsen my affection and lively nature.” (p. 39) One Sunday, the 14 March 1728, he returned late from a walking excursion outside the city and found the gates locked. This had happened twice before, each
An aimless period of his life followed, of loitering about, lying and stealing, which he did as a sort of self-defence against his fate. Then we find him arriving, “restless and dissatisfied with myself,” at the door of a Madame de Warens in Annecy. (p. 49) A devout twenty-nine years old Catholic convert, Warens, who was to have a decisive influence on his life, took him in providing he agreed to become a Catholic, a condition he accepted in his desperation, despite his “aversion to Catholicism,” and his trepidation about losing his prized Genevan citizenship. (p. 67) Sent off to the Hospice of the Holy Spirit in Turin, Italy he was accepted into the Catholic faith on 21 April 1728. He left the Hospice with a bitter taste in his mouth, twenty francs in his pocket, and the exhortation to be a good Christian in his ear. For a short while he enjoyed his freedom, exploring the city, and “punctiliously” attending the royal mass at court where he heard “the best music in Europe.” (p. 75) His funds exhausted, however, he was forced to seek employment as a liveried footman in the service of a Mme de Vercellis.

These adolescent years were years of confusion; of adventure, romantic fantasies and sexual frustrations because of his shyness with women. His position in the Vercellis household was terminated when, stealing a colourful ribbon that belonged to the lady of the house and faced with detection, he tried to pin the robbery on an innocent serving girl. Both were dismissed, but the incident, trivial in itself, haunted him till the end of his life. At the time he took to visiting an Abbe Gaime, a young Savoyard priest whose acquaintance he had made at the Vercellis house. Gaime taught him “a sound morality” and “the principles of common sense,” urged him to accept himself as he was, and encouraged him to believe that he could win his redemption by following Christ’s ethical example. (p. 92) Gaime was, “to a great extent at least,” his future model for the Savoyard Vicar in Emile, except that he expressed himself less frankly than the Vicar on “certain points.” (p. 93)

Rousseau’s next employment, with the de Gouvon family, brought him under the influence of the old Count’s youngest son the Abbe, who engaged him as a secretary. His association with the Abbe rekindled his interest in learning and taught him Latin and Italian “in its purest form.” From it he “acquired some taste for literature” and to discriminate between good and bad books. (p. 98) This promising employment, however, also came to a quick end through his fault following a needless quarrel with the Count over his new friendship with a young Genevan friend, a strange youth named M. Bacle. Aged nearly seventeen and jobless he drifted aimlessly with Bacle until their purse ran out. Then, in the Summer of 1729 he resolved to return to Warens who, despite his fear of an indifferent reception, welcomed him with open arms and promised her support and assistance. She became his Maman and he “fell into extravagances” of feeling over her, “that seemed as if they could only have been inspired by the most violent love.” (p. 108) An M. d’Aubonne, a relative of Maman’s asked to assess his future prospects strangely declared that “…despite my promising appearance and lively features, he could not find an idea in my head or any trace of education.” (p. 112) He was, at best, fitted for some small parish. So he was dispatched to a Lazarist seminary where he went “as if to the
The attempt to make him a priest failed, but one of his teachers, an M. Gatier, so impressed him with “his sensitiveness, and his affectionate, loving nature,” that he became his second model for the Savoyard Vicar. (p. 118)

Encouraged by Maman Jean-Jacques’s love for music grew, and he was next apprenticed with a Nicoloz Le Maitre a Parisian choirmaster, composer, and organist at the cathedral in Annecy. His apprenticeship, however, was brief and ended calamitously one night on the streets of Lyon when Le Maitre collapsed in a violent fit and the young man, panic-stricken, left him there to return home only to find that Maman had gone to Paris, no one knew where or for how long. He awaited her return patiently meanwhile trying his hand at musical composition, but when in late 1730 he had no news of her whereabouts, he was on the road to Fribourg accompanying a young servant of her household back to her family home. He returned to Geneva for the first time since he had left it four years earlier, and passed through Nyon where he resumed contact with his now re-married father and Lausanne where he passed himself off as a Parisian musician and music teacher. Even though Maman was never far from his thoughts, the prospect of employment as a companion to the nephew of a Swiss Colonel in the French service enticed him to Paris for the first time. His excitement with his visit was, however, replaced by deep shock when instead of the fine imposing city he had romanticised in his mind he found “dirty, stinking little streets, ugly black houses, a general air of squalor and poverty, beggars, carters, menders of clothes, sellers of herb-drinks, and old hats.” This negative first impression of Paris was never to leave him and was eventually to turn into “a secret aversion to living in the capital.” (p. 155)

Nothing came of the job, nor of his nearly frantic inquiries into Maman’s whereabouts. His financial problems were eased by a M. Rolichon who commissioned him to copy music, which he did poorly but proudly, later adopting it as his trade. Reunited finally with Maman at Chamberry towards the end of 1731, she found him temporary work as a land surveyor. In 1733, alarmed by the “dangers of my youth,” his exposure to the temptations of the flesh, she initiated him sexually, an experience which, though desired, brought him “mixed feelings of elation and a strange ‘invincible sadness’.” (p. 189) She was his Maman after all! It also distressed Claude Anet, her household administrator and covert lover, a “serious, even solemn,” man of peasant origins and roughly her age, who later inspired the figure of Wolmar in Heloise. Anet was “undoubtedly a rare man, and the only one of his kind I have ever met. Slow, sedate, thoughtful, circumspect in his behaviour, cold in his manner, laconic and sententious in his conversation,” though at times prone to hasty action, as an earlier suicide attempt over some petty disagreement with Warens showed. Rousseau speaks of becoming “in some sense his pupil,” i.e. of adopting him as his mentor. (pp. 172–173) From him and Maman came his interest in botany which became a great passion in later years. Maman informed Anet of her new liaison and he endorsed it with some difficulty. “An alliance” was formed between the three which was “perhaps unique on earth,” which “brought us all happiness, and which only death was strong enough to dissolve.” (p. 173) In fact, Anet died soon after from pleurisy. But the idyllic ménage a trois created with him and Maman would be attempted with others later and would find its echo later in
Heloise, in Emile, and in Rousseau’s political writing where it served as a model for the state also.

With Anet’s death Rousseau became Maman’s new administrator. Without Anet’s wise and firm guidance, however, she returned to an “old addiction for enterprises and schemes,” that would eventually bring her to financial ruin. (p. 195) In 1736, moving with her into Les Charmettes, a suburban cottage just outside Chambery, Rousseau experienced “the short period of my life’s happiness … those peaceful but transient moments that have given me the right to say I have lived.” (p. 215) Returning again briefly to Geneva in 1737 to finally reclaim his part of his mother’s small inheritance, he visited his father and other relatives again, en route. Then a fateful acquaintance with a M. de Conzie, an erudite Savoyard gentleman friend of Maman’s, fired “the seeds of literature and philosophy” which “were beginning to stir in my brain,” and led him to read Voltaire whose writing “fired me with the desire of learning to write a good style,” and to imitate his “fine effects.” (p. 205) However, he and Maman were drifting apart and he took increasingly to travelling on any pretext he could find. He also felt himself “drawn gradually towards study; meeting men of letters, listening to literary talk, and even sometimes daring to take part in it myself; but rather assuming a bookish jargon than gaining any real knowledge of a book’s content.” (p. 209) Now unhappy at home he also immersed himself in music and played chess. Then one day he suffered a sudden physical and mental collapse that was to cloud his whole life: “a kind of storm which started in my blood and instantly took control of my limbs.” It left him with a permanent insomnia and “buzzings” in his head and prone to physical suffering and to periods of fatigue and dizziness for the rest of his life. (p. 217).

Maman nursed him to health and their intimacy returned. Convinced of his imminent death, he discussed religion at length with her. In the Winter of 1738 he “began to read, or rather to devour” the work of the seventeenth-century Port-Royal philosophers who “combined devotion and the sciences,” with his doctor, an M. Salamon, “a great Cartesian,” making him, in his own words, “half a Jansenist.” (p. 221) By reading the Jansenists he became seriously disturbed by “the fear of hell which had bothered me very little before.” (1770:1953: 230) However, his appetite for philosophy whetted we find him continuing avidly with his self-education, reading Locke, Malebranche, Leibnitz, Descartes and others, ambitious at first to reconcile their thinking into one system. But soon he wanted to go his own way and started to use them purely as “a store of ideas” for his “self-tuition,” to create “a great enough fund of learning to be self-sufficient and to think without the help of another.” (p. 226) This, thinking “without the help of another,” became, as we shall see, his fundamental project in life and his educational ideal. Meanwhile he went for excursions into the countryside, worked with the peasants, studied physiology and anatomy which, he tells us, fuelled his disposition to hypochondria, and, with improved health, took to travelling again. Then one day, returning from a longish trip, he had the shock of his life. Maman had formed a new attachment “a young man from the Vaud country” named Wintzenried. (p. 248) For Rousseau, it threw his “whole being,” he says, “completely upside down.” (p. 249) There was to be no ménage a trois with Wintzenried as there had been with Anet. He was no
Anet. So he had no other option but to leave, and Warens helped him find a job in Lyon as tutor to the two young sons of Jean Bonnot de Mably, grand provost of the city – his break with Maman was conclusive but his first engagement with education was about to begin.

2.–1749

His experience as a tutor with the Mably family was brief and unsuccessful. “I was not lacking in industry,” he says, “but I had no patience and, worse still, no tact.” The methods he used to control the boys, “the appeal to sentiment, argument, and anger,” failed dismally. As any experienced teacher would have told him, they “are always useless and sometimes pernicious when employed on children.” (p. 253) On the positive side, his connection with the Mably household gave him access to an educated and well-connected society well-versed in the current trends and issues fashionable in the cultured circles of Lyons and Paris, the world of the philosophes and of Enlightenment thinking. He met the Abbe de Mably and his brother the Abbe de Condillac, who were both to distinguish themselves later in the world of ideas. He wrote some poems and an opera and, more significantly for us, the Project for the Education of M. de Sainte-Marie, which was inspired by John Locke’s seminal Some Thoughts Concerning Education of 1693. “Form in him the heart, the judgment, the mind, in that order,” Rousseau advised the tutor, one’s pupil is lost once one “has allowed his heart to be corrupted.” Good sense has more to do with “the feeling of the heart than the brightness of the mind”. (Mason 1979, p. 20) These were precepts later passed on to Emile’s tutor in Emile. The contribution of the arts and sciences to a young man’s education advocated in the Project, however, “contradict(ed) his later rejection of ‘civilization’ in the Discourses.” (Durant & Durant 1967, p. 14) Otherwise the pamphlet was unremarkable in itself, its message summarised in the valid but not very original argument that education is more than learning from books and should develop the judgement, sentiments, and spirit of the young man.

Resigning his employment with the Mably family in 1741 Rousseau returned to Paris “with fifteen louis in ready money, and with my comedy Narcissus and my scheme of notation my sole resources,” but dreaming of success. (p. 266) In August of 1742, he was ready to present his original scheme of musical notation (with numerical instead of the standard arrangements), to the Academy of the Sciences in Paris. But, to his disappointment, it was tactfully turned down. In 1743 he re-wrote and published it as A Dissertation on Modern Music. (p. 268) That year he also began an opera in the French style, The Gallant Muses, and became friends with Denis Diderot, a year his junior who shared his social background and his interests in the arts and the sciences, and in social criticism. Diderot was later to commission him to write articles for the famous Encyclopaedia, the project on which he collaborated with Jean d’Alembert in 1748, and their friendship was to last for nearly fifteen years before coming to grief, like several others. In July 1743 Rousseau found employment as private secretary to the French ambassador in Venice the Comte de Montagiu. The ambassador, however, was a vain, miserly, and incompetent man, and they soon quarrelled, ostensibly over the payment of arrears in Rousseau’s pay.
Within a year he was dismissed from his post and was back in Paris in August of 1744. In Venice he had acquired a greater knowledge of Italian and of Italian music which he had heard performed by the best ensembles in Europe. More importantly for us, he became interested in social theory and political institutions, and first conceived the idea of writing a political work on the subject which was later to become the *Social Contract*. “Everything,” he had decided, “is rooted in politics” and “whatever might be attempted, no people would ever be other than the nature of their government made them,” a conclusion which conditioned his later advocacy of public schooling. (p. 377) In 1745 he took Therese Levasseur, who worked as a laundress and seamstress in the cheap rooming house where he stayed, for his mistress. She was young, plain, and uneducated, but of a decent family. They were to live together for the next twenty-three years before he married her in 1768. With her he had five children, all of them dispatched at birth, at his insistence, to a foundling asylum—an act that became deeply embarrassing for the author of *Emile*, and which he felt constrained to defend until his dying days. Indeed, his remorse became so strong “that it almost drew from me a public confession of my fault at the beginning of *Emile*.” (p. 549) In 1761, he tried to re-trace them unsuccessfully and argued against the charge that he was “a man without feelings or compassion, an unnatural father,” that his actions were motivated by the good of the children and his duty as a citizen, to prevent them from becoming “adventurers and fortune hunters.” (p. 333) In the *Reveries* he insisted that “no man has ever loved seeing little children romping and playing together more than I do,” (1776:1979, p. 139) and that the writing of *Heloise* and *Emile* was evidence that “I engaged in this study with the attentive care of someone who enjoyed his work.” (p. 140)

His finished opera in 1745 failed to impress the foremost composer and musicologist in France at the time, Jean-Philippe Rameau, who listened to parts of it ungraciously and showed irritation throughout the performance, but it performed successfully at Court. Still, with his financial problems growing, he decided to give up on his musical ambitions and to devote “my time and energy to procuring a livelihood for myself and my dear Therese,” by copying music. (p. 319) In 1746, however, his aristocratic connections brought him a lucrative post as secretary with the wealthy Dupin family at Chenonceaux in the Loire Valley. In the year following, 1747, his father died and he re-claimed that part of his mother’s property which he had retrieved and which he had given to his father to enjoy while he had lived. Part of the money he sent to *Maman*, now in acute economic distress. His own finances improved considerably with his new employment and his circle of friends grew to include Condillac, d’Alembert, and Melchior Grimm. With the latter, in particular, he grew “firmly attached” because of their mutual interest in music. (p. 329) In 1748, he started work on the articles on music that Diderot commissioned for the *Encyclopaedia*. But Diderot himself was arrested that same year for writing the *Letter on the Blind* which endorsed Locke’s empiricism and his theory of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate. When his imprisonment was changed to house arrest in Vincennes, Rousseau, now thirty seven years old, took to visiting him regularly on foot. One fateful Summer day in 1749 on his way there he experienced a strange ‘illumination’ or vision, which he first described in his *Second Letter to
M. de Malesherbes written in January 1762, then reported later in the Confessions, and which was to change his life radically.

The day was excessively hot, he tells us, the pruned trees on the wayside offered little or no shade. Exhausted by walking, he lay under a tree to regain his energies and took out of his pocket an edition of the Mercure de France to read. His eyes fell upon an item announcing a prize essay competition sponsored by the Academy of Dijon on the subject whether progress in the sciences and the arts has done more to corrupt morals or to improve them. “The moment I read this,” he says, “I beheld another universe and became another man.” (p. 327) The drama of the moment is vividly described in the Letter. His mind, he tells us, was “dazzled by a thousand lights,” “crowds of lively ideas presented themselves at the same time,” and he was seized by “a dizziness similar to drunkenness”:

“Oh Sir, if I had ever been able to write a quarter of what I saw and felt under that tree, how clearly I would have made all the contradictions of the social system seem, with what strength I would have exposed all the abuses of our institutions, with what simplicity I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good and that it is from these institutions alone that men become wicked. Everything that I was able to retain of these crowds of great truths which illuminated me under that tree in a quarter of an hour has been weakly scattered about in my three principal writings, namely that first discourse, the one about inequality, and the treatise on education, which three works are inseparable and together form the same whole.” (Kelley et al. 1995, p. 575)

The “scales” fell from his eyes, the “chaos in his head” was “unscrambled,” his excitement was uncontrollable. Suddenly he saw “another universe, a true golden age, societies of simple, wise, happy men,” to which he and his fellow men had grown blind. (1776a:1990, p. 131) Reaching Vincennes “in a state of agitation bordering on delirium” he told Diderot about the prize and read him a piece of writing he had jotted down some time earlier, named Fabricius’s Soliloquy, which could be the first draft for his argument. Diderot applauded, and encouraged his project. “From that moment,” he tells us, “I was lost.” (1770:1953, p. 328)
"Lost"! What did he mean? Rousseau competed for the Dijon prize with the First Discourse, on the sciences and the arts, which he wrote in the autumn of the same year 1749. Its controversial thesis and powerful rhetoric won him the prize. Published in 1750 it caught “like wildfire” in the cultural world of Paris, and he was an immediate celebrity. (1770:1953, p. 338) Views about him were radically divided from the start, however; “the moment my essay appeared,” he remarks, “the champions of literature fell upon me as if on one accord.” (p. 341) His views and his scathing attack on their integrity had antagonised the philosophes. Later he called it an “unhappy work” which was not received “as it deserved to be!” and that opened an avoidable “abyss of miseries” for him. (‘Forward’ to a 1781 edition, Cress 1987, p. xxii) But at the moment it was published his missionary zeal left him in no mood to compromise: “I have taken my stand,” he declared, “I do not care about pleasing either the witty or the fashionable.” (1750:1987, p. 1)

Oddly Diderot had approved of its draft version and, it would seem, undertook to print it also in the Encyclopaedia. ‘Oddly’ because the Discourse was written to challenge projects like the Encyclopaedia, which emblemized the Enlightenment’s celebration of the sciences and the arts as marks of the civilized progress of contemporary society, in a most radical way, representing them instead as sources and symptoms of social degeneration. Rousseau opens it (prophetically as it turned out) by installing himself, like the heroic Socrates of the Apology, in the political role of society’s gadfly, seeking not fame and honour, like the philosophes, but only the reward Socrates finally achieved for himself; the survival of his reputation for virtue throughout the ages. Contemporary society he declared a society of slaves, of men who had lost the “original liberty” that was theirs by birthright. Far from contributing to their freedom the sciences and the arts had “spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains” that shackle them, (p. 3) lent governments the tools with which to crush them into “a vile and deceitful uniformity,” and taught them to love their slavery. (p. 4) “Our souls,” he declared, “have become corrupted in proportion as our sciences and our arts have advanced towards perfection.” (p. 5) Hence, like his mentor Socrates, he advocated banning ‘poetry’ from the city and praised the hard, practical minded Romans, his heroes together with the Spartans, as a people who were “dazzled neither by vain pomp nor by studied elegance.” (p. 10)

Society, he said, needed wise, fearless, men like Socrates willing to bear witness to the value of ‘ignorance’ and simplicity, men who recognise the limitations that
nature imposes on human knowledge for our own good, and are respectful of the ultimate secrets it conceals from us. The implication is clear; he would be such a man for his society. Aspiring to possess these secrets is arrogant, even blasphemous (since it presumes the ability to read the mind of the Creator), and a waste of time and energy, since pursuing them does not conduce to virtue or better morals. To the contrary it produces a materialist mentality that distorts and exploits what is natural. Rousseau accused the *philosophes* of *amour-propre*, a hunger for praise and honours that gives rise to vain narcissism, and dismissed them as “a troop of charlatans each crying from his own place on a public square.” (p. 18) He charged them with caring nothing for truth, and adjusting their genius to their thirst for popularity. *Amour-propre*, he affirmed, is the sentiment that undermines society, brings about the dissolution of public mores and corrupts virtue and taste among men and women. Contemporary education, which should serve the interests of moral and civic progress, is “foolish,” and its institutions serve only to “corrupt our judgment”:

“Everywhere I see immense establishments where youths are brought up at great expense to learn everything but their duties. Your children will not know their own language, but will speak others which are nowhere in use. They will know how to compose verses they will scarcely be capable of comprehending. Without knowing how to separate error from truth, they will possess the art of making themselves unrecognizable to others by means of specious arguments. But they will not know the meaning of the words magnanimity, fair-mindedness, temperance, humanity, courage. The sweet name homeland will never strike their ear; and if they hear God spoken of at all, it will be less to be in awe of him than to be in fear of him.” (p. 16)

“We have physicists, geometers, chemists, astronomers, poets, musicians, painters,” but “we no longer have citizens.” (p. 17) He repeats his view from the *Project* that children must be kept occupied at all times since idleness brings loss of innocence. What they should be learning is a “fine question” he was not yet ready to address – it would wait for *Emile*. But the passage quoted supplies an early indication of how he perceived the proper ingredients of education. Children must learn: (i) their duties and be socialised into their native, home-spun, culture; (ii) to value honest and forthright debate and the mind set that goes with it; (iii) the virtues of magnanimity, fair-mindedness, temperance, humanity, and courage; (iv) patriotic zeal, and; (v) awe towards their Creator. These are the ingredients of the public education he would describe later, in his *Third Discourse* and in *Poland* – they would also be the qualities possessed by Emile. For now he was occupied with a critique of his society that was entirely destructive. The institutions of state censorship that should guard the public from corrupt ideas and visions were well-intentioned but ineffective, the invention of printing a disaster that had permitted the circulation of “the dangerous reveries of the likes of Hobbes and Spinoza.” (p. 19) The *Discourse* finishes with an exhortation to God that must have read doubly provocative to the ‘atheist’ *philosophes*: “to deliver us “from the enlightenment and the deadly arts of our fathers, and give back to us ignorance, innocence and poverty – the only goods that can bring about our happiness and that are precious in your sights.” (p. 19)
Many years later he protested that he had never been “able to discover the cause of this extraordinary turn of events” that had turned the philosophes, his erstwhile friends, into his enemies but it was he who threw his gauntlet down and provoked their anger. (1776b:1979, p. 126) The suggestion in the Dialogues is that he perceived them as “ardent missionaries” of atheism and materialism with which, he claimed, they had influenced “the institutions of men,” and which conflicted with the “lofty ideas I had of the divinity.” (1776a:1990, pp. 52–53) He was convinced that their philosophy “does nothing but destroy,” hence his declaration of war. (p. 53) They replied by charging him with duplicity; “while he disparages the arts,” they said, “he himself writes plays, music and operas.” (Dent 2005, p. 56) His friend Grimm described the Discourse’s thesis as a plea for a ‘return to nature’, and as “devilish nonsense,” and mischievously asked the question that bedevils all ‘state of nature’ theories – “What is ‘nature’?” (Durant & Durant 1967, p. 23)

Rousseau himself later admitted to the Discourse’s shortcomings, describing it as “the most feebly argued,” of his work and “completely lacking in logic and order,” but he defended himself vigorously against its critics at the time, and put his defence together in his 1753 ‘Preface’ to his play Narcissus. (Simpson 2007, p. 34) Grimm’s question he addressed fully not long after in his Second Discourse. Meanwhile, he changed his life-style to accord with the ideals of modesty and plainness promoted in the First Discourse. He explicitly acknowledges the Jansenist influence on his conversion, of being “constantly in fear of error,” of endangering his soul for the sake of earthly pleasures. (1776b:1979, p. 54) He sought, he tells us, to put his life in order and to secure “an assured role of conduct for the rest of my days.” (p. 53) And it was this “change in my character,” rather than his newly-found literary celebrity, he believed, that really provoked the hostility of the philosophes. “They would perhaps have forgiven me for brilliance in the art of writing,” he reflects, “but they could not forgive me for setting up an example by my conduct; this appeared to put them out.” (1770:1953, p. 338) However, at the age of forty and in “the fullness of my mental powers” at the time, he was in no mood for compromise. (1776b:1979, p. 53) “Gold lace and white stockings,” were abandoned and he “wore a round wig.” (1770:1953, p. 339) He gave up his sword, sold his watch, and prepared himself to launch into “what were perhaps the most ardent and sincere investigations ever conducted by any mortal.” (1776b:1979, p. 54) This was to be his new mission.

Consistently with his new philosophy of life he resigned his lucrative Dupin employment and turned to copying music again to earn his living. This, as I remarked earlier, he continued to regard as his trade for life; ‘literature’, despite that it occupied most of his time, was a “distraction … prejudicial to my daily employment.” (1770:1953, p. 341) “Writing books to make a living,” he was to explain years later, “would have made me dependent on the public.” (1776a:1990) His “only thought” now, he says, was to make the reforms to his life “solid and lasting by striving to uproot from my heart all tendencies to be affected by the judgment of men,” i.e. all tendencies to amour-propre, that could deflect him, “out of fear of reproach, from
conduct that was good and reasonable in itself.” (1770:1953, p. 340) What he promised his fellows was pure honesty; there was to be no “twisting his morality to his own benefit,” no room for *amour-propre* in his life. (1776a:1990, p. 175) These would be the qualities into which Emile would also be educated. A “strict self-examination” was required to “order my inner life for the rest of my days as I would wish it to be at the time of my death” – the self-examination or ‘profession’ of the Vicar. (1776b:1979, p. 51) His “intellectual world” he now governed with “a simple and dignified economy,” his tone became “sharp and biting,” his “contempt” for bourgeois society open. (1770:1953, p. 388) “Deluded by my stupid conceit,” as he was to describe it later, he believed that he could change it. (p. 387) He was so transformed, he says, that “my friends and acquaintances no longer recognised me,” a foreigner in their midst, as Emile’s education would make Emile. (p. 388) Meanwhile, his domestic life was not going well; with the “wrangling and the daily disagreeableness” created by Therese’s family, her mother in particular, he “plunged” himself “entirely into literature as a way of escape,” and this was, he says, his fatal error. (p. 343)

In 1752, he involved himself in a politically charged polemic over the respective merits of French and Italian music, in other words of Rameau and Pergolesi, controversially taking the Italian side. An opera he wrote in the Italian style with French lyrics, *The Village Soothsayer*, was successfully performed before the king at Fontainebleau, became a financial success, and “brought me completely into fashion,” so that “no man in Paris was more sought after than I.” (p. 344) A successful performance of *Narcissus* by the Comédie Francaise followed in December of that year. But his *Letter on French Music* (1753), a frontal attack on Rameau’s *Treatise on Harmony*, published the year after, “raised the whole nation against me” and he was hung in effigy in the streets of Paris; a fore-taste of what was to come years later for a different reason. (p. 358) In November of 1753 the Dijon Academy announced another prize-essay. The subject, ‘What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it justified by natural law?’ suited him perfectly. He submitted his answer to the question with the *Second Discourse* in 1754 but, though he regarded it as “a work of the greatest importance,” the Discourse failed to win him the prize this time. (p. 361)

In June of 1754 he returned to Geneva. On his way there he saw Maman, for the last time as it turned out. The experience disturbed him deeply: “In what a state, Oh God! How low she had fallen! What was left to her of her former virtue?” (p. 364) On the other hand he was “feted and made much of by all classes” of citizens in Geneva to whom he had dedicated the *Second Discourse*. His “republican enthusiasm” aroused by this reception he returned publicly to the Calvinist faith and reclaimed his citizenship. (p. 365) But the *Discourse* itself was coldly received in the city and Voltaire’s (now his arch rival) decision to live close by, decided him against settling there. He was back in Paris within four months, only to leave it again in April 1756 for a small but charming and secluded residence close to Montmorency named the ‘Hermitage’, placed at his disposal by a wealthy friend, Mme. D’Epinay.

There, away from controversy and the publicity of city life, he resumed his solitary walks and worked on the book on *Political Institutions* he had first conceived.
thirteen years earlier in Venice, and compiled extracts from the Abbe de Saint-Pierre’s *Project for Perpetual Peace* for later publication in 1761. In July/August of 1756 he entered another controversy, this time with Voltaire himself, provoked by his *Letter to Voltaire on Providence* which criticised Voltaire’s views on the workings of divine providence and its influence on the world, expressed in two didactic poems. The *Letter* drew Voltaire’s response later in his famous parable *Candide* (1759). That same year Rousseau worked on his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* which was never finished, and on another book, *The Morals of Sensibility or The Wise Man’s Materialism*, which had the same fate. In autumn he began to write *Heloise* and was already planning *Emile*. In 1757 a painful and embarrassing infatuation with a much younger woman than himself, Sophie d’Houdetot, which again aroused his dream of *a manage a trois* with her lover, an M. de Saint-Lambert, produced the *Moral Letters*. Sophie, who “was not in the least beautiful,” but attractive nonetheless, inspired the character of Julie in *Heloise*. (p. 409) Meanwhile, his deteriorating relations with Diderot and Grimm, both of whom he believed to be in league with his enemies in the ‘Holbach circle’, and a painful quarrel with Mme. d’Epinay led him to leave the ‘Hermitage’ for a new home in Mont-louis. In September of that year, 1757, he published his *Letter to M. d’Alembert on the Theatre* in reply to an earlier article d’Alembert had published in Volume VII of the *Encyclopaedia* which had complimented the city of Geneva on various things but criticised the fact that it banned the theatre which, he had argued, is important for educating the taste of citizens. The article had caused uproar and indignation in the city and Rousseau’s *Letter* took the Genevan side in the matter, opposing the idea of a Genevan theatre with moral, social and aesthetic arguments. A great financial success it brought him the added satisfaction that d’Alembert, who he believed to be also in league with the ‘circle’ which, he thought, persecuted him, was forced to resign as co-editor of the *Encyclopaedia* with Diderot. His conclusive break with Diderot himself and with Grimm followed soon after in 1758.

SECOND DISCOURSE: SELF-SUFFICIENT MAN

The appeal to nature was not by any means original to Rousseau’s thought, it was already central to Enlightenment thinking, and had long been a subject of controversy, when the *First Discourse* appeared. A century earlier, the English materialist philosopher Thomas Hobbes had represented human nature as naturally vicious, aggressive, and acquisitive in his famous book *The Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes had described the ‘state of nature’, of absolute freedom from law or moral restriction, as one of unrelenting war of each against each, where life is ‘short nasty and brutish’, and where civilized existence is impossible. In these circumstances Hobbes represented ‘men’s’ transition into civil society through a compact made between themselves individually, and collectively with a ruler, as a net gain notwithstanding that it required them to alienate their individual freedom to an all-powerful sovereign who would guarantee their protection in return. In the *First Discourse* Rousseau had already dismissed this theory as a “dangerous reverie”. In the *Second*, while he agreed with Hobbes that the basic human instinct is of self-preservation and
well-being, and called it *amour de soi*, he described an original state very different from Hobbes’s, where men were happy and at peace with themselves and others in their self-sufficiency.

Rousseau was right to describe the *Second Discourse*, written under the proud nom de plume ‘Citizen of Geneva’, a superior work to the *First*. Its content is undoubtedly more scholarly and in between the writing of the two *Discourses* he had steeped himself in the French moralizing tradition headed by Montaigne and Montesquieu bringing a new sophistication to the work. Also, though its thesis is “even more radical,” than that of the *First Discourse* it is “less ridden by paradox and more complex,” as a work. (Gay 1987, p. 25) The ‘Letter’ of dedication in the preface addressed to the Lords and citizens of the Genevan Republic is an important political statement in its right, his first sketch of an ideal state which would be fleshed out years later in the *Social Contract*. His ideal, the state he would choose to live in, he says in the ‘Letter’, would be so intimate that “neither the obscure manoeuvres of vice nor the modest of virtue could be hidden from the notice and the judgement of the public,” (1755a:1987, p. 26) a state which would serve a small tight community of citizens, where “it is easy for the people to gather together” and where each citizen can easily know all the others, (1762a:1987, p. 180) founded on healthy families where the men are active citizens in the public sphere and the women perform their ideal role of “chaste guardians of mores and the gentle bonds of peace,” i.e. of keeping their families morally intact and healthy, (p. 32) where love of homeland (the absence of which in European societies he had lamented in the *First Discourse*) is “love of the citizens” rather than “of the land,” i.e. where patriotism is based on a generalised sentiment of fraternity rather than on an abstract nationalism, (p. 26) where the citizens enjoy the protection of secure borders and are not threatened by any expansionist ambitions by the state, and, more critically, where strong and tried democratic institutions render them sovereign. His ‘Letter’ claimed that these were conditions already found in the city-state of Geneva.

The *Discourse* proper is opened with the claim that the study of ‘man’ is the most crucial but least advanced branch of human knowledge; necessary for an understanding of the political sources of the inequality and betrayal of freedom he had described in the *First Discourse*. The central question the *Second Discourse* addresses is how did the strong “resolve to serve the weak, and the people to buy imaginary repose at the price of felicity?” (p. 38) The investigation prepares the way for the *Third Discourse* which is about political institutions, about “the fundamental compact of all government” *per se*, which would, in turn, be necessary to prepare the ground for the *Social Contract*, (p. 75) which “takes men as they are,” as nature made them, and describes the “laws as they might be” in an ideal, or well-ordered, state. (1762a:1987, p. 141) Rousseau promises a study of ‘man’ free from “metaphysical subtleties” or supernatural explanations, and which would lay claim to no “historical truths.” (1755a:1987, p. 34) Its findings would be “hypothetical and conditional … better suited to shedding light on the nature of things than to pointing out their true origin.” (pp. 38–39) Written as an anthropological/historical/social narrative it begins from the beginning, with ‘natural man’ (Rousseau uses the term for members of the male sex, not as a generic term for human beings in general) in his first,
pre-social, state – “a creature scarcely recognisable in contemporary man” (p. 33), and continues with a stage by stage description of his evolution into the contemporary bourgeois man whose condition was described in the First Discourse.

Modern anthropology tells us that Rousseau’s natural man never existed, but he recognised as much himself, referring to his writing as “hypothetical history.” (Reisert 2003, p. 35) He describes his natural man as a self-sufficient, solitary, primitive being “satisfying his hunger under an oak tree, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal,” satisfying his sexual urges randomly, happy because “all his needs are satisfied.” (p. 40) This self-sufficiency, of having no more than one needs and needing no more than what lies within one’s power to have is also, for Rousseau, the standard of human happiness. Apart from amour de soi, his self-love, natural man’s other basic sentiment is ‘pity’ which he experiences in the presence of the pain and suffering of other sentient beings, humans more particularly, and which induces the first social urge in him. (p. 35) So deeply embedded in human nature is this sentiment that even “the most depraved mores still have difficulty destroying it.” (p. 54) What activates it is a “kind of instinct in pressing circumstances, to beg for help in great dangers, or for relief of violent ills” which, in turn, occasions the need to communicate with others and marks the beginning of human language. (p. 49).

From the two natural sentiments of amour de soi and pity, Rousseau says, flow all the rules of natural right. “The state of reflection,” he continues, provocatively in an age that announced itself as the age of Reason, is “contrary to nature,” corrupted by amour-propre it creates “a depraved animal.” (p. 42) This ‘depraved animal’ is the ‘slave’ already identified in the First Discourse; namely bourgeois man. Natural man, to the contrary, is robust, agile and hardy, his lifestyle simple and regular, of vigorous spirit and with an intelligent instinct for survival, not vulnerable to illness, disease and the fear of death. What distinguishes him from other animals and renders his soul “spiritual,” or truly free, is not his reason but his power of agency, his ability to choose his fate. (p. 45) Living for the day he is drawn neither to speculation nor to foresight; “The only goods he knows in the universe are nourishment, a woman, and rest; the only evils he fears are pain and hunger.” Philosophy is unnatural for him but he possesses an “almost unlimited … faculty of self-perfection,” which Rousseau refers to as ‘perfectibility’ and which drives him to seek his continuous self-improvement in relation to nature and to his fellows. (p. 46)

Rousseau always regarded the first permanent human association, the nuclear family, as the natural and, therefore, the ideal social unit, visualising it as a co-operative whole embodying the happy self-sufficiency of the solitary individual at the social level. The nuclear family evolves in his narrative into the extended family first then into neighbourly associations and more complex settlements, then into civil society. The original self-sufficiency of the nuclear family is progressively eroded in the process, eventually requiring the regulation of laws and civil institutions. Festivals were what brought people together at first and they remained Rousseau’s favoured mode of conviviality or social sharing. But the abundant leisure time which grew with security, and prosperity, and a settled existence, led to the creation of luxuries and different kinds of possessions or ownership on which people learnt to
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grow more and more dependent for their happiness. Merit, beauty, opulence became desirable and desired qualities.

Thus the seeds of amour-propre, of living in the approval of others, were planted in the human soul which came to be corrupted with the artificial and negative sentiments of vanity, envy, shame, contempt, and outraged pride; and with them the thirst for revenge and retribution. Evolving social mores fixed sexual desire “exclusively on one single object,” creating the “artificial sentiment” of fidelity, which women, he says, extol mainly “to establish their hegemony and make dominant the sex that ought to obey;” a classical case of the strong serving the weak. (p. 56)

The sentiment of fidelity is grounded in the self-same motive which inspires men to possess property; the institution that eventually gives rise to the creation of a civil society. In the institution of property Rousseau finds the origin of the social inequality that “wreaks so much havoc among us.” (p. 56) “The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say this is mine, and found people simple enough to believe him,” he declares in a famous statement later echoed in the literature of anarchism and revolutionary socialism alike, “was the true founder of civil society.” (p. 60) With it inequality and slavery were institutionalised into the state – the question of the Second Discourse was answered.

The supplementary institution of inheritance then radicalized the division of society into the wealthy and the dispossessed, the master and the servant which, in any case, Rousseau tells us, is illusory, for there are no real masters and servants, all are ‘slaves’ in their dependence each on the other. Hence, his famous opening declaration in the Social Contract later that “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains,” and that he “who believes himself the master of others, does not escape being more of a slave than they.” (1762a:1987, p. 141) His judgment of the contemporary society that evolved from this condition in the Second Discourse is as stark and uncompromising as in the First: “The usurpation of the rich, the acts of brigandage of the poor, the unbridled passions of all,” he says, “stifles natural pity and the still weak voice of justice,” and men are universally “greedy, ambitious and wicked.” (1755a:1987, p. 68) The tables are turned on Hobbes. The depraved condition Hobbes described as the state of nature is the state of the ‘advanced’ civil society in Rousseau’s narrative. The social compact that Hobbes lauds for civilising civil society, in Rousseau’s eyes, only:

“gave new fetters to the weak and new forces to the rich, irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, established forever the law of property and of inequality, changed adroit usurpation into irrevocable right, and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjected the entire human race to labour, servitude, and misery.” (p. 70)

Re-defining it by returning to the model of nature would be the business of the Social Contract. But there was more work to be done first in the Third Discourse.

THE POLITICS OF THE CONTRACT

There is a popular misconception about Rousseau that he advocated a ‘return to nature’, to the idyllic condition of the savage as his response to the disordered
society of the day. In the Social Contract, however, he makes it clear that he saw man’s transition from a pre-social to a social state as a net gain rather than as a loss for humanity, for as a result his:

“faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas are broadened, his feelings are ennobled, his entire soul is elevated to such a height that, if the abuse of this condition did not often lower his status to beneath the level he left, he ought constantly to bless the happy moment that pulled him away from it forever and which transformed him from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man.” (1762a:1987, p. 151)

It is this “abuse of this condition” that the Social Contract wants to rectify. The social contract, or compact, is the means with which men create civil society, a good in itself it “substitutes a moral and legitimate equality,” based on convention and right, for the natural inequality of “force and intelligence,” that characterises the primitive, pre-social, state. (p. 153) It guarantees men a certainty of possession based on legal title not force, and substitutes a “moral liberty” based on an intelligent will “which alone can make man truly master of himself,” for the liberty of dumb inclination that constitues his absolute freedom in his pre-social state. (p. 151) One may ask whether this is not conceding to Hobbes. Not really, because Rousseau believed that to find the key to the salvation of the contemporary society requires returning to nature for clues to re-create man and re-devise society as it would be, an association of free equals, had not the lure of property and amour-propre deviated it from its course. This would be the political task of the Social Contract. His confidence that this could happen was based on his optimistic belief that nature’s imprint on humanity is indestructible: “It is … the life of your species that I am about to describe to you according to the qualities you have received, which your education and your habits have been able to corrupt but have been unable to destroy,” he says in the Third Discourse. (1755b:1987, p. 39)

In the Social Contract as in the Third Discourse, and in Part 2 of the Second Discourse, Rousseau argues that legitimacy is conferred on the state not by right of conquest nor by a people’s fear of anarchy but by their anxiety “to defend their liberty.” Hence, sovereignty always remains theirs. (1755a:1987, p. 72) Men cannot, as Hobbes had held, legitimately alienate their freedom or sell themselves as slaves, because such behaviour amounts to the renunciation of “one’s dignity as a man, the rights of humanity and even its duties” for which there “is no possible compensation.” (1762a:1987, p. 144) In the Second Discourse he had already argued that a true, or legitimate, compact is “between the populace and the leaders it chooses for itself,” not one that is imposed on it by force. Once made the populace “has united all its wills into a single one,” which, he says, is “the essence of the state” and which expresses itself in its laws. (1755a:1987, p. 75) This same line of thinking is pursued in the Third Discourse and the Social Contract where he refers to this “single will” as a ‘general will’; i.e. a will that unites all wills into one. Only unconditional adherence to this united will of the people, this general will, he insists in all three works, guarantees genuine social order and true equality. Its authority, unlike paternal authority which endures only for as long as nature renders the child dependent on
the father (after which the father is owed “merely respect and not obedience”), is never outgrown because it draws its power not from nature but from civil society itself; from the compact on which it is founded. (p. 74)

This distinction between domestic and state economy first made in the Second Discourse is pursued in depth in the Third Discourse where, defining the word ‘economy’ according to its Greek meaning as “wise and legitimate government” he warns against confusing the two together. (1755b:1987, p. 111) Yet, in the Social Contract he refers to the family as “the prototype of political societies,” a significant change, where what he has in mind is a patriarchal family. “The leader,” he says, “is the image of the father, the populace is the image of the children … none give up their liberty except for their utility.” The “entire difference” is that children love their father to repay him for the care he takes of them,” but in the case of the leader “the pleasure of commanding takes the place of this feeling” – which implies an impersonal relationship between the leader and his people. (1762a:1987, p. 142) In the Third Discourse Rousseau calls the economy used “in relation to the government of persons” education, (1755b:1987, p. 127) and he retains the same definition of education as government in Emile (1762b:1991, p. 33), although, paradoxically, Emile, as we shall see, seems to offer itself to the reader, and has been read over the years by educators, as a pedagogy of freedom from government. It is not surprising, given this definition of education as “the government of persons,” that in both the Third Discourse and in the Social Contract he characterizes the state as educator, but in the two cases the state, as we shall see, educates differently. In the Third Discourse it needs institutions of public instruction, or schools as we call them.

His thoughts on these institutions will be the subject of the next section. Meanwhile, in the Third Discourse Rousseau takes up the analogy Plato made in The Republic between the body politic and the body of the human individual which leads him, like Plato, to assume that the government (and hence the education) of the two is essentially similar: “The life of both is the self common to the whole, the reciprocal sensibility and the internal coordination of all the parts.” (1755b:1987, p. 114, italics in original) This “coordination of the parts” is what Rousseau understood by ‘order’, which is also, like Plato, how he regarded justice. Without it the ‘self’ (whether of the individual man or the collective) is disordered and forfeits its identity and stability. The man dies morally by losing his virtue, the collective degenerates into anarchy and injustice. Both individual and collective self are moral beings with a will; the collective will is expressed as the general will. Its laws are supreme over every individual will; like “the voice of God,” their pronouncement renders them absolute and infallible. (p. 115) In Emile Rousseau identifies moral conscience as the voice of God speaking to the individual from within. Both the political law of the collective and the law of conscience are corrupted by vice which ultimately stems from amour-propre, creating the disordered state and the disordered man respectively.

Being absolute and infallible the pronouncements of the general will are, like those of conscience, uncompromising; they demand “the total alienation of each associate, together with all of his rights, to the entire community.” (1762a:1987, p. 148) The crucial question the Social Contract asks, the most “formidable difficulty” for
theory of legitimate government, as he referred to it in the Third Discourse, is how this ‘alienation’ of individual freedom which, as for Hobbes, must be absolute, can square with autonomy; in short, how men can be both free and under their own laws and subject to the collective will. (1755b:1987, p. 116) His famous and ingenious solution follows this line of reasoning: (1) “since each person gives himself whole and entire [to the general will], the condition is equal for everyone”; (2) “since the condition is equal for everyone, no one has an interest in making it burdensome for the others”; (3) “since the alienation is made without reservation, the union is as perfect as possible, and no associate has anything further to demand”; and, finally (4) “in giving himself to all, each person gives himself to no one.” (1762a:1987, p. 148) Rousseau does not assume that the laws and edicts of the general will, will always be true, but that they will “always tends toward the public utility,” in an ordered state. (p. 155) His answer to the possibility of the prospective dissident is that he will “merely [be] forced to be free.” (p. 150) The “merely” has raised more than a few eyebrows with his modern critics who perceive this notion of a forced freedom as a dangerous paradox. But Rousseau did not think like his critics, he conceived of freedom differently, not as an affirmation of one’s individuality but as freedom to do one’s duty by obeying the law whether of one’s conscience in the realm of private morality as a man, or the edicts of the general will in the public realm as a citizen.

Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, summarizing Rousseau’s point “that in a just polity, the individual has only alienated his powers to himself under another name,” describes it as little more than a clever piece of intellectual legerdemain. (1996, p. 245) She points out that the kind of political contract described in the Social Contract requires “a New Man with a new psychology,” and criticises Rousseau for not showing how this could be achieved. (p. 245) But the answer is in the education of Emile which is designed precisely to create such a man. She also, like many another commentator before and after her, finds the figure of a ‘Legislator’ which Rousseau introduces into the Social Contract, paradoxical in a political theory which would seem to gravitate around the sovereignty of the general will. Dent calls it “perplexing.” (2005, p. 140) But the Legislator, as will be pointed out further down, plays a critical part in Rousseau’s general educational/political economy; it is replicated in Heloise in the figure of the Paterfamilias and in Emile in that of the Tutor; both, in turn, idealizations of Rousseau himself who aspired to the role. (Reisert 2003, p. x)

Meanwhile, Rousseau tempers this absolutist tendency of the general will by emphasising that it’s authority applies only to those aspects of the individual’s life and practices of freedom that concern the common good and the condition of equality; it cannot impose on him “fetters that are of no use to the community.” (1762a:1987, p. 157) In such cases “every man can completely dispose of such goods and freedom as has been left to him.” (p. 158) In short, while he limits the jurisdiction of the collective authority to the res publica, to the public business, he creates a realm of private freedom which belongs to the ‘man’ as distinct from the citizen, which the collective cannot legitimately legislate into obedience, and which is subject entirely to the laws of one’s conscience. This distinction between public
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and private, between the citizen and the man was influential on modern liberal
democratic politics later. It enabled him to reconcile his unorthodox private religious
beliefs described in the Profession with his orthodox religious practice as a
Calvinist or Catholic citizen.

On the other hand he dismissed the idea that the politics of the general will
should be modelled on the direct Athenian democracy where the people’s sovereignty
was expressed in a system of constant plebiscite, and warned that the general will
must not be confused with the will of a voting majority either, or even with the
votes of all counted together. Like Plato he is critical of the unreliability of the democ-
tratic voice, of the incompetence of the democratic voter, and of the inherently
confrontational and divisive nature of democratic politics in general. A wise collective
vision is unitary not fragmented, its laws make towards the common good not
towards factional or party interests, but it is difficult for a democratic government
to unite the things it supposes itself to unite; an intimate society, simplicity of mores,
equality in ranks and fortune, and the possession of little or no luxury. (p. 180) These
are qualities that are beyond the grasp of ordinary citizen or collective notwith-
standing that they may want and seek them. A deus ex machina, an external agent
is required for that purpose; the third, patriarchal, figure in the political manage a
trois, with the government (his wife) and the people (his children). This is the
wise Legislator (who was usually in ancient times also the founder of the state,
like Lycurgus for instance) who Rousseau brings into the picture to give the state
its constitution as the embodiment of the social contract. No popular ratification
for the laws is required when they are made if they are consistent with the consti-
tution; their silent obedience signifies the people’s consent to them, their tacit
approval.

The Legislator is to the general will what God is to the individual conscience,
the Father to the household, the Tutor to Emile, ever-present but invisible: “The
engineer who invents the machine” of the state while the prince or government
“constructs it and makes it run.” (p. 163) A wise and unique genius, he is an acute
and sensitive but, at the same time, a dispassionate observer of humanity, of his
people. His reason is not coloured by his feelings and is beyond the comprehension
of the populace, just as God’s is beyond that of ordinary mortals. His authority is
not coercive but persuasive, not actually written or pronounced in any edict, but
handed down; not the authority of a magistrate or sovereign which expresses some
sort of coercion, but the charismatic authority of a “great soul,” (p. 165) “which can
compel without violence and persuade without convincing,” (p. 164) like Moses
whom God gifted with the just eloquence to move his people into obedience.
(Johnston 1999, p. 54) Like any wise engineer/ “architect,” he “surveys and tests
the ground” first, “to see if it can bear the weight.” Like a wise Father or Tutor he
“does not begin by laying down laws that are good in themselves,” he sees that
“the people for whom they are destined are fitted to bear them,” first. (p. 165) His
happiness, as we saw, comes not from popular acclaim but from “the pleasure of
commanding,” from the respect and obedience he receives from the people as their
master. This is exactly, as we shall see, the same description Rousseau makes of
the Tutor in Emile and the Father in Heloïse – all in fact educate through their
ON STATE EDUCATION

Oksenberg Rorty describes the educational strategies that follow the will of this “benign, paternalistic, unflawed Legislator-Tutor,” as deeply problematic, but this issue will be returned to later, in the last chapter of this book. (1996, p. 244)

ON PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

“It is certain that in the long run people are what their government makes them,” Rousseau says in making his case for public or state instruction in the Third Discourse – echoing a conclusion made many years before in Venice. “Train men if you want to command them,” is a fundamental principle of government. The necessity to provide special institutions for this purpose he describes as “one of the fundamental maxims of popular or legitimate government,” and the state’s most urgent business. They must not, however, train men into blind obedience of the laws: “If you want the laws obeyed,” he warns, “make them beloved;” i.e. make the citizens make them their own. (1755b:1987, p. 119) This precept holds equally for the Tutor in the education of the man, and the Father in the education of his household. Rousseau’s statement in the Social Contract that “Every individual can, as a man, have a private will contrary to or different from the general will that he has as a citizen” (1762a:1987, p. 150 italics added) denotes that education into obedience of the general will be such that every citizen will make the general will his own, internalize it personally so that it “penetrates to the inner part of a man,” and is “exerted no less on his will than on his actions.” (1755b:1987, p. 119) Hence, to act in accord with the general will mean for each citizen, “to act in accordance with the maxim of his own judgement and not to be at odds with himself,” the perfect object of education whether of the man or the citizen. (p. 117) As a citizen “his private will is in conformity with the general will in all things, and we willingly want what is wanted by the people we love,” i.e. in the intimate community of the ideal state of the Social Contract, all one’s fellow citizens. (p. 121) This sense of not being at odds with oneself and one’s fellow-citizens is the closest to the original self-sufficiency in the state of nature men can achieve as social beings. It constitutes the moral and political definition of being ‘a man’ and a citizen respectively. Cultivating it will be the aim of Emile’s education, achieving it the mark of his true freedom. The authority of the general will, like the authority of the Father and the Tutor, must, on its part, be exercised with wisdom rather than severity. Indeed, the key to all good government/education, Rousseau insists repeatedly in all his works, is not to punish crime or misdemeanour severely when it occurs but to prevent it from occurring. This is the politics of ‘negative education’, the same adopted by his tutor in Emile’s education.

The object of public schools in the Third Discourse is to create citizens who will internalize the collective will expressed by the laws of the state. The curriculum and regulations are “prescribed by the government” and placed under the jurisdiction of “the magistrates put in place by the sovereign,” (p. 125) a principle taken from Sparta “where the law kept watch chiefly over the education of children.” (1755a:1987, p. 77) The curriculum’s political agenda will be to cultivate love of the laws and of the homeland, a patriotic citizenry where patriotism is identified with love for the government.
state – the political ‘self’. Patriotism is the social and political glue that holds the collective together, a condition indispensable for the existence and exercise of a general will and citizen solidarity. The citizens’ love for the state is reciprocated on the state’s part by the assiduous care it takes for their welfare. This is the political perspective the young are taught at school in their education as citizens. It was the absence of this love, Rousseau believed, that produced the “wicked slaves” willing to exploit the laws for their selfish advantage he saw everywhere in the contemporary society. (1755b:1987, p. 124)

The state education must start at the earliest possible age:

“(…) early enough never to consider their own persons except in terms of being related to the body of the state, and not to perceive their own existence except as part of the state’s existence … It is too late to alter our natural inclinations when they have taken their course and habit has been joined with self-love … It is from the first moment of life that one must learn to deserve to live.” (p. 125)

The principle is to ‘catch them young’. The statement, however, is startling for the reader who has read Rousseau’s pronouncements about freedom in the earlier Discourses. The principle about the lasting influence of our early upbringing restates that already expressed as early as in the Project, will be echoed in Emile, and corresponds with today’s wisdom. But the first part of the statement unambiguously directs schools to indoctrinate children from their earliest years to identify themselves totally with the state, and this is troubling to the modern democratic mind, no matter his declared commitment to freedom, because it sounds, and is, totalitarian. The second part, which ends with the statement that “one must learn to deserve to live,” is also troubling to today’s mentality attuned rather to the language of the right to live, and to the politics of state welfare.

One wonders where the family, so much celebrated in the Second Discourse for its crucial educational role – “morality and marital fidelity,” he says in the Confessions, “are at the root of all social order” – features in this account of things? (1770:1953, p. 405) The indications are that in an ideal world, where families perform their proper social and political function, Rousseau would have had them performing the task of educating their children rather than public schools. But his was not an ideal world; he had no confidence in the ability of the present families to educate their children responsibly. “Children cannot be abandoned to the lights and prejudices of their fathers,” he says, the same argument he made to justify foregoing the upbringing of his own children. (p. 125) The Romans were the only people who could dispense with public schooling because “they made all their homes so many schools for children.” (p. 126) The success of Roman home education, however, depended on severe paternal authority, and he disapproved of severe government, of individual or society, personally, pleading for wisdom instead. In Emile, as we shall see, the Tutor is not the boy’s father, and the boy is raised outside any family ambit.

The principles of public instruction in the Third Discourse are confirmed in Poland written sixteen years later in 1771. At the start of this, the bleakest time in
his life, he could still be optimistic that the virtues of citizenship, of spiritual vigour, patriotic zeal, and high public esteem he so admired in the ancients (as he enumerated them himself) were not completely lost to European society. Indeed, he was still confident that “the leaven they used is present in the hearts of all men,” and only awaits the political institutions that would revive them. (1771:1985, p. 23) These institutions were what he sought to give the Poles, who were promising subjects because they were reasonably sheltered from the “exposure to corrupt teachings, outmoded institutions, and a philosophy of egoism that preaches and kills,” that infected their European neighbours. (p. 23) True they had never yet “felt the true yoke of laws” and the country’s size, difficult geography and complicated political history added to their political problems. On the other hand, their conservative, idiosyncratic, traditions and customs were “too deeply rooted to be stifled by new plantings,” (1771:1985, p. 1) and a strong nationalistic and near-anarchic sense of independence guarded them from the modernizers among them who would have them re-model their constitution on the lines of the leading countries in Europe, all of which were, in Rousseau’s belief, “hastening to their doom.” (p. 2) But, for these very reasons, they combined the “stability of an ancient people and the docility of a new people,” required by the Social Contract and were therefore ideal to receive a constitution de novo. (1762a:1987, p. 168) All the Polish institutions needed, in his view, was an overhaul that would make them workable and just.

In Poland, unlike in the Third Discourse, he devotes a whole section to education. He begins by reaffirming his belief that nothing but the law should hold “sway over the hearts of the citizens,” and that they must internalize its authority as theirs. (1771:1985, p. 4) As in the Third Discourse, he describes the political object of public schooling as “to shape the souls of the citizens in a national pattern,” and so to direct the opinions of the students “that they shall be patriotic by inclination, passionately, of necessity.” (p. 19) Again, he advocates catching the children very young: “The newly-born infant, upon first opening his eyes, must gaze upon the fatherland, and until his dying day should behold nothing else.” (p. 19) The souls of the citizens are ‘shaped’ with the games they play in infancy at home and the instruction they receive at school in their childhood. The ‘shaping’ will continue when they are adults, with their participation in public rituals and festivities, games, festivals, competitions, and so on; activities where the spirit of friendship and solidarity comes to the fore through the experience of conviviality, and the sense of community is reaffirmed and strengthened. Rousseau recognises the educational value of such participation not just in Poland; he encourages it elsewhere in his writing, in the Second Discourse and Heloise, for instance. The consolidation of the patriotic bond that ties the citizens together also requires an institutionalised religion, also with its own public rituals and activities.

A “truly national education,” he insists in Poland, must be patriotic in this way. It must make the growing child “a Pole, not some other kind of man.” Already, at the age of ten he:

“should be familiar with everything Poland has produced; at twelve to know all its provinces, all its roads, all its towns; at fifteen, to have mastered his country’s entire history, and at sixteen, all its laws; let his mind and heart be
full of every noble deed, every illustrious man, that ever was in Poland so that he can tell you about them at a moment’s notice.” (p. 20)

How he understands freedom is evident in his claim that this sort of education “belongs only to men who are free.” One is free, by implication, when one does one’s patriotic duty, and doing one’s patriotic duty is how one is free. (p. 20) The system of public instruction, he continues, again along the lines of the Third Discourse, must be administered with supreme authority by a board of top-grade officials, and “the content, the sequence, even the method of their studies,” will “be specified by Polish law.” In short, no significant control or pedagogical initiative is allowed the teachers or the schools, everything is determined for them by the state – as with any totalitarian system. In order to tighten the patriotic agenda further, only Polish nationals would be allowed to teach in the schools and these would be married men of distinction publicly recognised for “their conduct, their probity, their good sense, and their lights.” After years of creditable service in teaching they would be retired and promoted to more prestigious and less-exacting posts in the state. “Above all else,” he advises the Poles, not to “make the mistake of turning teaching into a career,” because careers are tied with ambition, prestige, and reward, in short, they encourage amour-propre – teaching should be regarded as a service given by friends. Indeed, the state should recognise no other career than citizen. All should be citizens without distinction operating within a fluid meritocratic system which encourages them to seek their own advancement to the more important positions in their society out of a spirit of service. This is how the state “can unlock a great storehouse of energy,” that is the human resources of its citizens while recognising their equality as citizens. (p. 20)

Though he follows on Plato’s view that public schools must be supervised closely by the state, Rousseau does not follow Plato’s system of universal compulsory education for males and females in co-educational settings. His public schools would be affordable for “the poor nobles,” and there would be “scholarships” for children of “poor gentlemen” deserving reward for their service to the fatherland. They would be regarded as “‘wards of the fatherland’.” Rousseau repeats the emphasis on the value of physical education in Poland he had made already in Emile; the same emphasis made before him by Plato and Locke. Moreover his key pedagogical principle remains the same: “I cannot repeat too often,” he says in Poland, “that good education must always be negative education,” an education aimed to “choke off the vices before they are born.” (p. 21) Children must be encouraged to be constantly active and to play together in a healthy spirit of competition and emulation. Parents must be made to participate in their activities and to continue with them at home. Besides its physical benefits, playing games contributes positively to the moral and political formation of children, introducing them “to rules, to equality, to fraternity, to competition, to living with the eyes of their fellow-citizens upon them and to seek public approbation,” which will be their reward for their deeds and qualities. (p. 22)

With this last statement one wonders what has happened to his frequent warning against amour-propre which is exactly what tends to be fuelled by the desire for acclamation and the emulation of others. The answer is that Rousseau did not
regard *amour-propre* (vying for the approval of others) as such, as bad in itself or intrinsically disordered, to the contrary he saw it as a necessary social sentiment required by any human relationship, and therefore as natural to social beings as their distress with the suffering of their fellows. Not only did he not consider the two sentiments of *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* as “exclusive and opposed,” to the contrary he considered a healthy form of the latter, properly tempered with virtue, to be complementary with the former. (1755b:1987, p. 106) What he criticised as unhealthy was the kind of narcissistic and self-centred *amour-propre* he saw everywhere around him, which he identified with vanity, dishonesty, and superficiality, and which was not to be confused with *amour de soi*. For Rousseau the sentiment of *amour de soi*, or self-love, articulates itself as ‘care for oneself’ which was the exclusive care for pre-social man, but in a social setting care for oneself must take into account one’s care for others and the way it needs to be re-defined is as self-mastery.

**THE STATE AS EDUCATOR**

Given this importance he attributes to it in the *Third Discourse* and later in *Poland*, the question must arise: why is there no discussion, or even mention, of institutionalized public instruction or schools (this “most important business” of the state as he calls it) in the *Social Contract*? One could speculate that he assumed that the citizens in the state of the *Social Contract* would be educated on the lines of the *Third Discourse*. (Wiborg 2000, pp. 236–237) But why is this intention not explicitly stated in the text of the *Social Contract*, or indeed in any foot-note? A credible alternative reason, it seems to me, is that he thought schooling unnecessary for the ideally governed state of the *Social Contract*. Emile also, as we shall see, is not sent to school, but in *Emile*, as in the *First Discourse*, Rousseau tells us why; the current educational institutions, he says, cannot be trusted to educate the patriotic sentiments of the young, because the very idea of a fatherland had been expunged from the contemporary mind. They are “laughable establishments,” he says, capable only of creating selfish men in conflict with themselves and with their fellows, who end their days “without having been good either for ourselves or for others.” (1762b:1991, p. 41)

His writing on public schooling in the *Third Discourse* could be taken to constitute his views on the kind of reform they would require to become serious institutions capable of educating their students effectively as patriotic citizens. But education through institutionalized public schooling seems always to have been a second option for Rousseau necessary where political entities that are so large and complex as to be intrinsically ungovernable in any other politically legitimate way, nation states like France and England (and Poland) for instance, are concerned. Things are different with small city-states like Geneva, then with a total population of a mere 20,000 persons, of whom only 1,500 were actually citizens and burgesses. (Cranston 1983, p. 15) These, as we saw in the letter preceding the *Second Discourse*, he regarded as the ideal political setting for a well-governed state, the state of the *Social Contract*. As we saw, what he visualised there was a community
of healthy patriarchal families intimate to the point of being incestuous, bound together by a patriotism of fraternal friendship where one’s love of country translates into love for one’s fellow citizens. Such a society has no need for institutionalised state instruction; the education of the citizens takes care of itself. It comes first from the family then from living in the community and in the state. The opposite is true of societies incapable of this close community, large and complex societies where patriotism can be experienced only at the relatively abstract level of love for country, and specialised institutions are required to educate children into it. As Reisert points out, Rousseau regarded the uniting sentiment of friendship as beyond bourgeois society where no “‘sincere friendships; no … real esteem; no … well-founded trust’ (D1 8),” was possible because a narcissistic culture of amour-propre dominated people’s lives. (2003, p. 78) Friendship is an emotional attachment which proceeds from our natural inclination to empathise with others and which, Rousseau believed, requires the availability of convivial events and occasions, the festivals, games, ceremonies, and so on, mentioned earlier, where people mix and enjoy themselves together, which is only possible for small intimate communities.

A society of well-ordered families held together by patriotic ties expressed in the sentiments of brotherly friendship shared between its citizens and a love of virtue, and a state ordered politically by the politics of the general will overseen by a wise Legislator or educator, has no need for independent institutions of instruction, it educates itself. But where did such a society exist? Where did such families exist? Rousseau had lost faith in Geneva and in contemporary families that were built on “ill-formed relationships that are the result of our civil order.” (1755a:1987, p. 92) A new start was needed; the education of a new man and woman, the education prescribed in Emile which, it will be remembered, was written concurrently with the Social Contract. These would educate a new ideal household, the household of Heloise, which would be the building block for the new society which existed only in theory so far, the society of the Social Contract.

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

Rousseau’s political works from the critique of the First Discourse to the Social Contract, describing a transition from men-as-they-are in the contemporary society to men-as-they-could-be if they lived with the appropriate laws and institutions, forms a coherent project which is continuous with Emile and Heloise the subjects of the next chapter. Heloise, as we shall see, is about the politics of domestic education, Emile about the politics of the one-to-one relationship between boy and Tutor. Since he equates education with government, his political project is concurrently educational, hence there is no distinction between the two processes in his thought. In this chapter we saw him identifying patriotism as the political aim of the education of the citizen and advocating a tight, state-controlled, institutionalised system of public instruction for the purpose of achieving it; in the Third Discourse first then in Poland. I suggested that these political/educational works reveal what could be described as a pragmatic Rousseau responding to the challenge of re-animating the sentiment of patriotism among his fellow citizens lost in the contemporary European
reality of large complex nation-states like France, England, and Poland and bourgeois societies. The idealistic Rousseau, on the other hand, dispenses with such institutions. He reveals himself first in his outline description of an ideal political unit, a state of families he would choose to live in, in the Second Discourse, then provides its full political description in the Social Contract where education proceeds directly from the state and the family without intermediary institutions.

It is not difficult, given the contrary tendencies in his political thought that have emerged in our account, to understand why some “regard him as champion of both educational and political freedom,” while others sense “an authoritarian strain in his thought,” and suggest “that the seeds of modern totalitarianism are found in his writing.” (Carbone 1985, p. 399) The conflicting views, as we shall see, will extend to Emile which Compayre, for instance, claimed “inspired the democratic idea of making instruction general,” (1908:2002, p. 74) William Boyd that it “gives modern education a fresh orientation in the direction of democracy,” (1968, p. 178) Reisert that it constitutes “the democratic reply to The Republic,” (2003, p. 25) and Tal Gilead that it promotes “the happiness and welfare of the individual as an educational goal,” and inspires the development of individualistic trends in modern education. (2005:427) But these judgments do not square with what we have seen him say about the aims of public schooling in the Third Discourse and Poland. Oksenberg Rorty has described the Social Contract accurately as “an egalitarian transformation of Plato’s Republic” where Plato’s ideal of “a philosophically determined rational order” ruled by philosopher experts is replaced with an ideal of a “rational individual autonomy” which must, however, coincide perfectly with the collective conscience. (1998, p. 247)

In this way, as Peter Gay has put it, Rousseau wanted “to reconcile the irreconcilable, the design of totalitarian democracy.” (1987, p. vii) Indeed, the fact is that, like his mentor Plato, Rousseau revered order and regarded it as valuable above all else; “man cannot find happiness in disorder,” he claimed, “rather it is when there is order that he is able to enjoy true happiness. To live in a state of disorder is to lead a life of misery.” (Viroli 2002, p. 29) As Gay says, reconciling his instinct for freedom with this obsession with order within a single political theory that accommodates both doesn’t work, in modern eyes at least. It is easy to see why. “The good man,” Rousseau says elsewhere, “orders himself in relation to the whole, and the wicked orders the whole in relation to himself,” and one is not free to be wicked; if necessary the collective must force its freedom on the individual. (Dent 2005, p. 111) This is a paradox the modern liberal democrat cannot live with. This “ordering” of the individual “in relation to the whole” is, as we have seen, what he wants the institutions of instruction, or schools, set up by the state, to do in the name of education, from the earliest years of childhood, so that as citizens they will “never to consider their own persons except in terms of being related to the body of the state,” and they will not “perceive their own existence except as part of the state’s existence,” and to “shape(s) the soul of citizens in a national pattern.” And these, undoubtedly, describe the political agenda not of a democratic but of a totalitarian state.

His distinction of ‘the man’ from the citizen creating a private sphere where individual freedom is beyond state or collective interference sounds, and indeed is,
CHAPTER 1

distinctly liberal. On the other hand he continues to define the private sphere negatively as what remains after the common good, or good of the community, has been defined with laws. It is always clear in his writing that consideration of the common good takes precedence over those of freedom, which is residual to how comprehensively that good is defined, a matter for the collective to decide, and this is consistent with his communitarian outlook. “Were there a people of gods,” he says in the Social Contract, “it would govern itself democratically,” which is to say that “so perfect a government is not suited to men.” (1762a:1987, p. 180) It is more possible to find divine qualities in a single man, a Legislator, than it is to find in a whole people – but then Rousseau insists that the Legislator, who does possess divine qualities, must not be confused with a benevolent dictator on the Platonic model. As Maurizio Viroli says, “It is not possible to analyse the theory of political order in Rousseau’s work independently of his conception of natural order and his doctrine of moral order.” (2002, p. 17) This conception, and the totalitarian strains in Rousseau’s writing, were very much the result of his theology described in his Confessions and, by proxy (as we shall see in the next chapter), by the Savoyard Vicar, premised on his view of the natural world as perfectly ordered to a divine plan conceived by the inscrutable mind of an infinitely wise and benevolent Creator/architect, and his conviction that the model of the natural order must be imitated by the political/educational order as the framework for civil and political society. The edifice of his politics relies on the credibility of this thinking which has little purchase in today’s secular modern/postmodern world.

CHAPTER ONE QUESTIONS

1. In the First Discourse Rousseau attacks the contribution of the sciences and the arts to the European Enlightenment civilization of his time, implying that their inclusion in the school curriculum contributed to the general state of degeneration of the society. How would you have defended yourself against these charges were you one of the philosophes of the time? How would you evaluate the importance of the sciences and the arts for today world?

2. Discuss (a) the importance Rousseau gives to patriotism as an educational aim and (b) his curriculum to achieve it in public schools. How relevant should patriotism be as an aim in today’s curriculum?

3. Rousseau is generally taken to have followed Plato in recommending the establishment of state educational systems in the Third Discourse. Critically compare his system there and in Poland with Plato’s in The Republic.
CHAPTER 2

EDUCATION DOMESTIC AND SOLITARY

Emile and Heloise

“Whoever suffices to himself does not want to harm anyone at all.” (Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues, finished 1776 published posthumously, italics in original, Masters & Kelly 1990, p. 100).

THE PUBLICATION OF EMILE

Rousseau began to write Emile in 1758 when he was already working steadily on Heloise. Having severed his connections with Paris, his newly-found “leisure and independence” enabled him to write regularly and undisturbed and to produce his best and most lasting works. (1770:1953, p. 466) The year following, he conceived of and began compiling material for the Confessions; a work, he promised, that would be “unique and unparalleled in its truthfulness.” (p. 478) In the winter of 1760 Heloise was finally finished and dispatched to his publisher Rey in Amsterdam.

The book caused a stir in the Paris salons even before its publication in January 1761 when it immediately became a success and made him a lot of money. “Opinions differed among men of letters,” he writes, but “in the world the verdict was unanimous, and the women especially were wild about the book and its author.” (p. 504)

Now, while the writing of Emile was proceeding well, he was extracting “whatever could be extracted” from his abandoned work on Political Institutions to write the Social Contract, and working occasionally on a Dictionary of Music. (p. 478) However, his condition growing increasingly closer to paranoia with time, he became convinced that his enemies were circulating bogus works in his name to blacken and discredit him. Rey had the Social Contract out quickly in April 1762. Emile, however, which was to be his “last and best work,” was a different story. Its publisher, Duchesne, dragged his feet mysteriously. (p. 523) Unauthorised selections from it began to appear abroad, and he offered the author no explanation for the delay. Rousseau suspected plots on all sides and the hand of the Jesuits. He became “disturbed by vague and melancholy presentiments,” when he began receiving “rather strange” reports and letters, some signed and others anonymous. (p. 521) The book finally appeared in print in May of 1762, a month or so after the Social Contract. Meanwhile, earlier that year, he had written the Letters to Malesherbes (his first published autobiographical material) straight off without revision, “containing the true picture of my character and the true motives for all my behaviour,” and anticipating the Confessions. (Kelly et al. 1995, p. 572)

The guarded comments of his friends and the unsigned letters of congratulation from literati that followed Emile’s publication were “the dull murmurings that precede
CHAPTER 2

the storm” – that soon broke. (1770:1953, p. 531) In July of that same year the book was condemned publicly in an edict by the Archbishop of Paris Christophe de Beaumont. That same month he received the devastating news of Maman’s death. A “darkness in which I have been entombed for eight years past, without ever having been able, try as I might, to pierce its hideous obscurity,” he wrote later, engulfed him. (p. 543) The real persecution he was to suffer for the rest of his life began at this time as he found himself being relentlessly driven from town to town, city to city, country to country, frequently in disguise, by his enemies. With it grew the tone of bitterness in his writing which begins with his Letter to Christophe Beaumont, published in May 1763, in which he replied to the archbishop’s edict.

HELOISE: ON DOMESTIC EDUCATION

Rousseau represented both Heloise and Emile as ‘novels’, the first an epistolary one; i.e. one written in the form of an exchange of letters. Julie l’Etange is its hero, St Preux is her tutor who becomes her lover. Their passionate but ill-starred affair ends when it is discovered and Julie’s father orders her to break it off because St Preux is of inferior social rank and she is promised to his friend an M. de Wolmar. When Julie ends their liaison St Preux contemplates suicide but is persuaded by Lord Edward Bomston, his friend and protector, to travel the world instead. Returning from his travels years after he contacts Claire, Julie’s close cousin and confidante, to discover that Julie has married Wolmar and they have a young family. He is astonished soon after to receive a courteous letter from Wolmar himself informing him that he knew of his affair with Julie and inviting him to stay at their house, Clarens. St. Preux accepts the invitation with several, not unjustified, misgivings, because his passion for Julie is quickly re-kindled when they meet. But Julie overcomes a moment of strong crisis, a severe test to her marital fidelity set up by Wolmar, and stands firm. Her relationship with St. Preux now changes and is transformed into one of friendship as he comes to admire her qualities as a wife, mother, and mistress of the household. His respect for Wolmar deepens also, and the menage a trois echoes the friendship of twenty years earlier with Anet and Maman with the difference that Julie remains faithful to Wolmar, an “enlightened observer, who combined a father’s interest with a philosopher’s detachment.” (1761:1997, p. 460) St. Preux is allowed into the intimate family circle and estate at Clarens, which is a self-contained domestic unit of which Wolmar is the architect and which Julie manages – a clear replica of the Legislator/Prince political model of the Social Contract. St. Preux’s observations and reflections on the politics of the household, the children’s education, and a host of other matters, are relayed to Lord Bomston in a series of long lively commentaries. The Wolmars have two young sons, and Henriette, Claire’s slightly older daughter, lives with them. The children’s active upbringing is Julie’s responsibility. On one occasion St. Preux sits with her and Wolmar after breakfast in Julie’s room observing the boys, lively, noisy, and thoughtless at play, “as befits their age.” They grow increasingly boisterous and rowdy by the minute and St. Preux is disappointed that she does not intervene. He raises the subject with her when they are taken away by

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their nanny, upbraiding her gently for her inaction and making the point that discipline must not wait until their later years if she wants them to grow docile and obedient. Julie responds with the educational principles that will be familiar to the reader of *Emile*. The boys, she says, must be treated as children and allowed their natural freedom; being boisterous and uninhibited is how they express and enjoy it. Instruction will follow later when they are ready for it. Were they argumentative and defiant it would be another matter, but such attitudes come not with freedom but with boredom. Their readiness to learn must be respected always and, at this age, their physical development must be a priority. They must not be subjected to any regime of books or study that makes for a sedentary life. The uniqueness of their temperament and natural genius must be respected, not “changed nor constrained, but formed and perfected.” Nature makes us all “good and sound,” a bad education is what turns us vicious, she concludes her little lecture, anticipating the opening lines of *Emile*. (p. 461)

Later, on the same lines, Wolmar rejects St. Preux’s suggestion that children should be educated on the model of a properly educated man on the grounds that it means trying to “correct nature.” (p. 462) St. Preux replies that maybe we are not so much the work of nature as of our upbringing and that, this being the case, our education should be about forming our minds on a desirable model not about non-interference with our natural growth. Rousseau thus anticipates a powerful argument against his fundamental assumption that we are made good by nature, i.e. that we are not what nature but what society makes us. Wolmar, speaking with Rousseau’s voice, draws St. Preux’s attention to two puppies from the same litter and never separated since birth, playing in the courtyard, in reply; one is smart and lively the other sluggish and dull. Again St. Preux’s rejoinder is pertinent: one cannot conclude from the fact that they were raised together that their upbringing was identical, he points out, for no two experiences ever are, even if they appear to be. Wolmar’s reply is lame and somewhat disappointing. Given that we have no accurate knowledge of the working of a child’s mind, he says, he would rather not play the “astrologer.” He would rather stick to his observation and “leave aside all these subtleties.” (p. 463) “To change a mind,” he maintains, is “to change its inner organisation; to change a character you would have to change the temperament it depends on. So it would be vain to pretend to remodel a variety of minds on a common model.” (pp. 463–464)

The discussion stops there, St. Preux appears to concede. But the conclusion is reasonable only if one accepts the questionable premises it follows from; i.e. that the mind has an ‘inner organisation’ and that one’s temperament is natural not learnt (both of which were denied by the empiricists, for instance). On the other hand the claim that one cannot “remodel a variety of minds on a common model” seems to conflict with his view on education, just discussed, that the individual minds of citizens can be taught to conform without violence with a model of patriotic citizenship, but that, as we have seen, is another story driven by a different political plot. It also seems to conflict with *Emile* where the tutor is an obvious model for the growing boy. Interestingly, Julie herself seems to disagree with her husband on this matter since she declares that she is raising her boys to be like their father. Wolmar goes on to pronounce the principle that grounds the pedagogical philosophy
of *Emile*, that to educate is not to “change the character and bend the natural disposition, but on the contrary to push it as far as it can go, to cultivate it and prevent it from degenerating.” This is the principle of *negative education*, which, as I remarked earlier, Rousseau re-defines in different contexts and which is key to *Emile*. It is thus that “man becomes all he can be, and [that] nature’s work is culminated in him by education,” Wolmar concludes. (p. 464)

St. Preux’s reply echoes Rousseau’s claim in the *Third Discourse* that the civil state cannot afford this understanding of education because it must harness the talents of its citizens for its prosperity as it does its material resources. And this requires training regimes that bend their “natural disposition” into loyalty towards the state and their fellow citizens and to the purposes of economic productiveness. The discussion has grown intriguing at this point, but Rousseau stops it there. He has, however, raised the question that lies at the heart of *Emile* and the *Social Contract*, and of modern education in general; how do you educate in a manner that allows unrestricted individual growth and satisfies the demands of governance and the interests of society? How do you reconcile individual freedom with the common good? Wolmar announces another thesis in *Emile* that the mind’s cultivation should be postponed until such time when the body and the senses have matured already and the child is ready for it. But St. Preux puts this thesis to interrogation too. And again Wolmar replies by practical example; he points this time to his own children happily at play and untroubled by any kind of intellectual exertion. The answer appears to satisfy St. Preux but, given the boys’ very tender ages how can one be confident that the price they would pay for their present happiness is not any long term harm? Today’s wisdom holds that the child’s physical, emotional, and cognitive growth is concurrent not sequential. As Compayre puts it: “If Emile’s intellect lies fallow for twelve years, it will be like those fields which the husbandman does not sow: weeds will spring up in alarming abundance; and when their destruction is desired, it will be too late.” (1908:2002, p. 27) The secret of the child’s upbringing as a free man Rousseau says in *Heloise*, again anticipating *Emile*, is to replace “the yoke of discipline,” which is external, with “the yoke of necessity,” which is internal. (1761:1997, p. 465) The Wolmars let their boys run freely with the peasants, building their bodily strength and endurance in the process, and learning to be fearless and independent without, however, being self-indulgent or domineering over their social inferiors. Achieving this is “effortless” for them in a house where “the relationship between servants and masters is but an exchange of services and attentions,” and where the politics of the household (as they are intended in the wider society of the *Social Contract*) are based on “reciprocal affection, born of equality.” (p. 468)

**EMILE: THE EDUCATION OF THE MAN**

In the Preface to the first edition of *Emile* Rousseau refers to the book modestly as a “collection of reflections and observations, disordered and almost incoherent,” first intended as a monograph of a few pages that grew uncontrollably into “a sort of opus. Too big doubtless, for what it contains, but too small for the matter that
Later, as we saw, he was to describe it as the culmination of his work, continuous with the *Discourses* and with the *Social Contract*, intended for educated reading, but written by “a simple man, a friend of the truth.” A book “founded less on principles than on facts,” (p. 110) but, at the same time, “a visionary’s dreams about education,” describing “the goal that must be set,” but not claiming that it can be reached, only that “he who comes nearest to it will have succeeded best.” (p. 95) By practical he means possible to accomplish “wherever men are.” (p. 35) He dismisses any suggestion that he would have been better occupied describing possible reforms to current educational practices because these practices, he says, were fundamentally flawed and beyond any reform or redemption. (p. 34) The only way forward is to re-define education *de novo*, for a new kind of man for a new kind of society. In short, he promises his reader nothing less than a work which is revolutionary.

However, as I remarked earlier, he continues to define education consistently with the *Third Discourse* as “the art of forming men,” i.e. of governance, and the “first of all useful things,” but still largely neglected excluding Locke’s work. (p. 33) *Emile* opens with Rousseau’s article of faith and substantially the same premise as the *Social Contract*. “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things. Everything degenerates in the hands of man,” but (and this is an important ‘but’ which answers to the mistaken interpretations of Rousseau as radically anti-social) without civil society things would be “even worse.” (p. 37) It consists of five ‘Books’ distinguishing three phases of Emile’s education: first into a natural and self-sufficient; then into a social and moral; and finally into a civic and political, being. The Fourth Book, as indicated earlier, includes the ‘Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar’ and the Fifth, the last, addresses the education of Sophie, ‘the woman’.

We get our education Rousseau says, signifying his broad use of the word, “from nature or from men or from things.” (p. 38) The infant child must be treated as a “nascent shrub” and nurtured in accordance with its intrinsic nature, not formed or forced into a shape by the direct intervention of an adult. The first injunction for the Tutor (as for the Legislator for a society before giving it its constitution), is to study one’s pupil. These ideas anticipated, as we saw, in *Heloise* were already radical for his time. More radical for us today is his view that a boy must be educated as a self-sufficient solitary first before he can be made a moral and social being and a citizen. (p. 39) Our view today, in our age of mass schooling, is the contrary; we assume that we need to socialise children first, in a family then at school, before we encourage them to have minds of their own, and that their moral development is an intrinsic part of this upbringing. We are, therefore, even more intrigued to discover that Emile’s education is not, like the Wolmar children, to be in a domestic setting because, as we observed earlier, although Rousseau theorised an ideal domestic education in *Heloise* he believed that parents in his society had lost the ability to raise their children since they were at odds “both about the order of their functions and about their system.” (p. 48) The women were especially to blame for this; were they to be true mothers “men will soon become fathers and husbands again.” (p. 46) But they were more interested in “the entertainments of the city” than in raising their families, or indeed in having families.
The occasional brave soul who revolted against this regime was quickly put down by her own sex. When the father took over his six or seven year old son’s upbringing he found an “artificial seed” already formed. Then he compounded the matter by teaching him everything except to know himself and to live and be happy. Finally, the young man was cast into the world “frail in body and soul alike.” (p. 48) Hence, while mothers fail in their duty to provide society with moral and virtuous men, fathers fail to provide it with “sociable men.” (p. 49) It was in reaction against this situation that the pedagogy of Emile evolved, both with regards the education of the boy and, more indirectly, of the girl Sophie – the book is really, as I remarked earlier, about the education of a new family to start a new society. “To make a man,” Rousseau declares, a Tutor must be “more than a man himself,” he must be a “rare mortal,” like the Legislator, or Wolmar, or indeed Anet. (pp. 49–50) So Emile’s tutor is not his father but a “friend” of this kind. Rousseau, probably recalling his unhappy experience with the Mably children and his own failure as a father, acknowledges that he is not such a man himself – but this does not mean that he is unqualified to describe the pedagogy such a man should pursue.

Emile is an imaginary child of average intelligence, physically robust and healthy, not of noble rank but not poor either since “a poor man does not need to be educated. His station gives him a compulsory education,” always understanding ‘governance’ by the term. (p. 52) He is raised without family or friends even, in a temperate climate and in the quiet of a rustic environment, since “cities ‘are the abyss of the human species’,” dens that breed vice, and the success of the first part of his education depends on his avoiding any contact with vice. (p. 59) His tutor is his guardian and constant companion. He begins to learn with the first days of life; “before speaking, before understanding,” he is “already learning.” (p. 62) His early education will teach him “always to be master of himself and in all things to do his will, as soon as he has one.” (p. 63) This could appear a recipe for rebelliousness, self-centredness and a dominating personality but, as we shall see, this is very far from Rousseau’s intention. Affirming Locke’s empiricist belief that the child’s “sensations are the first materials of his knowledge,” he deduces that an education that follows nature must begin with the cultivation of the senses. (p. 64) So Emile is encouraged to explore his environment freely exercising all his senses in the process. His tutor intervenes only when he is threatened with serious harm or self-injury. His early infantile cries of distress, expressions of “want and weakness,” create the social bond with his tutor, who will ignore them except when the boy is sick or needlessly frustrated. (p. 65) They also activate his sentiment of *amour-propre* through his wish to please his tutor. He receives nothing directly from his tutor nor is his will frustrated when he wants something. Thus, he is disposed neither to dominion nor to rebellion. Rousseau attributes the wantonness and destructiveness of early childhood to his weakness, and confidently predicts that they will disappear as his self-confidence grows with time and as he grows older. The maxim for his tutor at this age is to allow Emile “more true freedom and less domination.” (p. 68)

Another is to give him time to mature, not to be too impatient or demanding with him, nor allow him to get ahead of himself, otherwise “a vice is planted in the
depth” of his heart which it will be difficult to eradicate later. (p. 92) The form this strategy takes includes a measure we now know to be disastrous, (but then Rousseau was not cognisant of our theories of language acquisition and development), to restrict Emile’s vocabulary as much as possible. He must not “have more words than ideas,” nor will he “know how to say more things than he can think.” (p. 74) As in Heloise the tutor is urged to respect Emile’s childhood, to recognise its role “in the order of human life,” (p. 80) not to “hurry to judge it, either for good or for ill,” nor to frustrate its tendencies when they appear. (p. 107) The wise Tutor knows, like Wolmar, that “each mind has its own form,” and will “let childhood ripen in children,” rather than seek to short-circuit it with precocious knowledge, (p. 94) which (and Rousseau was evidently thinking of his own childhood) “is the cause of children’s ruin.” (p. 107) Emile’s happiness at this stage comes, like that of the solitary pre-social savage, from that his “power and will [are] in perfect equality”. (p. 80) This is what makes him ‘well ordered’, the scope of government/education. “The truly free man wants only what he can do and does what he pleases.” This “fundamental maxim,” Rousseau remarks, is the root of all the rules of education. (p. 84) Emile is discouraged by his experience from thinking himself capable of more than he can achieve, which is “the true source of all our miseries,” and learns that to be truly free and happy is to live as fully as one can but within one’s possibilities; to “remain in the place which nature assigns to you in the chain of being,” and to accept suffering and death as one’s human condition. (p. 83)

NEGATIVE EDUCATION: AFFIRMING AMOUR DE SOI

This principle of knowing one’s place in the natural order is fundamental to Rousseau’s politics of government/education; in a social context it translates into knowing one’s place in the social/political order of the Social Contract. Meanwhile, mastery of speech brings Emile’s infancy to a close. His experiences teach him the limitations of his powers and the consequences of his actions. His errors or misdeemeanours are never punished. He breaks his window and the discomfort of living with it broken on cold nights tells him that it is a bad idea. He is not protected from pain and discomfort, but these are balanced by his tutor’s “sweetness of commiseration,” when he suffers. (p. 87) His moral education is negative. It consists not in “teaching virtue and truth but in securing the heart from vice and the mind from error.” (p. 93) Rousseau describes negative education as the difficult art “of governing without precepts and doing everything by doing nothing.” (p. 119) It is “difficult” because though it requires the Tutor not to intervene directly in the child’s behaviour he must constantly “be the child’s master,” and never lose his control. (p. 95) The trick is to let his pupil “always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are,” to let him do what he wants but to make sure he wants to do only what you want. This is how the illusion of personal freedom coincides with the reality of governance in Rousseau’s politics in general where the individual is required to internalize the will of his governor as the case may be. No subjection, he continues, ominously in virtue of what we said earlier about his disposition towards totalitarianism with the Third Discourse, is as perfect “as that which keeps
the appearance of freedom,” for “thus the will itself is made captive.” (p. 120) Naked power, for Rousseau, is cruel and barbaric and, contrary to what Niccolo Machiavelli said, an inefficient way of rendering men docile because it leaves the will resentful and rebellious; for such efficiency the only tool is an education which makes the will captive.

Rousseau describes the age from birth to twelve as “the most dangerous period of human life” because errors made then and vices acquired are lasting. To be the child’s master, according to the principle of negative education, means being “the master of all that surrounds him,” natural and social. (p. 95) Emile’s social environment must be controlled to limit human contact other than with his tutor in this pre-social stage despite “strong and solid”, possibly “insurmountable,” objections to this practice, and despite the acknowledged human failings of his tutor. (p. 94) The cultivation of his amour de soi, which is the basis of his education to this point, teaches Emile that his first duty is to himself, hence his sense of justice will be limited early to what is owed to him. Introduction to the socially important notion of property will teach him that there is also a justice owed to others. His tutor encourages him to cultivate a patch of beans in the garden. One morning he finds it uprooted. In distress he turns to his tutor for justice. The gardener is sent for. He admits to destroying the crop but complains that he had already planted the patch with melons himself, a more valuable product, and that his work was destroyed with the cultivation of the beans. Evidently, the whole business is a charade from beginning to end. Emile is set up by his tutor and there are other incidents in the book where he learns important lessons in a similar, stage managed, way.

The “only lesson of morality appropriate to childhood, and the most important for every age,” more important than encouraging him to do good, which everyone to some degree does, is “never to harm anyone,” oneself included. (p. 104) During this time he learns only his native language, but he speaks it well. He does not learn to study or memorize ‘facts’ since, Rousseau says, this exercise would be meaningless and boring for him. He learns only what he finds interesting; what he fails to show any interest in will not be forced on him. He is kept away from books, the instrument of children’s “greatest misery,” being valuable neither as objects of pleasure nor of instruction. They teach us “to use the reason of others … to believe much and never to know anything.” (p. 125) Emile will only receive his first book to read when he is aged twelve, appropriately enough Robinson Crusoe. Learning to write, when he is ready for it, will follow. (p. 116) His physical education remains an integral part of his curriculum since the self-sufficient man needs an active mind and body, such as are harmonized in the agile and mentally nimble savage who Emile resembles at this time. At twelve he dresses comfortably but lightly, runs barefoot in all seasons to harden his skin and his resistance to the elements, sleeps long hours in order to fuel his energy, in a comfortable but not luxurious bed, swims as naturally and well as he walks and runs, and does nothing rashly. Sports and games hone his senses and skills. He can sing and play an instrument well, but does not yet read music. He prefers natural food and avoids meat, which “is not natural to man.” (p. 153) Rousseau calls the “well-regulated” use of all his senses he has achieved at the time “common sense.” It “resides only in the brain,” in the
form of “perceptions or ideas,” and is still “sensual or childish;” the conjunction of several simple ideas. (p. 157)

His tutor, on his part, is “wholly involved with the child,” watchfully anticipating the patterns of his growth, discouraging or encouraging them as the case may be. (p. 189) Emile is a “bubbling, lively, animated,” child untroubled by any “gnawing cares, without long and painful foresight, whole in his present being, and enjoying a fullness of life which seems to want to extend itself beyond him.” (p. 159) He has grown healthy, independent, alert, and fearless but not rash, and he seeks assistance only when he truly needs it. “Vulgar eyes see only a little rascal,” in him, Rousseau remarks tellingly, clearly anticipating criticism, but “clear-sighted men” immediately recognise his true worth. (p. 162) The passions, a new danger, begin to make their appearance as he approaches early adolescence. The sexual are “the most terrible,” of all. (p. 165) They cannot long be suppressed, but they must be kept at bay for as long as possible because their intrusion announces the end of this unique and precious time when his entire life was ruled by a self-indulgent amour de soi, and the intrusion of the sentiment of amour-propre. The guiding principle of his education must now change from self-indulgence to utility still measured, for the time being, in terms of his own “security, his preservation, and his well being,” i.e. of his amour de soi. (p. 187) The tutor must match this change of focus with a changed relationship with his pupil; “the master’s severity must succeed the comrade’s compliance,” as the need for external discipline begins to show itself. (p. 175) It is time for him to acknowledge his own fallibility and limitations honestly with his pupil – and this will be his first act of self-disclosure to him.

BECOMING SOCIAL: TAMING AMOUR-PROPRE

Emile now learns the basic notions of physics and chemistry as they become useful to him, again directly from nature not from books. (p. 177) He learns not to confuse the truth with the opinions of men or the evidence of his senses, and to seek his own answers to the questions that trouble or intrigue him, persisting with them, learning from his errors – his tutor intervenes only when he is totally frustrated. His understanding is thereby “far clearer and far surer” than it would be from reading or from the direct instruction of a teacher. (p. 176) He learns to use his hands, as the first of all useful things; “If, instead of gluing a child to books, I bury him in a workshop, his hands work for the profit of his mind; he becomes a philosopher and believes he is only a labourer.” (p. 177) Natural, pre-social, man did not need to work, his idleness was productive, but with social man idleness brings nothing but vice and ruin, hence, work is “an indispensable duty for social man.” (p. 195) Emile learns to distinguish it from play as a serious undertaking. He learns an artisan’s trade which will free him from the ties of rank or land, or the need to conform to the views of others, by giving him financial security and independence. He can choose his trade himself, providing it is healthy, hard, and dangerous, not sedentary, repetitive, or soft. His tutor learns it with him, dirtying his hands also, in an artisan’s workshop from a master-craftsman. Emile learns about the convention of money and is made conscious of the importance of social and economic transactions
in a discussion with his tutor on what it takes to produce a meal. His first lessons in his material self-preservation and self-reliance, and this introduction into social and economic transactions, are a preparation for his transition into the social world.

Now in his mid-teens he is encouraged to continue to seek the truth for himself and to avoid rash judgments, even if what meets his eye seems certain and obvious to him – the stick half dipped in the pond appears broken to his eye but turns out to be straight. (p. 205) Aged fifteen with a mind of his own and mentally and physically strong, he knows nothing yet of history, morals or metaphysics, nor has he learnt to think in abstract terms. This is where his education goes next. Having learnt to relate to material things in terms of utility he now needs to learn to relate to other human beings, and how to “order(s) all the affections of the soul according to these relations.” (p. 219) In short, his social and moral education now begins. The sentiment of *amour-propre*, “a useful but dangerous instrument,” is still weak in him because, thus far, the wish to please the other has been excited only by his tutor. But the changes happening in his body, his growing passions, the attraction to the other sex in particular, will change all this and his perfect happiness as “a solitary being” entirely self-concerned will soon be lost. (p. 221) His *amour-propre* will grow stronger and the sentiments of love, friendship, and accord, will meet with “dissensions, enmity and hate.” (p. 215) His sexual curiosity is discouraged by his tutor for as long as possible but his questions on the subject are answered seriously and frankly. (p. 216)

He now needs to be sensitised to the distress, suffering, and death of his fellows-humans, in accordance with the general principle by which he has been educated so far, by being taken to observe it and discover it for himself, in the hospitals, poor houses, asylums, morgues, etc. of the city. The experience arouses his natural pity, and he learns to judge his own happiness in relation to that of the unfortunates he sees; i.e. he learns the important quality of fraternity. Because suffering knows no social distinctions, he learns “to love all men” the same and to dishonour no one. (p. 226) But, Rousseau warns, it must not be overdone otherwise it achieves the opposite effect. He learns from the over-indulgence of others, particularly the sexual, that “the sweetest habit of the soul consists in a moderation of enjoyment which leaves little opening for desire and disgust.” (p. 229) He also learns about his fellow humans by studying their passions in history; i.e. through the classics (as Rousseau had learnt them himself). He learns that they judge “things which are neutral or which are at most of interest as entertainment,” with their taste, and that their “needs” stem from their appetites, (p. 340) that “all the true models of taste are in nature,” and that good taste “depends on good morals” and is ruined by vanity and extravagance. (p. 343)

Rousseau believed that taste, like everything else, is gendered; that a woman’s taste is more acute “in physical things connected with the judgment of the senses,” and a man’s “in moral things that depend more on the understanding.” Emile is taken to Paris which is a laboratory of experiments in taste in all its forms. His literary taste has been cultivated with his reading of Latin and Classical literature, “for the sole reason that the ancients, since they came first, are closest to nature, and their genius is more their own” than that of contemporary writers. (p. 343) Rousseau calls
it “pure literature,” and Emile is taught to distinguish it from the “sewers in the reservoirs of modern compilers, newspapers, translations, and dictionaries.” (p. 343–344) The theatre, however, followed by poetry, not literature, is where “one learns so well the art of pleasing men and of interesting the human heart;” i.e. of amour-propre. (p. 344) Emile learns that true good taste corresponds not with the show and cleverness of a warped amour-propre but with the virtues of simplicity and modesty, and that pleasures are best enjoyed not alone but with like-minded friends. Indeed, that “exclusive pleasures are the death of pleasure,” and that “true entertainments” are those one shares with others not at the theatre but at festivals, games, fairs, etc., like the Wolmars. (p. 354)

These are telling remarks against those who, as we shall see later, sustain that Rousseau intended Emile to be educated for solitude. Emile’s debut in society, when it comes, is “simple and without brilliance.” (p. 233) His early errors as he finds his feet are corrected patiently by his tutor who increases his vigilance on him to the extent of sleeping in his room “at the very least.” (p. 333) He learns to hate violence and injustice with all his heart, love all “the true models of the beautiful, all the moral relations of beings, all the ideas of order,” and rejoice in the happiness of others. (p. 335) At the same time he learns that he must remain his own man, “to recognize the voice of friendship,” when it is genuine, and to reciprocate it, but to hold to his views and principles always. (p. 332) His demeanour is honest and forthright. He is serene and self-possessed, and detached, like “a likable foreigner,” while always showing concern, and being civil and respectful in his dealings with others, no matter who and what they are. (p. 339) He speaks sensibly, sparingly and unaffectedly, with due care for what he says, adopting the same honesty and forthrightness in his speech towards all alike whatever their age and rank and avoiding all ostentation and conceit. In short, he is the man Rousseau idealised for himself in those fateful days of self-reconstitution after he published the First Discourse.

THE VICAR’S PROFESSION OF FAITH

Why, given Rousseau’s deep religiosity, has Emile, now aged eighteen and old enough to think about a suitable spouse, not yet heard of religion, or even of God? His reply is in Book Four, the book that mainly got him into trouble with the religious and political authorities of his day. Following the pedagogical reasoning of the book it is obvious: “the obligation to believe assumes the possibility of doing so,” he says. (p. 257) Only now does Emile possess the intellectual maturity his religious education requires. Only now is he capable of the “gradual and slow climb,” the understanding of “purely intellectual ideas,” especially the idea of God, needed before he takes the final “leap” of faith, “a giant step upward of which childhood is not capable and for which even men need many rungs especially made for them.” (p. 255) The Vicar will provide the ‘young man’ he professes to with these “rungs,” the rungs for his self-education. Indeed, Emile will not be indoctrinated into any of the official religions nor will he be exposed to the “pedant teaching” of catechism. (p. 257) His tutor’s ultimate aim is to put him “in a position to choose the one to which the best use of his reason ought to lead him.” (p. 260)
The confused and unhappy young man who the semi-fictional figure of the Vicar professes himself to is roughly Emile’s age (and Rousseau’s in Turin in 1728, when he was ‘rescued’ from a life of depravity by the Abbe Gaime). “You shall see me, if not as I am,” the Vicar tells him in words that echo Rousseau’s own in his *Confessions*, “at least as I see myself”; i.e. he offers the young man not truth but honesty. (p. 266) The Vicar’s method is to expound his way through his intuitions about the natural world behind which he detects the ‘will’ of a Creator, a supreme ‘intelligence’ inscrutable to the human mind, the appropriate attitude towards which is to “lift myself up,” to “meditate on You ceaselessly. The worthiest use of my reason is for it to annihilate itself before You” – as, in a political setting, the individual annihilates his reason before that of the general will. (p. 286) Then he moves on to the intuitions he has gained about himself by his self-examination.

A self-confessed autodidact like Rousseau himself, he defends the validity of the human conscience as a moral tool against the widespread objection that it is nothing but the work of ‘prejudice’. Using *Port Royale* terminology he describes it instead as an “inner light,” an “innate principle of justice and virtue” which is universally inherent to human being, (p. 289) and which “persists in following the order of nature against all the laws of men,” (p. 267) “the voice of the soul,” in the same way as “the passions are the voice of the body,” (p. 286) a “divine instinct” and “infallible guide to good and bad which makes man like unto God.” Born “from this double relation to oneself and to one’s fellows,” it needs no “terrifying apparatus of philosophy,” (p. 290) its acts “are not judgments but sentiments, suitable to our nature.” (p. 289) It is God’s voice speaking plainly and directly to the human heart, so that “he who follows his conscience obeys nature and does not fear being led astray.” (p. 287) It tells us to pity others, and makes towards virtue, which lies “in the love for order,” (p. 291) a love which, as I pointed out earlier, the Legislator/Tutor shares with the Creator.

But while this “love of order,” this “concert reigns among the elements,” while the natural world is ordered according to God’s plan, the Vicar observes, there is nothing but “chaos,” and “evil on earth.” (p. 278) Men abuse the free will God gave them, which is not freedom “to want what is bad for me,” but to seek my goodness in His will. (p. 280) Goodness is “the love of order which produces order,” while justice is “the love of order which preserves order.” (p. 282) Echoing the critique of the first two *Discourses*, the Vicar speaks of “our fatal progress” with “its errors and vices,” without which, he says, “everything is good.” (p. 282) The wicked man, Rousseau repeats, orders “the whole in relation to himself,” makes himself “the centre of all things” in defiance of the natural order which emanates from “the common centre, which is God.” Man is “but the work and the instrument of the great Being who wants what is good, who does it,” like the Legislator in the political setting of the *Social Contract*. Man’s happiness and well-being lie in collaborating with His will. As a citizen in a political context it lies in collaborating with the will of the Legislator. “For what felicity,” the Vicar asks rhetorically, “is sweeter than sensing that one is ordered in a system in which everything is good?” and placing one’s confidence in a Divine justice that will come at the end of one’s life? (p. 292) Indeed, while “Man’s justice is to give each what belongs to him … God’s justice
is to ask from each for an accounting of what He gave him,” when he leaves this life. (p. 285)

As I have been observing, this theology is interpreted politically in the Social Contract. The Legislator is the state’s creator and conscience; the great Being whose invisible presence lies at the centre of the political order that emanates from him by way of its laws and institutions. The happiness of the citizen lies in “sensing that one is ordered in a system in which everything is good,” because it is ordered wisely for the common good by the general will. The young man, is “not yet depraved enough by vice to be in danger of choosing badly.” The Vicar invites him to “make your own those of my sentiments which have persuaded you.” (p. 311) This invitation to a personal creed seems to conflict with his other advice to “go back to your own country, return to the religion of your forefathers,” and to “follow it in the sincerity of your heart, and never leave it again.” (p. 311) But the conflict is only apparent because for Rousseau both are needed; a private and a public religion, one serving the man’s relation with his Creator through his conscience, the other serving the citizen in conformity with the public religion which “prescribe(s) in each country a uniform manner of honouring God by public worship,” and which is supported by the state. (p. 308) The public conscience which is the general will requires this support. If the public religion conflicts with the directives of one’s personal conscience one should seek another place to live where the two are at least compatible. This is how the conflict, in his own case, between his private beliefs and his dutiful public conformity with the Catholic religion is justified in the Confessions. (1770:1953, p. 365) The Vicar’s own heart is tranquil in this respect because he serves humble parishioners in a small parish where personal example and works of charity count for more than the complexities of theology and dogma.

THE EDUCATION OF THE WOMAN

“Emile is not made to remain always solitary,” Rousseau declares, the time has now come to find him a mate. (1772b:1991, p. 327) His tutor preconditions his search by feeding him with a picture of the ideal woman he should look for, even if the match is not perfect – controlling his choice! He even names her for him; Sophie “augurs well. If the girl whom you choose does not bear it she will at least be worthy of bearing it.” (p. 329) The girl he will eventually find will be ‘Sophie’ no matter her real name. Rousseau begins Book Five with the argument, already made in the Second Discourse, that natural or biological differences between the sexes should be reflected in their social and political roles, and that an ordered relationship requires that their roles be complimentary, with the one, the male, being “active and strong, the other passive and weak,” the one made to dominate, the other “to please and to be subjugated.” (p. 358) It follows that Sophie “ought not to have the same education” as Emile. (p. 363) In sum:

“(…) the whole education of women ought to relate to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to make herself loved and honoured by them, to raise them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console
them, to make their lives agreeable and sweet – these are the duties of women at all times, and they ought to be taught from childhood.” (p. 365)

The task of teaching them falls to their mothers.

Obviously these words, as I remarked earlier, jar on modern ears, liberal and feminist especially, and with good reason, but the condemnations that have followed have not always been fair with him. One common misconception is that he wanted women to be no more than powerless objects of male satisfactions. Against it one notes the important social and political role he ascribed to them in the Second Discourse as “chaste guardians of mores and the gentle bonds of peace;” no mean task given the social and political importance he gives to the family unit. Julie, the protagonist of Heloise, is hardly a powerless object. Women have their own peculiar power to seduce and repulse men’s passions, and this gives them the real dominance in their relationship with men, which is just as “nature wants it.” (p. 360) Using it wisely, he repeats from the Second Discourse, a woman can guide her man to find his strength, his self-esteem, and his natural virtue. (p. 358) Her nimble mindedness and looks are also a woman’s “weapons,” (p. 364) and her guile, a “peculiar cleverness given to the fair sex,” keeps her “his equal.” Indeed, in real terms, it is she who “governs him while obeying him,” which is how Rousseau wants his tutor to govern Emile. (p. 371) Rousseau is in no doubt that her “proper purpose” in society is to bear children, maintain the family’s unity and stability, and sustain her husband. (p. 362) Hence her infidelity is many times more pernicious than a man’s because it “dissolves the family and breaks all the bonds of nature” causing untold social and political disorder. (p. 361) This is what Sophie learns as she is educated to be a wife and mother.

Because her looks are so important for her a girl’s amour-propre, or vanity, unlike a boy’s, must not be discouraged – it is also what gives her mother power over her. Because she will need strength to bear children she must exercise hard, though differently from a man. Because “everything that hinders and constrains nature is in bad taste,” she must learn to act and dress naturally. (p. 367) She must learn to make clothes for her dolls in preparation for her future role as a mother. The principles of utility and readiness apply to her education as much as they do to Emile’s. She must learn to read, to write, to do arithmetic, but only to the degree that will be useful for her. Her natural intelligence is more precocious than a boy’s, and because a woman’s life “is a perpetual combat against herself,” she must learn to “conquer herself” earlier than he does. (p. 369) Hence her mother’s discipline must be strict, preparing her for the “docility” she will need as a woman, since in her life she will “never cease to be subjected either to a man or to the judgments of men.” Unless he is “a monster” her gentleness, her “first and most important quality,” will always bring a man “around and triumphs over him sooner or later.” (p. 370) She is not, however, to be brutalized by the discipline nor deprived “of gaiety, laughter, noise, and frolicsome games.” (p. 370) She must learn “the art of getting looked at,” or “the art of coquetry,” which she will, however, learn to practice always with due modesty. (p. 373) She will be raised to be lively, to play, dance, sing, and enjoy life in general, speak easily, politely and entertainingly. She will be taken to festivals and ceremonies and will participate in them with good taste.
Unlike Emile's her religious education will be strictly conventional, because, in Rousseau's view already stated in his earlier discussion of taste, she is incapable of abstract reasoning. This is, of course, nonsense, but in his eighteenth century view women's reasoning "is practical and makes them very skilful at finding means for getting to a known end, but not at finding that end itself … the woman learns from the man what must be seen and the man learns from the woman what must be done." In this reciprocal educative relationship, modelled earlier in the relationship between Wolmar and Julie “each obeys and both are masters.” (p. 377) But a woman’s reflections, he insists, "ought to be directed to the study of men or to the pleasing kinds of knowledge that have only taste as their aim; for, as regards works of genius, they are out of the reach of women.” (p. 386) This view, of course, colours his political view of her limited role as a citizen. On the other hand, while “men will philosophize about the human heart better than she does,” (p. 387) she is “the natural judges of men’s merits,” (p. 390) and “will read in men’s hearts better than they do.” (p. 387) Hence Rousseau reserves the domain of “experimental morality” to woman, man is more at home with moral concepts and systems. Put more simply, “woman has more wit, man more genius; woman observes, and man reasons.” (p. 387) Ideally Rousseau would have her “limited to the labours of her sex alone and left in profound ignorance of all the rest,” (p. 382) but this is dangerous “in big cities and among corrupt men,” where she needs her wits to protect her virtue. (p. 383)

Sophie is taught the true virtue of chastity not by disparaging her body or by stunting her natural passions but by making her feel the true value of purity so that she comes to love it:

"Depict for them the good man, the man of merit; teach them to recognize him, to love him, and to love him for themselves; prove to them that this man alone can make the women to whom he is attached – wives or beloveds – happy. Lead them to virtue by means of reason. Make them feel that the empire of their sex and all its advantages depend not only on the good conduct and the morals of women but also on those of men, that they have little hold over vile and base souls, and that a man will serve his mistress no better than he serves virtue. You can then be sure that in depicting to them the morals of our own days, you will inspire in them a sincere disgust!" (p. 392)

"This is the spirit in which Sophie has been raised," when Emile finds her. (p. 293) At sixteen she is lovable, pure, attractive though not beautiful, speaks little and listens a lot, is of seemly bearing and decent conversation, and so on. Her religious beliefs are simple and her virtue is “her dominant passion … Sophie,” the author of Emile declares, “will be chaste and decent until her last breath” – like Julie – fateful words, as we shall see. (p. 397) Like Julie she is raised to love and esteem her parents and to bow to their judgment. At fifteen her father has already spoken to her of marriage, “for the destiny of life depends on marriage, and there is never too much time to think about it.” (p. 399) Emile discovers her by chance at her parents’ house where he and his tutor seek accommodation for the night. She too has sought for the right man long and unsuccessfully. When she accepts Emile (who falls madly in love with her at first sight) as her suitor she takes possession of his
soul which he surrenders to her willingly, while he teaches her about the deeper things he has learnt.

This would seem to be the obvious ending to the story but, to Emile’s dismay, his education is still incomplete. He must learn “how to conquer his affections” and follow his conscience, to “keep himself in order” in everything so that nothing, not even his love for Sophie, “can make him deviate from it.” (pp. 444–445) Two hard years of separation are required, spent travelling with his tutor when he will learn also “to consider himself in his civil relations with his fellow citizens;” i.e. to be a citizen. (p. 455) His curriculum is impressive. He must become “versed in all manner of government, in public morals, and in maxims of state of every kind.” (p. 458) This requires him to go “back to the state of nature,” and to “examine whether men are born enslaved or free, associated with one another or independent” (for which the Second Discourse would be a suitable text-book). (p. 459) He then moves on to matters of domestic governance, sovereignty, the social contract which determines the political relations between peoples and their rulers, the concept of the general will, of democracy and political obligation in general, and so on, all amply discussed in the Third Discourse and the Social Contract. Then on, to the larger themes of federalism, international relations, just war theory, and the union of the states of Europe, discussed by the Abbe de Saint-Pierre. In short, his tutor would take Rousseau’s political writing as the text-books for Emile’s education, “a strategy that,” not only “reveals the close connection Rousseau saw between the ‘principles of political right’ of the Social Contract, and the educational principles of Emile,” but also indicates the didactic purpose for which he intended his political writing. (Roosevelt 1990, p. 4)

Emile learns the lesson of the Discourses, that the closer men are to nature, “the more their character is dominated by goodness,” and that “it is only by closing themselves up in cities and corrupting themselves by means of culture that they become depraved.” (1772b:1991, p. 469) He returns from his tour suitably disillusioned with European politics; there is, he learns, no true liberty there and no safeguard to be found under the laws. True freedom, he concludes, is “found in no form of government; it is in the heart of the free man” who lives “the morality of his actions and the love of virtue.” (p. 472–473) Sophie, he decides, is the only chain his heart will bear. He will, however, live in the land of his birth, among his people as a friend and benefactor to them and as a good citizen, despite his dissatisfaction with their laws and habits. He will live “a patriarchal and rustic life, man’s first life, which is the most peaceful, the most natural, and the sweetest life for anyone who does not have a corrupt heart.” Together with his Sophie he will “vivify the country and reanimate the extinguished zeal of the unfortunate village folk,” bringing in a new golden age for them where their fields become more fertile, the countryside beautiful, and where their work is transformed into festivals. The only threat to his happiness, Rousseau reflects grimly, will arise if he takes on “the sad job of telling the truth to men,” which he must avoid doing. (p. 474) This is the idyllic future Rousseau contemplates for the newly weds at the end of Emile. The tutor’s work seems over; he counsels them together on the elements of an enduring marital union. She will keep her husband by “managing your pleasures in order to make them durable.” This will give her a hold on him when “the attraction of mutual
confidence succeeds the transports of passion” – she will still remain his wife and friend, and the mother of his children, and he will live happily at home with his family. (p. 479) His work complete, the tutor’s rest is due, and well-earned. Sophie is soon pregnant; if it is a boy, Emile declares, he will be his son’s tutor and mentor and a true father. But he wants his own tutor and friend to continue as his master; indeed, as “the master of the young masters,” to advise and govern the family from a distance for ever – their Legislator. (p. 480) The book ends on this idyllic note.

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

As we have seen, Heloise and Emile are very different ‘novels’. Heloise showcases an ideal domestic education with a patriarchal structure and wife and husband who play complementary roles in the governance-education of their household, and not just of their children but also of the servants. The education is informal, lived rather than formally instructed as in the public schools. The same education as the citizens in the Social Contract on the larger, but still intimate, scale of the city-state. Heloise also anticipates many of the key views about the education of children found in Emile which Julie puts into practice until the boys are of an age when they are turned over to a male tutor and tested friend, St Preux. With Emile, Rousseau takes a step back; in the absence of contemporary households like the Wolmars’ he wants to show us how a Wolmar and a Julie capable of the matrimonial partnership of the Wolmars can be educated. Emile’s, a boy’s, education takes the same course as the natural evolution of man from a solitary in the first years, outside any social or domestic influence and entirely in the hands of a tutor who, like St Preux, is a trusted family friend, to a fully self-fulfilled married man, father, and citizen. A girl’s education, left unmentioned in Heloise despite the presence of Henriette, except for the comment that, unlike the boys’, it will continue to be her mother’s responsibility, is also taken up exhaustively in Emile. In the book Sophie is educated in a domestic setting, contrary to Emile. The object is to educate the two differently according to their gender but into the harmonious complementarity of the Wolmars. The suggestion is that they will eventually create a strong family like the Wolmar together which will be the first building block for the ideal society of the Social Contract.

As I remarked in the previous section, Rousseau has been consistently criticised, often unfairly, for his views on women and their education. Gauthier identifies “a contradiction” at the heart of Emile in that Sophie “is human but she is not born to be free;” (2006, p. 42) her life is pre-defined entirely in terms of the service she gives a man and her family. She is denied the individuality Rousseau prizes in Emile who is educated, as a man at least, as an autonomous being – at least apparently. William Boyd rightly dismisses Rousseau’s justification of his different treatment of the sexes, that he was simply following ‘nature’. “Here plainly,” Boyd remarks, “‘nature’ speaks the language of eighteenth century prejudice.” (1968, p. 117) But “prejudice” is not completely inexcusable and one must not forget, in Rousseau’s defence, that the appeal to “nature” had an ancient currency in his time and was a perfectly valid tool of philosophical thought shared by many. Locke, before him, had assumed that the
patriarchal model of the family was endorsed by the Bible, and had shown the same prejudice against women also putting them in a subservient role to men. (Spring 1994, p. 115) Rousseau himself believed that his optimistic view of nature could be justified theologically against Hobbes his materialist predecessor, and that the model of the patriarchal family structure could also be justified biologically and anthropologically, by going back to the very first human association, the nuclear family.

Readings of Rousseau as a misogynist fearful of women and wishing their subjugation because of his personal sexual inadequacies and unhappy experiences with them, narrated with varying degrees of honesty in the Confessions, fail to square with his treatment of Julie the protagonist of Heloise and, as I remarked earlier, far from a powerless accommodating woman, and the spirited Sophie we see before she marries Emile. As Strong puts it, the “major thrust” of Book Five of Emile is not the subjugation of women but “to establish that not only is the woman’s place in the home but the home is that which can make men want to be virtuous citizens.” (2002, p. 134) This, making men virtuous citizens, is the all-important educational role Rousseau sees women as fulfilling with respect to their husbands and male children. Already announced in his letter to the citizens of Geneva preceding the Second Discourse, it coincides with his general views on the political education of citizens discussed in the last section of Chapter One above. “Amiable and virtuous women citizens,” he says, “it will always be the fate of your sex to govern ours. Happy it is when your chaste power, exercised only within the conjugal union, makes itself felt only for the glory of the state and the public happiness.” (1755a:1987, p. 31, italics added) Strong continues to describe Rousseau as “one might say, sexist, but, in contemporary jargon, not phallocentric,” and this, I think, is a good assessment of this side of his work. (2002, p. 136) On the evidence of Heloise he wanted women to be active and happy wives and responsible mothers, operating under the invisible jurisdiction of their husbands, the domestic equivalent of the Founder-Legislator. Julie is the mistress of the house, the visible power who manages the household and raises the children, Wolmar makes the principles, the constitution, with which she manages it.

QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER TWO

1. Critically discuss the role Rousseau gives to domestic education in society and his conclusions about the kind of family he believed could carry out this role successfully. Do you think his views on the subject are still relevant today?
2. Friendly commentators contend that reading Emile is still a valuable experience for teachers today. Would you agree? If not, why? If yes, which are the aspects of Rousseau’s educational philosophy in the book that you think still relevant for teachers?
3. Using Rousseau’s work on the subjects comment critically on any of the following:
   (a) education for solitude
   (b) education as governance
   (c) education as self-mastery
   (d) self-education